



Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre

Opening Statement from our submission to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on key Issues affecting the Traveller Community: Employment

On behalf of Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre I would like to thank the Chair and members of the Committee for giving us the opportunity address you today, on the issue of employment.

The Committee members will have received a copy of our detailed submission and I do not intend to cover the full submission in my opening statement, but to give an overview.

The Committee in November heard testimony from Traveller and Roma representatives about the situation and experience of our communities in regard to accessing, participating in and deriving good outcomes from education. The discussion today is focused on employment, however, educational disadvantage and poor levels of educational attainment are key factors accounting for the significant employment gap between Travellers and Roma and the majority population. Addressing underemployment in our communities, therefore, must occur in parallel with targeted and mainstream measures to address educational inequality for our communities.

Data from Census 2016 show that the unemployment rate for Travellers is 80 percent, compared with 13 percent for the majority. In addition, almost 1 in 8 (11%) Travellers indicated they were unable to work due to a disability, nearly three times the equivalent rate for the general population (4 per cent). Data from the national Roma needs assessment indicate that approximately 17 percent of Roma respondents were in employment.

Traveller and Roma participation in employment is hampered by a range of barriers. The key barriers are:

- significantly lower levels of educational attainment, at all levels, in comparison to the majority population;
- high levels of reported discrimination in accessing education, employment, and key supports and services;
- failure by statutory stakeholders to accommodate cultural difference; and
- significantly high levels of social exclusion and socio-economic disadvantage which hinders access to education, training and employment networks and opportunities.
- for the Roma community there are additional barriers, namely:
 - o lack of access to state supports and benefits where Roma find it difficult to meet the Habitual Residence Condition, or where they cannot prove a right to reside.¹
 - o low levels of proficiency in the English language; and
 - o for some Roma, low levels of literacy and numeracy in their language of origin.

Opportunities to redress the balance

¹ If a person is unemployed, has worked informally and/or is living in accommodation without a tenancy agreement or utility bills and has not been keeping documentation to prove residency in the State, these difficulties can arise.

The significant barriers facing Travellers and Roma in accessing and participating in employment suggests the need for sustained, targeted measures involving action from a number of stakeholders across the statutory, NGO and private sectors. The stakeholders involved in the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy have a key role to play in regard to supporting and driving any such initiatives.

We would like to bring to the Committee's attention to a number of areas and forthcoming opportunities which hold potential to improve Travellers and Roma participation in employment and further education and training. It will, however, require a commitment by the state to increase its ambition to secure good outcomes for our communities in the area of employment.

1. The forthcoming Pathways to Work strategy

The new jobs strategy (Pathways to Work) is currently being prepared by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection. currently we have almost full employment in the state; this offers the opportunity to focus the new jobs strategy towards its stated principle of 'active inclusion'.

Pavee Point has made a number of recommendations to the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection in regard to the new jobs' strategy. These are set out in our submission, and include the following:

- the strategy should set out a number of targeted actions and mainstream approaches aimed at increasing the quality of Traveller and Roma engagement with, and outcomes from the Public Employment Service (delivered through Intreo centres),
- targeted initiatives could be developed to support:
 - Traveller and Roma enterprise, in conjunction with the Local Enterprise offices,
 - an increase in Traveller and Roma participation in apprenticeship, in conjunction with employers, Solas and education and training boards, and
 - the development of targeted training and employment pathways through the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP), Local Employment Services, and mainstream employment services.

2. The forthcoming further education and training (FET) strategy

Solas is currently preparing the new, national further education and training strategy. Solas funds the sixteen education and training boards (ETBs) around the country and the ETBs are key providers of training and further education to early school leavers and marginalised communities. ETBs are key providers of further education and training to members of the Traveller community.

Pavee Point has made a number of recommendations to Solas in regard to the forthcoming further education and training strategy, including the following:

- specific targeted measures are required by FET providers to address the diversity of needs within the Traveller and Roma communities, for example, apprenticeships and training should be tailored to respond to, and take advantage of the potential in the cultural practices, of an economic nature, evident in the Traveller community, such as apprenticeships and training in the equine industry, tinsmithing, and recycling,
- career guidance models should be developed that are culturally sensitive, with access to specific learning pathways that include positive action measures to address the needs of Travellers and to achieve an acceleration in their learning pathways,
- Solas could usefully develop and pilot a peer model of further education training and support, based on the successful Traveller Primary Health Care Project developed by Pavee Point.

3. The public sector equality and human rights duty

The public sector equality and human rights duty is an important part of our equality and human rights legislation. The Duty requires public bodies (including government departments), to take proactive steps to promote equality, protect human rights and prevent discrimination. The Duty could

be an important means of driving greater equality in how our public services are designed and delivered.

Key public service providers in the areas of employment, education and training, accommodation, and health, have enormous potential to reduce inequalities in society. There is an onus on such public sector bodies, therefore, to discharge on their obligations under the public sector duty.

These are three areas where positive outcomes for Travellers and Roma could be driven. Our submission contains more detail in regard to what I have covered in my opening statement. I think the Committee for your attention and am happy to answer any questions.