

The National Roma Infoline

Annual Report
2023



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Cairde is a community development organisation working to tackle health inequalities among minority ethnic communities by improving their access to health services and their participation in health planning and delivery. Since 2010, Cairde has been providing information and advocacy to a significant and increasing number of Roma families and individuals in Dublin, Balbriggan, and nationally. The National Roma Infoline was established in March 2020 to respond to Roma health needs in Ireland.

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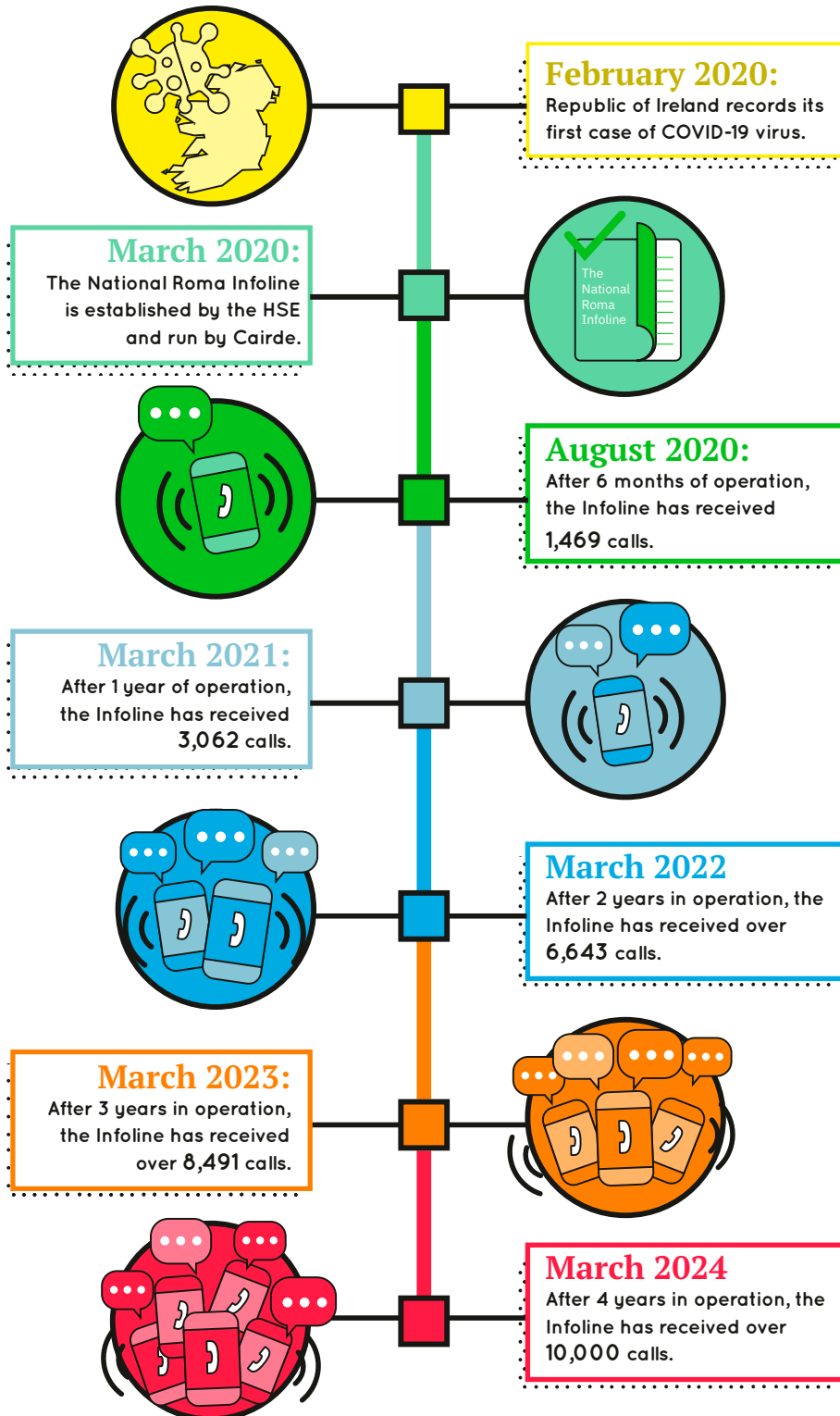
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Timeline of the National Roma Infoline



Overview of 2023 Calls

Number of Calls

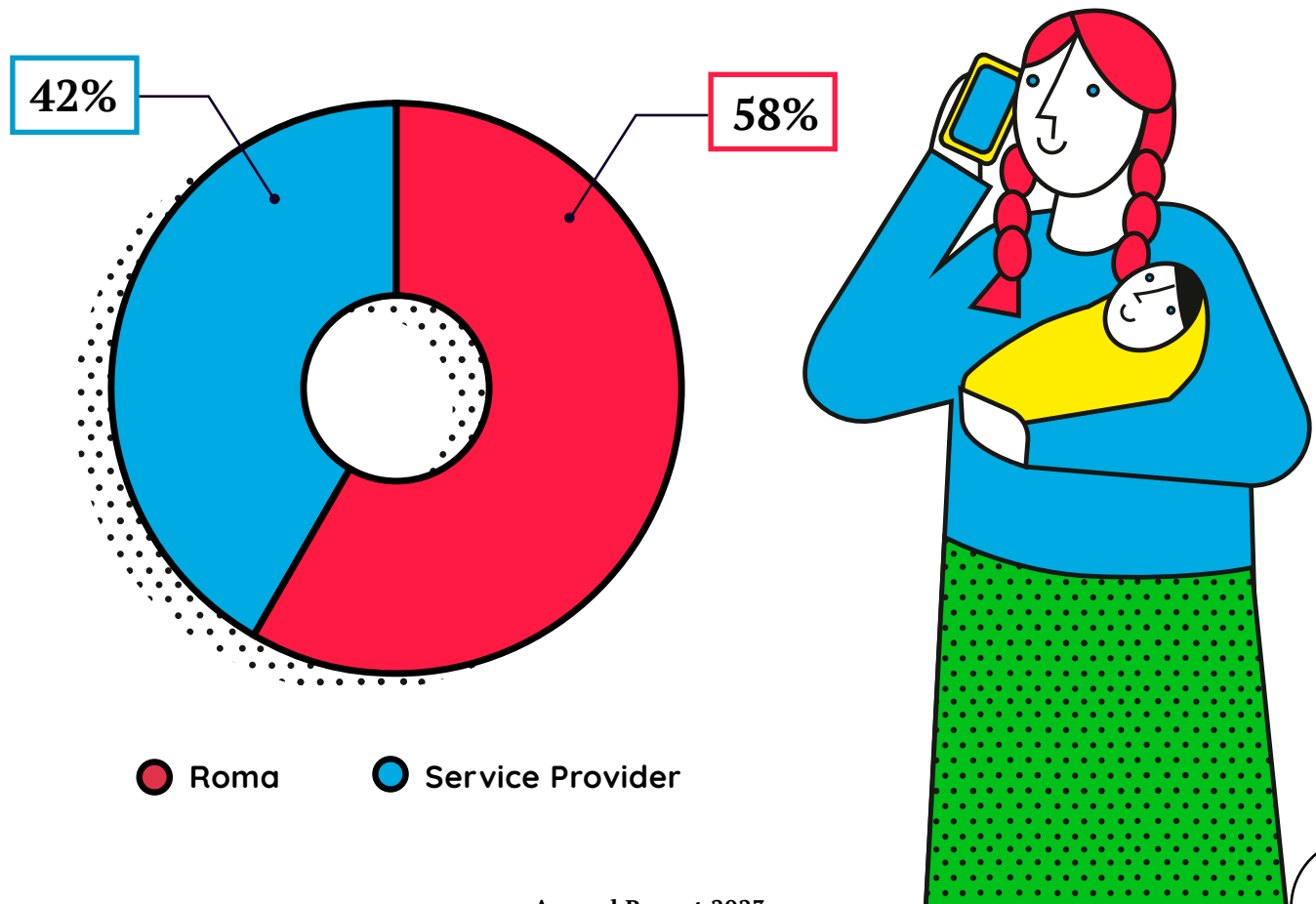
Between the 1st of January 2023 and the 31st of December 2023, the National Roma Infoline dealt with 4,650 calls. In 2023, our operators addressed a wide variety of queries from both Roma and service providers, including accommodation, health, and social welfare issues. Across these calls, translation and interpretation are usually concurrent issues.

Typically, callers had more than one reason for calling and the Roma Operators dealt with many complex cases.

The graphs below outline data collected from the calls, including information on gender, medical cards, age group, service providers, location, and accommodation.

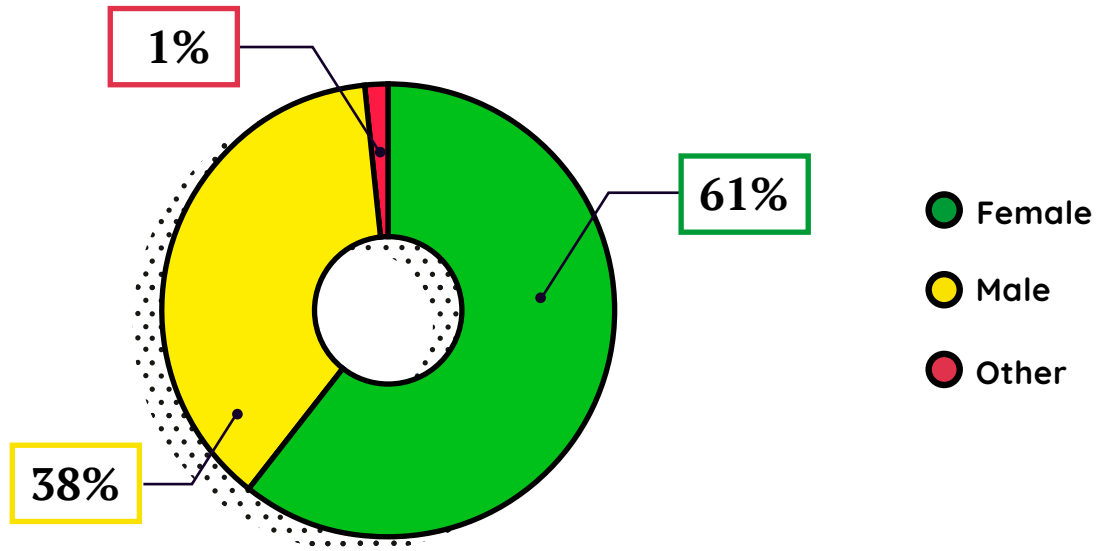
Caller Type

The graph below shows that 42% of the calls dealt by the National Roma Infoline in 2023 were from service providers while 58% of the calls involved engaging with members of the Roma community.



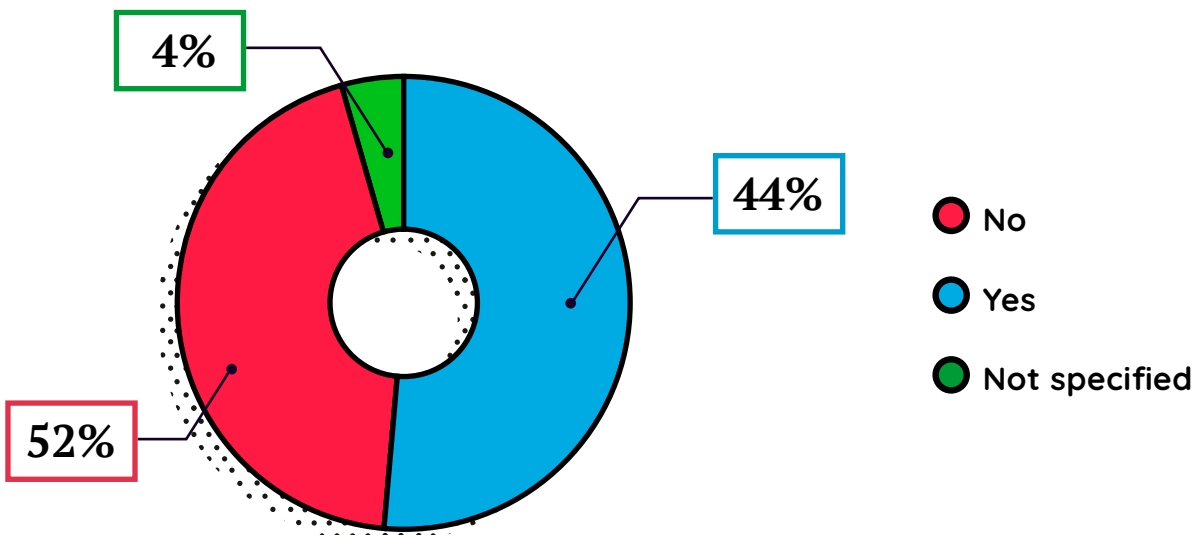
Gender

This graph shows that 61% of the calls dealt with by the National Roma Infoline in 2023 were from or on behalf of Roma women and 38% of the calls were from or on behalf of Roma men. In some cases, gender was not recorded, for example in the case of a general query or when queries were made on behalf of a family.



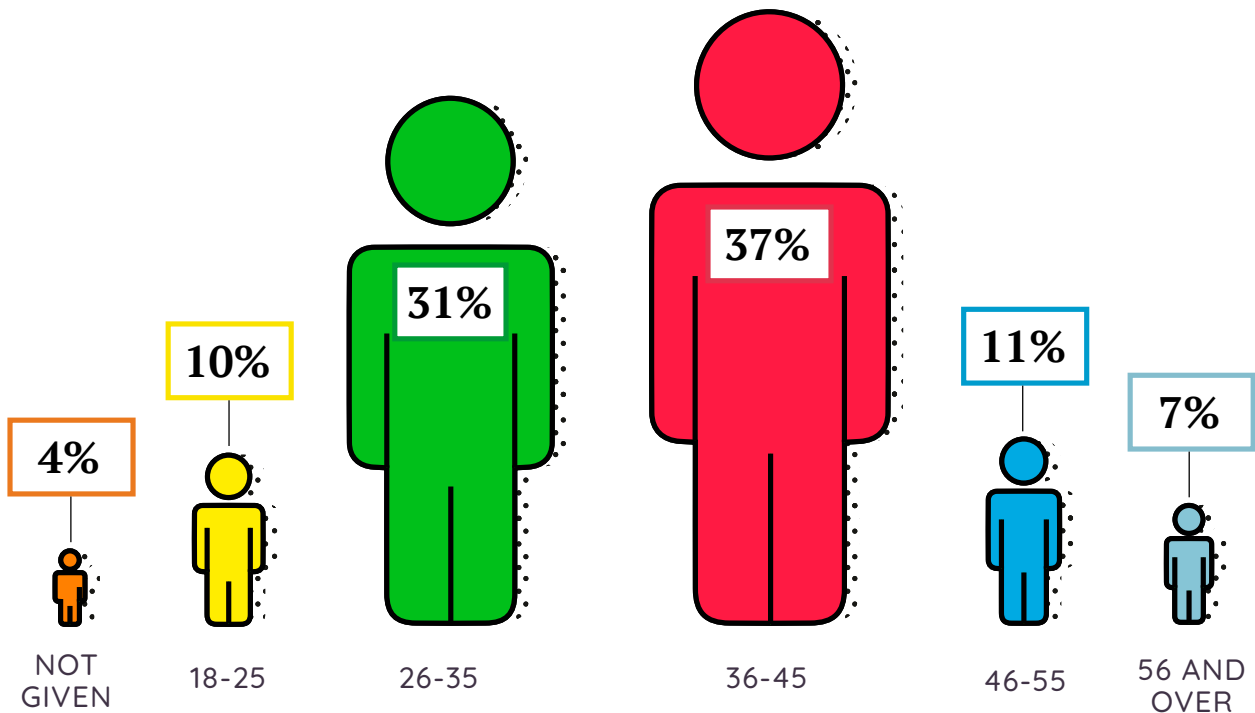
Medical Card

More than half of the incoming calls received by the National Roma Infoline, were made from or on behalf of Roma who had no medical card.



Age Group

36-45 was the most common age group of Roma who contacted the National Roma Infoline.



Service Providers

In 2023, 42% of the calls addressed by the National Roma Infoline were from service providers around the country. Most of these calls were received from health services, including staff from GPs, hospitals, primary care centres, and the Health-Link Team for the Homeless.

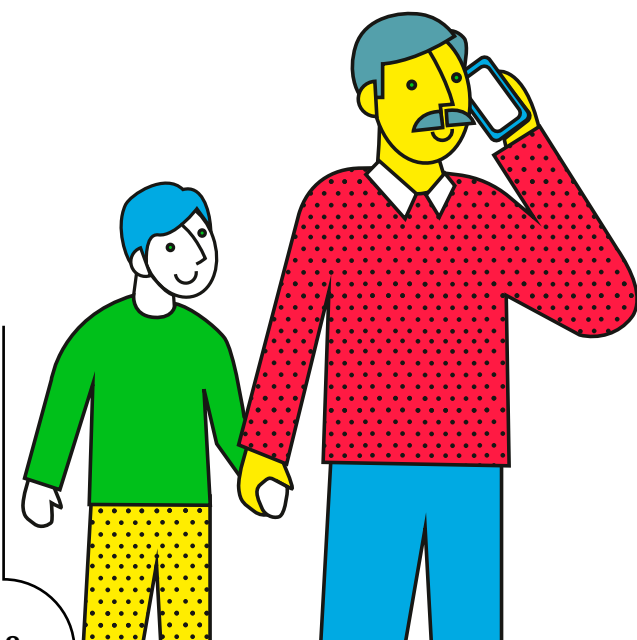
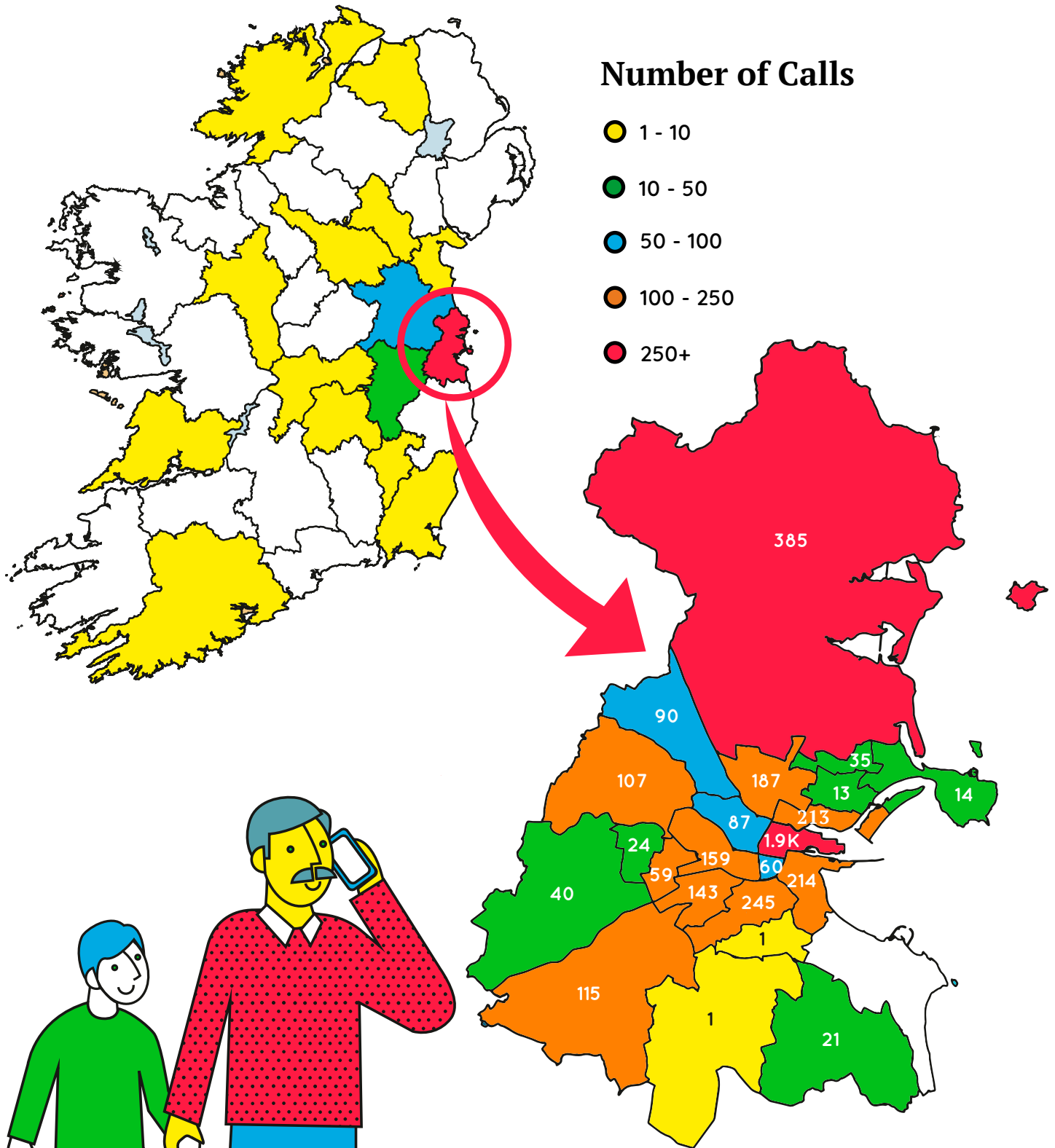
The National Roma Infoline also received a significant portion of calls from emergency accommodation, organisations working in this sector, and local authorities. The Roma Operators worked with a wide range of organisations in the community and charity sector nationwide, including organisations specialised in the areas of education, social welfare, employment, repatriation, discrimination, legal support, and poverty. Additionally, the National Roma Infoline received calls from several public and statutory bodies.

“The value of the National Roma Infoline to the health of marginalised adults and children cannot be overstated. I personally do not know whether my role would be possible or effective without their support. By acting as an important intermediary between health workers and often hard to reach Roma individuals with significant health needs, the National Roma Infoline provides an invaluable service which has had significant positive impacts on the health outcomes of a large number of Roma adults and children. Roma populations have historically had disproportionately poor health outcomes and have experienced exclusionary behaviours from health services, so by acting as a trusted advocate to link patients with health services, the National Roma Infoline serves to improve communication and has a significant positive impact on patient outcomes for Roma people in Ireland.”

- Caitriona Burke, HSE Roma Healthlink worker CHO7 (RVP team)

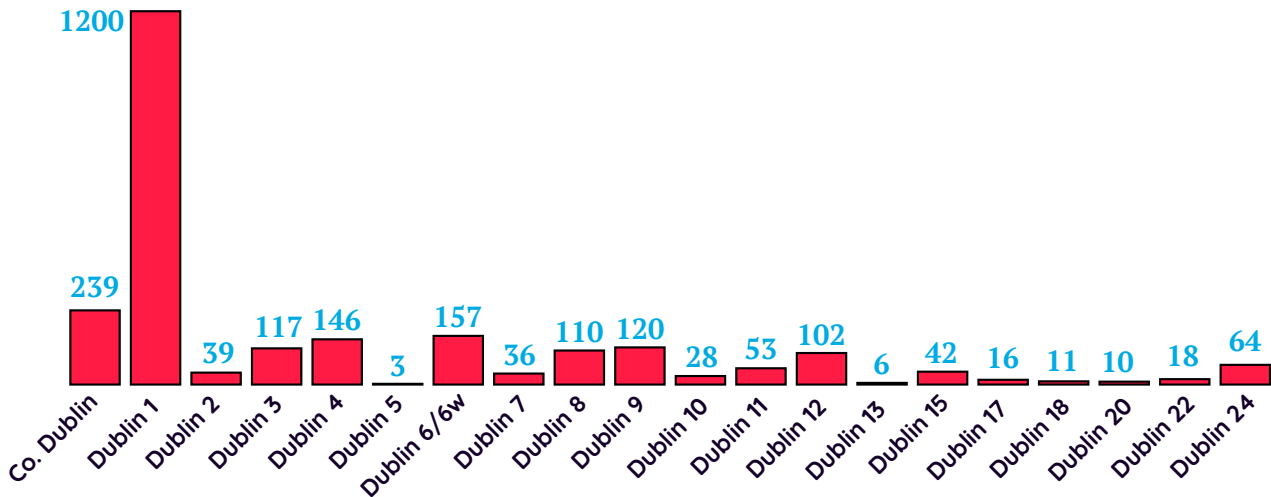
Location

The majority of calls dealt with by the National Roma Infoline were from Dublin, and a further breakdown showed that Dublin 1 was the area in the country with the highest number of calls to the Infoline. This graph shows that calls to the Infoline were received from all corners of Ireland.



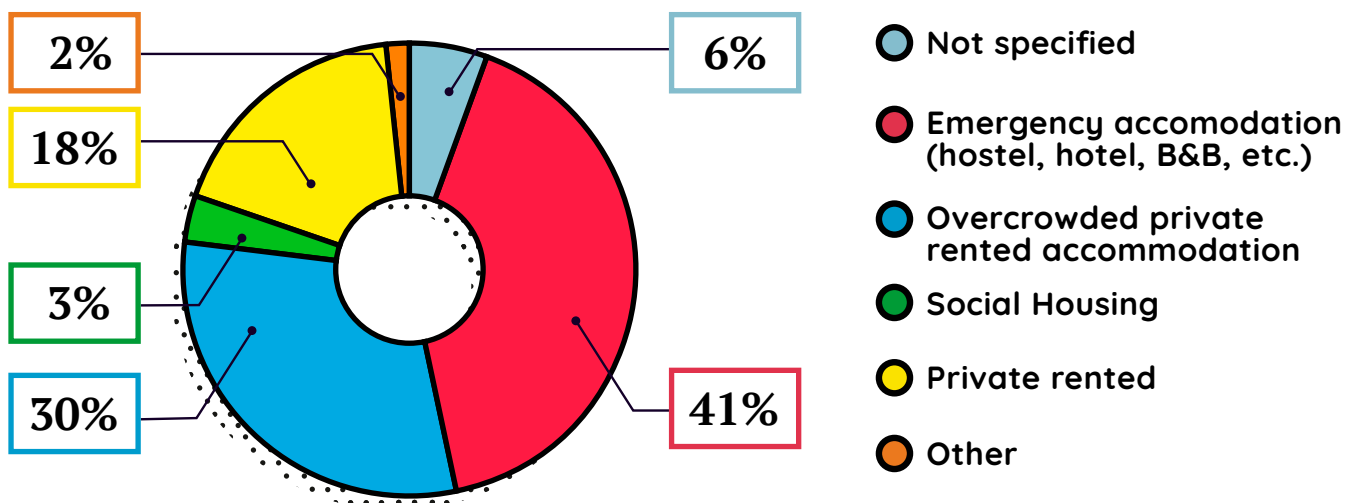
Breakdown of Calls from Dublin

Most calls handled by the Roma Operators were from Dublin, and particularly Dublin 1. This is unsurprising considering a large number of emergency accommodation is located in this area. It is worth noting that the majority of the other calls from Dublin also came from areas where emergency accommodation is located.



Accommodation

As for accommodation, over 70% of incoming calls were made from or on behalf of Roma who were homeless. This includes Roma who were sleeping rough, living in emergency accommodation or in overcrowded private rented accommodation. This reflects the dire housing situation in Ireland due to the ongoing housing crisis¹. In some of the most recent data published by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage in December 2023, EEA/UK citizens made up 23% of adults accessing local authority managed emergency accommodation². It is telling that only 3.5% of the calls were from Roma living in social housing.



1 <https://www.irishtimes.com/ireland/housing-planning/2023/03/23/irelands-housing-crisis-facts-and-figures-all-you-need-to-know/>

2 <https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/281942/146564ab-10ff-425d-8e3b-988097cfb8cb.pdf#page=null>

Case Study: Infectious Disease and Emergency Accommodation

- In 2023, the National Roma Infoline was contacted to communicate with a Roma family who were unknowingly suffering with scabies. The doctors needed assistance explaining to the family what scabies was and how urgent it was to receive treatment. This was impossible due to the language barrier. As the family were staying in emergency accommodation, it was also necessary for them to quarantine as scabies is extremely contagious.
- This was difficult news for the family, and the Roma Operator offered compassion, cultural understanding and guidance when communicating this information. With the Roma Operator's assistance, the family were relocated to self-isolate within a hospital setting. The Roma Operator supported the family and health professionals with translation and interpretation throughout their stay, and once they had recovered, they were discharged and returned to their emergency accommodation.
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"I called the emergency services when I had an emergency with my 5-year-old grandson. He was struggling to breathe, and I was very worried because he has asthma. It was very difficult for me to communicate with the emergency services and the hospital staff because I do not speak English. The only person I could call was the National Roma Infoline, and their Operator helped me with interpretation. I was distressed and desperate for assistance and I will never forget the help I received from the Infoline."

-Roma Caller



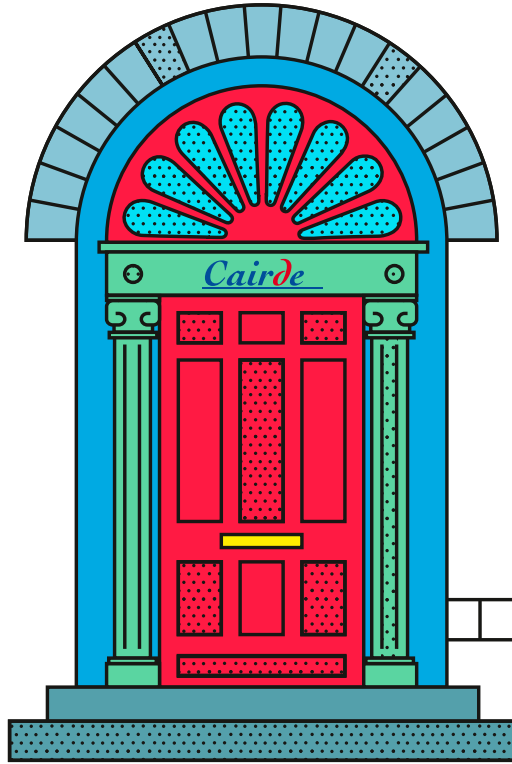
Recommendations: Health

- Interpretation services should be used systematically across all health services for Roma patients who do not speak English fluently.
- Health application forms should be simplified and available in languages other than English and Irish, including the languages commonly spoken by Roma in Ireland: Romanian, Czech, and Slovak, among others. Resources may also need to be allocated to support the HSE to process health application forms submitted in the aforementioned languages.
- Anti-racism training that addresses antigypsyism should be implemented across relevant health services as well as systems and procedures that respect cultural diversity.
- Due to the health inequalities experienced by Roma, the Department of Health and the HSE should consider removing certain qualifying criteria, such as proof of income and proof of rent, when Roma apply for a medical card but cannot meet these requirements.
- Medical cards should be made available for all Roma living in congregated settings, particularly when Roma live in state-funded emergency accommodation.
- Ethnic data should be collected consistently across all health services in Ireland to assess current policy and to develop more targeted policy measures going forward.

Recommendations: Accommodation

- Interpretation services should be used across all housing services for Roma who do not speak English fluently.
- Housing application forms should be simplified and made available in languages other than English and Irish, including the languages commonly spoken by Roma in Ireland: Romanian, Czech and Slovak, among others. Resources may also need to be allocated to support local authorities to process applications submitted in the aforementioned languages.
- Anti-racism training that addresses antigypsyism should be implemented across relevant housing and accommodation services as well as systems and procedures that respect cultural diversity.
- The Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage should establish a contact point with responsibility for Roma accommodation.
- The Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage should introduce actions on Roma and accommodation to the National Traveller Roma Inclusion Strategy (NTRIS) as a matter of urgency. These actions should be drafted in conjunction with organisations working on Roma issues.
- The Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage should introduce an ethnic identifier across all their services in order to assess current policy and to develop more targeted policy measures going forward.
- The Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage should ensure that the provision of emergency accommodation, across local authorities, is not dependent on the result of a social housing support assessment.
- The Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage should make a quota of housing available for Roma both in the public system and in the private rental market.
- The Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage should review the 41/2012 Housing Circular and consider removing some of the qualifying criteria.

Note: This report specifically deals with Roma issues, with the knowledge that there are other marginalised groups in Ireland. The recommendations outlined in this report may be applicable to communities facing similar barriers.



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