



National Traveller Mabs

Money Advice & Budgeting Service

- Pre Budget Submission -

Budget 2017

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Focus – Travellers: securing safe and habitable accommodation

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- the 2011 Census cites an Irish Traveller population of approximately 30,000. As a community, Travellers continue to face high levels of unemployment, low levels of education, poor health (in comparison to the majority settled population), higher mortality rates and many live on halting sites in very poor conditions. Failure to grant Travellers formal status as an ethnic group has directly and indirectly contributed to the poor levels of attainment outlined above.

National Traveller MABS has long advocated for Travellers to have full and equal access to financial services. Such services include savings, credit and insurance. While access to credit is necessary for many life events, National Traveller MABS has found that the biggest demand for credit by Travellers relates to accommodation costs.

Such costs include the purchase of caravans for long term living. Loans for such accommodation have traditionally been sourced from local authorities and in more recent times from Credit unions. However accessing credit to purchase caravans can prove to be a major difficulty for many Travellers. The lack of access to legal and affordable credit underpins this issue. Many Travellers cannot access bank accounts due to a lack of ID or insufficient income. While credit unions are more accessible, they are unwilling to lend large amounts as first or even second loans. Local authorities are in a strong position to provide affordable, accessible and sustainable credit to Travellers in their area yet many choose not to.

Access to adequate accommodation does not only include Traveller specific accommodation but also the private rented sector. National Traveller MABS acknowledges that both an increase in the cost of private rent and a decrease in rent supplements have affected Irish society as a whole. However, Travellers are often faced with the additional issue of being denied private rented accommodation due to their ethnicity. Additionally, young married Travellers often cannot afford existing rents as their income, if social welfare, is not adequate. This forces many young couples to live with parents and extended family causing serious overcrowding.

Priorities Budget 2017

The key elements of this submission aim to alleviate the difficulty that Travellers have in securing safe and habitable accommodation. We prioritise three specific areas that we call on the relevant government departments to consider:



Ethnic Recognition

The United Kingdom and Northern Ireland recognise Travellers as a distinct ethnic group. Under equality legislation in Ireland, the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission recognise Travellers as one of the nine distinct grounds for protection against discrimination. However, this is not adequate. First, ethnic recognition is a priority, as it will ensure Travellers are protected and provided with culturally appropriate supports in terms of housing, employment, access to financial services and education. Traveller groups, academics and the United Nations have long called for Travellers to be recognised as a distinct ethnic group.

Priority - Recognition of Travellers as a Minority Ethnic Group

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. Stringent application requirements by financial institutions have prohibited many from accessing basic banking. Because of this, the use of illegal moneylenders and high interest licensed lenders are the only credit option for many. The Government's attempt to address this with the pilot personal micro credit scheme 'It Makes Sense Loan', while welcomed, limits an individual to borrowing a maximum of €2,000. Such a limit excluded 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 €5,000. This would enable Travellers access affordable credit to purchase a caravan.**

Provision of Local Authority caravan loans:

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. A recent report by National Traveller MABS <http://www.ntmabs.org/publications/policy/2015/a-review-of-national-traveller-mabs-supported-caravan-loan-guarantee-scheme.pdf> highlighted the Jones 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, 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**

Traveller specific Accommodation

Independent Agency

It has unfortunately been proven by the track record of previous governments that Traveller specific accommodation is not a priority. The Department of Environment has failed to develop a model to address the complexities of providing culturally appropriate accommodation to Travellers.

Priority – Create an independent national Traveller accommodation agency

Budget allocation

The budget for Traveller accommodation has been cut from €40 million in 2008 to €4 million presently. As per a 2013 ITM 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.¹

Priority – Reinstate 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 and dangerous sites, which 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.

Priority – Introduce sanctions for local authorities who do not spend money allocated for Traveller specific housing

¹ <https://www.kildarestreet.com/committees/?id=2016-05-19a.49>

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

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