

Deputies, Senators and Oireachtas staff thank you for inviting us here this morning.

My name is Sinéad Burke. I'm employed by St Stephen's Green Trust (SSGT), a small grantmaking foundation, as Traveller Enterprise & Employment Policy Officer. To enhance the work I do, my position is seconded to the Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed. I'm joined by a trustee of the Board, Dr Mary Murphy. Dr Murphy is a senior lecturer in the Department of Sociology, Maynooth University.

SSGT is not a Traveller organisation but works in solidarity to contribute to improving the situation for Travellers. My role is around contributing to increased participation of Travellers in employment and enterprise. Another programme of SSGT – the Travellers in Prison Initiative has previously made a submission to this committee under the mental health module. Information on the other work of the Trust and the source of its funds is available in our Annual Report.

My opening statement will focus on the current levels of participation in the labour market. Colleagues from Shuttle Knit, Mincéir Whidden, Pavee Point and Involve will pick up on other topics.

In May 2019 SSGT published a short report, '*Mincéir Gruber Malaid Streed, What next for Traveller Employment*', included as part of our submission. The objective was to contribute to knowledge on how and why high numbers of Travellers are unemployed, to reflect the current policy context and to make some recommendations.

As you are no doubt aware, over 80% of Travellers are unemployed. In the 2016 Census this equated to 8,541 individuals although many more will be affected. The 2016 Census also found that one in eight Travellers was unable to work due to a disability – almost three times the rate in the general population. A major issue with finding solutions to low level of Traveller participation rates in the labour market is the invisibility of Travellers in policy and practice. Because there are no targets for Travellers in the Public Employment Services, none of the agents of the state is counting whether they are engaging Travellers or whether they are successful in moving Travellers into employment.

Our report cites examples of Travellers having to hide their identities in employment to avoid racism and discrimination. A 2017 Behaviour and Attitudes Survey found that only 17% of the general public said they would employ a Traveller. Contrast this with a 2019 Solas survey where over 60% of employers said they would employ an ex prisoner. A 2017 Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission report on workplace discrimination found the number of Travellers among survey respondents was too low to examine workplace discrimination.

The 2018 Solas review of pathways to apprenticeships acknowledges the proven links between ethnic and socio economic status and access to and progression in education. It references Travellers and commits to taking additional practical steps to improve Traveller participation but doesn't specify what these steps should be. We are not aware of any progress.

Other reports reviewed in our research do not mention Travellers nor specify targets for service providers. The main Government strategy encouraging access to employment – *Pathways to Work*

2016-2020 – does not mention Travellers. Neither does the 2017 *Action Plan for Jobless Households* nor the 2018 *Action Plan for Jobs*.

SICAP names Travellers as a target group but does not include targets – access, retention and progression of Travellers through SICAP is very low, accounting for just 2% of the total programme caseload for the period 2015-2017.

Barriers to Traveller access and progress include inadequate public services and discrimination. In some cases Travellers do not view education as the best route to income generation. Programmes are not designed to take Traveller-specific culture into account.

Enablers of the successful design and delivery of programmes for Travellers include leadership and accountability, effective administrative structures, a person-centred approach and creative and flexible progression measures.

Our recommendations around participation include more intentional action by the public employment services and including Travellers in the design of solutions. The LES guidance and counselling model grounded in a person-centred approach is considered to be more appropriate than the current transactional approach in the public employment service which emphasizes deficits in education and skills.

A national action plan to mainstream Traveller employment across all facets of the public service should be established, with targets set for all relevant agencies. There should be more ambitious targets for Traveller participation in and outcomes from supports under SICAP. Cognisance of the particular needs of Travellers should be included in all employment policy including the National Action Plan for Jobs, Pathways to Work and implementation of the public sector duty. There is also a need to gender-proof policy in relation to Traveller women.

More detail and the rationale for these recommendations are included in our research report.

Thank you for your time and interest.