

Oral Submission to the Joint Committee on Key Issues  
affecting the Traveller Community,  
April 20<sup>th</sup>, 2021.

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**1. INTRODUCTION**

Let me begin by thanking the committee for the invitation to the ESRI to appear today. My name is Frances McGinnity and I am here today with my colleague Dorothy Watson. We are presenting results based on our work as senior researchers at the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) with over 15 years' experience in the areas of social inclusion, equality and discrimination.

As researchers, we have studied the disadvantage experienced by a range of groups, particularly those covered by the nine grounds specified in equality legislation. Of these groups, it is fair to say that the degree of disadvantage experienced by Travellers is by far the greatest across these groups in a range of areas, including the reported experience of discrimination, educational attainment, employment, housing and health.

We would like to take this opportunity to draw your attention to some specific points in our submission. Our submission is largely based on a report using Census data which captures the entire population in Ireland and compares Travellers and non-Travellers. This report uses data from 2011, but evidence suggests that little has changed since then.

## **2. WE FIND VERY HIGH LEVELS OF EDUCATIONAL DISADVANTAGE**

Among those of working age, age 25-64, only 8 per cent of Travellers had completed the Leaving Cert in 2011, compared to 73 per cent of non-Travellers. Only 1 per cent of Travellers of working age had a third level degree, compared to 30 per cent of non-Travellers.

**The gap between Travellers and others in terms of completing second level was actually larger among younger adults.** Among those aged 25–34 years, an estimated 91 per cent of Travellers left school early, that is without completing second level education, but only 14 per cent of non-Travellers. This suggests that Travellers had not benefitted as much as non-Travellers from the considerable improvement in levels of education in Ireland since the 1960s.

## **3. TURNING TO EMPLOYMENT LEVELS AND THE IMPORTANCE OF EDUCATION**

**Paid work is important for many reasons.** It provides a source of income, it facilitates financial independence, allows people to contribute to society, confers social standing, a sense of identity and purpose. Not having a job is strongly linked to poverty and social exclusion, and also linked to physical and mental health challenges. **There were dramatic differences between Travellers and non-Travellers in employment rates.** 11 per cent of Travellers aged 25–64 were employed, compared to 66 per cent of non-Travellers. Of those in the labour market, the unemployment rate was 82 per cent for Travellers aged 25–64 in 2011, compared to 17 per cent for others. (That's 82 per cent, compared to 17)

**Education differences have a big impact on employment.** In our work, we found that the lower levels of education among Travellers was very important in accounting for Travellers not having a job. The statistical model we use lets us ask what would be IF Travellers and non-Travellers had the same

characteristics in terms of education, age and other characteristics. If we do this, the employment rate of Travellers would be just under two times lower (instead of the observed 6 times lower). This helps us understand some of the barriers to employment and also the importance of educational qualifications in the Irish labour market.

**Travellers who had higher levels of education had a much better chance of being employed than those with lower levels of education.** 57 per cent of Travellers with further or higher education were employed, compared with 9 per cent of Travellers with no second-level education. Even at higher levels of education, however, it's important to note that the employment level of Travellers was lower than that of others.

**But the fact that a two-fold gap in employment between Travellers and others remained, after accounting for education and other factors, suggests that there are additional barriers in the labour market that make getting a job more difficult for Travellers.** Other research we have done examined the self-reported experience of discrimination among the population in Ireland in 2014. Irish Travellers reported rates of discrimination in seeking work that were ten times higher than other White Irish, even accounting for age, education and other background characteristics. These results suggest that discrimination in recruitment is likely to play a role in accounting for the high unemployment rate among Travellers, as well as lack of networks, not hearing about opportunities.

Lack of work is closely linked to poverty and social exclusion, and this, in turn, has consequences for living standards (particularly poor housing and homelessness) and for physical and mental health.

## **8. POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

We would emphasise the following implications for policy of our findings:

- **Enhancing the educational achievement of Travellers is crucial to ensuring that they can participate in employment and in society more generally.** It is very unlikely that this can be achieved through mainstream policies. Targeted approaches that address the specific challenges of Travellers are needed.
- **The size of the disadvantage in employment suggests that as well as being included in mainstream employment policies, additional targeted supports are necessary.**
- **The level of prejudice against Travellers needs to be tackled by promoting a positive image of their culture and contribution to society.**
- **Discrimination in employment should be tackled as a matter of urgency.** There is a role for government policy and for action by employers to monitor, prevent and respond to discrimination in seeking employment and in the workplace. Incorporating actions into the anti-racism strategy, which is currently being drafted, is also important in this regard.

The scale and persistence of labour market disadvantage means considerable effort will be required, through multiple policies and measures, and it may take time.

# Submission to Joint Committee on Key Issues affecting the Traveller Community

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

This submission is authored by two researchers from the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI), a Research Professor and an Associate Research Professor. Our backgrounds are academic training in sociology to PhD level and over 15 years' experience as researchers at the ESRI in the areas of social inclusion and equality.

## 2. BACKGROUND

Although a relatively small group, accounting for less than 1 per cent of the population in Ireland, the Traveller Community stands out as a group that experiences extreme disadvantage in terms of employment, housing and health,<sup>1</sup> and that faces exceptionally strong levels of prejudice.<sup>2,3</sup> This overview draws mainly on a report published in 2017 which was based on a special analysis of Census 2011 and examined in detail the patterns of disadvantage experienced by Travellers in the areas of education, employment, housing and health.<sup>4</sup> The full population from Census 2011 gives a large enough number of Travellers to investigate. Rather than treating Travellers as a homogenous group, the study explored whether specific groups of Travellers (in terms of gender, age and region) experience particularly high levels of disadvantage. The report focused on education, employment, housing and health among Travellers.

## 3. EDUCATION

Level of education is an important determinant of employment opportunities. Travellers were much less likely to have completed education to Leaving Certificate level: only 8 per cent had done so in 2011, compared to 73 per cent of non-Travellers.<sup>5</sup> Only 1 per cent of Travellers aged 25–64 years had a college degree compared to 30 per cent of non-Travellers. Travellers were more likely to have left school at an early age, with 28 per cent of Travellers over 25 years having left before the age of 13, compared to only 1 per cent of non-Travellers. After adjusting for the fact that Travellers tended to be younger than non-Travellers (and younger adults tend to have higher levels of education), the 'education gap' became even larger.

Among Travellers and among the general population, women and younger adults were more likely to complete second level education. However, the pattern by age differed between Travellers and non-Travellers so that the gap in terms of completing second level was larger in the younger age groups. Among those aged 55–64 years, 97 per cent of Traveller and 49 per cent of non-Travellers left school without completing second level. Among those in the 25–34 age group, the figures are 91 per cent of Travellers and 14 per cent of non-Travellers.<sup>6</sup> This suggests that Travellers had not benefitted as much as non-Travellers from the general improvement in levels of education since the 1960s.

As noted above, women were more likely to have completed Leaving Certificate level. While Traveller women were more likely than Traveller men to have completed the Leaving Certificate, the gender

gap was smaller than among non-Travellers. Traveller women still remained very disadvantaged in educational terms in 2011, with an estimated 92 per cent having left school without completing second level. The figure is 95 per cent for Traveller men.<sup>7</sup>

#### **4. EMPLOYMENT**

The main difference between Travellers and non-Travellers in employment terms was their very high levels of unemployment. Among those aged 25–64 years, the unemployment rate was 82 per cent for Travellers in Census 2011, compared to 17 per cent for non-Travellers.<sup>8</sup> Travellers also had a lower rate of labour market participation, that is, being either in employment or unemployed. The labour market participation gap was not as large as the gap in unemployment rates, however: 61 per cent of Travellers aged 25-64 were in the labour market compared to 79 per cent of non-Travellers. Therefore, the lower employment rate of Travellers (11 per cent versus 66 per cent) was mainly driven by differences in unemployment.

A statistical model was constructed to check how much of the non-employment of Travellers and non-Travellers was associated with low levels of education or with other characteristics such as gender, marital and family status, age group and region. The results suggested that education was very important indeed. After accounting for the impact of education, the employment gap between Travellers and non-Travellers was very dramatically reduced. For instance, the employment rate of non-Travellers is about six times higher than that of Travellers, as noted above. If the two groups were similar in terms of education, age group, gender, marital status, presence of children and region, the rate would be just 1.9 times higher. This is a very substantial reduction in the gap, though the gap remains very large.

The second finding worth highlighting was the sharp increase in the chance of being in a job as level of education increased for Travellers. This is partly a function of the employment rate being so low among Travellers who have no second level education (9 per cent, adjusted rate), but the increase is observed as we move to lower second level (15 per cent adjusted rate), upper second level (Leaving Certificate, adjusted rate of 27 per cent) and further or higher education (57 per cent). While the employment rate of Travellers with further or higher education still lagged behind the rate for their non-Traveller counterparts and the proportion of Travellers with this level of education is very small, the improvement in employment chances compared to Travellers with lower levels of education was very substantial.

The fact that a large gap in employment between Travellers and non-Travellers remains after accounting for education and other factors suggests that there are additional barriers that operate within the labour market that make getting a job more difficult for Travellers. It was not possible to analyse this using Census data, but further research examined the experience of discrimination in Ireland in 2014, using data from the CSO's Equality module.<sup>9</sup> In line with best practice to minimise bias in reporting discrimination, respondents were asked whether they believed they had experienced discrimination according to a definition that reflects Irish law. The questions, which were asked of 15,000 adults in Ireland, also referred to a specified time period – the last two years – and to specific contexts (such as seeking work or in accessing specific services)

Irish Travellers reported very high rates of discrimination in seeking work, where they are ten times more likely than other White Irish to experience discrimination, even accounting for age, education and other background characteristics. These results suggest that discrimination in recruitment is likely to play a role in accounting for the high unemployment rate among the Traveller population. The number of Travellers at work in this survey was too low to examine discrimination in the workplace.

Discrimination in other areas, such as access to services, may also have an impact on employment opportunities. Travellers were over 22 times as likely to say they experienced discrimination in Ireland in private services (shops, pubs, restaurants, banks and housing) than White Irish in 2014. This difference is relevant to all private services, but particularly shops, pubs and restaurants, where Travellers were 38 times more likely to report discrimination than White Irish.<sup>10</sup>

While there are no significant differences between Irish Travellers and other White Irish in discrimination in accessing public services overall (education, health, transport and 'other public services'), Irish Travellers were four times more likely to experience discrimination in the 'other public services' domain (such as social welfare services and local council services). In general, these findings point to a general level of discrimination and prejudice that affects the lives of Travellers across domains.

The discrimination experienced by Irish Travellers reported in this survey is consistent with that reported in the earlier but larger All Ireland Traveller Health Survey (AITHS), and the more recent Fundamental Rights Agency survey of Travellers in Ireland.<sup>11</sup>

## **5. HOUSING**

Poor housing is one consequence of the disadvantage associated with unemployment. Census 2011 indicated that 12 per cent of Travellers lived in a caravan or mobile home.<sup>12</sup> Although associated with their traditionally nomadic way of life, this type of accommodation was likely to be overcrowded (84 per cent) and to lack internet access (91 per cent). It was also more likely than standard accommodation to lack central heating, piped water and sewerage facilities. Travellers living in mobile homes or caravans were somewhat more likely than those in standard accommodation to be married young adults, to have lower levels of education and to live in the Dublin or Mid-West regions.

Overcrowding in this report refers to living in accommodation where there is more than one person per room, counting living rooms as well as bedrooms. As noted above, overcrowding was associated with living in a caravan or mobile home, but only 12 per cent of Travellers lived in this type of accommodation, while 56 per cent live in overcrowded accommodation. The statistical model showed that overcrowding was more common among families with children. Overcrowding was also associated with low levels of education, not being in employment and was higher in the West and Mid-West than in Midlands, Mid-East and South-East.

Apart from the research based on Census 2011, other ESRI research also indicates the strong disadvantage experienced by Travellers in the area of housing. Research by Grotti et al. (2018) showed across ethnic groups, Travellers were the most at risk of being homeless in 2016 – while they represented less than 1 per cent of the Irish population, they made up 9 per cent of the homeless

population. Travellers also experienced the highest levels of discrimination in seeking access to housing: they were almost ten times as likely to report discrimination in access to housing as the Other White Irish population in 2014, even after education and labour market status were held constant.<sup>13</sup>

## 6. HEALTH

Since the poorer health outcomes of Travellers, compared to non-Travellers, have been documented elsewhere (AITHS, 2010; Kelleher et al., 2012),<sup>14</sup> we focused our analysis on whether poor health was associated with different socio-demographic factors for Travellers compared to non-Travellers (including the significance of education and employment). The most striking finding in this regard was that there was a steeper increase in poor health with age for Travellers, particularly in the 34–64 age range. As a result, the gap in poor health between Travellers and non-Travellers was smaller in childhood and early adulthood but increased very rapidly after the age of 35. For instance, among those under the age of 15, there was a two percentage-point difference between the adjusted rate of poor health among Travellers and that among non-Travellers (about 3 per cent versus about 1 per cent). In the 55–64 age group, the gap was 28 percentage points (50 per cent of Travellers versus 22 per cent of non-Travellers).<sup>15</sup> This pattern of an increasing gap with age has also been found for other minority ethnic groups and suggests that poor health among Travellers has the character of a disadvantage that cumulates or worsens across the life course.

More recent ESRI research has found that, based on available data until November 24<sup>th</sup> 2020, Irish Travellers were more vulnerable to COVID infection than White Irish, making up 1.8 per cent of COVID cases compared to 0.7 per cent of the population.<sup>16</sup> Up to that point, the available evidence suggested that Irish Travellers were less vulnerable to deaths from COVID-19 than the Irish population, possibly linked to their younger age profile.<sup>17</sup>

## 8. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

**Data requirements:** Given the relatively small size of the Traveller population, there are few national data sources that contain enough cases to permit a comparison of the circumstances of Travellers and non-Travellers. As a result, the importance of maintaining a high rate of coverage and identification of the Traveller population in future Census rounds is crucial.

**Targeted policies:** In general, our results on the sheer magnitude of the gap between Travellers and non-Travellers in terms of education, employment, housing and health highlight the tension between policies which seek to ‘mainstream’ services to Travellers and those which target the group. It raises the question of the best way to combine the implied quality assurance that comes with mainstreaming with the proper attention to the urgency of the situation of Travellers that is implied by targeting.

The report of the UN Committee on the Elimination on Racial Discrimination (CERD) registers concern about the challenges faced by Travellers and Roma, in particular high unemployment, low levels of education and poor health conditions.<sup>18</sup> Among other recommendations, the Committee urges the Irish State adopt a targeted strategy and plans of action to address the poor health conditions of Traveller and Roma, particularly mental health.

**Prejudice and discrimination:** In March 2017, Travellers were formally recognised as an ethnic group in Ireland. It is hoped that this recognition will be of benefit in ensuring respect for the cultural identity of Travellers in the context of targeted services. This recognition would also facilitate the routine use of an ethnic identifier on administrative databases, which would allow the assessment of progress towards equality for Travellers.

The Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities has called on the State to take immediate action to launch an awareness-raising campaign on the level of discrimination faced by Travellers and Roma in Ireland.<sup>19</sup>

**Education:** Both the findings of large differences in educational attainment and the benefits of education in terms of employment to Travellers point to the importance of enhancing the levels of education among Travellers. The depth of educational disadvantage experienced by Travellers means that specific targeted additional supports will be required for them to participate in education on equal terms. Such supports and strategies would include meeting the educational needs of parents as well as children, ensuring that school admission policies are inclusive, providing access to after-school study and homework clubs and, more broadly, educating both teachers and the general body of pupils on Traveller culture and history.

The recent report of the Committee on the Elimination on Racial Discrimination (CERD) urges the Irish State to 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.<sup>20</sup>

**Employment:** There is still a need to address barriers in the labour market, since the employment gap persists even after taking account of education, region, age, gender and family circumstances. Prejudice and discrimination are likely to play a significant role in accounting for the remaining gap. In this context, the reliance on mainstream employment supports may be inadequate. Services that support self-employment may be particularly beneficial to Travellers, who have a strong history of enterprise and self-employment.

The report of the Committee on the Elimination on Racial Discrimination (CERD) urges the government to develop effective measures with adequate level of resources to improve employment among Travellers and Roma.<sup>21</sup> Government and employer-led policies to monitor, prevent and respond to discrimination in seeking employment and in the workplace are also important.

**Housing:** Among Travellers living in caravans or mobile homes, there is a need to improve services such as the provisions of piped water and sewerage facilities. These dwellings are also likely to be overcrowded, pointing to the need for more space for families.

In order to address overcrowding, the nature of the accommodation provided needs careful consideration. With larger family sizes, average-sized accommodation simply does not provide enough space. In particular, privately rented accommodation is not likely to be large enough for Traveller families.

While the government has delegated responsibility for providing Traveller-specific accommodation to local authorities, this obligation is not being met. The national government needs to do more to ensure that local authorities are acting in a coordinated fashion to meet the need for Traveller-specific accommodation.

**Health:** The widening of the health gap between Travellers and non-Travellers with age is a clear example of cumulative disadvantage, where the situation later in life results from an accumulation of the effects of earlier disadvantage in education, employment, housing and other areas such as prejudice and discrimination. This highlights the need for policy to intervene at all stages of the life course. Since health status is influenced by a range of environmental factors and experiences – in education, work, housing, income and social life more generally – ensuring improved health for Travellers requires action in all these areas and not just in provision of clinical services.

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<sup>1</sup> Nolan, B. and B. Maître (2008). *A Social Portrait of Communities in Ireland*, Dublin: Department of Social and Family Affairs. All Ireland Traveller Health Study Team (2010). *All Ireland Traveller Health Study. Our Geels. Summary of Findings*, Dublin: UCD School of Public Health and Population Science. Watson, D., P. Lunn, E. Quinn and H. Russell (2011). *Multiple Disadvantage in Ireland: An Analysis of Census 2006*, Dublin: Equality Authority and ESRI.

<sup>2</sup> MacGréil, M. (2011). *Pluralism and Diversity in Ireland. Prejudice and Related Issues in Early 21st Century Ireland*, Dublin: Columbia Press.

<sup>3</sup> The term Travellers refers to 'the community of people who are commonly called Travellers and who are identified (both by themselves and others) as people with a shared history, culture and traditions including, historically, a nomadic way of life on the island of Ireland.' (Ireland, Equal Status Act, 2000, Sec 2 (1)). 'Ireland' refers to the Republic of Ireland.

<sup>4</sup> Watson, D., Kenny, O. and McGinnity, F. (2017) *A Social Portrait of Travellers in Ireland*. Dublin: ESRI.

<sup>5</sup> Figures from the 2016 Census show a similar gap: 13 % of Travellers had completed upper second level education (not including technical/vocational qualifications) compared to 69% of the General population (<https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cp8iter/p8iter/p8itseah/>).

<sup>6</sup> These estimated results are from a statistical model which adjusts for gender, age and region.

<sup>7</sup> These estimated results are from a statistical model which adjusts for gender, age and region.

<sup>8</sup> The unemployment rate among Travellers from the 2016 Census was 80%.

<sup>9</sup> McGinnity, F., Grotti, R., Kenny, O. and Russell H. (2017) *Who experiences discrimination in Ireland? Evidence from the QNHS Equality Modules*. Dublin: ESRI/The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission.

<sup>10</sup> This is even after controlling for age, gender, education, housing tenure, broad region marital/family status, disability status and religion.

<sup>11</sup> All Ireland Traveller Health Study Team (2010). *All Ireland Traveller Health Study. Our Geels. Summary of findings*, Dublin: UCD School of Public Health and Population Science, available at [https://www.ucd.ie/t4cms/AITHS\\_SUMMARY.pdf](https://www.ucd.ie/t4cms/AITHS_SUMMARY.pdf). The study was carried out in 2008 and the sample size was large – 1,604 Travellers in the Republic of Ireland. FRA (2020). *Roma And Travellers In Six Countries: Roma and Travellers Survey*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. The survey in the Republic of Ireland was carried out in 2019 and the sample size was 518 Travellers aged 16+. Additional information was collected about those living in the respondents' households.

<sup>12</sup> The proportion was similar in the 2016 Census (<https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cp8iter/p8iter/p8itseah/>).

<sup>13</sup> Grotti, R., Russell, H., Fahey, É and Maître, B. (2018) *Discrimination and Inequality in Housing in Ireland*. Dublin: Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission and Economic and Social Research Institute. Very high rates of discrimination in access to housing were reported among Travellers in the FRA 2019 survey (FRA, 2020).

<sup>14</sup> All Ireland Traveller Health Study Team (2010). *All Ireland Traveller Health Study. Our Geels. Summary of findings*, Dublin: UCD School of Public Health and Population Science. Kelleher, C., J. Whelan, L. Daly and P. Fitzpatrick (2012). 'Socio-demographic, Environmental, Lifestyle and Psychosocial Factors Predict Self-Rated Health in Irish Travellers, A Minority Nomadic Population', *Health & Place*, Vol. 18, pp. 330–338.

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<sup>15</sup> These adjusted rates are from a model controlling for gender, marital status, age, education, region and living conditions.

<sup>16</sup> Enright, S. McGinnity, F., Privalko, I. and Russell, H. (2020) *COVID 19 and non-Irish nationals in Ireland*. Dublin: ESRI /Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, Table 2.1. COVID-19 case numbers in Table 2.1 are based on data as of 25 November 2020 for events created on CIDR (Computerised Infectious Disease Reporting) up to midnight on Tuesday 24 November 2020. This was matched to data from Census of Population 2016 by CSO,

<sup>17</sup> Enright, S. McGinnity, F., Privalko, I. and Russell, H. (2020) *COVID 19 and non-Irish nationals in Ireland*. Dublin: ESRI /Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, Table 2.1.

<sup>18</sup> Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (2019) *Concluding observations on the combined fifth to ninth reports of Ireland*, December 2019.

[https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CERD/Shared%20Documents/IRL/INT\\_CERD\\_COC\\_IRL\\_40806\\_E.pdf](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CERD/Shared%20Documents/IRL/INT_CERD_COC_IRL_40806_E.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, *Fourth Opinion on Ireland*.

<sup>20</sup> Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (2019) *Concluding observations on the combined fifth to ninth reports of Ireland*, December 2019.

<sup>21</sup> Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (2019) *Concluding observations on the combined fifth to ninth reports of Ireland*, December 2019.