



Numerous research reports note the experiences of Travellers in relation to discrimination and racism. For example, **the National Traveller Community Survey** (Behaviour & Attitudes, 2017) found that 52% of Travellers had experienced an obstacle to accessing employment, and 43% encountered discrimination while accessing employment. The issues Travellers experienced included discrimination because of identity; not meeting required level of skills; having to modify and hide identity when applying or being known as a Traveller and not gaining employment as a result.

In 2017, Behaviour and Attitudes surveyed the general population about their attitudes towards a range of minority groups and found that Travellers (along with Roma) were the most discriminated against group among a list of 12 minority groups. The findings reveal the extent of discrimination, and included the following:

- Only 17% of the general public said that they would employ a member of the Traveller community.
- Only 15% of the public said that they would welcome Travellers in friendship, and
- Only 25% of the public said that they would welcome Travellers as co-workers.

Internships

A civil service internship Programme has been delivered across certain public sector sites since 2023. While this is welcome, it is imperative that public sector internship programmes that target members of the Traveller community are continued and scaled up to achieve impact. Crucially, they must include progression to full-time employment as an outcome for participants, following their successful completion of the Programme. In all future Programme, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform should include in the design of all internship programmes, the outcome of full-time employment for participants who successfully complete their internship Programme.

Internship programmes should extend beyond central government departments. Many Travellers live in counties which are not urban, and where there are few civil service employment opportunities. In these areas, there are public service employers, including local authorities, and these should all host internship programmes targeting Travellers. There are examples of good practice available, including the programmes delivered by *South Dublin County Council* in the mid-2000s, which provided training and sustainable employment for Travellers in general operative and administrative positions. The Local Government Managers Agency (LGMA) should be tasked with rolling out a scheme in collaboration with Traveller representative organisations in line with the good practices already established.

Targets

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To be fully inclusive, the public sector must be representative of the communities it serves. For Travellers, this means that there should be almost 1% of all employees from the Traveller community. This would amount to 3,700 public service employees.¹ There are measures in place to improve the diversity of the public service including the requirement to meet the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty, the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion focus of the Public Appointments Service (PAS) and the remit of the Department of Public Expenditure, National Development Plan Delivery and Reform (DPENDR) for public service reform and transformation programmes. Quotas have been notable in the gender and disability areas under the Duty; however, Travellers were not included as nested quotas, within those and a general intersectional lens was not applied. A spokesperson for the department told *The Irish Times* its 2030 strategy aims to ensure “that our policy and service responses are focused on equality, inclusivity and accessibility”.²

For progress to be made, the following should happen:

- A set of clear targets should be established in relation to Travellers’ employment in the public service, to ensure progress is made towards a fully representative public service.
- Public service bodies should be required to undertake targeted recruitment drives and report on their progress towards inclusive recruitment practice for Travellers.
- An ethnic identifier should be put in place across the public sector (and carried out in line with good practices, and data should be published on the ethnicity of the public sector workforce, across all levels of seniority
- Staff training on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion should include specific inputs on Travellers, as in our experience, this training does not cover all grounds of equality.

Social enterprise

There are high profile national social enterprises that are Traveller-led: these include Bounce Back Recycling, Bounce Back Upcycling and Shuttle Knit. For Traveller representative organisations, social enterprise has provided an opportunity for Travellers

¹ Almost 370,000 people are employed by the public service in Ireland, accounting for 14.4 per cent of the labour force in 2022.

² O Connor, Deana (2023) ‘Public service making EDI progress but says this is just the start’, *Irish Times*, October 13th, 2023. <https://www.irishtimes.com/special-reports/2023/10/13/public-service-making-edi-progress-but-says-this-is-just-the-start/>

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to claim the enterprise and employment space and create employment opportunities in the light of labour market discrimination and racism.

However, supports for Traveller organisations to explore and develop social enterprise activity is limited – the resources required to research and develop an idea to trading stage can be extensive, and criteria for accessing supports unrealistic. For example, the recent call for applicants for the Community Service Programme (CSP) required groups to be trading for over one year.

With the second National Social Enterprise Policy there is an opportunity to put in place adequate support for Traveller-led social enterprise development. This should include support to develop social enterprises, from early-stage concept development to trading stage. These supports should be developed in collaboration with existing Traveller-led social enterprises and Traveller organisations.

Social procurement

The EU Procurement Directives (2014) and Irish Regulations that followed (S.I. 284, 2016) provide significant scope for ‘social value’ to be included in the award criteria of public tenders. They also provide for ‘reserved contracts’ which provide targeted tendering opportunities to those with at least 30% of their employees from marginalised groups.

These provisions should be used in full to ensure that social enterprises that target Travellers and are Traveller-led can benefit from them, considering the extensive social value that they provide. For example, *Bounce Back Recycling* and *Bounce Back Upcycling* not only provide environmental benefits through mattress recycling and furniture refurbishment, but they provide employment to 20 Traveller men and women, and as social enterprises, all their surpluses are used for community benefit.

The example of the Social Value Act in the UK (and Northern Ireland) should be followed. Since June 2022, the Social Value Act mandated public authorities to allocate a minimum of 10% of the contract assessment for social value³– this was due to increase to 20% in 2023.

³ in contracts above a certain value.



Enterprise and employment services

Travellers often favour self-employment and micro and small enterprise development. The existing enterprise support programmes, either provided through Local Development Companies, Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) must undertake a targeted aspect to their programmes, in order to engage with more Travellers. This could include:

- Gathering data on ethnicity as outlined above, and reporting on the ethnicity of those who apply for their supports, and who receive them.
- Putting in place Traveller-specific supports in collaboration with Traveller representative organisations. This could include ring-fencing mentor and other supports for Travellers or recruiting mentors from the Traveller community.
- Ensuring that existing mentors and staff are competent to provide a culturally appropriate service to members of the Traveller community.

These approaches and practices should also apply to Local Area Employment Services.

Supports for employers and Traveller specific initiatives

There are no Traveller specific initiatives that provide information and guidance to employers who wish to develop inclusive Traveller employment practices. This is despite significant research which has identified the barriers to employment for Travellers, and the need for public and private sector employers to address barriers in the workplace for Travellers.

In a 2017 Traveller survey, only 3 in 10 people who have attended a training scheme gained employment as a result. (Base number was 307 people) There is a need for dedicated resources to support employers to implement positive action for Travellers in employment. Many of the initiatives noted above will require support from Traveller representative organisations, but few have the resources to provide this support. The Special Initiative for Travellers was established in 2005 and was an ad hoc and limited resource provided, operating in only 5 areas since that time. There is some support for targeted and inclusive apprenticeships but there is a need for greater resources around employment.

Funding should be made available for Traveller representative organisations to deliver supports to employers. This could be administered on a county or national basis to ensure that a comprehensive suite of resources for private and public sector employers could be provided at a scale required to achieve a national coverage. Local resources are also

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needed for specific measures (outreach, linkages with employers and the community at local level, and specific support measures for individuals).

Recommendations

- A national Traveler employment and enterprise strategy that is fully resourced for implementation from the outset to ensure it delivers on targets that are ambitious and delivers positive impacts to the Traveller community.
- Peer Led resources for Traveller organisations to support this area of work at local and national level.
- Full implementation of The National Action Plan on Racism. This will tackle the root cause of the high unemployment rate amongst Travellers. The plan needs adequate resources to have a meaningful impact for members of the Traveller community.
- Cross department support and resources to address the legacy of non-implementation of decades of reports and recommendations that have failed the Traveller community.

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