



Roma Communities and Climate Justice

Tackling Energy and Heat Poverty in Ireland

50 Friends of
the Earth
Celebrating 50 years

Cairde
Challenging ethnic minority health inequalities

 **Irish Aid**
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The authors would like to acknowledge the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) for their support of Cairde's Roma Education Programme. Thank you to the participants of the Roma Education Programme, especially Maria Marin for her contribution of Romani translations.

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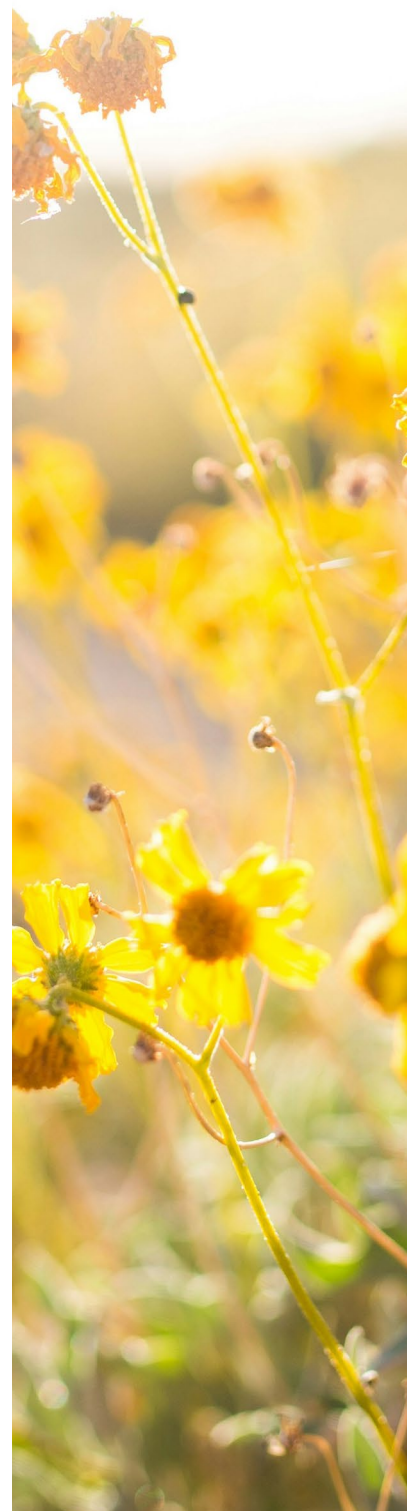


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Cairde is a community development organisation working to tackle health inequalities among minority ethnic communities by improving their access to health services and their participation in health planning and delivery. Since 2010, Cairde has been providing information and advocacy to a significant and increasing number of Roma families and individuals in Dublin, Balbriggan, and nationally. Cairde's Roma Project established the National Roma Infoline in March 2020 to respond to Roma health needs in Ireland, and this service has responded to more than 10,000 calls from Roma and service providers around the country. Since 2022, Cairde has also coordinated the Roma Education Programme to support Roma in accessing online language, literacy, and computer classes. Additionally, Cairde contributes to Roma research and policy development at a national and European level.





50 Friends of
the Earth

Celebrating 50 years

Friends of the Earth Ireland is a community at the heart of a growing movement for a just world with zero pollution. We are part of Friends of the Earth International - the world's largest grassroots environmental justice network. Here in Ireland, we work closely with Stop Climate Chaos - the civil society coalition campaigning to ensure Ireland does its fair share to tackle the causes and consequences of climate change. Our mission is to campaign and build movement power to bring about the system change we need for a just world where people and nature thrive. We work collaboratively to advance the organisation's mission, vision, and values.



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Section 1: Context

Background

In 2022, Friends of the Earth approached Cairde to understand the lived experience of Roma people in Ireland and in what ways climate justice intersects with other social justice issues for Roma community members. Cairde's existing Roma Education Programme, funded by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth was identified as a space to explore these climate and community issues. A workshop was developed in collaboration with Cairde and Friends of the Earth and delivered in July 2022 to Cairde's Roma Education Programme participants. In this session, 'Exploring Climate Change and Climate Justice', 16 Roma participants discussed key climate issues including:

What is our climate?

What is climate change?

What causes climate change?

What is climate justice?

This workshop was well received by the participants, and marked the beginning of the collaboration between Cairde and Friends of the Earth, which has developed into the Roma Climate Justice Project.

In developing this project under the Irish Aid Global Citizenship Education grant, with the objective of:

Collaborating to help build an inclusive and diverse movement with the knowledge and skills to be active global citizens committed to a fairer and more sustainable future for all.

Following the workshop, the Roma Education Programme participants worked with Cairde and Friends of the Earth staff to develop the poster on the following page to promote Romani language and climate justice.

In 2024, Elena Manciu was employed to work as Ireland's first Roma Climate Justice Peer Education Officer supported by Cairde and Friends of the Earth.

The focus of this role was to support the work of the Roma Climate Justice Project by undertaking tasks to develop the project including peer-support work, training, attending events, information sharing, advocacy, research, and other duties.

Early on in the collaboration it was identified by both organisations that there was a lack of research into Roma experiences of heat and energy poverty in Ireland. Building on Friends of the Earth's research on this topic and the Warm Homes For All Campaign, as well as Cairde's extensive research into the living standards and accommodation experiences of Roma in Ireland, this current research project was designed.



CELEBRATING ROMANI LANGUAGE



This poster was created by Cairde's Roma Education Programme and Friends of the Earth to raise awareness of Romani language and the impact of climate change on Roma communities. The Roma Education Programme brings together Roma in Ireland to participate in online classes in English, computers, and other subjects. There are different dialects of Romani language and the words below reflect the words used by the participants in the Roma Education Programme.



Cam
Sun



Conoto, shonet
Moon



Globo
World, earth



Manus, manos
People



Primavara
Spring



Milai
Summer



Toamna
Autumn



Ivend
Winter



Brasand, prasand
Rain



Lag, yag
Fire



Varval, balval
Wind



Thu, tu
Smoke



Pai
Water



Lu
Snow



Bar
Storm



Drom
Land



Gargaunea, biromni
Bee



Maso, maceo, masio
Fish



Balo, melo
Pig



Gurumni, gormni, baca
Cow



Pomo
Tree



Grast
Horse



Guchel
Grass



Lulughea
Flower



Section 1: Context

Rationale

Climate justice recognises that those who are least responsible for causing climate change are often the ones who suffer its gravest consequences. Climate justice is rooted in human rights and equality - it's a framework or a lens that helps to understand the climate crisis not just as an environmental issue but as a justice issue. Climate change affects people differently, depending on a number of factors - location, income, gender, class, race, age, level of education etc.¹ Recent European research has highlighted the disproportionate impact that climate change is having, and will continue to have, on marginalised Roma communities. This includes: "inequitable access to environmental resources and services"², as well as the proximity of toxic facilities and environmental hazards to Roma settlements.³

Partnerships and collaboration between environmental organisations and Roma organisations have been identified as crucial principles of addressing environmental injustices⁴.

Both Cairde and Friends of the Earth have a strong background of grassroots activism and advocacy, as well as informing policy through engagement with key decision-makers at a national and European level. Cairde has conducted extensive research on the numerous barriers Roma in Ireland face when accessing health care, accommodation, employment, education, and other social services. While the core focuses of the organisations may seem at first unlinked, it is through the deeper knowledge and understanding of the overlapping and intersecting issues that this partnership seeks to benefit those who are at greatest risk of experiencing poverty, inequality, and in tandem, the impacts of climate change.

Friends of the Earth's Warm Homes for All Campaign strives to ensure a fair transition to a fossil free-society, meaning that all should have access to warm homes and low energy bills that do not require that people choose whether to heat or eat because of poverty. In March 2023, Friends of the Earth published a report "Still Left Out In The Cold" on the subject of energy poverty and reducing household reliance on fossil fuels, and has continued to campaign to ensure that everyone should have access to a warm home.

The report outlined the interlinkages between poverty, energy, housing, social inclusion, and consumer protection, and how each of these areas intersect in a way that further disadvantages many who may already be at the margins. Particularly relevant to Roma experiences were the findings that "...

Energy poverty and deprivation in the context of climate action is a complex social problem which cannot be separated from other aspects of poverty, and requires a systematic and holistic approach. This means that housing conditions cannot be divorced from wider social challenges, including household income.

The private rental sector is particularly vulnerable to energy poverty given that rental accommodation comprises larger numbers of older, low BER dwellings. The sector also often suffers from weak regulation and protections for tenants, as well as weak incentives for retrofitting. Tenants in private rented or social housing generally have no ability to influence the insulation level of their homes.

The 'poverty premium' experienced by many at-risk households is poorly understood, including customers being penalised for paying bills in cash (as discounts are offered for direct debit accounts), the inability to switch supplier without direct debits, as well

1. Friends of the Earth 2024, Roma Climate Justice Peer Education Officer, Friends of the Earth, viewed 27th September 2024, <<https://www.friendsoftheearth.ie/news/roma-climate-justice-peer-education-worker>>

2. Diego Marin 2024, 'Bearing the brunt: Roma and Traveller experiences of environmental racism in Western Europe', European Environmental Bureau (EEB), viewed 27th September 2024, <<https://eeb.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/roma-report-WEB-1.pdf>>

3. Ibid

4. ERGO and EEB 2024, 'EEB Common basic principles for environmental justice for Roma', EEB, viewed 27th September 2024, <<https://eeb.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/EEB-Common-basic-principles-for-environ-justice-for-Roma-4.pdf>>

as related challenges such as the underreported issue of self-disconnection⁵.

The approach of several actors across the sector to only engage with consumers/households online must be reconsidered. Many of those at risk of energy deprivation have low levels of digital literacy and are disempowered from accessing SEAI (Sustainable Energy Authority Ireland) supporting schemes and dealing with utilities.

The Government's broad based electricity credit risks being counterproductive insofar as it does not target resources to those in most need of support. One-off payments granted in Budget 2023 have helped many to deal with increases in energy prices but they do not respond to fundamental issues of income inadequacy and inability to carry out retrofitting measures or access associated schemes."

In July 2024, many of Friends of the Earth's submissions were endorsed by the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Social Protection, Community, Rural Development and the Island.

A joint submission⁶, with over 20 NGOs, laid out the context for energy poverty in Ireland and the action required to meet Ireland's emissions goals: 29% of Irish households are now estimated to be living in energy poverty, the highest number ever recorded⁷. Average household energy bills have increased by €1100 in one year. The rising costs of energy prices continues to disproportionately impact households in the bottom 20% of the income distribution who spend a larger percentage of their income on energy. This situation has the potential to deteriorate further during the coming winter. The ESRI have estimated that if energy prices were to increase by an additional 25%, it would drive 43% of all Irish households into energy poverty.

It has never been clearer that the rapid decarbonisation of the Irish economy and society is an economic and social imperative as well as a moral and environmental one. Ireland does not currently have sufficient safeguards to protect against further

price volatility as a result of the heavy role of polluting fossil fuels in home heating and in Ireland's energy mix. Ireland must also reduce emissions by 51% by 2030.

The recommendations included proposals on addressing the root causes of heat and energy poverty - inefficient buildings, high energy costs and inadequate incomes. Further to the recommendations to the Committee, Friends of the Earth's demands for the government's new Energy Poverty Action Plan include:

Setting an ambition, that by 2026, everyone in Ireland can access the basic energy they need, regardless of income, home ownership status, age, disability or health status, location, or type of housing.

Focus on long-term solutions to permanently eradicate energy poverty such as home retrofitting, renewable solutions, and adequate social welfare support.

Include the voices of those most affected by energy poverty in the new action plan's development, delivery and review.

The present research is particularly significant, as it is the first research on Roma attitudes to climate change in Ireland, and timely, due to the intersecting factors related to social pressures of the increased cost of living, access to affordable housing, discrimination, alongside the health dimensions of environmental and climate impacts on Roma people such as air pollution, ability to heat homes, waste disposal and management. People who are more vulnerable to economic, social and environmental shocks are more likely to be from systemically marginalised groups in society and are often left behind in policies on climate and environmental issues¹⁰. As such, there is a need to explore climate justice in the context of Roma to inform and identify opportunities for greater inclusion in policy, community education and outreach.

5. Self-disconnection is where users of prepayment metres are disconnected from gas and electricity because of lack of credit.

6. Friends of the Earth 2024, 'Joint Statement on Energy Poverty and Energy Pollution', Friends of the Earth, viewed 27th September 2024, <https://www.friendsoftheearth.ie/assets/files/pdf/joint_statement_on_energy_poverty_and_energy_pollution.pdf>

7. Ibid

8. Ibid

9. Here we define energy poverty as those who spend more than a tenth of their net income on energy at home (electricity, fossil methane gas, oil and other solid fuels).

10. UNDP Climate Promise 2023, 'Climate change is a matter of justice - here's why', United Nations Development Programme, viewed 27th September 2024, <[!\[\]\(140fccad8efe967d1a77878d990524ac_img.jpg\) Cairde
Challenging ethnic minority health inequalities](https://climatepromise.undp.org/news-and-stories/climate-change-matter-justice-heres-why#:~:text=Why%20is%20climate%20justice%20important,and%20triggering%20displacement%20and%20conflict.>></p></div><div data-bbox=)

Researcher Reflection: Roma Climate Justice

My name is Elena Manciu and I am 28 years old. I was born in Romania, moved to Spain when I was six years old, and moved to Ireland four years ago. I have a large Roma family here that makes me feel connected to my culture. I am a curious and empathetic person. I love music, nature, and although I am quite introverted, I love being able to connect with people.

Life for Roma can be difficult because some people don't understand our culture and traditions. There is a lot of racism but still we feel proud to be Roma. I think Roma culture is misunderstood not only in Ireland, but around the world. For the past 2 years, I have been a participant in Cairde's Roma Education Programme, and through this project, I had access to online classes and workshops on English language, literacy, and other topics. Through this programme, I first encountered Friends of the Earth and had the opportunity to learn more about climate change and climate justice.

Earlier this year, I was employed as Ireland's first Roma Climate Justice Peer Education Officer. Roma face many climate, environmental and sustainability issues, including poverty and exposure to dangerous chemicals and materials, for example when working in rubbish dumps and recycling centres without adequate protection. Another climate issue in Ireland is that houses are not properly insulated and many people living in poverty, including Roma, are living in accommodation that is difficult to heat.

While the entire world is suffering from extreme energy poverty, the fight against climate change remains slow. In this research, Cairde and Friends of the Earth wanted to highlight the experiences of one of the communities most affected by these problems: Roma communities in Ireland.

During this research, I completed surveys with

32 Roma respondents and I found the extent of poverty Roma are facing to be truly shocking. Roma respondents were terrified of the expenses of electricity consumption, and these costs contribute to a vicious cycle of poverty. Many of the respondents were grateful simply to have a roof over their heads even if the conditions were not always the best.

I believe that if the government could make homes more insulated, make energy consumption more affordable, and above all, more efficient, these would be vital steps in improving life for everyone in Ireland, including Roma. Roma communities are passionate and strong communities and I would love for us to be more involved in climate change advocacy. This research is an important first step on the journey for Roma climate justice, and I am proud to be the first Roma Climate Justice Education Officer.

Section 2: Methodology

Participatory Action Research

Participatory Action Research was a key feature of the methodology for this research project. This approach values the knowledge that exists within communities and advocates for community members themselves to be part of research that can potentially impact their own lives. An essential aspect of this research is to engage the active participation of the people involved in the study. Cairde has previously used this approach for research with Roma communities in Ireland, and has contributed to some of the most comprehensive and up to date research on Roma lives in the country.

Researcher Training

Prior to data collection, the peer researcher was provided with training to deepen their knowledge of Cairde and Friends of the Earth as organisations, as well as further background on the purpose of the research. Staff from both organisations worked with the peer researcher on strengthening their knowledge, skills, and comfort in working with quantitative and qualitative research design, data collection, and analysis. A key feature of this training focused on maintaining anonymity of respondents, which is particularly important when the researcher is conducting research within their own community.

Questionnaire Design

The survey was designed based on previous research conducted by Friends of the Earth on energy poverty in March 2023. This survey 'Energy Poverty Supporter Survey' was adapted to make it more appropriate and accessible for Roma respondents, and this process was led by the Roma Climate Justice Peer Education Officer. Cairde and Friends of the Earth staff ran a small focus group with a number of Roma Education Programme participants and Cairde Roma staff for their thoughts on which questions could be used in a survey for Roma respondents. Once the survey was finalised, an online version was created where the researcher could input respondents' answers.

The survey consisted of thirty-nine questions and were a mixture of multiple choice responses and/or open text responses. See Appendix 1 for survey questions.

Data Collection

The data was collected by the Roma Climate Justice Peer Education Officer and was completed in-person, via Zoom call, or over the phone either through the online form or hard copy. All respondents provided consent for their data to be collected, anonymised, and used for the purposes of this research. While the survey was designed in English, the researcher collected the survey responses by translating the questions verbally to the participant in Romanian, with responses translated back into English. In total, thirty two individual responses were recorded, which included data on 176 Roma individuals. These responses were then reviewed for their validity by Cairde and Friends of the Earth staff.

Data Analysis

Once the data collection was completed, data analyses were shared between Friends of the Earth and Cairde. Analyses of quantitative and qualitative data allowed the researchers to categorise the findings into eight themes (Accommodation; Families, Households and Spaces to Live; Homelessness; Housing Conditions; Energy Usage and Cost; Heat Poverty; Discrimination; Climate Change and Climate Action), reflecting experiences and trends across energy, heat, accommodation and living arrangements, and what respondents considered the most important issues facing the Roma community.

Cairde then organised a focus group of Roma respondents to verify that they felt the issues had been captured in a sensitive and respectful manner, as is the process with Participatory Action Research - in case of any need for clarification or to better understand the community context.

Section 3: Findings

Summary of Key Findings:

The majority of respondents are living in private rented accommodation.

66% of respondents recycle their waste.

More than 25% of respondents were living in accommodation that was damp and structurally unsound.

69% of respondents had experienced homelessness at some time in their lives in Ireland. The average time spent homeless was 23 months, and one-parent families accounted for 50% of responses of people currently living in emergency accommodation. All of the one-parent families in this research were led by women.

More than 50% of respondents said they were unhappy in their current accommodation due to issues including cost, living conditions, and location.

Of the respondents who live in private rented or social housing accommodation, 99% expressed being “very worried” or “extremely worried” about their energy bills.

68% of respondents reported they were not able to keep their home warm enough.

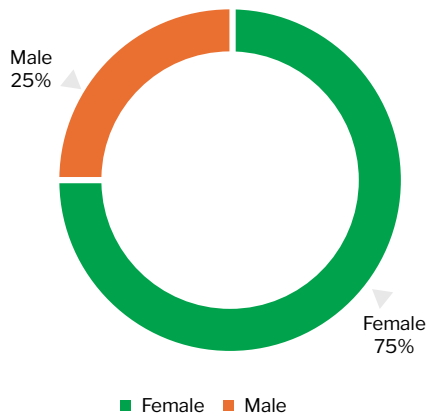
More than 80% of respondents reported that they had to reduce their energy use to keep their bills low.

Over a quarter of Roma respondents expressed worry about climate change, however 84% of respondents reported that they do not feel confident in taking action to tackle climate change.

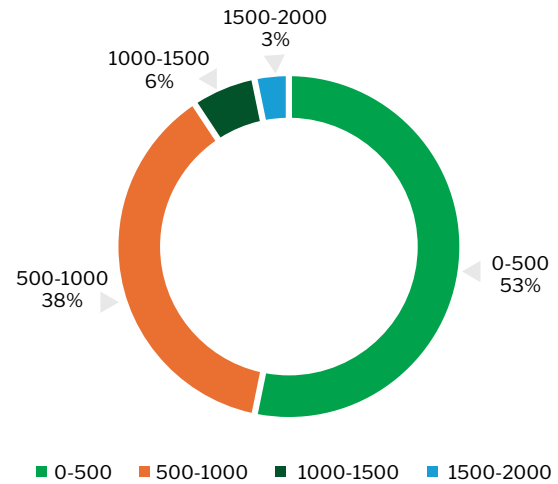
Section 3: Findings

Demographics of Roma Respondents

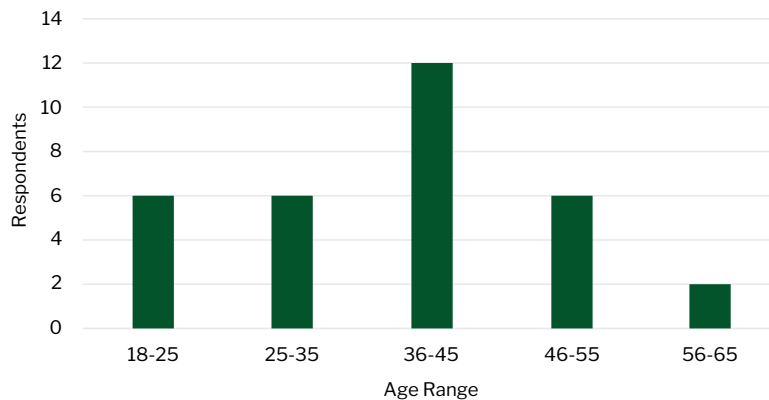
Gender



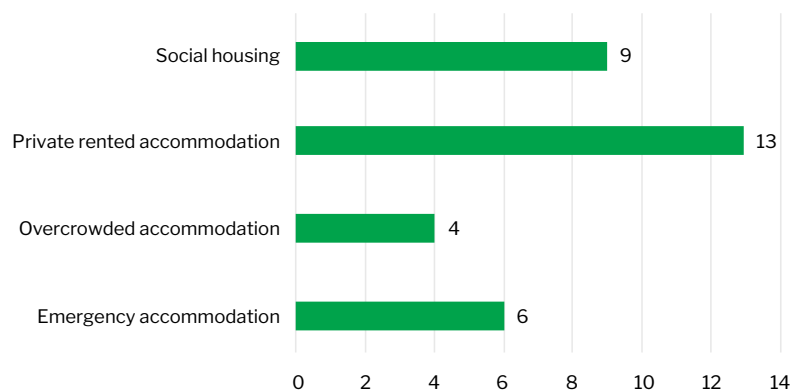
How much do you pay per month in rent?



Age of Respondents



Accommodation Type



Section 3: Findings

Average size of people living together (families and households) across all accommodation types (including children):

5.5 people

Single adult families (all women):

7

Average number of families per household:

1.25

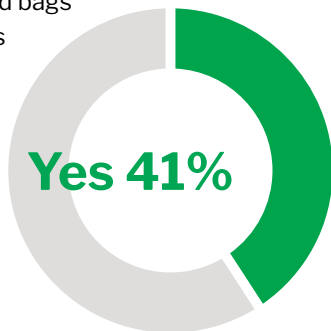
The majority of participants were living in

Leinster

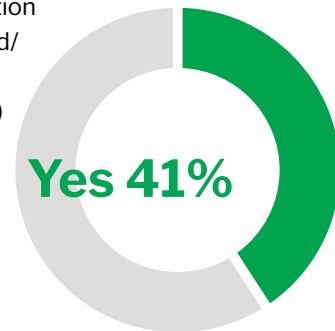
(Dublin 75%), and in Munster and Ulster.

WASTE - How do respondents dispose of their rubbish?

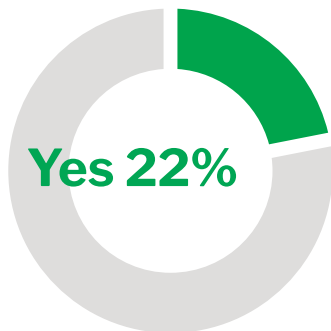
I use prepaid bags and stickers



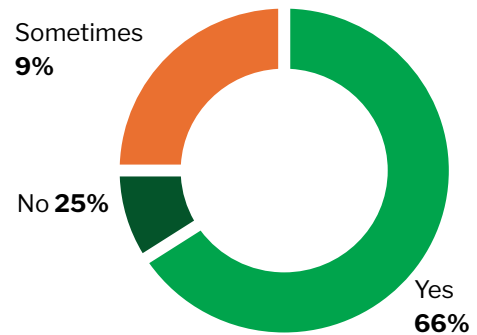
My accommodation provider (landlord/ emergency accommodation) disposes of my rubbish for me



I use prepaid wheelie bins



Do you recycle your waste?



Accommodation

“I’m happy because I don’t have to live in the hotel but my house is really in bad condition.”

-Roma woman, aged 26 -35, Dublin

More than a quarter of respondents identified Housing as the most important issue currently affecting Roma in Ireland. The survey captured information about five accommodation types: Temporary Emergency Accommodation, Social Housing, Overcrowded Private Rental Accommodation Housing, Private Rental Accommodation (with HAP and without HAP). Private Rental Accommodation was the most common type of accommodation amongst respondents, with around 46% renting with the support of HAP, living in Temporary Emergency Accommodation and in social housing, while 54% rented with the support of these schemes.

Of the responses, 9 people reported living with damp and that the windows and doors in their accommodation were not properly sealed meaning more than a quarter of respondents were living in accommodation that was damp and structurally unsound.

Taking into consideration the different experiences based on accommodation type, it is important to note that discounting temporary emergency accommodation responses caused the proportion of people living in damp and structurally unsound accommodation to rise to 37% of people surveyed.

This indicates a higher impact on renters of inadequate housing and reliance on landlords, management services or other external services to address these issues.

While the majority of responses of those in temporary emergency accommodation lived in rooms that didn’t presently have issues with damp, this can not suggest that this is representative of all temporary accommodation in Ireland.

Section 3: Findings

Families, households and space to live

The responses illustrate how families are living across the different accommodation types and whether their family or household occupied the whole, or part, of the property. One-family households made up the majority of responses at 69%, and 31% were two-family households. Twenty people said they rented an entire property with their family, irrespective of number of households in the property. Five respondents reported that they rented part of a property. For seven people this was not applicable due to living in temporary emergency accommodation or overcrowded accommodation. More detailed data on this theme is included in Appendix 2.

Twenty-two one-family households had an average of 2.1 rooms (excluding bathroom and kitchen) to live in, and nine two-family households had an average of 3.2 rooms. None of the respondents owned their own home which reflects a direct need to address specific circumstances relevant to Roma experiences. For many Roma access to affordable housing, including social housing and in the private rental market, is challenging. The different living circumstances of respondents determines their access to heat and energy programmes and will be discussed further in the conclusion.

Homelessness

“I have a small space so I would really need another room to be really comfortable. But I feel happy because living in a hotel with children is a horrible situation, I never want to go through that again.”

- Roma woman, aged 26 - 35, Dublin

Since 2008, Ireland has been in a worsening state of housing crisis, which has had a disproportionate impact on marginalised communities, including Roma. In some of the most recent data published by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage in July 2024, EEA/UK citizens made up 22% of adults accessing local authority managed emergency accommodation¹¹. In this piece of research, 69% of people surveyed had experienced homelessness at some time in their lives

in Ireland. The average time spent homeless was 23 months, with respondents reporting the duration of being homeless as ranging from 9 months to 6 years. One-adult families (of which were all women-headed households) accounted for 50% of responses of people currently living in emergency accommodation.

Housing Conditions

“I am very sad. I am outside of Dublin, in my hotel I do not have a kitchen or even a refrigerator. My condition is horrible. My dream would be to have a house but at least have a hotel close to my work. Having a kitchen and having a refrigerator is something essential for me. I work in Dublin 2 and I support my children alone, it takes me two hours to get to work.”

-Roma woman, aged 35 - 46, Dublin

Respondents were also asked: **Can you tell us how happy or unhappy are you in your current accommodation?**

In response to this question, 44% indicated in their response that they are happy in their current accommodation, and 56% indicated in their response that they are unhappy in their current accommodation. It is vital to note that where respondents indicated that they were happy in their accommodation, this was usually explained as being grateful for having accommodation at all, or no longer being in emergency accommodation. For example:

“I am happy because I have a home but really the structure is very poorly made. I do not complain because I lived with my children in a hotel and we had to go outside all day, it did not matter if it rained, I spent hours outside in the rain until we were allowed to re-enter the hotel.¹²”

- Roma woman, aged 26 - 35, Dublin

11. Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage 2024, 'Monthly Homelessness Report', Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, viewed 27th September 2024, <<https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/303899/6f83e3b5-e97e-4333-834f-5336a59436bf.pdf#page=null>>

12. This was in reference to the pre-COVID situation in temporary emergency accommodation, which has since changed to allow individuals to remain in shelters throughout the day for greater safety,

This participant response is particularly concerning in the context of the climate crisis, as Ireland experiences an increasing number of storms and colder temperatures in the winter months¹³, and extreme heat in the summer¹⁴.

Additionally, of the few people who said they were happy with their accommodation, the majority were living in social housing. No respondents who said they were happy were renting without the support of HAP, and 8 of the 9 people who responded that they were in some way 'happy' had also previously experienced homelessness. This further supports that many respondents were grateful and felt privileged to have any accommodation at all.

Of the respondents who were unhappy with their accommodation, there were four clear themes that emerged from the qualitative data: Cost, Living conditions, Location, and Other. The majority of respondents were unhappy due to the cost of their accommodation, energy costs, and general cost of living.

“I am not happy because gas and electricity are extremely expensive.”

- Roma woman, aged 56 - 65, Dublin

“I can barely support my family, I would love to have a good job to be able to offer a better home.”

- Roma man, aged 36 - 45, Dublin

Living conditions were a challenge for more than a quarter of Roma respondents, some of whom reported living in accommodation with a lack of basic amenities including refrigerators, heating, and beds. Respondents also described accommodation that was difficult to keep warm:

“I have a small son who had heart surgery [...] in winter it is very difficult for me to keep my house warm and comfortable.”

- Roma man, aged 18 - 25, Dublin

“[The house] is completely empty. I don't have enough money for beds. I asked them [local council] where my children would sleep and they told me that it is not their problem. At least they have let me stay a little longer at the hotel with my children while I find the solution to start furnishing the house.”

-Roma man, aged 36 - 45, Dublin

Additionally, location was a concern for some respondents, who had to move away from family to access more affordable housing. In Cairde's work with Roma communities, it has been noted that many Roma fear racism when they are living in a location where they do not know other Roma nearby and prefer to live in neighbourhoods where members of the Roma community reside. Respondents felt unhappy about feeling a lack of freedom because they couldn't make changes to their rental accommodation, as well as one respondent feeling they had limited space for their family:

“I'm not happy, I don't have space for my children. We live like in a cage and I still pay a lot of money weekly.”

-Roma woman, aged 36 - 45, Dublin

13. Met Éireann, Human caused climate change brings increased storm rainfall, Met Éireann, viewed 27th September 2024, <<https://www.met.ie/human-caused-climate-change-brings-increased-storm-rainfall>>

14. Kevin O'Sullivan 2024, 'Temperatures exceeding 30 degrees likely to become more common in Ireland - study', The Irish Times, viewed 27th September 2024, <<https://www.irishtimes.com/environment/climate-crisis/2024/07/02/temperatures-exceeding-30-degrees-likely-to-become-more-common-in-ireland-study/>>

Section 3: Findings

Energy Usage and Cost

“Another big problem that I suffer in my house is expenses, in winter I never allow myself to keep my house warm out of fear.”

- Roma woman, aged 46 - 55, Dublin

The survey questions related to energy focused on choices the respondents had to make about energy use, and how worried they were about their energy costs. Of the respondents who live in private rented or social housing accommodation, 99% expressed being “very worried” or “extremely worried” about their energy bills.

More than 80% of respondents reported that they had to reduce their energy use to keep their bills low. There was a clear relationship between respondents who were worried about their energy costs, and those who restricted their energy use.

	Extremely worried	Very worried	Sometimes I'm worried	Not worried	Total
Female	8	8	1	7	24
Male	5	2	1		8

Table 1. Level of worry about cost of energy bills categorised by gender.

While there weren't enough responses from men to accurately compare trends of “Worry about energy bills” and “restricted energy use” between the respondents by gender, or to comment on gendered experiences as a whole, most men were either extremely worried (63%) or very worried (25%) about their bills regardless of energy restriction patterns. Despite this concern regarding energy costs, no respondents reported accessing any organisations for help with their bills.

Case Study: Energy Restriction

A male Roma respondent in his early thirties reported being happy overall with his accommodation and feels he is sometimes able to keep his home warm enough. There are two families living in a house with four rooms, and the respondent is renting the entire accommodation without the support of HAP. This respondent paid the highest amount of rent of all research participants, however he had to make a fireplace in the property to heat it and has been collecting his own wood. While the families have access to the necessary appliances in this accommodation, the respondent was resorting to these measures to not only feel warm enough, but also to reduce electricity usage.

Heat Poverty

“The windows are in very bad condition, the cold comes in, in winter I have to put blankets so my children don’t get cold.”

- Roma woman, aged 25 - 36, Dublin

It is evident that keeping accommodation warm enough was a significant issue facing the majority of respondents, with 68% of respondents expressing they did not have adequate insulation from the cold, including accommodation with serious problems with window insulation. The qualitative analysis showed more than one case where families were going to the extremes of putting blankets and tape over their windows and doors.

Further analysis showed that only five respondents¹⁵ (all living in emergency accommodation), felt that they could keep their homes warm (especially over the winter months) and did not have to restrict their energy use. Only 30% of the people living in emergency accommodation and overcrowded accommodation could choose when to turn the heating on.

“The power of the stove is very low so it takes me a long time to cook because they don’t work properly. I don’t decide when I can turn the heating on and do the laundry.”

- Roma woman, aged 18 - 25, Dublin

	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Do not
I always feel I’m able to keep my home warm enough	3		2	
I don’t feel I can keep my home warm enough	16	3	1	1
I sometimes feel I’m able to keep my home warm enough	1		1	1

Table 2. Frequency of feeling able to keep home warm enough

15. Of these five respondents, one person had to make financial contributions to the heating bill.

Section 3: Findings

Discrimination

“I dream of a future where there is change for children, where there is no racism and discrimination anymore.”

- Roma man, aged 36 - 45, Kildare

Despite the day to day challenges many respondents were facing, including insecure and unsafe housing, looking after unwell family members, and struggling with the cost of living crisis, Discrimination was identified as the most important issue affecting Roma in Ireland. The majority of respondents (53%) indicated that they felt Discrimination to be the most important issue affecting Roma, followed by Housing (25%), Cost of living (13%), Education, Employment, Health (each 3%), and Other (0%). During the analysis of these questions, the Roma Peer Researcher also noted that 100% of the participants expressed having suffered denigration due to racial factors.

This echoes previous research Cairde has undertaken, for example in *Proiectos Romano* (2016), 79% of respondents stated they had been victims of several forms of racism and discrimination since they moved to Ireland, and 90% of respondents did not report any racist incidents to the Garda¹⁶. Since the National Roma Infoline was established in 2020, more than 194 calls made from or on behalf of Roma were regarding racism and discrimination. Around a third of these Roma callers reported experiencing discrimination in a wide variety of settings including emergency accommodation, social housing, public transport, and in the street.

While the survey gave the option to highlight ‘Other’ important issues, all of the respondents selected one of the given answers and did not select ‘Other’, however additional themes and experiences were described in the qualitative answers.

Climate Change and Climate Action

“I feel that the structure of my house is not very strong, a lot of cold comes in through the windows. I dream of having solar panels or some help to pay for the garbage. Everything is extremely expensive, garbage, gas, children’s expenses... it is difficult for us to make ends meet.”

- Roma man, aged 36 - 45, Dublin

Over a quarter of Roma respondents expressed worry about climate change, however, 84% of respondents reported that they do not feel confident in taking action to tackle climate change. It is important to note that the researcher highlighted that many of the respondents had very limited knowledge of the concept of climate change. Even though there were fewer male participants in the research, they reported higher levels of climate worry than female participants.

16. Dr Marianna Prontera 2016, ‘Proiectos Romano: A study of Roma communities in Balbriggan’, Cairde, viewed 27th September 2024, <<https://cairde.ie/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Proiectos-Romano-Report-Cairde-2016.pdf>>, p.14



ROMA CLIMATE JUSTICE



This poster was created by Cairde's Roma Education Programme and Friends of the Earth to raise awareness of Romani language and the impact of climate change on Roma communities. The Roma Education Programme brings together Roma in Ireland to participate in online classes in English, computers, and other subjects. There are different dialects of Romani language and the words below reflect the words used by the participants in the Roma Education Programme.



warm
tato



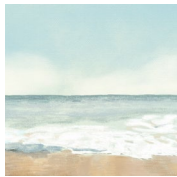
cold
şál



temperature
baro takimos



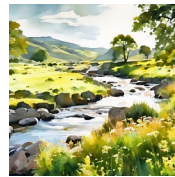
weather
o timpo



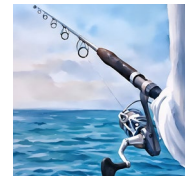
sea
marea



lake
lako



river
izvoro payesko



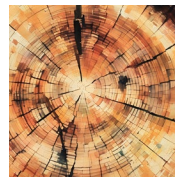
fishing
jal maşeste



forest
veş



mountain
plai baro



wood
kaşt, caşt



leaf
patrea



health
sastipe, sastimos



house
kher



power
puterea, zuralo



justice
căcimós



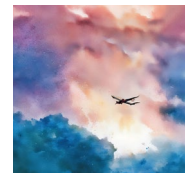
clouds
nori



air
àero



airplane
aviono



sky
o ceri



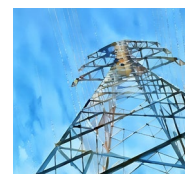
coal
angara



gas
gaso



bills
fakture, factura



electricity
curento



Section 4: Conclusions

Significance

It has been well-documented that Roma in Ireland face barriers in accessing healthcare, accommodation, employment, and other social services. The marginalisation that Roma communities face was reflected in this research, and it was evident that discrimination, accommodation, energy use and cost, and poverty were the most pressing issues facing respondents. For the first time, this research captures levels of worry about climate change issues and Roma community member's confidence in taking action. The significance of this piece of research cannot be understated - not only is it the first research conducted on Roma and climate issues, but also the first climate research in Ireland researched by a Roma peer-researcher, and the first Roma Climate Justice Peer Education Officer.

Climate change shocks are more intensely experienced by marginalised communities and as such the interventions targeted at the broader population risks creating wider gaps for communities such as Roma in Ireland. To be effective, fair and equitable, climate positive interventions and mitigations must include, by design, the experiences, and insights of those impacted by policies and structures. The active participation of Roma community members, and particularly Roma women, has been at the forefront of this project throughout its various stages. This approach has produced rich data and analysis that Cairde and Friends of the Earth hope will inform Irish policy in a variety of areas including housing, inclusion, and climate.

Accommodation

The relationship between accommodation and the impact of climate change is one of the most stark and concerning. As a minority ethnic group, Roma in Ireland are disproportionately impacted by the housing crisis¹⁷, with many Roma families experiencing homelessness, longer durations in emergency accommodation, discrimination in emergency accommodation services, and poor living conditions in a variety of settings. It can be difficult for members of the Roma community to access schemes such as the Housing Assistance

Payment (HAP). To qualify for this scheme, applicants must first be assessed as needing social housing¹⁸. If deemed eligible for social housing support, they are placed on the local housing list. Applicants then need to apply for HAP after finding suitable accommodation and securing the landlord's support. This entire process requires an understanding of the system and the ability to complete applications in English. Coupled with the necessity to provide relevant documentation, this can be quite challenging for Roma who are illiterate or do not speak English fluently.

An emerging theme of this research was that despite living in accommodation that was damp, had mould, was overcrowded, or lacked basic amenities, in the majority of cases Roma respondents were grateful simply to have a roof over their heads. Reliance on housing in the private rental market, social housing and in many cases emergency accommodation in the context of a housing crisis puts people in a vulnerable position. As outlined in the qualitative response, families of all kinds are under extreme pressures to meet their families' complex needs around healthcare, disability and privacy. As one respondent pointed out, some emergency accommodation services were previously only available in the evenings, and during the day families were required to stay outside, regardless of weather conditions.

Not only does the pressured rental market mean less quality and choice for families to stay in areas they know, or with family, it also creates many barriers to improving the quality of the available housing in terms of affordability, access to government upgrading insulation schemes and energy efficiency. For many Roma, these schemes are difficult to access, especially in situations where they would need the most support to access quality interventions around housing, heat and energy. Many in the Roma community may face challenges in accessing wheelie bins, which could be more convenient for larger households. Waste removal services tend to require having a credit or debit card to make advance payments therefore making the process less accessible compared to the ease of purchasing prepaid bags in shops. Households living in central urban areas such as Dublin also may limit access to waste collection points from private companies who do not provide a wheelie bin service in some areas.

17. Aoife Kelly Desmond 2022, Statutory Housing Rights and Discrimination within Housing - The impact of a right to housing for ethnic and racial minorities in Ireland', Mercy Law Centre, viewed 27th September 2024, <<https://mercyllaw.ie/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/The-impact-of-a-right-to-housing-on-ethnic-and-racial-minorities-in-Ireland-April-2022.pdf>>, p.1

18. Housing Assistance Payment 2024, How to apply for HAP, Housing Assistance Payment, viewed 27th September 2024, <<https://www.hap.ie/tenants/howtoapply/>>

Energy Usage and Cost

While over 90% of respondents have access to vital amenities in their accommodation, it was evident that some respondents not only felt inhibited by rising energy costs, but also restricted their energy usage accordingly. Taking this into account, it is vital that schemes and information that relieve energy costs are made available and accessible to Roma communities in Ireland. For example, in Budget 2024, it was announced that domestic electricity customers would be in receipt of a €450 credit to their electricity bills¹⁹. While this is a welcome development, it is probable that this would be difficult to access by Roma who are in precarious rental arrangements, living in overcrowded accommodation, or where they are not the account holder of the electricity bill.

Heat Poverty

Heat Poverty was a significant issue for most of the respondents, with the majority living in temporary accommodation that they struggled to keep warm enough for themselves and their families. This is unsurprising considering 29% of Irish households are currently estimated to be living in energy poverty - the highest percentage ever recorded²⁰. Tenants are at an increased risk of energy poverty compared to homeowners, which is particularly relevant to Roma as most Roma in Ireland are not homeowners. There is a clear need for government-subsidised retrofitting schemes that target rental accommodation, while also ensuring security of tenancy for the tenants. Additionally, information about retrofitting needs to be more accessible for tenants, including information materials that are available in languages other than English and Irish.

Discrimination

In recent years, there has been a marked increase of hate crime in Ireland²¹ and worsening attitudes towards Roma²². It is important to note this broader context, as the impacts of the lived experience of discrimination was shared by the Roma respondents in this survey. In the context of Europe, particularly concerning the Roma and Traveller communities, environmental racism is recognised as a facet of antigypsyism²². In 2020, the EU Strategic Framework for Roma Equality, Inclusion, and Participation was published. This policy document was significant in that it explicitly recognised the need for Member States to deliver environmental justice for Roma communities²⁴. Currently, Ireland's National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy (NTRIS II) does not include actions that explicitly address the impact of climate change on Roma communities²⁴. However, Cairde and Friends of the Earth are hopeful that these much needed actions could be developed in the near future, using this groundbreaking research as a starting point.

Climate change has been described as a threat multiplier in that it worsens existing inequalities and marginalisation²⁶. This extends to gender inequality and it is important to note that Roma women face discrimination as women, as Roma, and as Roma women. In this research, Roma women made up the majority of respondents, including 7 women who were leading single-adult families and were all living in temporary emergency accommodation. With this in mind, a gender-based approach to supporting Roma women requires analysis that also includes a climate justice lens.

19. Citizens Information 2024, Electricity Account Credit, Citizens Information, viewed 27th September 2024, <<https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/consumer/utilities/electricity-account-credit/>>
20. Threshold 2024, Energy Poverty, Threshold, viewed 27th September 2024, <<https://threshold.ie/advocacy-campaign/energypoverty/#:-:text=29%25%20of%20Irish%20households%20are,compared%20to%20being%20a%20homeowner.>>>
21. An Garda Síochána 2024, 2023 Hate Crime Data and Related Discriminatory Motives, An Garda Síochána, viewed 27th September 2024, <<https://www.garda.ie/en/about-us/our-departments/office-of-corporate-communications/news-media/2023-hate-crime-data-and-related-discriminatory-motives.html>>
22. Sean Murray 2023, 'Ireland has 'disappointing attitudes' towards Traveller and Roma communities', Irish Examiner, viewed 27th September 2024, <<https://www.irishexaminer.com/news/arid-41172976.html>>
23. Diego Marin 2024, 'Bearing the brunt: Roma and Traveller experiences of environmental racism in Western Europe', European Environmental Bureau (EEB), viewed 27th September 2024, <<https://eeb.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/roma-report-WEB-1.pdf>>
24. European Commission 2020, 'A Union of Equality: EU Roma strategic framework for equality, inclusion and participation', European Commission, viewed 27th September 2024, <https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/99cc0720-68c2-4300-854f-592bf21dceaf_en?filename=eu_roma_strategic_framework_for_equality_inclusion_and_participation_for_2020_-_2030.pdf>
25. Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth 2024, 'National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy II', Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, viewed 27th September 2024, <<https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/302189/41e380c9-3f4d-403f-8591-9f21986adaab.pdf#page=null>>
26. UN Women 2022, Explainer: How gender inequality and climate change are interconnected, UN Women, viewed 27th September 2024, <<https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/explainer/2022/02/explainer-how-gender-inequality-and-climate-change-are-interconnected>>

Section 4: Conclusions

Climate Change and Climate Justice

While awareness of climate change and environmental issues is increasing in Ireland²⁷, and levels of worry are high²⁸, there is still a low level of awareness of the causes and consequences of climate change in the general population. Broad support for climate action exists in rural and urban areas in Ireland, for example, in transport and agriculture. Polling carried out by Ireland Thinks showed 80% of respondents believed climate change to be a problem and that actions should be taken to tackle it²⁹. A lower level of awareness of climate issues is reflected in the responses within the Roma community. It is important to recognise that the wider population has greater access to reliable climate and environmental information. The researcher also debriefed their interpretation of some of the responses and highlighted that particularly relevant for the Roma community is the issue of fake news (chemtrails), and the lack of access to information means that understanding of climate change is limited, along with education about the environment, science and technology. This highlights a clear need to have access to climate and environmental education that is targeted towards Roma on issues and topics that are relevant to their lives, aimed to empower individuals, and tackle misinformation and climate worry.

As mentioned, Roma in Ireland face discrimination in many settings, including public transport and in the street. In 2018, Cairde supported a Roma woman to access legal representation as she was thrown off a Dublin Bus³⁰ and accused of not paying her fare. This woman and her friend were represented by Free Legal Advice Centres at the Workplace Relations Commission and in Circuit Court proceedings, and were awarded a substantial settlement from Dublin Bus. This is just one example of the discrimination Roma, and particularly Roma women, face in public settings, and it is important to keep this in mind as public transport and walking are promoted as more environmentally friendly modes of

transport. This is particularly worrying considering that data from the last Central Statistics Office Census (see Appendix 3) highlights the reliance of public transport, cycling and walking for Roma travelling to work. Around 69% of the Roma respondents to the Census stated their means of travel to work, with 16% using public transport, 28% travelling by foot, and 5% by bike. The figures from the CSO also indicate the low-carbon impact of how Roma people travel. Encouragement of low cost, reliable and low carbon travel is a benefit both to Roma people and the State.

Moving Forward

It is clear that the Irish State needs to support the whole of society to be able to take informed action, to be empowered about managing the health of their families and the health of the surrounding environment to meet climate goals at a national and local level. Access to adequate housing, safety in using public transport and in public spaces, and choice around energy usage, are important for people to have in order to have the ability to make decisions and choices about meeting their families' needs and living their ordinary lives.

With the goal of better supporting Roma communities in Ireland with climate justice education and action, Cairde and Friends of the Earth have produced further materials and resources:

Two Romani and English language posters highlighting environmental, energy and social justice words.

A Romanian translation of Nuts and Bolts: A Campaign Guide for grassroots groups in Ireland. This document is a resource to support grassroots and community groups fighting for climate justice and social justice in Ireland.

27. Dóchas 2024, Worldview Toolkit: 4th Annual Tracker Survey, Dóchas, viewed 27th September 2024, <<https://www.dochas.ie/resources/worldview/quantitative-findings/survey-4/>>

28. EPA and Yale 2024, 'Climate Change's Four Irelands: An Audience Segmentation Analysis', EPA and Yale, viewed 27th September 2024, <<https://www.epa.ie/publications/monitoring--assessment/climate-change/EPA-Climate-Changes-Four-Irelands-Report-Wave-2-Report-2.pdf>>

29. Friends of the Earth 2023, Ireland Thinks polling provides "Temperature Check" on public opinion on climate action, Friends of the Earth, viewed 27th September 2024, <<https://www.friendsoftheearth.ie/news/ireland-thinks-polling-provides-temperature-check-on-public-o/>>

30. Michelle Hennessy 2020, 'Roma woman wrongfully accused of failing to pay fare and thrown off Dublin Bus', The Journal, viewed 27th September 2024, <<https://www.thejournal.ie/flac-annual-report-5218698-Oct2020/>>

Section 5: Recommendations

Cairde and Friends of the Earth would like to share their recommendations based on this present research and extensive engagement with heat and energy poverty, Roma lived experience and climate justice. We hope that this work can help to inform organisations, individuals and decision makers to take action. We encourage opportunities to increase collective awareness and solidarity across communities and organisations to create a safer, healthier, inclusive and climate resilient Ireland.

Funding should be made available for organisations to continue to work with Roma communities in Ireland on climate change and climate justice issues.

Inclusion of actions that specifically address climate change and climate justice and their impacts on Roma communities in the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy II (2024 - 2028).

Translated application forms for relevant schemes and supports including the Social Housing Support Application form, the National Housing Retrofit Scheme, and Electricity Account Credits should be available in languages other than English and Irish, including the languages commonly spoken by Roma in Ireland: Romanian, Czech, and Slovak, among others.

The Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage should ensure all accommodation, including emergency accommodation and rented accommodation, is properly insulated, heat and energy efficient, with appropriate and affordable methods of rubbish disposal - such as the introduction of minimum BERs in the private rental sector from 2025, alongside strong rental protections against evictions and rent hikes.

Retrofitting schemes that target rental accommodation, while also ensuring security of tenancy for the tenants.

Education and peer support programmes for Roma should continue to be resourced and adequately funded, to support Roma access to English language and literacy classes and overall inclusion in Irish society. Education for sustainable development should be inclusive and ensure that Roma are reached and supported in any civil outreach programmes and interventions.

The Department of Transport should ensure that investments are made to make public transport safe by providing training that tackles racism, discrimination and antigypsyism, and ensuring the availability of low cost, reliable travel to all demographics and regions.

And to reiterate the joint demands of over 20 leading Civil Society Organisations to the Government plan to permanently end energy poverty, that Friends of the Earth and Cairde submitted to:

By 2026, everyone in Ireland should have access to the basic energy they need, regardless of income, home ownership status, age, disability or health status, location, or type of housing.

The new plan must align with the government's commitment to cut emissions by 51% by 2030, and must prioritise at-risk groups for energy efficiency and renewable heating solutions, making sure no one is left behind in the transition off fossil fuels.

Focus on long-term solutions to permanently eradicate energy poverty, not just short-term relief like untargeted energy credits.

Set enforceable, measurable, and time-bound targets to reduce energy deprivation across all cohorts.

Include the voices of those most affected by energy poverty in the plan's development and delivery.



Appendix 1:

Questionnaire to capture Roma Experiences of Energy Poverty in Ireland

Section 1: Demographic Information

1. Gender
2. Age Range
3. Accommodation Type
- If other, please specify
4. If you are in emergency accommodation, do you have to make a financial contribution to your emergency accommodation provider?
5. Family Size (number of adults)
6. Family Size (number of children under 18)
7. Are you or your family renting the entire house/ apartment?
8. How many families are living in your household?
9. How many bedrooms does your household have, excluding the kitchen and bathroom?
10. Have you ever been homeless?
- If yes, for how long?
11. Are you currently on the housing list?
12. Location
13. How much do you pay per month in rent?

Section 2: Concerns Around The Energy Crisis

14. What do you consider to be the most important issue facing Roma in Ireland?
- If other, please specify here
15. How worried are you currently about your energy bills?
16. Do you feel like you've been able to keep your home warm enough, especially over the winter months?
17. Do you have to restrict your energy consumption to keep your energy bills low?
18. Are there any organisations you go to for help with cost of living/ bills?
19. Are you worried about Climate Change?
20. Do you feel confident in taking action to tackle climate change?

Section 3: Access to Energy

21. Can you choose when to turn the heating on in your accommodation?
22. If you are in emergency accommodation, do you have to make any financial contribution towards heating?
23. Are all the windows and doors in your accommodation properly sealed?

Section 4: Household Amenities

An oven
A washing machine
A fridge
A freezer
A microwave oven
A shower
A supply of cold drinking water
Access to hot water
A fixed heating appliance in each room, which provides enough heat for the room
Property is free from damp and is structurally sound internally and externally

I use prepaid bags and stickers
I use prepaid wheelie bins
My accommodation provider (landlord/ emergency accommodation) disposes of my rubbish for me
I use public bins to dispose of household waste because I can't afford bin charges
Other - If other, please specify here.
Do you recycle your waste?

Section 5: Additional information - Case Study Examples

This section is optional. This is an opportunity for participants in the survey to share with us from their lived experience - about the kinds of issues you may be facing in relation to energy poverty, and what you think needs to change to improve the situation.

25. Can you tell us, how happy or unhappy are you in your current accommodation?
26. What if anything, needs to improve?

Appendix 2:

Accommodation based on family size and house

	No. of adults in family	No. of children avg (range years old)	Avg. number of rooms	Number of households	Renting entire property	Type of housing
1 Adult*	7	3.3 (1-5)	1.6	1	3 Yes, 3 NA, 1 No	3 Emergency Temp, 1 overcrowded, 3 renting privately
2 Adult*	16	3.9 (0-5)	1.9	1.3	8 Yes, 4 No, 4 NA	3 Temp em, 3 overcrowded, 2 renting with HAP, 5 renting without HAP, 3 Social Housing
3 Adult	3	3.7 (2-5)	3.6	1	3 Yes	1 with HAP, 1 without HAP, 1 Social Housing
4 Adult	3	3.7 (1-5)	3.2	1.7	6 Yes	5 Social Housing, 1 without HAP
Households	No of family		Avg. Number of rooms	Number of households	Renting entire property	Type of housing
1 Family	22		2.1	1	15 y, 1 no, 7 NA	5 temp, 2 overcrowded, 6 renting with HAP, 3 renting no HAP, 6 social housing
2 Family	9		3.2	2	5 yes, 4 no	2 Overcrowded, 4 renting privately without HAP, 3 social housing
Don't know	1			1	NA	Emergency Temp

Appendix 3:

CSO Data on Means of Travel to work or school (Census 2022)

Means of travel to work/ school	All ethnic or cultural backgrounds	Roma
All means of travel	5084879	16,059
On foot	473781	3,086
Bicycle	99767	586
Bus, minibus or coach	333940	1,497
Train, DART or Luas	86830	280
Motorcycle or scooter	9541	80
Driving in a car	1320404	3,365
Passenger in a car	701471	1,791
Van	154765	337
Other, including lorry	14820	53
Work mainly at or from home	298235	506
Not stated	1591325	4,478



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