



On behalf of Minceirs Whiden (Cant for Travellers talking) Ireland only all Traveller Forum, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to discuss the serious issue of crisis levels of unemployment within the Traveller community 2016 Census puts this at over 80%.

This is unemployment on a mass scale that can create no other outcome but poverty and deprivaton for the people who have to deal with it.

To understand how this is possible, how any community would be left in this situation particularly in a prosperous country like Ireland, we have to look to the underlying causes, that is anti-Traveller bias and racism, that has been allowed to go unchecked in this country for generations, discriminating, isolating, and excluding its only indigenous ethnic minority community.

The negative impacts of the miss treatment of the Traveller community is all too evident, as a community we are dealing with multiple crisis i.e. short life expectancy much of this due to poverty related illnesses and chronic ill health due to having to live in substandard and hazardous conditions, the decades old crisis in Traveller accommodation leading to escalating levels of homelessness in our community. In more recent years we are seeing a frightening rise in levels of Traveller with depression, addiction, and committing suicide. Each death leaves a painful legacy of loss and suffering altering forever the lives of the families the leave behind, bereaved spouses and all too often very young orphans.

The Irish Traveller populations is currently less than 40,000 people.

Traveller children, bright talented children leaving school with little of no education, some barely literate limiting their ability to access employment, even the few who were able to navigate the education system and achieved educational qualifications, they struggle to access employment.

All over the world, people see employment and education leading to better employment as the route to breaking free from poverty in an honest and dignified way.

Yet for the majority of the Traveller community this opportunity is not there, doors to employment are closed to them because of their Traveller identity, many members of our community feeling they have no other choice but to hide their identity to get a job, or out of fear of losing their job, being subjected to anti-Traveller racism in the work place, anti-Traveller racism continues to go unchecked in the work place as it continues to go unchecked in the education system, and in society as a whole.

The result is a community in crisis due to poverty and want, a proud and once self-sufficient people now overly dependent on the state, while their skills and talents go unused and wasted.

Our community is Corralled down dead ends, though discrimination, low educational attainment lack of work opportunities stuck in poverty, leading to depression, addiction, some to anti-social behaviour and others into criminality because they see no way out.

This negatively impacts not just the Traveller community, but society.

The elders of our community been highlighting the need for work and jobs for Travellers for decades they could see far off the negative impacts of not having anything to do was having and would have on people, no opportunity of work or jobs.

To highlight this fact - lyrics from Campfire in the Dark *“My father rises early, he makes a cup of tea, he lights the kitchen fire, then he calls me, his days are often empty, he’s nothing much to do, so he sits and tells me of the Travelling life he knew”* this song was written in the 1980’s by Paddy Houlihan during his time in Ennis, and made famous by the Fureys. The situations is far worse now than then.

It’s time to address the crisis in Traveller employment in a meaningful way. To turn this situation around our Government must

1. Acknowledged and address that anti-Traveller bias and racism that is causing so much devastation to the Traveller community, this must be address through education, training and legislation.
2. Work with employers both in the public and private sector to open doors for real employment opportunities for the Traveller community. Opportunities that will lead to long term better outcomes.
3. The Traveller community is diverse community filled with talented, competent and capable people who just need an opportunity. Many who are trying very hard to access employment without success, not because of willingness or ability but because of anti-Traveller bias.

4. We must take a broad view of both the skills and abilities within the Traveller community; one fit will not suit all. Many are ready and willing to take up suitable employment immediately, other will need supports to bridge the gap to gain recognised qualification for their natural talents.

Among the many talents of our community are Traveller men and women who are gifted with their hands, natural crafts men and women, artists, seamstress, beauticians, hairdressers, carpenters, builders, mechanic without any formal qualifications, men who know everything about horses.

And a growing number who are more academically minded, talented with IT and computers.

5. Our people are natural learners and teachers. To date the educational results of our community doesn't reflect this.

The Traveller community just want what everyone else wants, equality and justice , to be able to live with dignity have the ability to provide for themselves and their families.