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**For Immediate Release**

**Covid-19**

**NGOs call for action on most marginalised communities**

A group of 19 NGOs have issued a detailed joint submission calling for increased action to support already marginalised communities during and after the Covid-19 crisis.

**Rachel Doyle convenor of the Covid-19 NGO Group** stated that the group “*acknowledges the huge challenges facing all of us at this very difficult time and collectively commend and support the enormous efforts on the part of Government, government departments, local authorities, state agencies, civil and public servants, and in particular the Department of Health, HSE, the NPHET and associated COVID-19 committees, as well as the courageous health carers at every level and others in seeking to deal with the multitude of complex and diverse medical, social, environmental and economic concerns that this pandemic is causing”.*

*“There are however, many risks, dangers and long terms threats facing the communities that members of the Covid-19 NGO Group represent and we are most concerned to see their needs given due priority in current and future planning. This planning must involve the organisations representing these communities being at the table when decisions are being made that affect their lives”,* she added.

Building the resilience of communities to come through and recover from the COVID-19 crisis is critical and urgent. This requires accurate and robust data disaggregated data on the basis of ethnicity, gender and other equality grounds measuring the medium and long-term impacts of the COVID-19 crisis on marginalised groups and communities. 

*Ronnie Fay, Co-Director of Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre, acknowledged the whole of the government approach to addressing COVID-19 and the priority being afforded to Travellers and Roma during this crisis given the disproportionate impact on both communities. She called for Travellers and Roma to be prioritised in the forthcoming programme for government and for a Traveller agency to be established, to address longstanding health inequalities, inadequate accommodation, educational disadvantage, high suicide rates, poverty and long-term unemployment. She further noted that, in particular, accommodation and health needs of Roma needs to be urgently addressed by the new government.*

*“A health crisis such as*COVID*-*19*can make existing inequalities for*women*and girls worse*” said **Orla O’Connor Director of the National Women’s Council of Ireland.** “*Stay at home measures are putting girls and women at heightened risk of violence in the home and it can be difficult for them to access services when they have no privacy or safe space to do so”. “The crisis is having further impacts on women’s economic equality and independence due to increased care burden, further removal from the labour market, increased poverty and social exclusion, increased vulnerability to violence, concern over maintenance payments”,* she added. “*We need to ensure that women already disadvantaged pre-Covid do not emerge from this crisis at increased risk of poverty, violence and isolation.*

In relation to people seeking asylum in Direct Provision including some who work in the health care sector, **Nick Henderson Director of the Irish Refugee Council** highlighted that the Oireachtas Report on Direct Provision 2019, and most recently the Ombudsman report of last week, had already identified key problems in the Direct Provision system. These included‘hostel-like conditions where they share a room, sometimes with up to four people, and have their three meals provided in a canteen at set times throughout the day’ and the fact that ‘the remote location of many Direct Provision centres not only segregates residents from communities but creates considerable issues for residents who need to access medical appointments’

*“We, and many other organisations remain deeply concerned about the situation of people in Direct Provision who still cannot socially distance themselves from others. People sharing intimate space including bedrooms, washing facilities, kitchens and canteens. The impact of this is increased risk of contracting the disease and it spreading more quickly; Increased risk of Direct Provision centres, through no fault of the residents themselves, becoming hot spots for the disease. While some people living in Direct Provision and working in healthcare have been able to obtain accommodation, some people are still waiting to hear back from the HSE.”,* he said.

The Covid-19 NGO Group will issue further updates and briefs on progress in relation to these and other issues in the coming weeks.

The full Covid-19 NGO Group submission can be found [here](https://www.communityworkireland.ie/covid-19-ngo-group-marginalised-groups-and-promoting-equality-inclusion-and-human-rights-in-the-covid-crisis-a-joint-submission/)

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