



National Traveller Mabs

Money Advice & Budgeting Service

Pre Budget Submission

Budget 2019

Prepared June 2018

Focus – Travellers: ethnic recognition needs to deliver

Improved outcomes

National Traveller MABS was formally established in 2005 and is fully funded by the Citizens Information Board (CIB). National Traveller MABS *is a leading advocate for the financial inclusion of Travellers in Ireland.*

Traveller Accommodation Policy

Access to Affordable Credit

Addressing Traveller Fuel Poverty

Travellers and accommodation in the Republic of Ireland

Travellers in Ireland represent just over half of one percent of the total population according to the Central Statistics Office, with the 2016 Census citing an Irish Traveller population of approximately 30,987. As a community, Travellers continue to face high levels of unemployment (80%), low levels of education – with only 1% reaching third level, and poor health (in comparison to the majority settled population), higher mortality rates, and many live on halting sites in very poor conditions.

Greater detail on the level of disadvantage faced by Travellers is available through the recently published Behaviour and Attitudes Traveller Community National Survey of 2017, commissioned by the Community Foundation for Ireland.

The Irish state formally recognised Travellers as an indigenous ethnic minority in March 2017, and at the Department of Justice and Equality launch of the [National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy 2017-2021](#) in June Minister Stanton said:

“During the years of the recent recession from which Ireland is slowly emerging, those at the margins of our society frequently – and regrettably – suffered disproportionately from the effects of financial adjustments during the financial crisis. Now that Ireland’s economy is back on a firmer footing, it is a moral and societal imperative that we work together to address the real needs of these communities”.

Travellers want to access credit to purchase caravans, as this is often the only way that they can secure a place to live. The Housing Agency carried out a [Review of Loans and Grants for the Purchase of Caravans by Travellers Scheme](#) for the Department of Housing, Planning, and local Government. All 31 local authorities participated in the review and there was 20 written submission received. The original aim of the scheme was to improve and provide quality and affordability accommodation. 12 of 31 local authorities operated the scheme, but all the stakeholders thought the scheme was still relevant (p.19). Local authorities are in a position to provide affordable, accessible and sustainable credit to Travellers in their area yet many choose not to administer this scheme.

National Traveller MABS are calling for the development of a national caravan rental scheme and the re-instatement of an updated caravan loan scheme. The household budget scheme should form part of the operation of each scheme.

There is a crisis in Traveller accommodation which cannot be addressed without the development of a comprehensive strategy for the provision of culturally appropriate affordable housing.

Introduce an overall national Traveller culturally appropriate accommodation policy. We believe that caravan rental should be a priority and implementation of this policy is long over due in this area, because Traveller families in the current housing crisis are at a higher risk of being made homeless.

We are calling for:

- a reinstatement of the Caravan loans, with the deduction at source via the Household Budget scheme,
- an overall national culturally appropriate accommodation policy to be introduced for Traveller accommodation
- Caravan rental to be a priority for Traveller families wanting to avail of a scheme

Priorities Budget 2019

The key elements of this submission are to alleviate the difficulty that Travellers families are having to face in securing safe and habitable accommodation. National Traveller MABS prioritise three specific areas that we call on the relevant government departments to consider:

**National Traveller
specific
Accommodation**

**Access to Affordable
Savings and Credit**

**Travellers & Fuel
Poverty**

National Traveller culturally appropriate Accommodation Policy

National Traveller MABS main focus is ensuring that Travellers had access to legal credit when purchasing a caravans/mobile home. As an organisation, we are currently aware of the high portion of the family income that is mainly being taken up by accommodation costs. Historically, due to the absence of a national policy in implementing a National Traveller Specific Accommodation policy, local authorities deal with the issue of accommodation. The responsibility for purchasing and maintaining caravans has been pushed onto the individual and not provided for by the State. National Traveller MABS are calling on the State for the development and implementation of culturally appropriate Traveller-specific accommodation policies. Travellers are social housing tenants who do not have the same access to good quality accommodation as other social housing tenants and there needs to be Traveller specific housing policy that includes standards and rental options.

This year, National Traveller MABS completed a study into the cost of mobile homes. We have made a number of recommendations around developing proper standards for the purchases of caravans/mobile homes and for the provision of a national caravan rental scheme.

<https://www.ntmabs.org/publications/development/2018/national-traveller-mabs-mobile-home-study.pdf>

Following from this report National Traveller MABS is calling for a national policy to implement Traveller culturally appropriate accommodation to be developed which would entail a standards position being applied in relation to mobile homes. (See concerns on fuel poverty below). Traveller accommodation is in crisis which cannot be addressed without the development of a comprehensive strategy for the of provision culturally appropriate affordable housing. The financial exclusion of Traveller from mainstream financial institution is a concern. The importance of affordability is significant and we believe that a caravan/mobile rental scheme should be introduced and seen as a priority within Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government policy. Travellers are citizen of this country and some are social housing tenants who do not have the same access to good quality accommodation as other members of society within the social housing sector. There needs to be Traveller specific housing policy that includes standards and rental.

Priority

Develop a National Traveller Culturally Appropriate Accommodation Policy

Traveller specific Accommodation recommendations

Independent Agency

Traveller accommodation policy has not been prioritised by successive governments. The Department of Housing,

Planning and Local Government has failed to understand the complexities of providing culturally appropriate options to Travellers.

Priority Create an independent national Traveller accommodation agency

Budget allocation

The budget for Traveller accommodation has been cut from €40 million to €4 million. As per a 2013 Irish Traveller Movement accommodation working group report: 361 Traveller families lived on unauthorised sites, 188 Traveller families lived on "basic service" bays, 182 families shared permanent halting sites, 17 families shared basic service bays or transient halting sites, and 663 Traveller families shared houses. This means that roughly 5,500, or 18.6%, of the Traveller population are in need of proper accommodation provision and at the same time nearly 50% of the Traveller accommodation budget to Local authorities over two years remained unspent¹.

Priority Reinstatement of adequate funding allowances for Traveller Specific accommodation, using the 2008 budget allocation of €40 million as a minimum starting point.

Traveller Accommodation Programmes (TAPs)

Local authorities are obliged under the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act 1998 to implement Traveller Accommodation Programmes. At present, no sanctions are in place for local authorities who fail to provide adequate Traveller specific accommodation in their area. Because of this, many Travellers continue to live in sub-standard living accommodation and families are raising children in dangerous sites that are not fit for purpose.

Priority – Introduce sanctions for local authorities who do not fulfill their obligation to the Traveller Accommodation Programme

Local Authority Underspend:

Many local authorities have continuously had an underspend of their Traveller housing budget, even when it has been recognised that there is a housing crisis in their area. It has been reported that money not drawn down is not made available the following year.

¹ <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/local-authorities-spend-less-than-half-of-allocation-for-traveller-accommodation-1.3301443>

Access to affordable savings and credit

Low cost loans

Travellers are one of the most marginalised groups in Ireland. This has resulted in them being both socially and financially excluded. Financial exclusion includes an inability to access legal financial services such as savings, insurance, and the most basic entitlement of low cost credit. Lack of formal requirements by financial institutions has prohibited many from accessing basic banking. Because of this, the use of illegal moneylenders is prevalent amongst the Traveller community along with high interest licensed moneylenders being seen as the only options for many. The Government's attempt to address this with the pilot personal micro credit scheme 'It Makes Sense Loan', while welcomed in starting to address financial exclusion it however limits an individual to borrowing a maximum of €2,000. Such a limit excludes Travellers from borrowing to purchase a decent caravan for long term living.

Priority –

- 1- Implement the 'It Makes Sense Loan' scheme in every Credit Union in Ireland with no cap on the number of loans provided**
- 2- Increase maximum loan amount from €2,000 to €10,000. This would enable Travellers access affordable credit to purchase a caravan.**

Provision of Local Authority caravan loans:

National Traveller MABS welcomed the recent Housing Agency review of the local authority Caravan Loan Scheme on behalf of the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government. However, we ask the following consideration needs to be addressed when considering a reinstatement of the scheme.

The Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act 1998 makes provisions for local authorities to operate a caravan loan scheme. To date, 36% of local authorities provide caravan loans to Travellers in their area, with a further 7% doing so on a 'case by case basis'. The remaining 57% do not provide caravan loans. The recent report by National Traveller MABS highlighted a model of best practice when lending to those on low income. The Jones Model argues that with the correct structures those on low income are credit worthy.

Priority –

1 – Using the Jones Model of lending (below), every local authority or recognised agency should provide caravan loans to Travellers in their locality.

2 - A transparent system of assessing tenants for loans, providing loans, and monitoring repayments should be implemented.

3 -An accessible method of repayment should be provided to support people in repaying the loans.

- (i) Provision of credit through trusted sources;
- (ii) An accessible application process;
- (iii) Engagement with money management support;
- (iv) Clear delineation of roles and responsibilities between assessor, appraiser and guarantor;
- (v) Sharing of risk and the application of responsible lending principles;
- (vi) Provision for repayment deduction at source (subject to protected income considerations and individual choice);
- (vii) That such a scheme should provide a pathway to financial inclusion, and hence should encompass a strategic focus.

Travellers and Fuel Poverty

When approached by our colleagues in Dublin 10 & 20 MABS, we wanted to lend credence to the fact that the issue of fuel poverty directly and disproportionately affects the lives of Travellers, as borne out by the data in the Dublin 10 & 20 report *Left behind in the Cold*².

National Traveller MABS commissioned some research in this area in 2017. It was a comparative study of how utility provision is administered and rents collected in Traveller specific accommodation in Fingal.

As part of the broader recommendations arising from that research we have the issue of fuel poverty and the following list of initiatives:

² https://www.mabs.ie/downloads/reports_submissions/Left_Behind_in_the_Cold_Dublin_10_and_20_MABS_Report.pdf

Address fuel poverty.

Consider removing the restriction on the payment of the Fuel Allowance to one family per address as Traveller experience is that many are forced into doubling up with extended family. At times as many as two or three extended family members can be resident at the same address and adversely impacted by this, and it is not a reflection on Travellers, due to the lack of an accommodation policy.

A conventional method of measuring fuel poverty is to define it as a situation where a household needs to spend more than 10% of their income on energy in order to maintain an acceptable level of heat throughout their home. All Traveller clients were in fuel poverty on the ten per cent measure, with the average (median) percentage of household disposable income taken up by fuel costs amounting to around one fifth (21 per cent). The average age of a mobile/caravan was 15 years;

From the Comparative study of how utility provision is administered and rents collected in Traveller specific accommodation in Fingal.

Specific initiatives that:

1. Identify the costs for families (of different sizes and type) of running a caravan (including the percentage of the families' income spent on rent, light and heat);
2. Identify how caravans could be made more energy efficient (e.g. insulation with the application of green technologies (e.g. wind and solar)) undertaken with the Traveller economy and social enterprises
3. Tests the use of district heating

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