

Implications of COVID-19 pandemic on Roma and Travellers communities

Country: Ireland

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Contents

1	Specific implications of the general measures taken to stop the COVID-19 pandemic on Roma and Travellers' communities?.....	3
1.1	Type of measures.....	3
1.2	Implications of measures.....	5
1.3	Estimates of the scale of the impact.....	11
2	Specific measures to address the implications of the pandemic on Roma and Travellers.....	14
2.1	Measures to tackle the spread of the virus specifically among Roma and Travellers communities.....	14
2.2	Measures to support Roma and Travelers communities in regards to medical and social assistance.....	16
2.3	Measures addressing the needs of Roma children.....	16
3	Any negative public reactions targeting Roma and Travellers or positive change in attitudes towards them.....	17
3.1	Negative public reactions.....	17
3.2	Positive change in attitudes.....	19

1 Specific implications of the general measures taken to stop the COVID-19 pandemic on Roma and Travellers' communities?

1.1 Type of measures

The Irish National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE) first met to discuss Covid-19 on January 27th. Testing for Covid-19 commenced in February. The first case of Covid-19 was reported in Ireland on the 29th of February 2020.¹ Since then, a range of measures have been incrementally implemented in Ireland to restrict the spread of Covid-19. These include:

- Cancellation of national holiday celebrations; closure of schools, colleges, universities and State cultural centres; recommendations for remote working; restrictions on the numbers allowed at in/outdoor gatherings; cancellation of all non-essential travel; closure of bars and restaurants and all non-essential businesses; people were advised to stay home, to leave only where necessary for work; caring responsibilities; essential shopping.²
- People could only leave home for the aforementioned special reasons and for brief exercise within a two kilometre radius from their home. When in public spaces, people were requested to practice two-metre physical distancing between themselves and others. Those aged 70+ years and those classed as medically at risk to Covid-19 were asked to cocoon, essentially reduce as much as possible, all interaction with other people. Restrictions were placed on the number of people who could attend funeral services - maximum of ten people in the church and at the graveside (maintaining physical distancing). State exams for secondary students were also cancelled/postponed.³

¹ Department of Health (2020), 'Previous updates on COVID-19 (Coronavirus)', available at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/ce3fe8-previous-updates-on-covid-19-coronavirus/> .

² Department of Health (2020), 'COVID-19 (Coronavirus): Travel advice', 13 March 2020, available at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/e885b2-covid-19-coronavirus-travel-advice/> ; Department of An Taoiseach (2020), 'Government Publishes National Action Plan on COVID-19', 16 March 2020, available at <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/47b727-government-publishes-national-action-plan-on-covid-19/> .

³ Citizens Information (2020), 'Know your rights: COVID-19 and funerals', 3 April 2020, available at: <https://whatsnew.citizensinformation.ie/2020/04/03/know-your-rights-covid-19-and-funerals/> ; Citizens Information (2020), 'Cocooning during COVID-19', available at: https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/health/covid19/cocooning_during_covid19.html ; Department of Health (2020), 'Previous updates on COVID-19 (Coronavirus)', available at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/ce3fe8-previous-updates-on-covid-19-coronavirus/> ; Department of An Taoiseach (2020), 'Daily briefing on the government's response to COVID-19 - Tuesday 5 May 2020', 5 May 2020, available at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/379bb6-daily-briefing-on-the-governments-response-to-covid-19-tuesday-5th-/> ; Department of Education and Skills (2020), 'Minister announces postponement of 2020 Leaving Certificate examinations', 8 May 2020, available at: <https://www.education.ie/en/Press-Events/Press-Releases/2020-press-releases/PR20-05-08.html> ; Department of Education and Skills (2020), 'State Examinations', available at:

- To help with restrictions, the Government announced financial supports for employers, self-employed and employees: Pandemic Unemployment Payment of €350 per week; and a wage subsidy scheme to help retain current staff.⁴
- 28th May, all international arrivals into Ireland were legally required to notify the State where they will be residing and self-isolate for fourteen days.⁵ Police were granted powers to enforce (including arrest) Covid-19 restrictions which ran to the 8th of June.⁶

On 18th May, Ireland moved into the first stage of a multi-phase national reopening.⁷ This includes:

- This allowed for educational professionals to visit offices to access materials; return to work of construction/outdoor workers; permitted opening for selected retailers; reopening of public outdoor amenities (physical distancing measures and travel restrictions maintained).
- The two-kilometre travel limit was increased to five (May 5th) then to 20 kilometres, two-metre physical distancing rule maintains.⁸ Restrictions on cocooning eased, allowing people aged 70+ and others medically vulnerable to Covid-19 initially to leave their home for

<https://www.education.ie/en/Learners/Information/State-Examinations/junior-cert-2020.html> .

⁴ Citizens Information (2020), 'COVID-19 Wage Subsidy Scheme', available at: https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/employment/unemployment_and_redundancy/covid19_temporary_wage_subsidy_scheme.html .

⁵ Department of Health (2020), 'COVID-19 (Coronavirus): Travel advice', 28 May 2020, available at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/e885b2-covid-19-coronavirus-travel-advice/#further-information-on-the-covid-19-passenger-locator-form> .

⁶ Department of Health (2020), 'Minister for Health Simon Harris signs regulations to give An Garda Síochána the power to enforce COVID-19 restrictions', 10 April 2020, available at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/e9d120-minister-for-health-simon-harris-signs-regulations-to-give-an-garda-/>; Department of Justice and Equality (2020), 'Information regarding the Justice Sector COVID-19 plans', available at: http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/Information_regarding_the_Justice_Sector_COVID-19_plans ; Gallagher, C. (2020), 'Garda's Covid-19 powers will not be revoked early, says Flanagan', *The Irish Times*, 18 May 2020, available at: <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/crime-and-law/garda-s-covid-19-powers-will-not-be-revoked-early-says-flanagan-1.4255602>; Gallagher, C. (2020), 'Covid-19: Gardaí lose enforcement powers over movement restrictions', *The Irish Times*, 9 June 2020, available at: <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/crime-and-law/covid-19-garda%C3%AD-lose-enforcement-powers-over-movement-restrictions-1.4273899?localLinksEnabled=false+no+longer+have+enforcement+powers+over+Covid-19+radius> .

⁷ Department of Health (2020), 'Easing the COVID-19 restrictions on 18 May (Phase 1)', 2 May 2020, available at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/ad5dd0-easing-the-covid-19-restrictions-on-may-18-phase-1/> .

⁸ Department of Health (2020) 'Previous updates on COVID-19 (Coronavirus)', available at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/ce3fe8-previous-updates-on-covid-19-coronavirus/>; Health Service Executive (2020), 'Protect yourself and others from coronavirus', available at: <https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/coronavirus/protect-yourself-and-others.html> .

exercise/drive and now visit shops and also accept visitors; visit shops; people cocooning can also accept visitors to their homes; general groups of up to four people from one household may visit another; re-opening of most retailers.⁹ Remote working remains encouraged. The numbers allowed to attend funerals also increased to 25; limited outdoor activities of up to 15 people can commence (albeit. Maintaining physical distancing and the wearing of personal protective equipment).¹⁰

1.2 Implications of measures

A Governmental report on the social implications of Covid-19 published in May highlighted what were perceived to be the key social impacts of the virus in Ireland.¹¹ This report identified Travellers and Roma, among others, as those upon which the Covid-19 emergency would have particular impacts. The report notes: “existing vulnerabilities of members of the Traveller and Roma communities in health and accommodation put them at particular risk of contracting the virus”.¹² The report continues to note perceived difficulties vis-à-vis physical distancing and self-isolation in “some living environments”.¹³ In the context of education, Traveller and Roma children will be “severely impacted by school closures” due to limited internet connectivity and access to related technologies impacting on their ability to engage with online learning.¹⁴

Key issues highlighted by Traveller and Roma and advocacy groups as particular concerns during the Covid-19 emergency include: disproportional

⁹ Citizens Information (2020) ‘Cocooning during COVID-19’, available at: https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/health/covid19/cocooning_during_covid19.html; RTÉ (2020), ‘Covid-19 restrictions - What changes from today and beyond’, 8 June 2020, available at: <https://www.rte.ie/news/2020/0608/1146046-covid-latest-ireland-restrictions/> .

¹⁰ Department of Health and Department of An Taoiseach (2020), ‘View Phase 2 of Ireland's Roadmap for reopening which is in place right now’, 5 June 2020, available at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/7ae99f-easing-the-covid-19-restrictions-on-june-8-phase-2/> .

¹¹ Department of An Taoiseach (2020), ‘Report of the Social Implications of COVID-19 in Ireland. Preliminary Assessment’, available at: <https://assets.gov.ie/74373/5cc1bbfe59b447d3b841fa43cecfc79d.pdf> .

¹² Department of An Taoiseach (2020), ‘Report of the Social Implications of COVID-19 in Ireland. Preliminary Assessment’, available at: <https://assets.gov.ie/74373/5cc1bbfe59b447d3b841fa43cecfc79d.pdf> .

¹³ Department of An Taoiseach (2020), ‘Report of the Social Implications of COVID-19 in Ireland. Preliminary Assessment’, available at: <https://assets.gov.ie/74373/5cc1bbfe59b447d3b841fa43cecfc79d.pdf> .

¹⁴ Department of An Taoiseach (2020), ‘Report of the Social Implications of COVID-19 in Ireland. Preliminary Assessment’, available at: <https://assets.gov.ie/74373/5cc1bbfe59b447d3b841fa43cecfc79d.pdf> .

impact and an exacerbation of existing poor health and higher levels of chronic disease levels within the Traveller community when compared to the general national population; over-crowded living conditions and related negative implications vis-à-vis physical distancing and self-isolation; inability to access water and sanitation facilities; potential broadening of educational disadvantage due to deficit of access to information communication technologies and insufficient space.¹⁵

Employment

In terms of impact, according to a joint Covid-19 NGO Group Report (henceforth CNG) one effect of Covid-19 and related restrictions on minority communities will be “increased unemployment amongst Traveller men”.¹⁶ According to the 2016 Census, the rate of unemployment in the Traveller Community stands at 80%. The comparative figure for the time for the general population was 12.9% unemployment. According to the Roma in Ireland National Needs Assessment (henceforth RNA) (2018) less than 17% of participants reported being employed.¹⁷ Census data evidence that almost a third of Traveller women aged 15 and over work in the home fulltime. Those Traveller women who also are in paid employ, predominantly work in caring, administrative, retail and service occupations. Traveller men, work in construction, trades, sales, service occupations among others.¹⁸ The implications of Covid-19 restriction have been profound on these sectors. Data published on the 2nd of June demonstrate that those occupations wherein Traveller men and women are employed accounted for the highest sectors wherein staff applied and were in receipt of the Pandemic Unemployment Payment.¹⁹ As noted in the RNA, an inability to meet official requirements means (e.g. meeting the Habitual Residency Condition for social supports due to a lack of documentation and/or language barriers; access to a Personal Public Service Number) that Roma people are often

¹⁵ Pavee Point (2020), ‘COVID-19 Information and Resources,’ available at: <https://www.paveepoint.ie/stay-safe-from-coronavirus-covid-19/> ; Irish Traveller Movement (2020), ‘What ITM are doing’, available at: <https://itmtrav.ie/what-itm-are-doing/> .

¹⁶ COVID-19 NGO Group Report (2020), ‘Marginalised Groups. Promoting Equality, Inclusion and Human Rights in the COVID-19 Crisis’, available at: <https://www.inou.ie/assets/files/pdf/covid-19-ngo-group-joint-submission.pdf>.

¹⁷ Pavee Point (2018), ‘Roma in Ireland: A National Needs Assessment’, available at: <https://www.paveepoint.ie/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/RNA-PDF.pdf> .

¹⁸ Pavee Point (2020), ‘Traveller Employment’, available at: <https://www.paveepoint.ie/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Factsheets-Pavee-Point-EMPLOYMENT-1.pdf> .

¹⁹ Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (2020), ‘Update on Payments Awarded for Covid-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment and Enhanced Illness Benefit – Statistics’, available at: <https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/75250/8e3dc7ee-120c-475c-8b21-6dac66bcc6bb.pdf#page=null>

unable to access unemployment and training schemes, social protection payments, child benefit supports and those related to housing.²⁰

Health

The All-Ireland Traveller Health Study (2010) noted the high-level of chronic health problems among Traveller children and adults.²¹ The standardised mortality rate (SMR) for Traveller men was reported as 3.5 times that of the general population, for Traveller women the SMR was 3.1 times that of the general population; infant mortality rates were over three times that of the general population;²² the life expectancy of Traveller males was reported at 61.7 years, 70 for women; the suicide rate male Travellers is 6.6 times that of the general population.²³ According to the CNG Report "Roma [also] disproportionately experience chronic health conditions".²⁴ Given this, "Travellers and Roma at greater risk of contracting Covid-19." The disproportionate impact of Covid-19 on Traveller and Roma communities, along with restrictions on movement and contact have placed a "greater stress on mental health and wellbeing".²⁵ Traveller and Roma communities "place a significant importance on engaging with extended family and community" meaning that social/physical restrictions have been particularly difficult. Traveller and Roma community members in addiction recovery and withdrawal are, with the absence of specialist supports "experiencing greater stress and difficulty".²⁶ As already noted, Roma community members are marginalised from all services and supports. In terms of psychological and physical wellbeing, there have also been "reports of Traveller women not being able to access domestic violence services and protections" (emergency accommodation and legal protections). In the case of accommodation, there have also been reports of women and children leaving their homes to stay

²⁰ Pavee Point (2018) 'Roma in Ireland: A National Needs Assessment', available at: <https://www.paveepoint.ie/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/RNA-PDF.pdf> .

²¹ Pavee Point (2010), 'All Ireland Traveller Health Study', available at: <https://www.paveepoint.ie/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/AITHS-Summary-of-Findings.pdf> .

²² Pavee Point (2010), 'All Ireland Traveller Health Study', available at: <https://www.paveepoint.ie/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/AITHS-Summary-of-Findings.pdf> .

²³ Pavee Point (2010), 'All Ireland Traveller Health Study', available at: <https://www.paveepoint.ie/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/AITHS-Summary-of-Findings.pdf> ; Department of Children and Youth Affairs (2020) 'Young Travellers in Ireland. Includes some data on Young Roma,' available at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/c2a87f-the-statistical-spotlight-series/> .

²⁴ COVID-19 NGO Group Report (2020), 'Marginalised Groups. Promoting Equality, Inclusion and Human Rights in the COVID-19 Crisis', available at: <https://www.inou.ie/assets/files/pdf/covid-19-ngo-group-joint-submission.pdf>.

²⁵ COVID-19 NGO Group Report (2020), 'Marginalised Groups. Promoting Equality, Inclusion and Human Rights in the COVID-19 Crisis', available at: <https://www.inou.ie/assets/files/pdf/covid-19-ngo-group-joint-submission.pdf>.

²⁶ COVID-19 NGO Group Report (2020), 'Marginalised Groups. Promoting Equality, Inclusion and Human Rights in the COVID-19 Crisis', available at: <https://www.inou.ie/assets/files/pdf/covid-19-ngo-group-joint-submission.pdf>.

with family in overcrowded conditions that are not conducive to social isolation and physical distancing.²⁷

Education

Fears have been raised that the educational gap present in Ireland will heretofore be exacerbated during school closures.²⁸ In the current context, Traveller advocacy groups have highlighted “a deficit of and a lack of access to appropriate devices and Wi-Fi coverage”;²⁹ restricted study space for students; insufficient/no access to electricity in unofficial sites.³⁰ Furthermore, in the home-schooling environment, as a result of intergenerational educational disadvantage, parents in Traveller and Roma Communities “are often not equipped with the literacy skills and curriculum knowledge” that would enable them to support and home school their children during school closures.³¹ All of these factors contribute to fears of an exacerbation of educational disadvantage in the Traveller Community vis-à-vis the general population.³²

On the 8th of May the Government announced that the State exam for final year secondary students (Leaving Certificate) was being postponed indefinitely.³³ Instead, students would have the option to 1) sit the exam at some point in the future or 2) apply for a calculated grade system which estimates expected personal and overall school and national performance

²⁷ COVID-19 NGO Group Report (2020), ‘Marginalised Groups. Promoting Equality, Inclusion and Human Rights in the COVID-19 Crisis’, available at: <https://www.inou.ie/assets/files/pdf/covid-19-ngo-group-joint-submission.pdf>.

²⁸ RTÉ (2020), ‘Over half of Irish Travellers have left school by the age of 15,’ 20 February 2020, available at: <https://www.rte.ie/news/regional/2020/0226/1117793-traveller-ethnicity-day/>; Council of Europe (2020), ‘European Social Charter. European Committee of Social Rights: Conclusions 2019’, March 2020, available at: <https://rm.coe.int/rapport-irl-en/16809cfbc0>.

²⁹ Irish Traveller Movement (2020), ‘Letter to Department of Education and Skills’, 29 April 2020, available at: https://mcusercontent.com/ed5a922d721d5640ea6620735/files/5e927b61-d668-4fdc-8ed6-37f10b5dc943/Letter_to_Department_of_Education_and_Skills.pdf.

³⁰ The Irish Times (2020), ‘Travellers on halting site ‘thick with rats’ challenge Cork council housing plan’, 3 June 2020, available at: https://www.irishtimes.com/news/crime-and-law/courts/high-court/travellers-on-halting-site-thick-with-rats-challenge-cork-council-housing-plan-1.4269806?utm_source=dlvr.it&utm_medium=twitter <https://www.paveepoint.ie/solidarity-on-international-traveller-roma-day-2020/>.

³¹ COVID-19 NGO Group Report (2020), ‘Marginalised Groups. Promoting Equality, Inclusion and Human Rights in the COVID-19 Crisis’, available at: <https://www.inou.ie/assets/files/pdf/covid-19-ngo-group-joint-submission.pdf>.

³² Irish Traveller Movement (2020), ‘Letter to Department of Education and Skills’, 29 April 2020, available at: https://mcusercontent.com/ed5a922d721d5640ea6620735/files/5e927b61-d668-4fdc-8ed6-37f10b5dc943/Letter_to_Department_of_Education_and_Skills.pdf.

³³ Department of Education and Skills (2020), ‘Minister announces postponement of 2020 Leaving Certificate examinations’, 8 May 2020, available at: <https://www.education.ie/en/Press-Events/Press-Releases/2020-press-releases/PR20-05-08.html>.

standards.³⁴ Traveller advocacy groups raised concerns regarding the impact of the exam postponement, noting the “considerable difficulties” faced by Traveller students in the Covid-19 context, ongoing concerns regarding Traveller students vis-à-vis transitioning through various educational stages and, importantly, the potential for “unconscious bias” to impact negatively on Traveller students in the calculated grade process.³⁵

Housing

According to independent think tank Social Justice Ireland: current “Lack of facilities and unsanitary conditions in some Traveller accommodation, particularly so-called unauthorised halting sites, present a serious health risk in normal times. In the midst of a highly infectious pandemic, they could be catastrophic”.³⁶ Given overcrowded, substandard living conditions, and inadequate provision of and access to water and sanitation, Traveller advocacy groups, have raised concerns regarding the ability of Traveller and Roma community members to self-isolate, maintain physical distancing and requested hygiene practices.³⁷

According to Bernard Joyce, Director of the Irish Travellers Movement (ITM), greater than 2,000 families and 3,000 children live in “inadequate, unsafe and temporary conditions.” Joyce continues, 1,045 families live on official sites, but have to share basic facilities with members of extended family; 927 families share accommodation with siblings, parents and grandparents. 174 other families live with access to only portable water, toilet and sanitary facilities.³⁸ In the context of overcrowding, a report recently published by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs detailed that 18% of Roma

³⁴ Department of Education and Skills (2020), ‘Leaving Certificate 2020: Information and Resources’, 1 June 2020, available at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/2f07eb-leaving-cert-2020-information/#information-for-leaving-cert-students> .

³⁵ Pavee Point (2020), ‘Urgent letter regarding Leaving Certificate and Traveller and Roma Students’, 8 May 2020, available at: <https://www.paveepoint.ie/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Urgent.-Leaving-Certificate-Traveller-and-Roma-students-2.pdf> .

³⁶ Social Justice Ireland (2020), ‘Inadequate housing means c.14,700 households unable to social distance - #MoveTheVulnerableOut’, 27 March 2020, available at: <https://www.socialjustice.ie/content/policy-issues/inadequate-housing-means-c14700-households-unable-social-distance> .

³⁷ The Irish Examiner (2020), ‘Concern Over Lack of Self-isolation facilities for Traveller and Roma Communities’, 18 April 2020, available at: <https://www.irishexaminer.com/breakingnews/ireland/concern-over-lack-of-self-isolation-facilities-for-traveller-and-roma-communities-994762.html> ; COVID-19 NGO Group Report (2020), ‘Marginalised Groups. Promoting Equality, Inclusion and Human Rights in the COVID-19 Crisis’, available at: <https://www.inou.ie/assets/files/pdf/covid-19-ngo-group-joint-submission.pdf> .

³⁸ Joyce, B. (2020), ‘Opinion: Conditions for Travellers have been difficult in the Covid-19 shutdown’, *The Journal.ie*, 6 June 2020, available at: <https://www.thejournal.ie/readme/travellers-coronavirus-5113397-Jun2020/> .



households have 5+ children residing therein.³⁹ Members of the Roma community in Ireland live in “extreme poverty, in sub-standard accommodation, sometimes with no bathroom, kitchen or cooker”. In addition to reports of rat infestations, “damp and sewerage problems,” there is also evidence of overcrowding, and people living in “unsafe abandoned buildings”.⁴⁰

It is important to note that in the pre-COVID-19 context, only €8.6m of an annual budget of €13m for Traveller accommodation was spent by local authorities in 2019, despite data from the Department of Housing in 2018 detailing families (600) living in unofficial sites as having no access to running water, toilets, electricity and chronic overcrowding in the living conditions shared with other (927) families.⁴¹ Traveller advocacy groups have also and repeatedly pointed to unhealthy (physical and mental) and unsafe living conditions including overcrowding, lack of access to water, sanitation and electricity, inadequate heating, rat infestations among others.⁴² It has been argued that institutional racism and a will to assimilate the Traveller Community underpins the living conditions outlined here.⁴³ Members of the Roma community have also reported experiencing discrimination when accessing and in accommodation including poor levels of quality and an insecurity of tenure.⁴⁴ These issues increase the potential negative impact of COVID-19 on the Traveller and Roma communities. Further, the above also indicate that, despite supports being offered by

³⁹ Department of Children and Youth Affairs (2020), ‘Young Travellers in Ireland. Includes some data on Young Roma’, available at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/c2a87f-the-statistical-spotlight-series/> .

⁴⁰ Pavee Point (2018) ‘Roma in Ireland: A National Needs Assessment’, available at: <https://www.paveepoint.ie/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/RNA-PDF.pdf> .

⁴¹ Holland, K. (2020), ‘More than €4m in Traveller housing funding left unspent,’ *The Irish Times*, 18 May 2020, available at: <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/more-than-4m-in-traveller-housing-funding-left-unspent-1.4256149> .

⁴² Galway Advertiser (2019), ‘Report highlights ‘uninhabitable, unsafe, and unhealthy’ Traveller accommodation in Galway’, 5 December, available at: <https://www.advertiser.ie/galway/article/111888/report-highlights-uninhabitable-unsafe-and-unhealthy-traveller-accommodation-in-galway> ; Shanahan, C. (2019) ‘Institutional Racism in its rawest form’, *The Irish Examiner*, 2 December 2020, available at: <https://www.irishexaminer.com/breakingnews/ireland/institutional-racism-in-its-rawest-form-967745.html> .

⁴³ Galway Advertiser (2019), ‘Report highlights ‘uninhabitable, unsafe, and unhealthy’ Traveller accommodation in Galway’, 5 December, available at: <https://www.advertiser.ie/galway/article/111888/report-highlights-uninhabitable-unsafe-and-unhealthy-traveller-accommodation-in-galway>; Social Justice Ireland (2020), ‘Inadequate housing means c.14,700 households unable to social distance - #MoveTheVulnerableOut’, 27 March 2020, available at: <https://www.socialjustice.ie/content/policy-issues/inadequate-housing-means-c14700-households-unable-social-distance> .

⁴⁴ Point (2018) ‘Roma in Ireland: A National Needs Assessment’, available at: <https://www.paveepoint.ie/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/RNA-PDF.pdf> .

central Government in Ireland, there is no guarantee that these will be provided by Local Authorities across the State.

Water and Sanitation

As noted in the previous section, members of the Traveller and Roma communities often reside in substandard, unsafe and unhealthy conditions, as well as in overcrowded accommodation with inadequate access to water, sanitation and heating inter alia. In March, Dr Sindy Joyce, member of the Council of State and Traveller Rights activist, stated that "Mincéir (Traveller Community) families [are] living on overcrowded sites with limited or no access to water, and many with only shared porta[ble] toilets, any plans being put in place to protect these families?"⁴⁵ Measures taken by some local authorities to support Traveller Community families in the context of Covid-19 are discussed below. For now, it is important to note that in June, reports continued to emerge in the media of the ongoing problems faced by Travellers in the context of accommodation, sanitation and Covid-19. Twenty plus members of one Traveller family brought their case to the High Court. It was noted that they have been living in an unauthorised halting site for fifteen years without access to electricity or secure, permanent toilet amenities (Portable toilets in place for almost a decade).⁴⁶ The family members stated that their living conditions are "thick with rats" and furthermore, "they remain in unsanitary conditions with limited washing facilities during the Covid-19 pandemic".⁴⁷

1.3 Estimates of the scale of the impact

On April 22nd, a letter signed by the leaders of a number of civil society organisations was sent to the Taoiseach (Irish prime minister) calling for a human rights assessment of the actions taken by the State in response to Covid-19. This letter included a call that data on Covid-19 cases be disaggregated on, among others, ethnicity and nationality. This would allow for the impact of the virus on vulnerable communities to come to the fore as noted above vis-à-vis health outcomes.⁴⁸ Despite calls by CSOs for a broader human rights assessment on the impact of Covid-19 preventative

⁴⁵ Rorke, B. (2020), 'Inequality, anti-Roma racism, and the coronavirus', 19 March 2020, available at:

https://euobserver.com/coronavirus/147759?utm_source=euobs&utm_medium=email .

⁴⁶ The Irish Times (2020), 'Travellers on halting site 'thick with rats' challenge Cork council housing plan', 3 June 2020, available at: https://www.irishtimes.com/news/crime-and-law/courts/high-court/travellers-on-halting-site-thick-with-rats-challenge-cork-council-housing-plan-1.4269806?utm_source=dlvr.it&utm_medium=twitter <https://www.paveepoint.ie/solidarity-on-international-traveller-roma-day-2020/> .

⁴⁷ The Irish Times (2020) 'Travellers on halting site 'thick with rats' challenge Cork council housing plan',
ibid.

⁴⁸ Joint Civil Society Organisations (2020), 'CSOs letter to Taoiseach calling for HRIA', 22 April 2020, available at: <https://www.iccl.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/CSOs-letter-to-Taoiseach-calling-for-HRIA.pdf> .

measures, insights on the broader impact of the virus in areas such as poverty, unemployment and the differential impact on Roma women and children are limited at time of writing.

Speaking to the media on April 6th, co-ordinator of CSO Pavee Point's Roma programme, noted that experiences of exclusion from social welfare supports and overcrowding experienced pre-Covid-19 were being exacerbated during the pandemic.⁴⁹ As noted, less than 17% of participants in the RNA reported being employed. Furthermore, participants reported being unable to access unemployment and training schemes, social protection payments, child benefit supports and those related to housing.⁵⁰

One of the effects of Covid-19 and related restrictions on minority communities will be "increased unemployment amongst Traveller men".⁵¹ Data published in early June evidence that those occupations wherein Traveller men and women are employed accounted for the highest sectors wherein staff applied and were in receipt of the Pandemic Unemployment Payment.⁵² As such, the impact of Covid-19 and associated restrictions may likely be felt greater among the Traveller and Roma communities comparative to the general population vis-à-vis increased rates of unemployment and exacerbation of poverty.

Covid-19 restrictions will impact on those who have been subject to domestic violence, not only through increased stress and implications of same, but also in the ability for people to seek help and safety. Previous policy submissions note various barriers that may hinder the ability of Traveller and Roma women to leave situations of domestic violence. These include financial barriers, as faced by women in the general population, and also community pressures to remain in a violent relationship.⁵³ As a result of Covid-19 restrictions on social movement, Traveller women who experience

⁴⁹ Pollak, S. (2020), 'Coronavirus 'disproportionately impacting' Ireland's Roma community', 6 April 2020, available at: <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/coronavirus-disproportionately-impacting-ireland-s-roma-community-1.4222000> .

⁵⁰ Pavee Point (2018) 'Roma in Ireland: A National Needs Assessment', available at: <https://www.paveepoint.ie/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/RNA-PDF.pdf> .

⁵¹ COVID-19 NGO Group Report (2020), 'Marginalised Groups. Promoting Equality, Inclusion and Human Rights in the COVID-19 Crisis', available at: <https://www.inou.ie/assets/files/pdf/covid-19-ngo-group-joint-submission.pdf> .

⁵² Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (2020), 'Update on Payments Awarded for Covid-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment and Enhanced Illness Benefit – Statistics', 2 June 2020, available at: <https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/75250/8e3dc7ee-120c-475c-8b21-6dac66bcc6bb.pdf#page=null> .

⁵³ Pavee Point (2013), 'Submission to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Justice, Equality and Defence on the issue of domestic violence', available at: <http://www.paveepoint.ie/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/12-July-Pavee-Point-Submission-to-the-Committee-on-domestic-violence-1.pdf> .

domestic violence have been “trapped in their house or trailer with their abuser with little way to connect with the outside world”.⁵⁴ Roma women in a domestic violence setting may also be exposed to increased risk of abuse with little to no opportunity to secure help. Domestic violence impacts the whole of society. However, for Traveller and Roma women who experience domestic violence, extant structural barriers and experiences of discrimination are likely to increase negative outcomes vis-à-vis domestic violence.

Covid-19 restrictions will likely impact on those who have been subject to domestic violence, not only through increased stress and implications of same, but also in the ability for people to seek help and safety. As a result of Covid-19 restrictions on social movement, Traveller women who experience domestic violence may find themselves in confined conditions with the person who has abused them heretofore with little opportunity to communicate with external supports. Similarly, Roma women in a domestic violence setting may also be exposed to increased risk of abuse with little to no opportunity to secure help. Domestic violence impacts the whole of society. However, for Traveller and Roma women who experience domestic violence, extant structural barriers and experiences of discrimination are likely to increase negative outcomes vis-à-vis domestic violence.

Pre-Covid-19 insights from the RNA evidence that Roma children were already disadvantaged in education due to poverty, including not having access to regular meals. These experiences are amplified by intergenerational discrimination and exclusions in the education context which impact parent’s ability to support their children.⁵⁵ Experiences such as these will be exacerbated in the Covid-19 context and there will likely be a widening of the educational disadvantage between Roma children and those of the general population. Pavee Point note that “some very vulnerable Roma do not have access to social welfare” and as such “do not have enough food to eat or nappies for their children”.⁵⁶ It is likely that, albeit with nuanced differences, that Traveller Children will also see education disadvantage

⁵⁴ Pavee Point (2013), ‘Submission to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Justice, Equality and Defence on the issue of domestic violence’, available at: <http://www.paveepoint.ie/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/12-July-Pavee-Point-Submission-to-the-Committee-on-domestic-violence-1.pdf> .

⁵⁵ Pavee Point (2018), ‘Roma in Ireland: A National Needs Assessment’, available at: <https://www.paveepoint.ie/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/RNA-PDF.pdf> .

⁵⁶ Pavee Point (2020), ‘COVID-19 Solidarity on International Traveller & Roma Day 2020’, available at: <https://www.paveepoint.ie/solidarity-on-international-traveller-roma-day-2020/> .

widen when compared to the general population as a result of Covid-19 and associated measures.⁵⁷

2 Specific measures to address the implications of the pandemic on Roma and Travellers

2.1 Measures to tackle the spread of the virus specifically among Roma and Travellers communities

Medical testing

On March 24th Department of Health officials announced that the Traveller and Roma communities were to be treated as priority groups for Covid-19 testing.⁵⁸ In April the Government commenced communicating data on the impact of Covid-19 on Traveller, Roma and other vulnerable communities.⁵⁹ While welcomed, official data seem to be at odds with those gathered by Traveller and Roma civil society organisations. Speaking to media, the NGO Pavee Point stated that her organisation had at that point recorded 61 cases of Covid-19 and 6 fatalities among the Roma community. It also noted that the fourth person to die from Covid-19 in the State was Roma. This stood in contrast to the official figure released a day earlier by the Deputy Chief Medical Officer whereby it was claimed that there were 22 cases of Covid-19 in the Roma community, 4 fatalities and 7 people then in hospital.⁶⁰ The figure reported by Pavee Point concerning the Roma community presents a fatality rate of almost 10% among the Roma community, far in excess of the general population. Writing on June 2nd, the Irish Traveller Movement cited data from Pavee Point, working in conjunction with Traveller Health

⁵⁷ Irish Traveller Movement (2020), 'Letter to Department of Education and Skills', 29 April 2020, available at: https://mcusercontent.com/ed5a922d721d5640ea6620735/files/5e927b61-d668-4fdc-8ed6-37f10b5dc943/Letter_to_Department_of_Education_and_Skills.pdf .

⁵⁸ Department of Health (2020), 'Statement from the National Public Health Emergency Team – Tuesday 24 March,' available at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/e378fd-statement-from-the-national-public-health-emergency-team-on-tuesday-/> ; Hennessy, M. (2020), 'Explainer: Coronavirus Testing', *The Journal.ie*, 26 March 2020, available at: <https://www.thejournal.ie/explainer-coronavirus-testing-5058094-Mar2020/> .

⁵⁹ Cullen, P. (2020), 'Coronavirus: Marginalised groups to become new frontline in battle against disease', *The Irish Times*, 8 May 2020, available at: https://www.irishtimes.com/news/health/coronavirus-marginalised-groups-to-become-new-frontline-in-battle-against-disease-1.4247933?mode=amp&fbclid=IwAR0hgKcqcNMBYR_VXG1mGTtwCKoth7hjtHxFyRLxPI4ymgZnVMSjmWdgo ; See for example: McGrath, D. (2020), 'Coronavirus: Three deaths and 47 new cases confirmed in Ireland', *The Journal.ie*, 3 June 2020, available at: <https://www.thejournal.ie/cases-numbers-covid-19-coronavirus-tony-holohan-5114061-Jun2020/> .

⁶⁰ RTE (2020), 'Drivetime', 21 May 2020, available at: <https://www.rte.ie/radio/radioplayer/html5/#/radio1/11194073> .

Units and others that reported that more than 150 Travellers have tested positive for Covid-19.⁶¹

Physical Distancing

In order to support the Traveller Community in maintaining physical distancing living in official and unofficial sites, the Minister for Housing communicated in a circular notice on March 18th (reiterated and clarified on April 24th) that the following measures may be required to Directors of Local Authorities in Ireland. In the context of physical distancing, these include the provision (of):⁶²

- Additional mobile accommodation / space where there is overcrowding
- Additional units (either mobiles on site or houses elsewhere that will allow for self-isolation / quarantine)
- Furthermore, if any works are required, the Local Authority in question was directed to contact the Department of Housing to discuss the measures to take and the availability of funding

As of June 6th, only twenty (of thirty-one) local authorities had requested funding to address Traveller Community needs (including sanitary as discussed below).⁶³

On the 27th of March, the Emergency Measures in the Public Interest (Covid-19) Act 2020 came into effect. Section 5(7) thereof stipulates that: “all Travellers currently residing in any location should not be evicted from that location during the COVID-19 emergency, except where the movement “is required to ameliorate hardship and provide protection” and subject to consultation with the Travellers concerned”.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Joyce, B. (2020), ‘Opinion: Conditions for Travellers have been difficult in the Covid-19 shutdown’, *The Journal.ie*, 6 June 2020, available at: <https://www.thejournal.ie/readme/travellers-coronavirus-5113397-Jun2020/> .

⁶² Pavee Point (2020) ‘COVID-19 Information and Resources’, available at: <https://www.paveepoint.ie/stay-safe-from-coronavirus-covid-19/> and Department of Planning, Housing and Local Government (2020), ‘Note for clarifications on Circular 06/2020 and examples of good practice’, 24 April 2020, available at: https://mcusercontent.com/ed5a922d721d5640ea6620735/files/48d01ee9-1862-4be3-9238-e59a2b3e645c/C_19_TA_clarifications_and_egs_of_good_practice.pdf .

⁶³ Joyce, B. (2020), ‘Opinion: Conditions for Travellers have been difficult in the Covid-19 shutdown’, *The Journal.ie*, 6 June 2020, available at: <https://www.thejournal.ie/readme/travellers-coronavirus-5113397-Jun2020/> ; Pavee Point (2020) ‘Letter’, 25 March 2020, available at: <https://www.paveepoint.ie/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Letter-to-Minister-of-Housing-March25.pdf> ; Local Government Management Agency (2020), ‘About us’, available at : <https://www.lgma.ie/en/about-us/> .

⁶⁴ Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (2020), ‘COVID-19 Queries from TDs’, 17 and 20 April, available at: https://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/covid-19-related_responses_17_and_20_april.pdf .

Provision of running water and sanitation

The circular sent by the Minister for Housing to Local Authorities also referred to measures to support the Traveller Community water provision and sanitation.⁶⁵ This included ensuring the availability of:

1. Extra toilets
2. Running water
3. Extra refuse collection

As with accommodation, as of June 6th, one third of all Local Authorities had yet to draw down supports on offer from the Minister of Housing.⁶⁶ While welcomed, Traveller Community representatives have noted that it has taken a crisis such as Covid-19 for Travellers to get access to basic sanitation services and there is a fear that once the crisis passes, the provision of such services will end.⁶⁷ It is also worth noting that despite some good work, problems remain for some in the Traveller Community with access to water being restricted at certain times.⁶⁸

2.2 Measures to support Roma and Travelers communities in regards to medical and social assistance

There are no additional measures specifically for the Traveller and Roma communities, apart from those listed in section 2.1.

2.3 Measures addressing the needs of Roma children

On April 26th the Irish Traveller Movement wrote to the Department of Education and Skills requesting that it ensured that consideration of and support for Traveller children in new education regulations.⁶⁹ In response, the Minister for Education and Skills referred to official guidance offered to schools on the continuity of learning in the current context.⁷⁰ This guidance

⁶⁵ Pavee Point (2020), 'COVID-19 Information and Resources', available at: <https://www.paveepoint.ie/stay-safe-from-coronavirus-covid-19/>.

⁶⁶ Joyce, B. (2020), 'Opinion: Conditions for Travellers have been difficult in the Covid-19 shutdown', *The Journal.ie*, 6 June 2020, available at: <https://www.thejournal.ie/readme/travellers-coronavirus-5113397-Jun2020/>.

⁶⁷ Holland, K. (2020), 'Traveller realities amid the pandemic: 'I thought I'd never see a sup from a tap again'', *The Irish Times*, 25 May 2020, available at: <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/traveller-realities-amid-the-pandemic-i-thought-i-d-never-see-a-sup-from-a-tap-again-1.4261246>.

⁶⁸ Councillor Anthony Flynn (2020), '@AnthonyICHH', 30 May 2020, available at: <https://twitter.com/AnthonyICHH/status/1266865328283422725?s=20>.

⁶⁹ Irish Traveller Movement (2020), 'Letter to Department of Education and Skills', 29 April 2020, available at: https://mcusercontent.com/ed5a922d721d5640ea6620735/files/5e927b61-d668-4fdc-8ed6-37f10b5dc943/Letter_to_Department_of_Education_and_Skills.pdf.

⁷⁰ Minister for Education and Skills (2020), 'Letter from Minister for Education Traveller students and Covid', available at: <https://itmtrav.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Letter-from-Minister-for-Education-Traveller-students-and-Covid.pdf>.

suggests that teachers adapt their pedagogical approaches, maintain regular contact with students and parents, and the posting of materials for those without digital access.⁷¹ The Minister’s letter also made reference to additional (to extant €40m annual grant) funding of €10m (€7m post-primary, €3m primary) to support access to technology and assist in the procurement of devices. Schools were requested to direct funding to support children who are “disadvantaged (including Traveller and Roma children) in their engagement with the schools remote teaching and learning due to a lack of access to digital devices.”⁷²

On June 5th, the Minister for Education confirmed that a Summer Education Programme would be made available for “children with significant special educational needs and those at greatest risk of educational disadvantage.” Specifics in relation to this programme are to be finalised at time of writing. Interestingly, there may be a differential impact of this programme given that “the programme would be reliant on schools, teachers and Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) choosing to participate”.⁷³

3 Any negative public reactions targeting Roma and Travellers or positive change in attitudes towards them

3.1 Negative public reactions

Anti-Traveller racism is nothing new in Ireland.⁷⁴ The current Covid-19 context has also witnessed anti-Traveller racism. In April, the Kerry Traveller Community Health Organisation stated that the Traveller Community were “under siege”.⁷⁵ Despite the vast majority of the Traveller Community abiding by physical distancing restrictions, the organisation related claims

⁷¹ Department of Education and Skills (2020), ‘Guidance on Continuity of Schooling: Supporting pupils at risk of educational disadvantage. For primary schools’, 22 April 2020, available at:

<https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Information/National-Emergencies-Public-Health-Issues/guidance-support-pupils-at-risk-primary.pdf> .

⁷² Irish Traveller Movement (2020), ‘Letter to Department of Education and Skills’, 29 April 2020, available at:

https://mcusercontent.com/ed5a922d721d5640ea6620735/files/5e927b61-d668-4fdc-8ed6-37f10b5dc943/Letter_to_Department_of_Education_and_Skills.pdf .

⁷³ Department of Education and Skills (2020), ‘Minister McHugh confirms Summer Programme to run for children with special educational needs and disadvantage’, 5 June 2020, available at: <https://www.education.ie/en/Press-Events/Press-Releases/2020-press-releases/PR20-06-05.html> .

⁷⁴Michael, L. (2020), ‘Reports of Racism in Ireland: 2019’, available at: https://inar.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/2019_iReport_Final.pdf .

⁷⁵ Press Association (2020), ‘Travellers facing racism over claims some are flouting COVID-19 restrictions’, 24 April 2020,

<https://www.irishexaminer.com/breakingnews/ireland/travellers-facing-racism-over-claims-some-are-flouting-covid-19-restrictions-995998.html>; see also @BrigidQuilligan (2020), 24 April, available at: <https://twitter.com/BrigidQuilligan/status/1253642804863086593> .

that all Travellers were flouting Covid-19 restrictions, that Travellers were spreading Covid-19 and that Travellers should be “gassed”.⁷⁶

The issue of Traveller Community funerals was a common theme in anti-Traveller abuse with reference being made to two in particular which had a large number of mourners in attendance. In response, a local councillor claimed that “where Travellers and their funerals are concerned, there appears to be one law for the general population and another for this specific group”.⁷⁷ This despite Traveller Community advocacy groups actively calling for the maintenance of physical distancing measures.⁷⁸

The focus on the Traveller Community vis-à-vis Covid-19 restrictions was obvious on social media. In response to media reports about same online comments included:

*“Travellers not following rules and laws. Would you believe it. And if Pavee Point are saying it a “significant minority”, then you know that translates to “almost every last one”. Only surprised the admit to it, [sic] and haven’t claimed it’s racist against them”.*⁷⁹

In the same context another stated:

*“they should be put on reservations like the native Americans, they are a threat to the rest of the tax paying residents”.*⁸⁰

Other comments on social media implied ‘allowing’ the Traveller Community to contract Covid-19 and “ethnic cleansing” and on the same thread another stated “I hope every knacker in the country dies of CV.”⁸¹ Other posts also claimed that Traveller Community members coming to Ireland during the Covid-19 crisis should be killed.⁸² Traveller Community advocates also called

⁷⁶ Press Association (2020), ‘Travellers facing racism over claims some are flouting COVID-19 restrictions’, 24 April 2020, <https://www.irishexaminer.com/breakingnews/ireland/travellers-facing-racism-over-claims-some-are-flouting-covid-19-restrictions-995998.html>.

⁷⁷ Holland, K. (2020), ‘Gardaí must be ‘more assertive’ at large funerals – Traveller advocate’, *The Irish Times*, 13 May 2020, available at: <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/garda%C3%AD-must-be-more-assertive-at-large-funerals-traveller-advocate-1.4251853>.

⁷⁸ Holland, K. (2020), ‘Gardaí must be ‘more assertive’ at large funerals – Traveller advocate’, *The Irish Times*, 13 May 2020, available at: <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/garda%C3%AD-must-be-more-assertive-at-large-funerals-traveller-advocate-1.4251853>.

⁷⁹ Link available on request, personal account hence not identifying publicly here.

⁸⁰ @SindyLJoyce (2020), 13 May, available at: <https://twitter.com/sindyljoyce/status/1260539786818998272?s=21>.

⁸¹ @SindyLJoyce (2020), 20 March, available at: <https://twitter.com/sindyljoyce/status/1240991138527563781?s=21>.

⁸² @SindyLJoyce (2020), 18 April, available at: <https://twitter.com/sindyljoyce/status/1251645437406257153?s=21>.

out perceived media bias when it comes to reporting on and negative generalisations of Traveller Communities vis-à-vis Covid-19.⁸³

3.2 Positive change in attitudes

Despite some very positive examples within the Traveller Community of actions by individuals or local organisations such as working on the frontline to combat COVID-19 or donating financial sums to keyworkers to support their efforts, there is no evidence of a change in narrative towards the Traveller and Roma communities.⁸⁴

⁸³ @SindyLJoyce (2020), 15 May, available at: <https://twitter.com/sindyljoyce/status/1261247347880857600?s=11>.

⁸⁴ O'Kelly, E (2020), 'Leaving Cert student's 30-hour week on the Covid-19 frontline', RTÉ, 2 May 2020, available at: <https://www.rte.ie/news/education/2020/0501/1136194-leaving-cert-student/> and @TeresaMannion (2020), 15 April, available at: <https://twitter.com/teresamannion/status/1250529926425575424?s=2>.