



Geneva, 30 July 2013

RE: 'Communication from Special Procedures Joint Allegation Letter AL Poverty (1998-11)
Health (2002-7) Minorities (2005-4) IRL 2/2013'

Dear Ms. Connors,

Please find enclosed a response to the joint letter of 17 May 2013 received from the Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights, the Special Rapporteur on the Right of Everyone to the Enjoyment of the Highest Attainable Standard of Physical and Mental Health and the Independent Expert on Minority Issues, in relation to the health conditions of Irish Travellers in Ireland.

Gerard Corr
Ambassador and Permanent Representative

Ms Jane Connors
Chief
Special Procedures Branch
Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
Geneva



Geneva, 30 July 2013

Dear Ms. Sepúlveda Carmona, Mr. Grover, Ms. Izsák,

Please find enclosed the response of the Government of Ireland to your joint letter of 17 May 2013 in relation to the health conditions of Irish Travellers in Ireland.

Gerard Corr
Ambassador and Permanent Representative

Ms Maria Magdalena Sepúlveda Carmona
Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights
Mr Anand Grover
Special Rapporteur on the Right of Everyone to the Enjoyment of the Highest Attainable
Standard of Physical and Mental Health
Ms Rita Izsák
Independent Expert on Minority Issues
Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
Geneva

Response of the Government of Ireland to the concerns expressed re: the alleged persistently deteriorating health conditions of Irish Travellers in Ireland contained in the joint letter received from the mandates of the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights; the Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health; and the Independent Expert on minority issues

Traveller health

Traveller health continues to be a priority area for the Irish Government. At central policy level the Traveller Health Advisory Committee (THAC) was established in 1998 and comprises Department of Health staff, members of the Health Service Executive (HSE), and representatives of Traveller organisations.

“Traveller Health – A National Strategy 2002-2005” was developed by the THAC and published in February 2002 with the aim of improving the health status of Travellers. Although the life-term of the Strategy has expired it still guides policy in the area.

The Department of Health is committed to working in partnership with Travellers, their representative organisations, and the Health Service Executive towards improving the health outcomes of Travellers.

All Ireland Traveller Health Study

The *All Ireland Traveller Health Study* was commissioned by the Department of Health and Children and commenced in 2007. This was a comprehensive study of the health and social status of the Traveller community in Ireland and was carried out by the School of Public Health, Physiotherapy and Population Science, University College Dublin. The initial findings of the *All Ireland Traveller Health Study* were published in September 2010, with a *Birth Cohort Follow-Up Study* published in September 2011.

The Study was carried out on behalf of, with, and by Travellers. This innovative approach enabled the study to achieve a high response rate. In addition, due to the high level of involvement by Travellers, the results are seen as more robust and more useful to policy makers and service providers. The findings of the Study provide a strong evidence base for assessing existing and future service delivery. The importance of this study to Travellers was

pursued via the NTHAF through working groups including the design and delivery of a structured education programme for the prevention of Type 2 Diabetes in the Traveller community and a pilot programme around an Asthma Education programme for Travellers.

Funding

€10,069,132 was spent on Traveller health via Traveller Health Units during 2012. This amount excludes the costs of core/mainstream services accessed by members of the Travelling community *e.g.* GP services, foster care, etc. While austerity has the potential to impact disproportionately on all vulnerable groups, including Travellers, efforts have continued to ensure that funding for all vulnerable groups remains protected as far as possible.

The funding for Traveller health is directed towards additional services, with a range of Primary Care projects particularly important in this regard. Support is also provided to a range of other priority projects, including mental health, domestic violence, suicide etc. New initiatives in the form of health awareness programmes and health screening will be delivered via the Traveller Health Units/Primary Care Projects in each HSE region and will target those most at risk in the Traveller community.

Healthy Ireland

The Healthy Ireland framework proposes a whole-of-Government and whole-of-society response to improving the health and wellbeing of Irish people over the coming generation. It will put in place new structures which will focus on the cross sectoral social determinants of health and will incorporate actions relating to addressing health inequalities among marginalised groups such as Travellers.

National Drugs Strategy 2009 – 2016

The National Drugs Strategy recognises that Travellers are more likely to be exposed to the risk factors that lead to problem drug use. In addition, the Strategy recognises that Travellers experience specific problems relating to access to services arising from a lack of awareness of the existence and nature of drug services, lack of formal education, stigma and embarrassment and lack of culturally appropriate services. A number of measures are in place to address this, including the Traveller Health Units in the Health Service Executive and engagement of members of the community as peer primary carers working to link Travellers

The Department of Social Protection, through its Social Inclusion Division, has a central role in co-ordinating the *National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007 – 2016* (NAPinclusion), which sets out the Government's strategic approach to tackling poverty and social exclusion. NAPinclusion is based on three inter-connecting themes of income support, activation and access to services, which in turn are coordinated on the basis of the five lifecycle groups (children, people of working age, older people, people with disabilities and communities).

The Plan sets out a national poverty target, and prioritises 12 related high level goals in relation to children, people of working age, older people and people with disabilities and communities. It identifies some 150 actions across government departments and agencies with a remit in social policy to progress the achievement of the targets and goals.

There are a number of actions set out in the NAPinclusion that pertain to Travellers as a group vulnerable to poverty, including some with a health focus. The latter are set out in Chapter 3: People of Working Age and Chapter 6: Communities. See [here](#) for more details.

Monitoring implementation of National Action Plan for Social Inclusion

The Department of Social Protection is responsible for monitoring the implementation of the NAPinclusion. The main mechanisms used for this purposes at the annual social inclusion report and the social inclusion forum.

- Annual Social Inclusion Report

The Department is currently finalising the Social Inclusion Report, which outlines progress in implementing NAPinclusion. The report covers the period from January 2011 to December 2012 with preparation and compilation of the report having been coordinated by the Social Inclusion Division (SID) of the Department of Social Protection with support from other stakeholder Government Departments that provided report material. This is the fourth such report, the previous three covering the periods 2007, 2008 and 2009-2010 respectively can be obtained [here](#).

- Social Inclusion Forum

The Social Inclusion Forum (SIF) was established by the Government as part of the structures to monitor and evaluate NAPinclusion. The annual SIF is part of the institutional structures put in place to underpin the implementation, monitoring and on-going development of the Government's social inclusion agenda. The event provides a forum for wider public

Accommodation policy framework

Extensive actions have been and continue to be undertaken by the Government to ensure that the right to adequate housing is upheld for Irish Travellers.

From the outset, it is important to note that the vast majority of Travellers currently live in standard housing, whether standard local authority housing or private housing with local authority assistance, rent supplement or the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS). According to the 2012 Annual Count of Traveller families (see below), 68% of Traveller families recorded are accommodated in standard housing – social housing (including voluntary housing), private rented accommodation, and private houses assisted by local authorities.

The 2011 Housing Needs Assessment revealed that the vast majority of Travellers in need of housing at that time opted for standard housing. Of the 1824 Traveller families on the waiting list, 1789 were for standard local authority/voluntary housing.

This indicates little demand for Traveller-specific accommodation. It is anticipated that more mainstream social housing provision including re-lets, RAS etc., under standard social housing schemes will contribute more fully to meeting traveller accommodation needs.

Accordingly, as the vast majority of Traveller families are accommodated in the same type of accommodation as other social housing recipients, the link between accommodation and poor health is not definitive.

Legislative position

Government policy in relation to the accommodation of Travellers is implemented through the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act 1998. This Act requires each major housing authority to draw up, adopt, and implement multi-annual Traveller accommodation programmes, with the aim of accelerating the provision of accommodation for Travellers. The first round of Traveller Accommodation Programmes ran from 2000 – 2004, the second round from 2005 – 2008. In early 2009, local authorities adopted a third round of accommodation programmes which will cover the period 2009 – 2013. The 1998 Act also made provision for consultation mechanisms with local communities and with Travellers through the National Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee and Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committees.

- In the period 2009 – 2012, a total of 1488 units of accommodation were provided to Traveller families. This includes standard housing, Traveller specific accommodation and families accommodated through RAS scheme or in voluntary housing. The combined target of all local authorities in the period 2009 – 2012 was 2075 units of accommodation. This represents 72% of target. A figure for 2013 is not yet available.
- Traveller representatives often express the opinion that not enough Traveller specific accommodation is being provided and that Travellers are being forced into private rented accommodation and ultimately standard housing. Particular concerns are raised at the lack of provision of halting sites.
- Travellers are free to express a preference for either Traveller-specific accommodation or general social housing under the mandatory social housing assessment process carried out by Local Authorities. The assessment of needs process points, in most areas, to a preference among Travellers for standard housing. There is very little demand for Traveller specific accommodation in many local authority areas. If Travellers are opting for standard housing then this is what the local authority will provide. If there is no demand for Traveller specific accommodation then such accommodation will obviously not be included in the Traveller Accommodation Programme of that local authority and will not be provided.
- The majority of Travellers already live in standard housing, whether standard local authority housing or private housing with local authority assistance, rent supplement or the RAS scheme.

Funding for Traveller accommodation measures

Significant funding has been made available by the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government for the provision of Traveller-specific accommodation.

Capital Funding

The Department provides 100% funding for the provision of Traveller specific accommodation as follows:

- Permanent, Temporary, Emergency and Transient Halting Sites
- Group Housing Schemes for Travellers

in 2013 is €4m and the current allocation in 2013 is €3.5m. Although this is a significant reduction in previous years, it is in line with 2012 recoupment amounts.

Annual Count of Traveller Families

The Annual Count of Traveller Families, which is carried out by local authorities at the request of the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government, provides a measure of the accommodation position of Travellers which is accepted by all stakeholders, including Traveller representative groups, as accurate.

The most recent Annual Count of Traveller families, which took place in November 2012, estimated that there were 9,911 Traveller families living in the state at that time. This was an increase of 3.9% on the previous year.

The number of families living on unauthorised sites showed a slight increase of 3 families (from 327 to 330). While any increase is undesirable, this small increase must be viewed in the context of a 3.9% increase in the numbers of Traveller families nationally and actually represent a 0.1% reduction from 3.43% in 2011 to 3.33% in 2012.

The number of Traveller families living in standard local authority housing declined by 1.79%, reflecting the reduction in social housing provision. There was a slight increase of 1.7% in the number of Traveller families in private rented accommodation from 26.83% in 2011 to 28.55% in 2012.

Details of the 2012 Annual Count and comparison with the 2011 figures are set out in the table below.

	Number of Families in:	2011	%	2012	%
(I)	Standard Houses (including Voluntary Houses)	3,466	36.35	3,425	34.56
(II)	Unauthorised Sites	327	3.43	330	3.33
(III)	Permanent Halting Site Bays	565	5.93	562	5.67
(IV)	Group Housing	739	7.75	722	7.28

To advise the Minister:

- in relation to any general matter concerning accommodation for Travellers
- in relation to any matter referred to it by the Minister.
- on the most appropriate measures for improving, at local level, consultation with, and participation of, Travellers in the provision and management of accommodation, and
- on general matters concerning the preparation, adequacy, implementation and co-ordination of Traveller accommodation programmes.

The NTACC, once appointed, will establish a Work Programme for its duration which will examine a number of relevant issues such as the composition, operation and effectiveness of LTACCs and accommodation-related Supports to Travellers (including Management and Maintenance of Traveller Accommodation).

Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committees (LTACC)

Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committees (LTACC) are established under the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act 1998, to advise:-

- in relation to the preparation and implementation of Traveller Accommodation Programme,
- on the management of accommodation for Travellers, and
- provide a liaison between Travellers and members and officials of the appointing authority concerned

Each local authority will form a new LTACC in 2014. Their membership will consist of Travellers and Traveller support group members, elected members of the local authority and local authority officials.