

## Memorandum on the human rights of Travellers and Roma in Ireland

### Introduction

1. The Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights (hereinafter the Commissioner) carried out a visit to Ireland from 7 to 11 October 2024. The visit was part of a series of country visits taking place in the context of the Commissioner's priority work on the human rights of Roma and Travellers<sup>1</sup> across the Council of Europe area. It also provided the Commissioner with an opportunity to discuss issues related to the reception and accommodation of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants.<sup>2</sup>
2. According to his mandate, the Commissioner fosters effective observance of human rights; assists member states in the implementation of Council of Europe human rights instruments, in particular the Convention; identifies possible shortcomings in the law and practice concerning human rights; and provides advice and information regarding the protection of human rights across the region.<sup>3</sup>
3. This memorandum presents the Commissioner's key findings and recommendations from the visit in relation to human rights issues faced by Travellers and Roma in Ireland, drawing on his engagement with the authorities, members of the Traveller and Roma communities, as well as civil society and other actors.
4. These recommendations are not exhaustive and should be considered in conjunction with the recommendations by Council of Europe and other international human rights bodies,<sup>4</sup> as well as the guidance provided by national human rights structures.
5. During his visit, the Commissioner visited Traveller halting sites in the Dublin area and in Limerick,<sup>5</sup> and had discussions with Traveller and Roma representatives and activists, women's groups and young Travellers and Roma. In Limerick, he met with representatives from the European Centre for the Study of Hate at the University of Limerick and the Irish Travellers Access to Justice team. On Traveller Mental Health Day, 8 October, the Commissioner attended a ceremony dedicated to the memory of Travellers who died by suicide, organised by the Limerick Traveller Network.
6. In Dublin, the Commissioner met with the Minister of Justice Helen McEntee TD and the Minister of State with responsibility for Community Development, Charities, and Integration of the Department

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<sup>1</sup> The term "Roma and Travellers" is used at the Council of Europe to encompass the wide diversity of the groups covered by the work of the Council of Europe in this field: on the one hand a) Roma, Sinti/Manush, Calé, Kaale, Romanichals, Boyash/Rudari; b) Balkan Egyptians (Egyptians and Ashkali); c) Eastern groups (Dom, Lom and Abdal); and, on the other hand, groups such as Travellers, Yenish, and the populations designated under the administrative term "Gens du voyage", as well as persons who identify themselves as Gypsies. The present is an explanatory footnote, not a definition of Roma and/or Travellers.

<sup>2</sup> See Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, End-of visit [statement](#): Ireland: The situation of Travellers, Roma and asylum seekers needs more attention (October 2024).

<sup>3</sup> [Resolution \(99\)50](#) on the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 7 May 1999.

<sup>4</sup> See, among others, European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), [Fifth report on Ireland \(adopted 2 April 2019\)](#), June 2019 (sixth monitoring cycle underway); Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (ACFC), [Fourth Opinion on Ireland \(adopted 10 October 2018\)](#), June 2019 (fifth monitoring cycle underway).

<sup>5</sup> The Commissioner visited Avila Park, St Joseph's Dunsink Lane and Dunsink unofficial (roadside) site - all located in Finglas, Dublin, as well as the Clonlong and Childers Road sites in Limerick.

for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) Joe O'Brien TD. He met the Chair, Senator Eileen Flynn, and members of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Key Issues affecting the Traveller Community and exchanged with the Ombudsman for Children Niall Muldoon. The Commissioner met with the Director, Deidre Malone, and Commissioners of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC). He also visited the Mountjoy Female Prison (Dóchas Centre) in Dublin and met with Prison Governor Lorraine McCarthy. In Limerick, he also met the Chief Executive of Limerick City and County Council Dr Pat Daly.

7. The Commissioner thanks the Irish authorities in Strasbourg and in Ireland for their assistance in organising this visit. He is also grateful to the members of Traveller and Roma communities, civil society organisations and other interlocutors to whom he spoke for their insights.
8. Section I of this memorandum provides an overview of general developments in Ireland as they relate to the human rights of Travellers and Roma, Section II addresses the impact of anti-Traveller racism and antigypsyism on access to rights within the Irish justice system. Section III focuses on the right to culturally appropriate accommodation. Section IV examines the continued shortcomings in ensuring access to the right to education for Travellers and Roma, while Section V addresses their access to the right to health, including mental health.<sup>6</sup>
9. The Commissioner looks forward to continuing his dialogue with the Irish authorities on the issues addressed in this memorandum.

#### **I. General situation**

10. The Irish authorities have made important efforts in recent years to develop and adopt ambitious and forward-looking strategies and action plans that are aimed at a more effective protection of the rights of Travellers and Roma.<sup>7</sup> The Commissioner commends the extensive consultation process with Traveller and Roma representatives that informed the development of the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy II (NTRIS II) (2024-2028), launched in July 2024. He further welcomes the adoption of the National Action Plan Against Racism (NAPAR) (2023 – 2027) in March 2023, the National Traveller Health Action Plan (NTHAP) (2022 – 2027) in November 2022, and the National Traveller and Roma Education Strategy (NTRES) (2024–2030) in July 2024.
11. During his visit, the Commissioner was impressed with the expertise, proficiency and commitment of authorities, national human rights structures, community representatives and other members of civil society, including academia, who have all contributed to these important achievements and will be instrumental in ensuring effective policy implementation in the months and years ahead.
12. Despite these positive developments, the Commissioner was struck by the consensus among most interlocutors, including from the governmental side, that structural anti-Traveller racism and antigypsyism in Irish society constitutes one of the main barriers to progress in the access to rights of Travellers and Roma, permeating all aspects of their lives. He further observed fatigue among Traveller and Roma communities and the shared sense that their overall situation has not developed well in recent years and that their previous hopes and anticipation of improved living conditions and access to rights have repeatedly been disappointed. This has led to frustration and anguish which further undermines their well-being. While acknowledging genuine efforts within government to address the entrenched anti-Traveller and anti-Roma sentiments and attitudes in Irish society, community representatives pointed out that there is still insufficient political will across central government to follow through with commitments and publicly stand up for the rights of Travellers and Roma.

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<sup>6</sup> This memorandum was finalised on 31 January 2025. All online documents quoted in the memorandum were last accessed on that date.

<sup>7</sup> In the [2022 census](#), just under 33,000 people self-identified as Travellers, while other official figures, including health data, establish the Traveller population at over 36,000. Roma ethnicity was included in the Irish census for the first time in 2022 when around 16,000 people self-identified. Most had immigrated from other EU member states and 28% held Irish citizenship. It was previously estimated that there were around 5000 Roma living in Ireland.

## II. Anti-Traveller racism and antigypsyism in the criminal and civil justice system

13. The Commissioner welcomes the sustained attention paid to the particular needs and circumstances of Travellers within Irish prisons and the important work performed in this field by the Irish Penal Reform Trust, the IHREC, and the Irish Travellers Access to Justice (ITAJ) project. He notes positively the introduction by the Irish Prison Service of an ethnic identifier which provides statistical data on the Traveller experience in Irish prisons. According to the Irish Penal Reform Trust, Traveller men are between five and 11 times more likely than other men to be imprisoned, while Traveller women are between 18 and 22 times more likely to be imprisoned compared with the general population.<sup>8</sup> While Travellers represent only 0.7% of the Irish population, official data show that they make up some 10% of the male prisoner population and have reached up to 22% of the female prisoner population.<sup>9</sup> Overrepresentation is further particularly acute among Traveller youth who, in 2020, accounted for 26% of the population of Oberstown Detention Campus.<sup>10</sup>
14. The Commissioner notes findings that Traveller women tend to be incarcerated for minor offences such as shoplifting, and that many of them are reported to have themselves been victims of serious crimes.<sup>11</sup> He further notes that there is a high prevalence of mental health conditions among Traveller women in Irish prisons and welcomes in this context that Traveller women in the Dóchas centre have access to support from community organisations.
15. There is robust evidence of Traveller and Roma perceptions of the criminal justice system as biased against them, and their consistent experiences of being over-policed as suspects while remaining under-protected as victims. According to the ITAJ report, Travellers frequently encounter unlawful arrests, excessive use of force, wrongful convictions and disproportionately high sentences.<sup>12</sup> The Commissioner notes that these findings match those of a survey conducted by the EU Fundamental Rights Agency in 2020.<sup>13</sup> He further notes reports of discrimination and ethnic profiling experienced by Roma in Ireland, with available data showing that 78% of Roma respondents have been stopped for identification by the police (gardaí) at least once, and 56% have been stopped four times or more.<sup>14</sup>
16. The Commissioner heard that 83% of Travellers who reported a crime to the gardaí thought that they were not being taken seriously and 67% reported not to have been treated respectfully while doing so. Traveller women reported that they hesitated to call the gardaí in situations of domestic abuse because they had experienced inaction before and been told by individual gardaí that violence was “normal” within their community and did not warrant an intervention. Few Travellers had submitted complaints following a negative experience with an individual gardaí or judge, often because of fear of retaliation, and 31% of all Travellers surveyed indicated that they had experienced a crime in the last five years which they had not reported to the gardaí. The Commissioner notes that Travellers participating in the ITAJ research identified examples of excellence among gardaí and judges, but these experiences were described as an exception rather than the rule.
17. The Commissioner notes that Travellers’ documented mistrust of the justice system is considered the legacy of a system that was constructed “by settled people for settled people”, and which has contributed to undermining key pillars of Traveller culture, including a nomadic lifestyle. It is further

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<sup>8</sup> See Irish Penal Reform Trust, [Travellers in the Irish prison system](#): a qualitative study, May 2024.

<sup>9</sup> See Joint Committee on Key Issues affecting the Traveller Community, [Report on Travellers’ Experience of the Justice System](#), 6 November 2024, citing Irish Prison Service figures of 2017.

<sup>10</sup> See Irish Penal Reform Trust, [Alternative Report to the UN Human Rights Committee](#) on Ireland’s Fifth Review under the ICCPR, 30 May 2022.

<sup>11</sup> See Joint Committee on Key Issues affecting the Traveller Community, [Report on Travellers’ Experience of the Justice System](#), 6 November 2024.

<sup>12</sup> See Sindy Joyce, Olive O’Reilly, Margaret O’Brien, David Joyce, Jennifer Schweppe and Amanda Haynes, [Irish Traveller’s Access to Justice](#), European Centre for the Study of Hate, 2022. The findings are based on surveys and qualitative interviews conducted in 2021 with 1 in every 100 Travellers from 25 of the 26 counties. While 71% of the general population agree with the statement “the gardaí in this area treat everyone fairly regardless of who they are”, 84% of Travellers disagree.

<sup>13</sup> See EU [FRA Roma and Travellers Survey](#) in six countries, including Ireland, 2020.

<sup>14</sup> See Pavee Point, [Submission to the Department of Justice and Equality](#), 2018.

perpetuated by ongoing discrimination against Travellers within that system, by individual gardaí and individual judges as well as by institutional processes, which collectively facilitate disparities in Travellers' access to justice based on their ethnicity. The Commissioner was told that frequent raids of homes within halting sites, often conducted in the early morning hours and without presentation of a search warrant, were traumatic for Traveller children and instilled fear and distrust of the police from an early age.

18. Based on his discussions with Travellers as well as experts and prison officials, the Commissioner understands that a variety of factors contribute to the overrepresentation of Travellers in the criminal justice system. Besides the possibilities of over-policing and overly punitive sentencing, these include poverty, exclusion, and the multiple forms of discrimination that Travellers experience in all areas of life, including housing, education, and healthcare (see below) as well as the provision of private services. According to research conducted in 2017, Travellers are 38 times more likely to experience discrimination in shops, pubs, and restaurants than the majority population.<sup>15</sup> While anti-discrimination laws in Ireland prohibit discrimination in the workplace, in the provision of goods and services and with respect to accommodation, housing assistance and education, including on the ground of "membership of the Traveller community", there are concerns regarding the functioning and effectiveness of these laws in practice, which undermines Travellers' access to effective remedies and further weakens their trust in the justice system.
19. By way of example, matters concerning access to "places of entertainment", such as bars, restaurants, or clubs where alcohol is offered for sale, are not under the purview of the anti-discrimination laws but that of the Intoxicating Liquor Act 2003. According to its Section 19, complaints regarding discrimination in licenced premises must be brought before district courts rather than the more accessible WRC, which acts as an equality body and hears most other discrimination cases. This exception, which disproportionately affects Travellers and Roma, imposes higher costs and greater burden of proof requirements on claimants, thereby effectively hindering Travellers and Roma from accessing remedies in such cases. While welcoming the uptake in the NAPAR 2023-2027 of urgent recommendations by international monitoring bodies and IHREC to give jurisdiction to the WRC in relation to discrimination regarding use of licensed premises, the Commissioner notes that to date, no action has been taken in this regard.

#### **Recommendations:**

20. The Commissioner recommends that the Irish authorities effectively address over-policing of persons belonging to the Traveller and Roma communities in close consultation with community representatives, including through the establishment of an accessible independent complaints body that operates across the criminal justice system.
21. The authorities should introduce an ethnic identifier throughout the criminal process to ensure that the contributing factors to the over-representation of Travellers in Irish prisons are adequately recognised and addressed.
22. The Commissioner recommends that the authorities strengthen access of Travellers and Roma to support facilities available within the criminal justice system and enhance the use of alternatives to criminal convictions and imprisonment for minor offences.
23. The authorities should ensure the effective implementation of the National Action Plan Against Racism (NAPAR) 2023-2027, including by
  - ✓ Amending Section 19 of the Intoxicating Liquor Act to include claims of discrimination by licensed premises under the jurisdiction of the Workplace Relations Committee (WRC).
  - ✓ Strengthening legal aid schemes to enhance access of Traveller and Roma victims of discrimination in all sectors to effective remedies and complaints mechanisms.

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<sup>15</sup> See IHREC/ESRI, [Who experiences discrimination in Ireland](#), Evidence from the QNHS Equality Modules, November 2017.

### III. Access to culturally appropriate accommodation

24. The Commissioner notes that the recognition by the lower house of the parliament (Dáil) in 2017 of Irish Travellers as an indigenous ethnic minority has an important symbolic value and provided an opportunity to combat racism and discrimination against Travellers by promoting a more positive image of their distinct cultural features. He welcomes the fact that the new policy framework “Housing for All” covering the period up to 2030 contains a specific policy objective to increase and improve Traveller accommodation, including for young Travellers. The Commissioner also notes positively an increase in the annual budget for Traveller-specific accommodation, such as group housing schemes that are built to accommodate larger families wishing to live closely together and, sometimes, also provide special spaces to store recyclable materials or keep horses.
25. The Commissioner further welcomes the collaboration of one local authority with the Ombudsman for Children, initiated by an investigation of the Ombudsman into the living conditions of Traveller children on the site.<sup>16</sup> This led to a process of consultation and dialogue between the various parties that resulted in significant progress, demonstrating the need for genuine commitment and political will at local level to implement obligations. He notes in this context the repeated and longstanding calls for the establishment of an independent authority for Traveller accommodation that would coordinate the provision of culturally appropriate Traveller accommodation across the country and have central oversight over all planning and budget allocation processes, in close cooperation with the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.
26. The Commissioner observed a deep sense of frustration among Traveller representatives, however, about the fact that their above-mentioned recognition as an indigenous ethnic minority has not led to the discontinuation of policies that denigrate their traditional nomadic or semi-nomadic way of life, including through criminalisation.<sup>17</sup> The Commissioner was informed of the sentiment among Travellers that the onus remains on them to explain or validate their culture within an overall hostile environment that considers sedentary lifestyles superior to nomadism and views them with a combination of fear and contempt.
27. The 2001 Trespass Legislation and the Housing Miscellaneous Acts of 1992 and 2002 still make it a criminal offence to trespass on any land which is private or publicly owned. Travellers who breach the requirements of these laws face eviction and possibly imprisonment, and their trailers can be impounded. In many places, boulders have been erected by the local authorities in what used to be traditional halting sites for Travellers. The Commissioner notes that the above-mentioned policies and the continued lack of provision of culturally appropriate accommodation prevents many Travellers from practicing nomadism. Only an estimated 15 - 20% still live in mobile homes or trailers, however, often in substandard and overcrowded conditions such as on unofficial halting sites and without access to water or electricity.
28. There are consistent accounts of poor maintenance, rodent infestation, inadequate sanitation and waste disposal systems, and unsafe or intermittent electrical installations in halting sites for Travellers. As a result, many Travellers feel pressured to apply for social housing, which often fails to account for the size of Traveller families, or are forced to rely on a generally hostile private rental market.<sup>18</sup> In January 2024, the European Committee of Social Rights considered that, despite considerable efforts taken, there had been no tangible and meaningful improvements as regards the provision of accommodation for Travellers or living conditions on halting sites and that “crucial recommendations of the Traveller Accommodation Expert Review, including those on national oversight, data collection and governance, had yet to be implemented”.<sup>19</sup> The Commissioner learned that significant parts of the funding allocated by the Department of Housing, Local

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<sup>16</sup> See [No End in Site 2024 Update](#), Report by the Office of the Irish Ombudsman for Children, October 2024.

<sup>17</sup> See also the [Traveller Accommodation Expert Review 2019](#), which contains a specific recommendation to repeal trespass legislation. During his visit, the Commissioner was informed that a review was not currently considered.

<sup>18</sup> See [IHREC Comments on Ireland's 20th National Report on the Implementation of the European Social Charter](#), June 2023.

<sup>19</sup> See [Conclusions on Ireland, March 2024](#). The Committee had assessed the follow-up given to its decision of non-conformity with Article 16 of the European Social Charter in the complaint European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC) v. Ireland, No. 100/2013, decision on the merits of 1 December 2015, Resolution CM/ResChS(2016)4.

Government and Heritage for the construction of culturally appropriate accommodation for Travellers remain unspent.

29. At the halting sites he visited in Dublin and Limerick, the Commissioner observed very basic and overcrowded conditions, with an insufficient number and quality of sanitary facilities, illegal dumping around the sites. There are also significant safety concerns due to limited access routes for emergency vehicles, and the bays are so close to each other that they are a fire hazard. The Commissioner learned that residents had repeatedly and without success requested the additional construction of toilets but were, themselves, prevented from building new facilities. He also noted high walls around parts of some sites, an overall desolate environment, and the absence of any green spaces or safe playing areas for children. According to residents, the local council wanted to remove a horse stable without offering an alternative, which would break one of the last links that they had with their traditional way of life and take away an important factor for mental wellbeing and recreation, particularly for boys and men.
30. The Commissioner was further informed by Traveller organisations that the provision of culturally appropriate accommodation is significantly hindered by the current planning system, which grants local authorities a wide margin of appreciation and results in an offer that remains generally incoherent and inadequate. The local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committees are reportedly often not effectively involved in decision-making processes, contributing to a situation where Traveller Accommodation plans are developed that disregard the views and needs of the communities. The generally appreciated “Caravan Loan Scheme”, for instance, appears to be continued without adequate consideration being given to the multiple calls by Traveller representatives to review the scheme to render it more accessible and to complement it with an effective trailer rental scheme.<sup>20</sup> Traveller representatives attribute their lack of involvement to anti-Traveller prejudice within institutions and longstanding mistrust towards their culture, preventing constructive cooperation and dialogue.
31. Within the context of the broader housing crisis in Ireland, the Commissioner also notes the mounting levels of homelessness among Traveller and Roma communities. According to Traveller and Roma organisations, two in five Travellers are homeless and almost one in two Roma have experienced homelessness in their lives,<sup>21</sup> including because of widespread discrimination in the private rental market. Many Roma reportedly live in poor quality accommodation and in unsafe abandoned buildings, in constant fear of eviction.<sup>22</sup> The proposed introduction of a habitual residency condition as eligibility criteria for accessing social housing could render the situation even worse.

#### Recommendations:

32. The Commissioner recommends that the Irish authorities ensure access to culturally appropriate accommodation for Travellers and Roma, including by
- ✓ Repealing the 2001 Trespass Act and other provisions that prevent Travellers from practicing their nomadic lifestyle.
  - ✓ Establishing an independent authority mandated to oversee and coordinate the planning and construction of culturally appropriate accommodation at local level.
  - ✓ Ensuring adequate funding and expenditure to address overcrowding and improve living conditions in halting sites.
  - ✓ Increasing the participation of Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committees at local level by enhancing their mandate and powers.
  - ✓ Reviewing the trailer loan scheme in consultation with community representatives to render it more accessible.

<sup>20</sup> See [Report on the Trailer Loan Scheme](#), Joint Committee on Key Issues affecting the Traveller Community, October 2024.

<sup>21</sup> According to the [European typology of homelessness and housing exclusion](#) developed by the European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless (FEANTSA), this includes those experiencing “hidden homelessness” in overcrowded conditions or unauthorised sites.

<sup>22</sup> See Pavee Point submission to the [Housing for All Updated Action Plan](#) Stakeholder Engagement, July 2024.

33. The authorities should address the increasing homelessness among Travellers and Roma, including by rendering homeless services more accessible to them, introducing appropriate targets and resources in the Housing for all Strategy, and providing adequate safeguards against evictions.

#### **IV. Inequalities in access and outcomes regarding the right to education**

34. The Commissioner welcomes the adoption of the National Traveller and Roma Education Strategy (NTRES) (2024–2030) in July 2024, jointly with a Plan for Implementation 2024-2026, and the government's commitment to ensure equity of access, opportunity, and outcomes as well as meaningful participation for all Travellers and Roma across the education system. He further welcomes recent reports of increasing numbers of Traveller children participating in the Leaving Certificate cycle and of some other positive trends, in particular in relation to enrolment at post-primary level.<sup>23</sup> He also notes positively the Yellow Flag Programme developed by Traveller organisations to support schools to become more inclusive of all cultures and ethnicities and challenge racism and discrimination, which 69 primary and secondary schools out of some 4000 in Ireland are participating in.<sup>24</sup>
35. At the same time, the Commissioner notes the views of Traveller, Roma and other civil society representatives that the above-mentioned strategy fails to sufficiently address the widespread experiences of exclusion, racism, and identity-based bullying that Traveller and Roma children continue to face in schools, including from teachers and other staff.<sup>25</sup>
36. During his visit, the Commissioner learned of significant inequalities experienced by Traveller and Roma children from early childhood education on and throughout school. In November 2021, 28% of Travellers were reported to leave school before the age of 13, compared to 1% of the general population; only 8% had completed education to Leaving Certificate level, compared to 73% of non-Travellers; and only 1% of Travellers above 24 years of age had a university degree, compared to 30% of non-Travellers.<sup>26</sup> According to a recent study, however, there is a much higher representation of Traveller students in schools that are more likely to have greater numbers of disadvantaged students.<sup>27</sup> The Commissioner further notes that 25% of Roma pupils are reported to have attended school hungry, that inadequate English language and literacy is a widespread challenge, and that 57,5% of Roma families do not have sufficient financial resources to buy educational materials and uniforms.<sup>28</sup>
37. In his meetings with Traveller and Roma representatives, the Commissioner was struck by reports of the continued disproportionate use of reduced timetables for Traveller and Roma children in primary and secondary schools. This consists of schools making a student start the school day later than usual, or finish it earlier, or of otherwise not allowing students to attend the full five-day school week, sometimes over extended periods. The practice, which went unmonitored for years with lifelong negative impacts on the educational achievement, income, and health of Travellers and Roma, reportedly increased during the COVID-19 pandemic.
38. Despite guidelines issued by the Department of Education in 2021 with the aim of ensuring that reduced timetables are only applied where absolutely necessary, with the parent's/guardian's consent and in the short term,<sup>29</sup> Traveller and Roma children are still reported to be four times more likely to be placed on reduced school hours at primary school level, and 12 times more likely at post-primary level.<sup>30</sup> The Commissioner welcomes civil society efforts to increase rights awareness

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<sup>23</sup> See [Fifth State report](#) submitted by Ireland to the ACFC, July 2023.

<sup>24</sup> See Programme description at [www.yellowflag.ie](http://www.yellowflag.ie).

<sup>25</sup> See [Study into the effectiveness of the Anti-Bullying Procedures](#) on Traveller and Roma pupils' experiences in the school system, Dublin City University, 2022.

<sup>26</sup> [Final Report](#) of the Joint Committee on Key Issues affecting the Traveller Community, published in November 2021.

<sup>27</sup> Economic and Social Research Institute, [The distribution of Traveller students across education settings in Ireland](#), July 2024.

<sup>28</sup> See Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre & Department of Justice and Equality [Roma in Ireland, A National Needs Assessment](#), 2018.

<sup>29</sup> See The [Use of Reduced School days](#), Guidelines for schools on recording and notification of the use of Reduced School days, September 2021.

<sup>30</sup> See [Reduced School Days 2022/23 School Year](#), Department of Education, September 2023.

among Traveller and Roma communities as the guidelines have only been issued to schools and many parents are reportedly not aware of them.<sup>31</sup>

39. In addition, the Commissioner learned that the majority of Traveller and Roma children are identified as requiring special education support and placed in support groups, which are geared, however, towards behavioural improvement rather than academic achievement. Focus group research conducted in Limerick City collecting data for a total of 164 Traveller children showed that 54% of Traveller children in primary schools did not learn Irish because of attending group support outside class, a figure that rose to 83% of Traveller children in secondary schools.<sup>32</sup>
40. The study further revealed that the performance of Traveller children in schools dropped year by year, demonstrating that the continued placement in special support groups did not achieve the intended results. Missing out on Irish language classes also has a lasting detrimental effect on the career opportunities of Traveller children as it prevents them from pursuing certain professions, including that of primary school teacher. Given the consistent reports of discrimination and negative attitudes in schools being the main thing holding Traveller and Roma children back, the Commissioner considers that the targeted recruitment of Traveller and Roma teachers into schools could play an important role in creating an inclusive system where Traveller and Roma children are respected and their cultures and ethnic identities are acknowledged, visible and valued, in line with the commitments undertaken in the NTRES.
41. The Commissioner notes the recent introduction of 12 community link workers across schools in areas with high numbers of Traveller and Roma pupils to foster better communication and support the learning of Traveller and Roma children and young people.<sup>33</sup> He also welcomes the continued support by the DCEDIY for the Roma Education Programme operated by the community health development organisation Cairde, which is a programme designed jointly with Roma and targeting Roma adults, and encourages further mainstream and targeted efforts to enhance access to education for Traveller and Roma children, including through close cooperation and dialogue with parents.

#### **Recommendations:**

42. The Commissioner recommends that the Irish authorities take measures to address racism against and bullying of Traveller and Roma children in schools, including
- ✓ Ensuring that teachers and school staff are fully trained regarding children's equal rights to education and fully implementing the Action Plan on Bullying.
  - ✓ Recruiting more Traveller and Roma teachers and staff.
  - ✓ Encouraging more schools to join the Yellow Flag Programme.
43. The authorities should ensure the diligent application of the Guidelines on the reduced school hours in all schools and conduct targeted rights awareness campaigns among Traveller and Roma communities to empower parents to support their children in the education system.
44. The Commissioner recommends that the authorities review the disproportionate placement of Traveller and Roma children in special support groups and ensure their equal access to Irish language classes.

#### **V. Inequalities in access and outcomes regarding the right to health**

45. The Commissioner welcomes the adoption of the NTHAP in November 2022, and the acknowledgement in the plan of the important role of peer-led services in addressing Traveller health inequalities. He notes positively in this context the development of health programmes with an enhanced role for local Traveller and Roma organisations, relying particularly on the engagement of Traveller and Roma women and young people. The website Young Pavees 'Mind

<sup>31</sup> See Children's Rights Alliance Guide to Reduced Timetables "[Know your rights](#)", April 2022.

<sup>32</sup> See the [Findings of the Traveller Education Change \(TEC\) Project](#) running from March 2023 until October 2024, Limerick Traveller Network.

<sup>33</sup> See [Minister Foley announces new roles to support Traveller and Roma pupils and students](#), Department of Education, 31 October 2024.



Your Nuck', for instance, was launched in 2022 as an innovative platform that offers culturally appropriate information on many areas that impact on young Travellers' mental health. In March 2023, a new Roma Mental Health and Wellbeing working group was established for Roma and Roma health workers. The Commissioner further commends the running of primary healthcare community projects across Ireland, with reportedly positive impacts on physical and mental health among communities, and the preparation of regional Traveller health action plans that address the social determinants of Traveller health through a combination of targeted and mainstreaming measures.<sup>34</sup>

46. There are distinct health inequalities faced by Travellers and Roma compared with the majority population, however. Traveller mortality rates are on average 3.5 times higher than average, life expectancy for Traveller men is reported to be at least 15 years less than for their peers in the majority population, and Traveller women die approximately 11.5 years younger.<sup>35</sup> Research conducted in East Limerick in 2018 revealed that only 3% of Limerick Travellers live past 65. The situation is reported to have worsened further because of the COVID-19 pandemic.
47. In addition, the poor mental health outcomes for Travellers, including women and children, remain particularly concerning. According to the 2010 All-Ireland Traveller Health Study, Travellers are seven times more likely to die from suicide than their non-Traveller peers, with 11% of all Traveller deaths from suicide alone. Surveys indicate that 82% of Travellers have been affected by suicide, and 26% have been affected by suicide within their immediate family.<sup>36</sup> Poor education outcomes, discrimination and poverty are considered the main contributors to poor mental health amongst Travellers.
48. On Traveller Mental Health Day 2024, the Commissioner participated in a ceremony at a cemetery in Limerick dedicated to the memory of Travellers, including children, who had died by suicide. While welcoming the formation of the Traveller Mental Health Working Group at the Department of Health in December 2023, initiated by the National Traveller Mental Health Network, and the allocation of a ringfenced budget for the promotion of Traveller mental healthcare programmes, concerted efforts are required to continue to support and further develop both mainstream and special, culturally appropriate measures to address what has developed into a crisis situation.<sup>37</sup> Overall, the Commissioner notes that the available mental healthcare services for Travellers and Roma remain largely insufficient, including with respect to services to address the high prevalence of drug addiction and substance abuse among communities.<sup>38</sup> He further notes in this context that uptake of support services among Travellers remains low due to stigma associated with mental health problems in the community.
49. Persons belonging to the Roma community face significant barriers, including the absence of sustainable funding for a support infrastructure, limited access to medical cards because of residency requirements, including for pregnant women,<sup>39</sup> as well as the scarcity of available interpretation and translation facilities and discriminatory attitudes among practitioners. The Commissioner welcomes the commitment by the government to develop a Roma Health Action Plan, led by the Department of Health, set to be completed by the end of 2026.<sup>40</sup> A positive development has been the allocation of funding for healthcare staff working with Roma. Cairde's National Roma Infoline was established in March 2020 to address the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on Roma, including in terms of health needs. As of December 2023, the Infoline has

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<sup>34</sup> See, for example, the [Eastern Region Traveller Health Action Plan](#), Working together to improve the health experiences and outcomes for Travellers, prepared by the Health Service Executive in cooperation with Traveller organisations, November 2023.

<sup>35</sup> All data taken from the [Final Report](#) of the Joint Committee on Key Issues Affecting the Traveller Community, November 2021.

<sup>36</sup> See [Behaviour and Attitudes Traveller Community National Survey](#), July 2017.

<sup>37</sup> See, among others, [Irish Travellers 'mental health crisis' driven by discrimination and deprivation](#), BBC, 18 April 2022.

<sup>38</sup> See Joint Committee [Report on Travellers in the justice system](#), November 2024.

<sup>39</sup> Although maternal healthcare is free for all pregnant women who are resident in Ireland, Roma women report being asked to pay for services if they cannot provide proof of employment or address. According to community representatives, some 40% of Roma women do not have a general practitioner and 50% do not have a medical card.

<sup>40</sup> See [Minister Burke announces initiatives to improve Traveller and Roma health as part of national strategy](#), 1 August 2024.

responded to close to 10 000 calls from Roma and service providers around the country with two thirds of calls made from or on behalf of Roma with no medical card and no general practitioner.<sup>41</sup>

**Recommendations:**

50. The Commissioner recommends that the Irish authorities ensure effective implementation of the National Traveller Health Action Plan (NTHAP) and the National Traveller Mental Health Action Plan through adequate allocation of recurring budgets and resources, paying attention to the special needs and concerns of Traveller women, children, and young people.
51. The authorities should provide sustained funding for peer-led Traveller-specific mental health support through primary healthcare projects at local level, prioritising suicide awareness and prevention activities.
52. The Commissioner recommends that the authorities enhance access to basic healthcare, including mental and maternal healthcare for Roma, including through the issuance of medical cards for them and improved access to interpretation services.

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<sup>41</sup> Cairde's 2023 [Annual Report](#) on the Infoline.