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**The Joint Committee on Gender Equality
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Reporting Organisation:

The National Traveller Women's Forum is the National Network of Traveller women and Traveller women's organisations from throughout Ireland. We recognise the particular oppression of Traveller women in Irish society and are working to address this issue through the provision of opportunities to Traveller women to meet, share experiences, ideas and develop collective strategies and skills to work towards the enhancement of their position in society. Traveller women are one of the most marginalised groups in Irish society. Traveller women's experience of inequality and discrimination differs to that of the majority population or other minority groups, and their experience of racism and discrimination is different to those of Traveller men. The needs of Traveller women may not be met by responses and strategies designed to confront and tackle gender inequality or ethnic discrimination alone, i.e., without an examination of the interaction of ethnic disadvantage/discrimination. Acknowledging and addressing this experience is central to outcomes for Traveller women, as the experience of a Traveller woman will sometimes be distinctive because she is a woman, sometimes because she is a Traveller, and sometimes because she is both.

- The life expectancy of a Traveller woman is 11.5 years less than women in the general population. This is equivalent to the life expectancy of the general population in Ireland in the 1960sⁱ.
- Traveller Women suicide rates 5 times higher than women in the general populationⁱⁱ.
- 30% of Traveller women over 15 years are looking after the home with all the additional challenges of homelessness, overcrowding, little or no basic facilities.ⁱⁱⁱ
- Low level of attainment in education particularly senior cycle and third level^{iv}
- Travellers make up less than 1% of the general population but are grossly over-represented in the prison population. Research on Traveller women in Prison show Traveller women constituted 22% of the women in prison^v.

From constant stereotyping and casual racism to systemic barriers to accessing healthcare, education, and going forth for political roles, glaring injustices are clear throughout Irish society. It is urgent that Traveller women are not only included in the work of this committee but that they are prioritised so that the issues impacting on Traveller women are addressed without delay. Traveller women are invisible in many, if not most, mainstream strategies, research and reports that have been conducted to highlight gender inequalities in Ireland. There is a real need for the state to address the intersectionality of gender and equality and the invisibility of Traveller women. If the state is to address stigma, prejudice, discrimination and racism of Traveller women then it needs to address the

key social determinants which impact on Traveller women and the lack of legislation to protect Traveller women from racism.

Recommendations:

- Undertake special measures to address the intersectional racism and discrimination experienced by Traveller women and ensure such measures have clearly defined resources, timeframes, targets, indicators and outcomes. Ensure a coordinated and integrated approach to actions targeting Traveller women in the next National Traveller Roma Inclusion Strategy, National Strategy for Women and Girls and National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence and ensure the inclusion of Traveller women's voices and experiences in wider gender issues, research and policy development by the state.
- Ensure full implementation of all recommendations contained in the Traveller Accommodation Expert Review by the Independent Expert Group on Traveller accommodation, including overhauling legislation and policies which impact on accommodation provision for Travellers and address homelessness as a matter of urgency
- Develop and implement a National Traveller Education Strategy^{vi} with resources targets, timelines and appropriate monitoring processes. Provide an immediate timeline for the inclusive development of the strategy.
- Publish the National Traveller Health Action Plan without further delay; establish a clear consultative structure to drive its implementation and monitoring; and ensure all actions in the Plan have clear targets, indicators, outcomes, timeframes and budget lines.
- Develop a National Traveller Mental Health Strategy^{vii} with robust actions clear targets, indicators, outcomes, timeframes and budget lines
- Undertake legislative and practical measures to ensure the inclusion of Traveller women in political representation at local and national levels, in the houses of the Oireachtas and in Local Councils.
- Develop of a comprehensive National Traveller Employment and Enterprise Strategy.
- Introduce appropriate Hate Crime Legislation to ensure Traveller women are protected and can seek redress from hate speech and racists incidents^{viii}.

Traveller women experience significant exclusion from **decision-making and wider political processes** due to discrimination and marginalisation. There is a real need for Traveller women to have an attainable opportunity to participate in spaces of power and decision-making. Regardless of the recommendations made by the Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities^{ix}, 23 CERD^x and former Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights^{xi}, the State has not adopted positive action measures to improve on the underrepresentation of Travellers in political institutions and public affairs. The UNCESCR has also raised concerns over the lack of meaningful consultation by the Irish State within civil society in developing and implementing policies and legislation relating to Travellers. Consultative mechanisms have emerged in structures devoted to Traveller issues^{xii}. Traveller women have invested large parts of their time in resourcing these consultative spaces on health, accommodation and education in particular with little outcomes overall. The role of these committees also remains only advisory in nature without any decision-making powers. In 2019, four candidates in local elections openly identified as Travellers, three of which were women—none were elected. Eileen Flynn's nomination to the Seanad in June 2020^{xiii} as the first ever Traveller woman to take a seat in any of the houses of the Oireachtas was a very historic

and proud day for very many Travellers. Our ambitions as a state for the inclusion of Traveller women in politics must go further.

Earlier this year the NTWF^{xiv} published the report, *Different Paths, Shared Experiences: Minoritised Women and Local Politics in Ireland*^{xv}, which was prepared by Maynooth University's Professor Pauline Cullen assisted by Shane Gough. The Report called for women candidate quotas for Irish elections to incorporate a quota for ethnic minority women to help tackle the issue of their underrepresentation in elected office. This research was conducted in 2021 and involved interviews with minoritised women who may have considered running or will run for election as well as unsuccessful former candidates, ethnic minority women who hold public office, representatives of political parties, advocacy organisations and stakeholder groups. The research makes recommendations across a range of areas from the State, Political Parties, Local Authorities, Electoral Commission and Civil Society/Training Organisations.

The research shows that for Traveller and other minoritised women campaigning and canvassing were found to be a mixed experience, positive in some respects but at times discouraging. Experiences of abuse ranged significantly from racism and sexism on and offline, to sustained 'in person' racist and sexist harassment, abuse and intimidation. The minoritised women who took part in the research shared experiences of exclusion from electoral politics at the same time as they engaged in essential political work in building their own communities.

For Traveller women, community activism was more likely to be in service of their own communities with less involvement in majority community organisations. Much of this kind of work is less recognised as leadership or political work and is not usually where political parties look to when recruiting candidates.

The research indicates that the range of current interventions to increase the number of women in local politics will increase gender parity there, but they will not deliver the change required for minoritised women to access local politics such as the issue of Traveller political participation which remains the issue hiding in plain sight. Increasing minoritised women's inclusion in local politics will require confronting the sexism, racism and other forms of discrimination including the normative whiteness of public life that combine to discount minoritised women's political imagination and diminish their political agency.

Recommendations:

- Adopt quotas for Traveller and Roma women in formal political structures – nested ethnic quotas could be legislated for in current national quotas and incorporated in the introduction of future local gender quotas.
- Adopt measures to ensure that current state funding to parties include a requirement to diversify their membership and candidate lists.
- Explore, identify and adopt specific measures that would act as a platform to ensure Traveller women representation - such as reserved seats in the Dáil, Seanad, Constitutional Convention and local councils. Seats should also be reserved in local and national government community engagement structures^{xvi}.
- Include ethnic minorities (with gender parity) in the Taoiseach's Seanad Nominees.
- Introduce nested quotas to establish the participation of Traveller women on state boards. The existing quota of 40% for women on state boards has been reached but there is no visibility of Traveller or other marginalised women.

- Establish a range of supports and resources targeting Traveller women across state, political parties and in local government, to ensure Traveller women’s participation/uptake in political structures. This needs to be underpinned by the development and implementation of Gender and Diversity Action Plans specifically naming Traveller women. These supports and resources need to ensure a practical element which will ring fence funding for Traveller women candidates and provide a basic wage for Traveller and other ethnic minority candidates during an election campaign and also allow campaign funding to be used for childcare.
- Ensure wider political training programmes take account of Traveller and other ethnic minority women.

ⁱ Kelleher et al., *All Ireland Traveller Health Study*, University College Dublin & Department of Health & Children, 2010.

ⁱⁱ Kelleher et al., *All Ireland Traveller Health Study*, University College Dublin & Department of Health & Children, 2010.

ⁱⁱⁱ Census 2016

^{iv} Traveller Education - Data:

- Only 13% of Travellers complete secondary education in comparison with 92% of the general population.
- 55% of Travellers have completed their formal education by the age of 15.
- 7 out of 10 Traveller children (67.3%) live in families where the mother has either no formal education or primary education only.
- 17.7% of Traveller children have no formal education in comparison with 1.4% of the general population. Of the 115, 76 are women.
- Less than 1% of Travellers are in third level education with only 167 adult Travellers with a third level qualification.

In ‘A Social Portrait of Travellers’, the 2017 ESRI report, reported that:

- Travellers are more likely to have left school early and are much less likely to have reached Leaving Certificate level: only 8% of working-age Travellers compared to 73% of non-Travellers.

A National Traveller Survey of 300 Travellers in 2017 funded by the Community Foundation of Ireland found that 4 out of 10 Travellers said they were bullied in school.

^v Travellers in Prison Initiative, *‘Hearing their Voices’: Traveller Women in Prison*, 2017.

^{vi} In line with Programme for Government commitments.

^{vii} In line with Programme for Government commitments.

^{viii} A survey conducted by the Economic and Social Research Institute in 2017 showed that 79.6% would be reluctant to purchase a house next to a Traveller and 40% of respondents reported that they would be unwilling to employ a Traveller, it also showed that 18.2% of respondents to the survey would deny Irish citizenship to Travellers.

^{ix} Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, 2012.

^x CERD, 2005 and 2011.

^{xi} Council of Europe, Report by the Commissioner for Human Rights Mr. Thomas Hammarberg on His Visit to Ireland, Strasbourg, 2008,

https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?p=&id=1283555&Site=CommDH&BackColorInternet=FEC65B&BackColorIntranet=FEC65B&BackColorLogged=FFC679&direct=true#P402_100717&direct=true.

^{xii} These include National Traveller Roma Integration Steering Committee, National Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee, Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committees, Traveller Education Strategy Advisory and Consultative Forum, and the Traveller Health Advisory Committee.

^{xiii} This followed Senator Flynn's candidacy on the Labour Panel Labour Panel in the 2020 Seanad election, but she missed out by a very narrow margin. On 28 June 2020, she became a Senator upon being nominated by the Taoiseach, and in doing so became the first-ever Traveller to be a member the Oireachtas.

^{xiv} Research was carried out in conjunction with AkiDWA. The research was funded by the Irish Research Council, and the Department Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth.

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https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/sites/default/files/filefield_paths/Different_Paths_Shared_Experiences_Report.pdf

^{xvi} Ireland could draw on the experience of other EU jurisdiction such as measures introduced in Malta in 2021 to provide up to **12 additional parliamentary seats** to “the under-represented sex” - similar measures could be contemplated in the Irish context for Traveller women.