



**Congress Written Submission
to the Joint Committee on Key Issues affecting the
Traveller Community**

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**Irish Congress of Trade Unions
31/32 Parnell Square
Dublin 1
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Introduction

Congress is pleased to take up this invitation to make a brief written submission submit on the topic of Traveller employment and labour market participation, having regard to the unemployment rate of 80 per cent among Travellers. Of course, this figure is quoted from prior to the pandemic¹. Due to an absence of ethnic equality monitoring in the collection of employment and unemployment data, the rate of unemployment among Travellers post-Covid is not known at this stage.

We were previously prepared to present to the previous Joint Committee on Key Issues affecting the Traveller Community during the 32nd Dáil but the calling of the general election meant our session was cancelled. We welcome the fact that this Committee aims to build upon the work begun by that group. As government supports people back into employment post the pandemic, it is imperative there are positive action measures which ensure that Travellers and other under-represented groups in the labour market are not left behind.

Trade Union involvement in Traveller issues:

Trade unions have a long history of standing by and supporting Travellers and Traveller organisations. In 1963 a group of Traveller families parked in Cherry Orchard, and they were parked illegally because the Local Authority hadn't provided any accommodation for them, and so faced eviction by Dublin Corporation. The unions passed a motion that none of its workers would evict the Travellers and downed tools when asked to do so. The NUJ have worked with Pavee Point in developing a set of guidelines on how the media should report on Traveller issues and ran a number of workshops and seminars in this regard. More recently Fórsa trade union launched the union's Traveller Equality Network at an event in Sligo Town Hall. The purpose of the event was to highlight many of the issues that affect the Traveller community in the workplace, including the depth of structural inequalities facing Travellers from accessing the workplace, as well as socio-economic rights and a focus on public policy provisions.

The teacher unions have a solid record of advocacy on behalf of Traveller children and their families and are currently pressing the Department of Education and Skills to move swiftly to implement the 13 recommendations on education in the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy 2017-2021.

¹ Census 2016

Congress has also been an active member of the advisory group to the Traveller Enterprise and Employment Policy Programme (TEEPP)² of the St Stephen's Green Trust (SSGT).

Congress also marked the 2017 formal recognition of Travellers as a distinct ethnic group within the Irish nation by inviting Martin Collins, Co-Director of Pavee Point to address our Biennial Delegate Conference in Belfast. Martin reflected on how proud a day that was for his community, and the long hard journey to get there. He went on to add that the recognition of Traveller ethnicity is not some abstract ideological debate, but fundamentally a human rights issue, and that it has implications for policy development and service provision.

We agree with Traveller organisations contention that recognition of Traveller ethnicity is not a panacea however. That it alone will not deal with the 80% unemployment rate in their community - a statistic underpinned by a range of issues affecting their participation in the labour market. Factors such as severe educational disadvantage, widespread and endemic inequality and discrimination in the workplace all contribute to this situation. It is clear that rights must follow, and that an institutionalised policy response is needed to address all of these.

The policy framework

1. National Traveller Roma Inclusion Strategy

Following the ethnicity announcement, then Minister of State at the Department of Justice, David Stanton launched the National Traveller Roma Inclusion Strategy – which includes employment as one of 14 thematic areas. Broadly welcomed by the community, the big challenge of course is for that strategy to be fully implemented. Congress participates in the work of the employment subgroup of the NTRIS.

An analysis carried out by TEEPP on relevant NTRIS actions highlights the shortcomings and limitations of NTRIS both in terms of its own programme and on targets in relation to Traveller employment and enterprise. TEEPP and others responded to this by forming a subcommittee to identify and advocate for NTRIS priorities in September 2020. The changing of remit of the Department of Justice (whereby functions have recently transferred to the Department of

² <https://www.ssgt.ie/traveller-employment/>

Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth) has limited progress on this action. The current stream of NTRIS funding is due to end in 2021, and its future is uncertain.

The TEEPP has ended due to the impact of COVID but Congress believes the project has had a significant input and that the findings in relation to employment are a lasting legacy for this work.

They include:

- Although there is now a suite of national strategies underpinning growth, recovery, employment and enterprise, with the exception of SICAP, none name Travellers as a target group. This underpins the perception that national policy makers consistently fail to consider the needs of Travellers. We are aware of only two specific employment supports for Travellers, the Special Initiative for Travellers (SIT) and Traveller specific CE schemes.
- Strong encouragement for the incorporation of the Census question on ethnicity into the work of all statutory bodies and programmes as a means of gathering data on participation. Without it, there is no way of telling whether a particular programme has any beneficial impact on the lives of Travellers.
- Positive action measures to increase supports for Travellers into enterprise and employment are necessary.
- Targets for Traveller participation and progression should be incorporated into all measures.
- Consultation with Traveller organisations is key to developing appropriate and accessible programmes which have specific Traveller participation targets. Traveller groups should be involved in the design of strategies, policies and actions which affect them and will improve outcomes and impact.
- All measures should include monitoring, evaluation and learning frameworks which capture the impact on Travellers. Tools such as qualitative analysis and narrative enquiry can capture the voice and experiences of Travellers – particularly where numbers are small and will be invisible in quantitative analysis.

- Positive actions measures should be gender-proofed in relation to Traveller women. All initiatives should encourage the participation of Traveller women, including the provision of affordable and accessible childcare.
- The Public Sector Duty and the Diversity and Inclusion Strategy of the Public Appointments Service could be utilised by the Equality Unit to model the changes that are being sought in the private sector in relation to employment of Travellers.
- Targeted attitude surveys should be carried out with employers to consider the additional barriers which Travellers have in gaining and retaining employment and training places. There should be an expectation and incentivisation for employers to address racism against Travellers within their work places.

2. Integrated Workplaces

Congress furthermore believes that investment in workplace integration can help to make our workplaces effective role models for wider society. Back in 2006, in the context of the National Action Plan on Racism, we worked with the Equality Authority, Ibec and other partners to develop the concept of the integrated workplace.

Integrated workplaces are:

- free from discrimination and harassment;
- welcoming to all migrant workers and other Black and minority ethnic groups including Traveller employees and customers or service users;
- acknowledge and provide for cultural and linguistic diversity among employees and customers as well as making adjustments for diversity among all migrant workers and other Black and minority ethnic employees;

- takes practical steps in order to achieve full equality in practice for all migrant workers and other Black and minority ethnic employees;
- communicates a message promoting greater equality within the wider culturally diverse community served by the business.

The Equality Authority worked with all of the partners to promote the integrated workplace concept until its demise after the economic crash. The Traveller Community National survey (2017) found that 77% of Travellers experienced discrimination in the past year and that 43% indicated they have encountered discrimination while accessing employment.

It is therefore timely that we are now (along with Ibec and the IHREC) seeking to revive this work in the hope of contributing towards securing better employment outcomes for excluded groups, including Travellers.

3. UN CERD Committee

It is also worth noting that the UN CERD Committee remains concerned that the Government has not yet developed concrete action plans or allocated sufficient budget to implement the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy and recommends that they take legislative measures to formalise the recognition of Travellers as an official minority group, clarify the rights accorded to them and ensure that such rights are protected and promoted. It also recommends that the Government fully implement the NTRIS, including by developing concrete actions plans with clear targets, indicators, outcomes, time frames and a budget line for the implementation and putting in place a mechanism to coordinate and monitor the implementation.

The Committee is also concerned about the challenges faced by Travellers and Roma in enjoying their economic, social and cultural rights, in particular the extremely high unemployment rates of Travellers and Roma and their continuing experience of discrimination in obtaining employment or in the workplace. They go on to urge them to:

- a) Adopt effective measures with adequate level of resources to improve employment among Travellers and Roma;

- b) Publish the 2019 review of the Traveller Education Strategy and develop a new strategy on Traveller and Roma education with an adequate budget and concrete action plans;

(The “Minceir Gruber Malaid Streed – what next for Traveller Employment” report by the Stephen’s Green Trust report³ also calls for an implementation plan with time bound targets and indicators. The report points out that although there is now a suite of national strategies underpinning growth, recovery, employment and enterprise, none name Travellers as a target group. This underpins the perception that national policy makers consistently fail to consider the needs of Travellers. There are 16 specific recommendations outlined to address these challenges).

Congress strongly agrees that the state should lead by example here and that the obligations set out under the public sector statutory equality and human rights duty provide a useful context for this.

Conclusion

Finally, as a sustainable development goal champion organisation, it is incumbent upon us to point out that decent work is now a crucial part of Agenda 2030. While the lack of specific targets in national initiatives has been highlighted in discussions here, target 8.5 set out under Goal 8 of the Sustainable Development Goals - states that:

“By 2030, achieve full and productive employment and decent work for **all women and men**, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value”.

So, the clock is ticking and if we are to implement the oft cited “leave no one behind” concept, the issues above have to be tackled head on.

Thanks for the opportunity to participate and Congress wishes you well in your work.

ENDS

³ <https://www.ssgt.ie/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/TEGPreportwebsiteMay19.pdf>