

**Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty
Irish Delegation Presentation of Issues 3rd April 2008**

THEME: HOUSING/ACCOMMODATION

The issue of housing in Ireland impacts on many different groups who experience poverty and social exclusion. This includes people with disabilities, asylum seekers, homeless people, those on social welfare and low incomes, migrant workers, lone parents, Travellers, women and those living with HIV. *People can become homeless for many reasons and more and more people are losing their homes through unemployment and debt.* The Irish delegation includes representatives from some of these groups but the issues covered are relevant for most of the groups.

A. What is working well?

Travellers are an ethnic group in Ireland similar to Roma and Gypsies. Traveller organisations are involved in the local committees set up under legislation for Traveller accommodation. This allows for dialogue and relationships to be developed and recognises that Traveller organisations have a valuable input to make in design and implementation of Traveller accommodation.

Some organizations, including homeless organisations, are working well to provide services e.g. emergency accommodation houses in different parts of the country. There are examples of policies that are positive in themselves but there is great difficulty in how they are being implemented or enforced.

- For example Building Regulations have a section, 'Part M', to ensure that buildings are accessible for people with disabilities. However, many builders have found ways around this.

B. What is not Working Well?

1. Plans and strategies are often not implemented or enforced.

For example

- Despite a Traveller Accommodation Programme many Traveller families are living in bad accommodation, often on the roadside.
- targets to provide social housing are usually never achieved.

2. There is *insufficient* funding for some services.

Examples include:

- *Inadequate* funding for alcohol and drug detox centres *and follow up support services*, for people, including many who are homeless. Such supports would give people the ability *to leave homelessness* and live more independently.
- There is not enough funding in place to ensure that many people with disabilities can live independently with all the supports they need.

3. Accessibility of housing/accommodation

- The cost of rent is often too high and *most* people cannot afford the deposits. The amount of support from the Government's Rental Accommodation Scheme is often not high enough for people to afford *appropriate* accommodation.
- There are long waiting lists for social housing. This and the lack of enough social housing can result in homelessness.
- Discrimination, usually from landlords, is an issue for many.
- Many houses or apartments are not accessible for people with a disability.

4. Quality of Housing Accommodation

- State provided Direct Provision accommodation for asylum seekers is not suitable for people to live in. *Asylum seekers are not given any choice in the type of accommodation that would most suit them.*
- The quality of social housing and rental accommodation can be very bad and sometimes landlords can be a difficulty.
- For Travellers and others there is not enough discussion with families or the community on important elements of the space they will be living in and what is *culturally* appropriate accommodation *for them.*

C. Some Specific examples of policies that need to be addressed

Homelessness (For Michael and Billy only)

There is a goal in Ireland to end homelessness by 2010 and a goal in the European Union to end it by 2015. If the EU and Governments, including the Irish Government, are serious about these goals they have to put more funding and supports in place to make it happen. With 5000 people still homeless in Ireland this will take a much greater commitment.

If homeless people or those at risk of homelessness are to get out of their situation and live independently they need individual supports from organisations and services to do this. Many organisations for the homeless provide these supports but need more funding to meet people's needs.

People with Disabilities (For Sammy only)

In some towns and cities few houses or apartments are accessible for people with disabilities. It takes some people a long time to get their own home in the right place near shops etc. However, for many people with disabilities being able to live independently is more than having an accessible home. For example many people with disabilities need a full time personal assistant in order to stay in this home. In Ireland the funding is not available for 24 hour personal assistant supports. This makes living independently very difficult and for many impossible.

Asylum Seekers and Refugees (for Salome only)

Many Asylum seekers in Ireland live in Direct Provision accommodation, often in mobile home parks far from services. *Adults only receive €19.10 per week and are not allowed to work, all of their meals are provided and the food is usually not culturally appropriate to their needs.* The minimum social welfare payment for others is €197.80 per week. This situation can last for up to 6 years *and many* asylum seekers suffer from depression and other mental illnesses.

Those who are successful and leave the asylum system face great difficulties in getting the right house or apartment and often face discrimination from landlords. Because of the *insufficient* amount of rent support available and not having a job they often end up in communities already experiencing high levels of marginalisation. In *many* cases they then experience racism.

D. What needs to Change?

1. Need better funding

Examples include:

- Funding for services for homeless people
- Funding for better needs assessment for people with disabilities to identify the supports they need to live independently and for full-time personal assistants for those who need them.
- Need more funding for social and affordable housing.
- *More alcohol and drug detox beds and follow up supports in the community.*

2. Greater effort needs to be put into ensuring that policies are implemented and enforced.

For example:

- In relation to the provision of Traveller Accommodation. There is a need for some mechanism to ensure that targets are achieved e.g. a way of providing motivational supports and also sanctions where there is failure.
- Recognition of the right to culturally appropriate accommodation needs to be embedded into the system. This should involve training for staff who deliver programmes and not letting prejudices effect delivery.

3. Policies need to be closely monitored and reviewed

4. In the short term there is a need to improve the quality of Direct Provision accommodation for Asylum Seekers and give asylum seekers more rights, *choice* and independence in their own lives.

5. There is a need to address the causes of homelessness *and put more supports in place to help people get out of it.*

6. It is essential to engage with the people affected by policy when it is being designed and implemented. This includes policy on housing and homelessness. People affected by the issues should be empowered to be able to have a voice in these issues.