

The National Roma Infoline



Annual Report

2024



Cairde
Challenging ethnic minority health inequalities

HE

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About Cairde

Cairde is a community development organisation working to tackle health inequities 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 Programme consists of the following four projects:

The National Roma Infoline

Cairde's National Roma Infoline (the Infoline), funded by the HSE, was established in March 2020 to respond to Roma health needs in Ireland. The Infoline's Roma Operators answer calls in Romani, Romanian, and English. The Operators provide advocacy and support to Roma callers, with queries ranging from medical card applications to finding emergency accommodation. After five years of operation, the Infoline has received close to 12,000 calls from Roma and service providers around the country.

In their 2025 Memorandum on the human rights of Travellers and Roma in Ireland, the Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights recognised the Infoline as a positive development in addressing Roma health needs¹.

The Roma Adult Education and Training Programme

The Roma Programme has coordinated a number of education programmes for Roma, including the Roma Women's Advocates Project and the Roma Education Programme. These programmes have delivered online English language and literacy classes, computer classes, and other topics to more than 30 Roma, many of whom were single parents and/or living in emergency accommodation.

In 2025, Cairde's Roma Adult Education and Training Programme is building on the foundations of the aforementioned projects by providing further training for 5 Roma Peer Support Workers. These projects have all been supported by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration, and Youth (DCEDIY), recently renamed the Department of Children, Disability and Equality (DCDE).

¹ Council of Europe (2025), 'Memorandum on the human rights of Travellers and Roma in Ireland', viewed 4 February 2025, accessed at: <https://rm.coe.int/memorandum-on-the-human-rights-of-roma-in-ireland-by-michael-o-flahert/1680b44725>



Roma Climate Justice Project

Since 2023, Friends of the Earth and Cairde have partnered to deliver community education to Roma learners. A key focus of our work was to understand how Roma were experiencing heat and energy poverty and their attitudes towards climate change. This research was led by Cairde's Roma Climate Justice Peer Education Officer.

Our vision is that this research informs policy approaches to develop meaningful support for the Roma community and ensure they are not left behind in pursuing climate-resilient policies. This work is funded by Irish Aid through Friends of the Earth's Global Citizenship Education project.

Roma Influencers Network

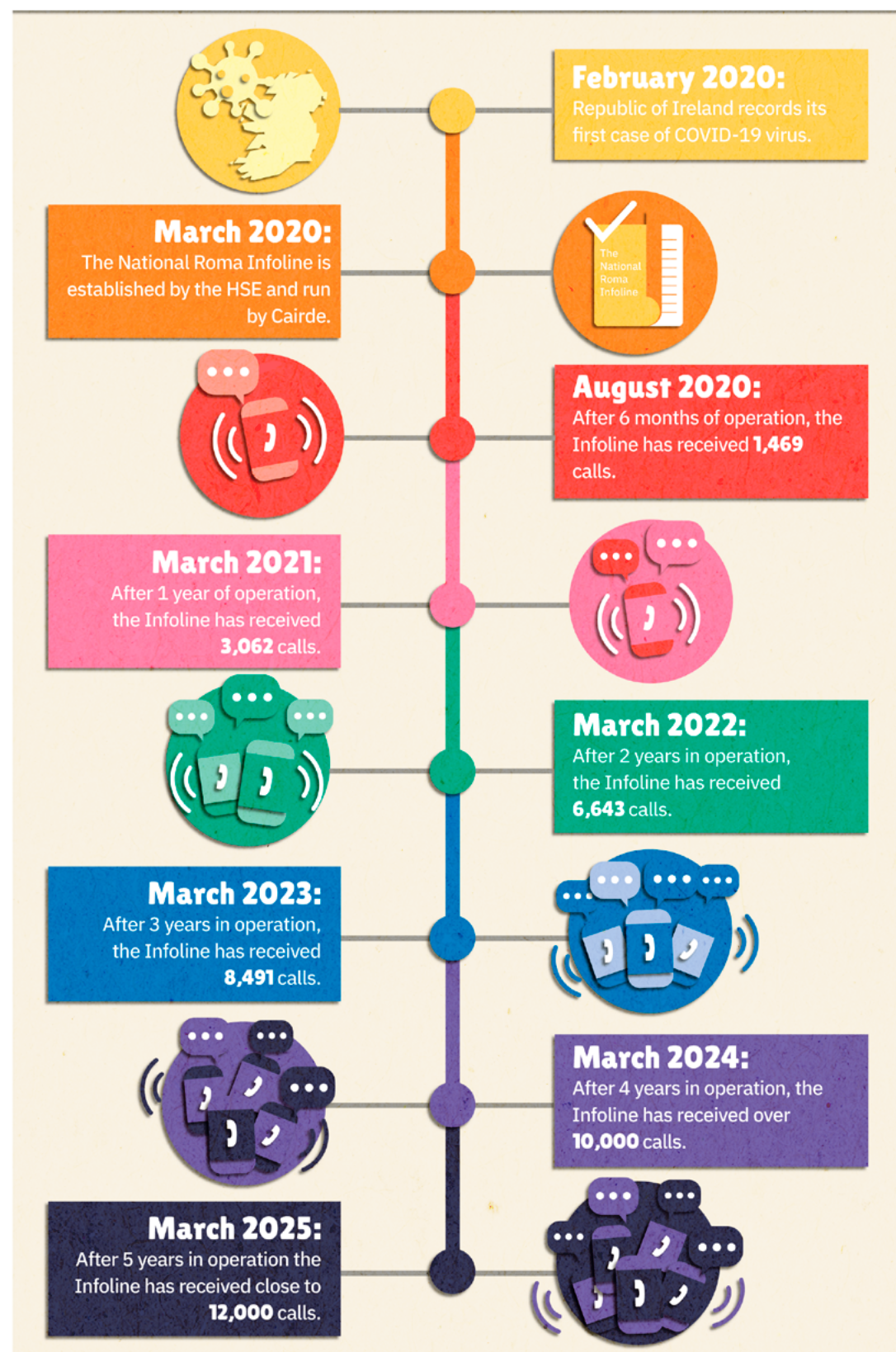
The international project "Roma Influencers Breaking the Circle of Early Marriages and Early Motherhood in Roma Communities," which is known as the Roma Influencers Network, is led by Klimaka-Roma Day Center (Greece), in partnership with Cairde (Ireland), Cesis and Cooperactiva (Portugal), and Sastipen (Romania). This is an Erasmus+ project co-funded by the European Union.

This project derives from the gravity of the harmful practice of early marriages and early motherhood in Roma communities. It is focused on empowering, supporting, protecting and raising awareness of the Roma community, especially women and girls affected by the specific concern, by suggesting ways to change behaviours and attitudes in order to overcome, reduce or eliminate it.





Timeline of the National Roma Infoline



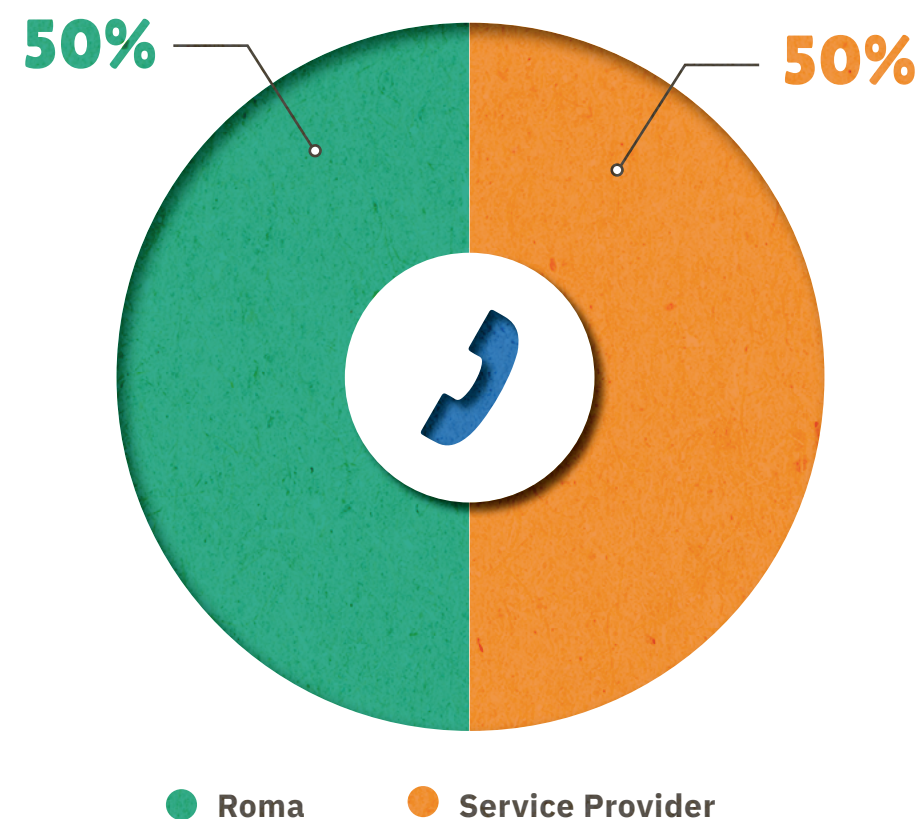
Overview of 2024 Calls

Number of Calls

Between the 1st of January 2024 and the 31st of December 2024, the Infoline dealt with 4,307 calls. In 2024, the Infoline addressed a wide variety of queries from both Roma and service providers about accommodation, health, racism and discrimination, among others. Across these calls, translation and interpretation are usually concurrent issues. Typically, callers had more than one reason for calling the Infoline and the Roma Operators dealt with many complex cases, which are outlined in the case studies later in this report.

Caller Type

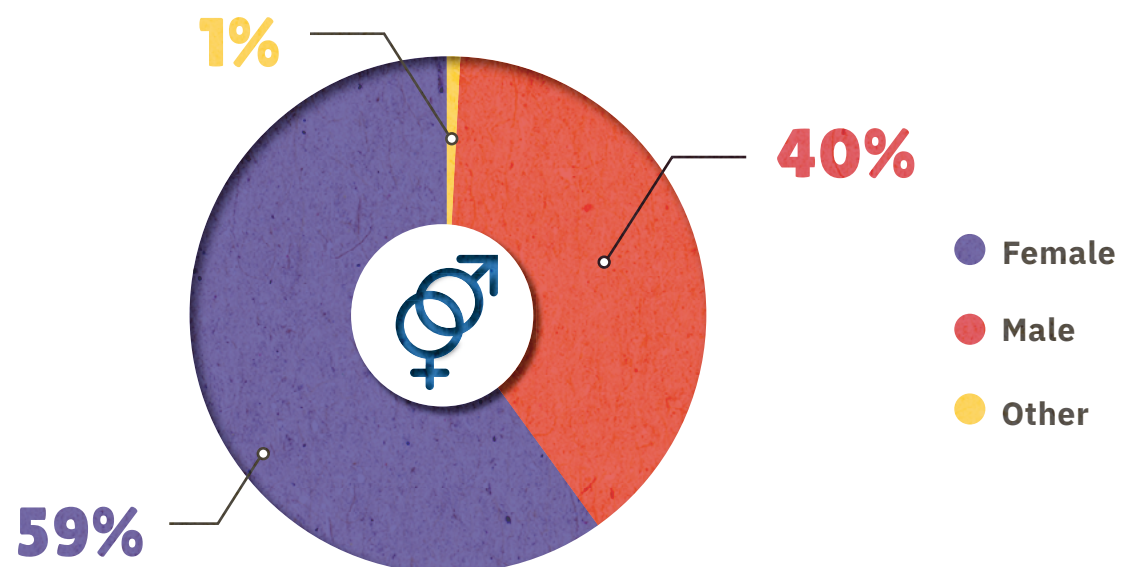
The graph below shows that 50% of the calls dealt with by the Infoline in 2024 were from service providers, while the other 50% involved engagement with members of the Roma community.





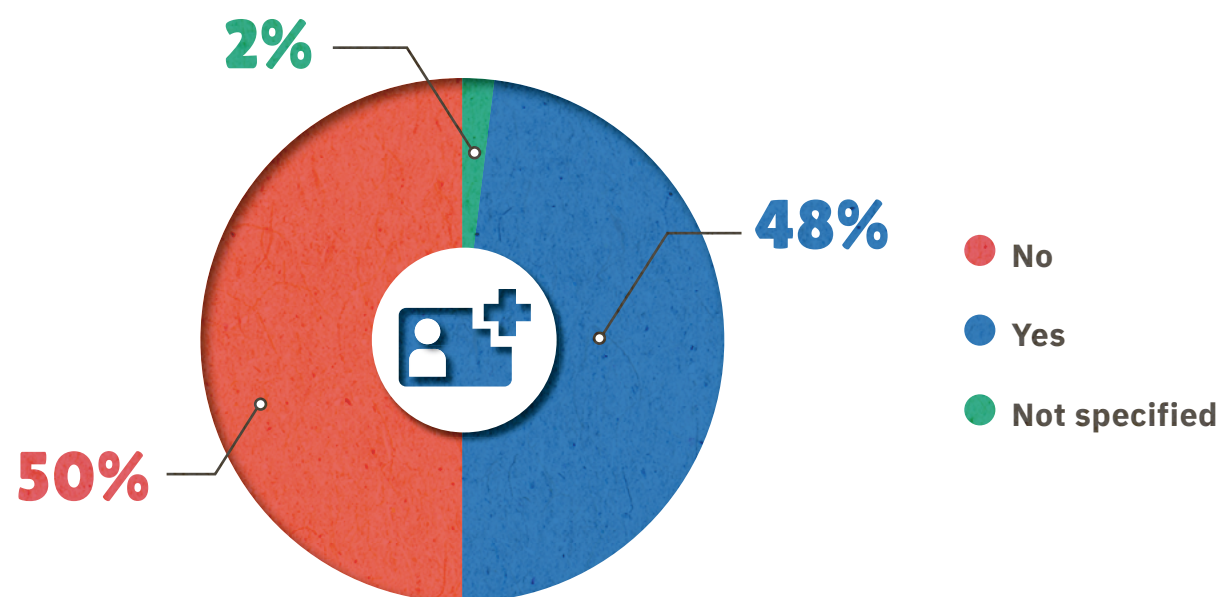
Gender

This graph shows that nearly 60% of the calls received by the Infoline in 2024 were from or on behalf of Roma women, and close to 40% 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.



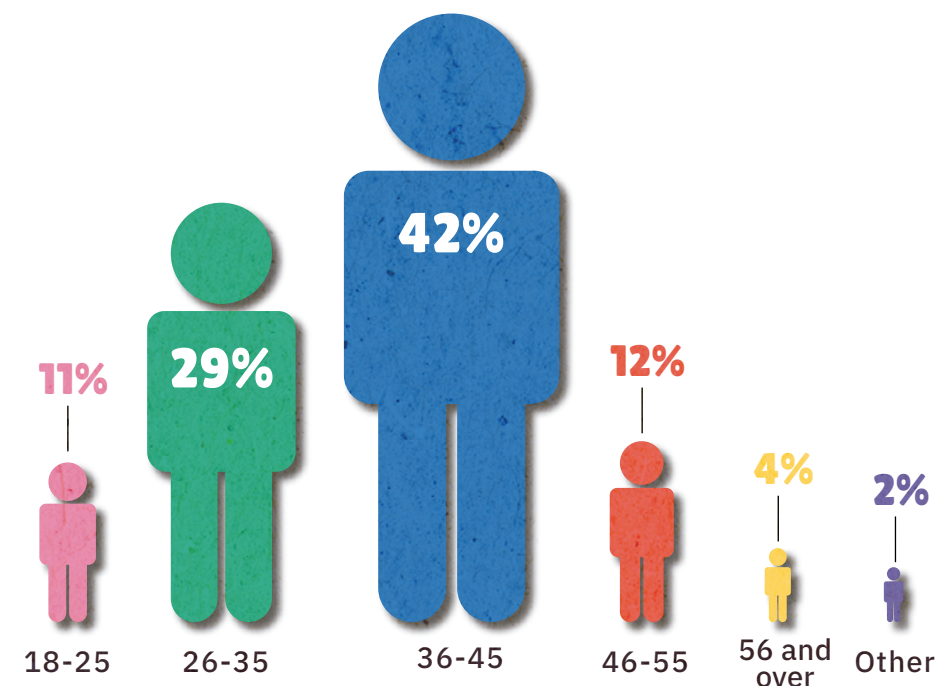
Medical Card

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



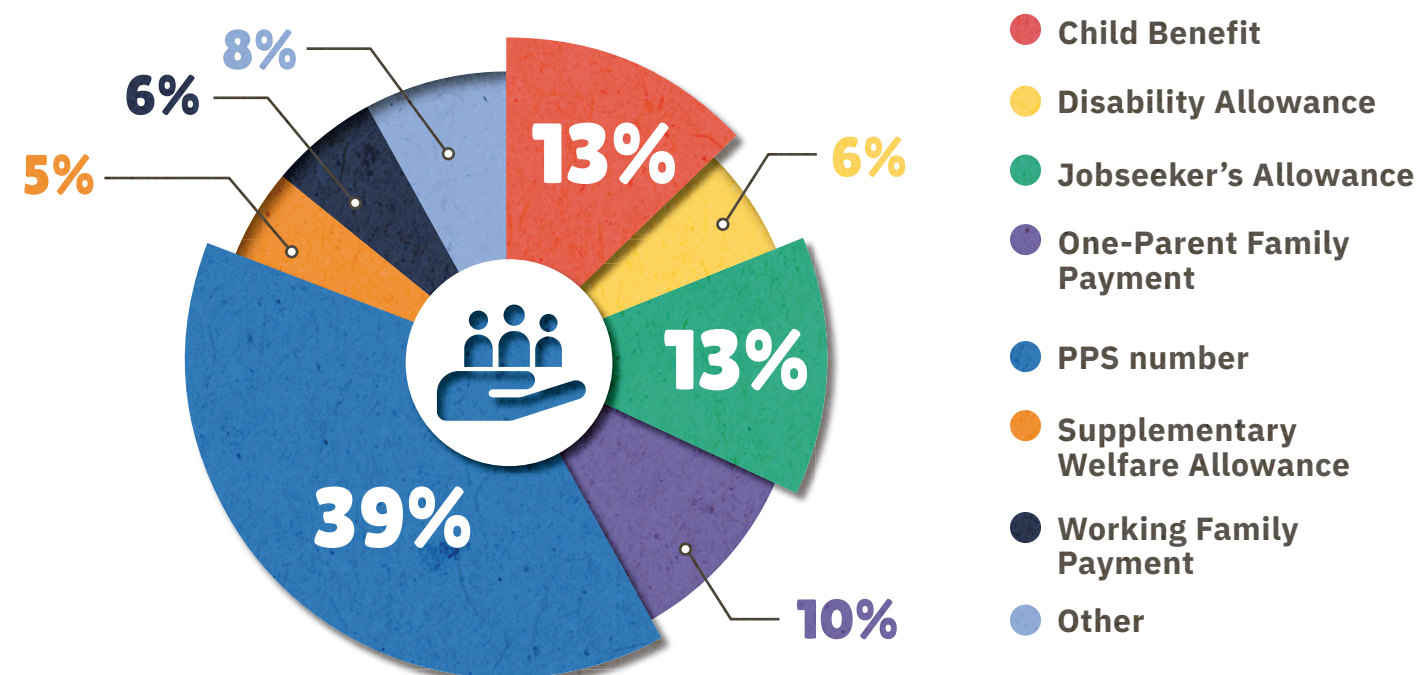
Age Group

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



Social Welfare

Among the calls received by the Infoline in relation to Social Welfare, queries related to PPS numbers, Jobseeker's Allowance, and Child Benefit were the most prominent, standing out as the top three areas of support provided. Having a PPS number is an essential aspect of accessing many services in Ireland, therefore the Infoline plays a vital role in supporting Roma to fully participate in Irish society.





Service Providers

In 2024, half of the calls addressed by the Infoline were from service providers around the country. The Infoline received most of these calls from health services including staff from GPs, hospital staff, primary care centres, and the Health Link Team for the Homeless. Calls were also received from local authorities and emergency accommodation staff and from NGOs colleagues working in the field of housing and homelessness.

The Infoline worked with a wide range of organisations in the community and charity sector nationwide. The majority of these organisations deal with issues in relation to health and accommodation. The Infoline also liaised with organisations working in the areas of education, social welfare, employment, legal support, and poverty. Additionally, the Infoline received calls from a number of public and statutory bodies.

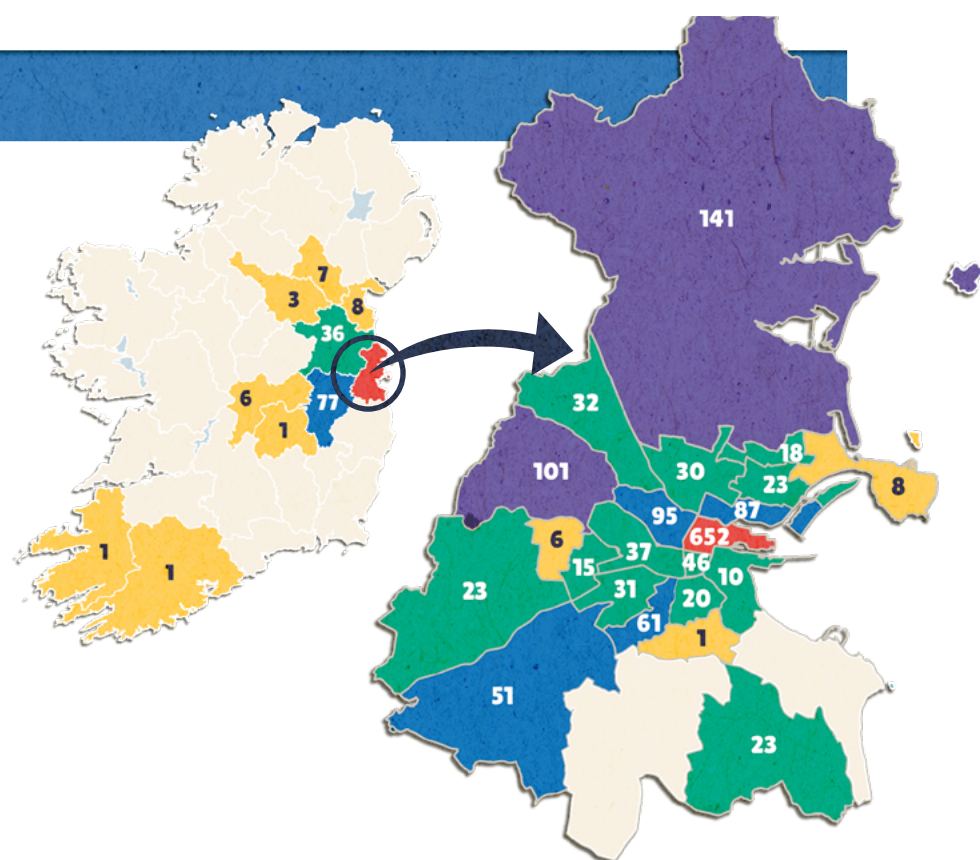


"The National Roma Infoline has been invaluable to supporting the attendance of children to the Lynn clinic and their ongoing engagement with necessary hospital services. Through the understanding and support provided by the Roma Infoline we are able to overcome many barriers that prevent care delivery such as fear, misunderstanding and poor health literacy. This service is an essential pillar that supports the medical care that we provide."

*Dr Aoibhinn Walsh, Consultant Paediatrician,
Children's Health Ireland*

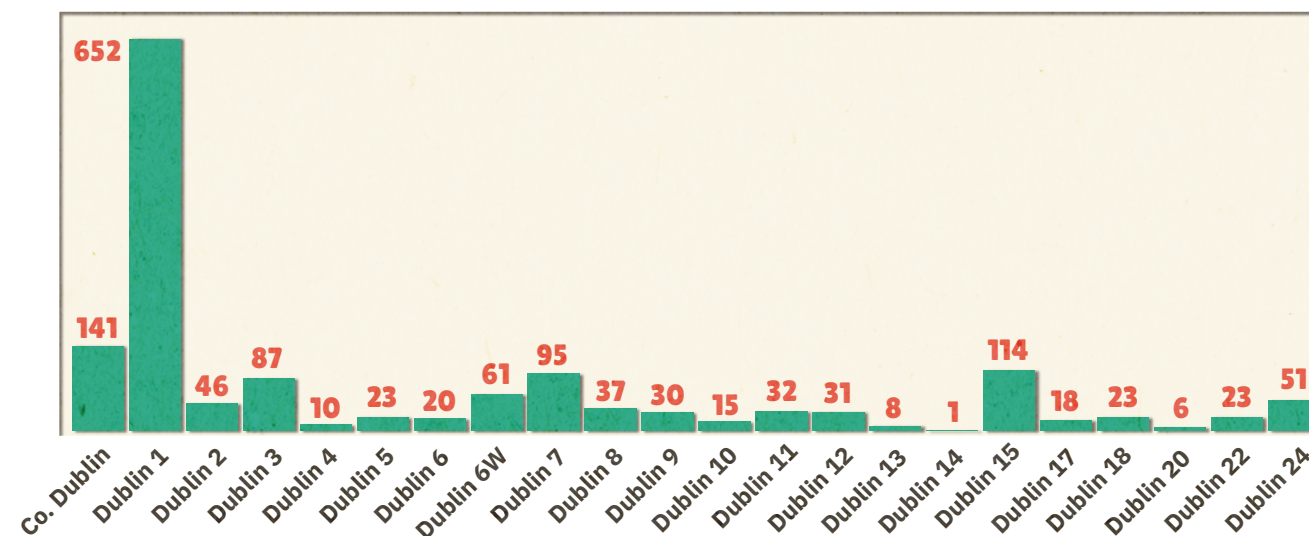
Location

The majority of calls dealt with by the 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.



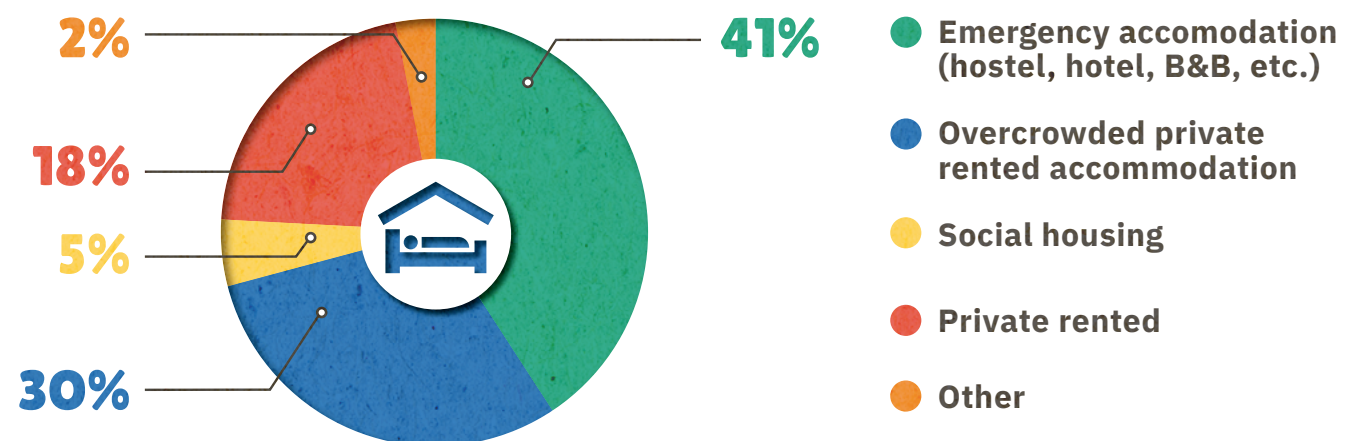
Breakdown of Calls from Dublin

Most calls dealt with by the Infoline 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 living in emergency accommodation or in overcrowded private rented accommodation. This reflects the dire housing situation in Ireland due to the ongoing housing crisis. It is telling that only 4.65% of the calls to the Infoline were from Roma living in social housing, confirming that the vast majority are residing in emergency or overcrowded accommodation rather than in stable, long-term housing. In some of the most recent data published by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage in December 2024, EEA/UK citizens made up 21.7% of adults accessing local authority managed emergency accommodation².



² The Department of Housing and Local Government (2024), 'Monthly Homelessness Report', viewed 28 February 2025, accessed at: <https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/318333/deed35a1-2976-4d04-93d7-a5a-60b3889e5.pdf#page=null>

Racism and Discrimination

The Infoline plays a critical role in supporting Roma individuals facing racism and discrimination in Ireland. When Roma community members contact the service, after experiencing discrimination, the team provides comprehensive support, guiding them through the entire process of seeking justice and accessing equality services.

Of the 79 calls that were made to the Infoline about Racism and Discrimination in 2024, approximately 57% were from Roma callers, and 43% were from service providers who were calling on behalf of Roma clients/service users.

Nearly 90% of these calls were made from or on behalf of Roma women, and close to 10% were made from or on behalf of Roma men. This aligns with Cairde's extensive experience in supporting Roma women facing intersectional discrimination based on gender, ethnicity, and other factors. Similarly, other organisations working on these issues, including FLAC, have noted the significant rates of discrimination experienced by Roma women in Ireland³.

In the case of approximately 40% of calls, Roma called the Infoline because they felt they had experienced discrimination and wanted advice/support (e.g. how to contact FLAC to make a formal complaint). Roma callers reported experiencing discrimination in a wide variety of settings, including:

- Shops (including pharmacies)
- Banks
- Emergency accommodation
- Schools
- Employment



³ Colm Keena (2024), 'Roma women are facing discrimination from retailers, Flac says in 2023 annual report', The Irish Times, 23 September 2024, viewed 26 May 2025, accessed at: <https://www.irishtimes.com/crime-law/2024/09/23/roma-women-are-facing-discrimination-from-retailers-flac-says-in-2023-annual-report/>

The Roma Infoline Operators were able to refer the callers mainly to the Free Legal Advice Centre (FLAC) or the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC). In many cases, the Roma Infoline Operators would then work closely with the client and the legal service, as a trusted figure, to support progression of the complaint/case.

Roma experiencing racism and discrimination trust the Infoline, and the Roma Operators often bridge the gap between legal services and Roma clients, even in circumstances where professional interpretation is provided by the legal service. This shows the importance of having Roma peer support workers involved at all levels of the complaint process.

"For FLAC, the National Roma Infoline run by Cairde is a vital link with the Roma community. The Infoline refers and supports those within the Roma community who need legal advice and representation to FLAC's advice clinics. Without the Infoline many Roma would not become aware of FLAC's services or would not trust that our service understands their experience and has the ability to address their legal situation. The Infoline not only makes initial referrals to FLAC but also provides ongoing support to clients and assists them to act on the advice they receive. It also reinforces their understanding and engagement with the legal process they are involved in. In this way the Infoline supports the Roma community to understand and act on their legal rights and address their daily experience of discrimination and exclusion."

Sinéad Lucey, Managing Solicitor,
Free Legal Advice Centres (FLAC)



Case Studies

Case Study: Child Health

The Infoline received a call from a Roma woman who was struggling to access medical appointments for her child who has a disability. This caller was a single mother and was staying in a women's refuge with her two young children, due to her experiences of domestic violence by her husband. She had previously missed an important medical appointment for her child, as no translation services were offered to her. The Roma Infoline Operator called the woman's key worker, as well as domestic violence service staff and explained the difficulties she was facing. The Roma Infoline Operator helped the woman to arrange another appointment for the child.

The Roma Infoline Operator also contacted the woman's local authority as she was concerned that her position on the housing list would be affected by her stay in the women's refuge. Through discussions with the county council, the Roma Infoline Operator was able to reassure the woman that these circumstances would not impact her housing application.

Case Study: Health and Accommodation

The Infoline was contacted by a Roma family living in emergency accommodation with their four young children. One of the parents had been diagnosed with cancer, and the family had attempted to contact relevant homeless support services to request a change in their accommodation. However, due to a lack of translation support, they were unable to communicate effectively. The Roma Infoline Operator reached out to the relevant service on their behalf and was positively received, as staff were relieved to speak with someone who could assist the family. An appointment was arranged, which the Roma Infoline Operator attended alongside the family. As a result of this meeting, the family received support in securing new accommodation.

"I would like to say a few words of gratitude. Thank you for always being with us since I arrived here in Ireland. For all the help you have given to make our child happy, helping us to go to the hospital, to get our child's medication, and to find a GP. Thank you for all the guidance, support, and care. Thank you for listening to me and helping me in difficult moments. You have made my life better. Thank you from the bottom of my heart."

Roma Caller

Recommendations: Accommodation



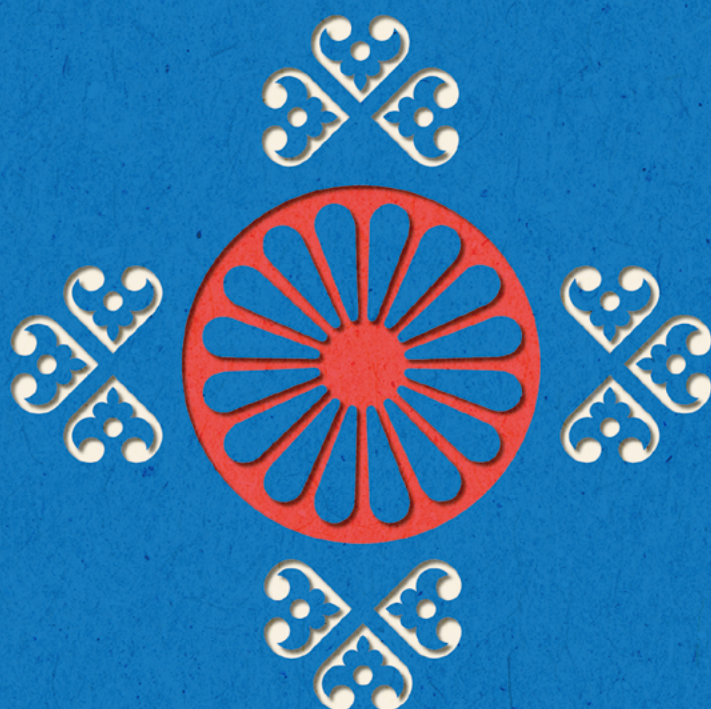
- Interpretation services should be used across all housing and homelessness services for Roma who do not speak English fluently.
- Ensure that all telephone numbers used to housing and homeless services, whether mobile or standard landline, are free to call from both landlines and mobile phones, removing any financial barrier for Roma experiencing or at risk of homelessness.
- 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 homelessness services.
- The Department of Housing, Local Government, and Heritage should appoint a dedicated contact person to specifically address Roma accommodation issues in Ireland.
- 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 review the 41/2012 Housing Circular and consider removing some of the qualifying criteria.
- Ensure the employment of Roma at all levels within the housing sector, including roles in community outreach, advocacy, and tenant support. This is essential for effectively addressing and reducing housing inequities.

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.
- 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.
- Ensure the employment of Roma at all levels within the health sector, including roles in information, advocacy, and peer support. This is essential for effectively addressing and reducing health inequities.

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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