



RoseMarie Maughan - Employment - Speaker 1 on Employment Topic

Twenty-two recommendations were made in the Final Report of the Joint Committee on Key Issues Affecting the Traveller Community on employment, but progress has been too slow with only 11 in the early stages of development.

To date there has been no systematic understanding applied to redress Traveller's social inequalities, including in employment. The absence of data and a coherent government approach to inform mainstream investments and strategies, has worsened outcomes. The Programme for Government 2020 commitment to Traveller and Roma Training, Employment and Enterprise Plan, was positive, but has not materialised, and a multi-level integrated approach involving the education and training sector is critical to redress integrational poverty and exclusion, arising from long term community unemployment.

In 2022 unemployment in Ireland was 8%, and 61% for Travellers, 20% below the 2016 rate, but comparatively, alarmingly high. A concerning statistic is the number of Travellers unable to work due to permanent sickness or disability. 7 Employment actions linked to NTRIS are under the Department of Social Protection, but pace and a centralised lead is needed for the next one, and there is acceptance of need for a national Traveller and Roma employment strategy, including to mainstream employment across all facets of the public service, with targets laid out for all relevant agencies.

National employment policy, for example Pathways to Work 2020-2025, makes commitments to Travellers but little evidence of progress leading to change and there is also an over reliance on funded initiatives through NTRIS to make progress in Traveller employment, putting the responsibility on the Traveller organisation to resolve the issue, without the resources to do so

Traveller participation in the labour market is marked by stigma and discrimination in recruitment, both direct and indirect. Travellers are ten times more likely than White Irish to experience discrimination in seeking work. Decades of inaction have resulted in limited work opportunities or self-employment and therefore dependency on social welfare. Many Travellers who do secure employment, often don't reveal their Traveller identity, due to fears of discrimination with many adapting their behaviour and how they present themselves.

Current Education policy and practice, has not been successful in significantly improving Traveller access, progression and retention in post primary, further and higher education as a pathway into employment. In 2017 of 6 in 10 Travellers surveyed who undertook training schemes, they averaged a rate of 2-3 schemes, but with only 3 in 10 of those gaining employment.

The absence of Traveller employment data fails both the system, and the community, and without it we cannot even measure the uptake of Government's own positive initiatives, for example The Work Placement Experience Programme, targeted at young jobseekers facing significant barriers to employment, including Travellers, or the Progression routes to appropriate further education, training and employment supports offered by Intreo as there is no monitoring of outcomes for Travellers.

Traveller women face additional challenges and barriers in accessing training and employment, often rooted in societal prejudices, cultural factors, and economic disparities. Employment Strategies don't recognise their unique position, including intersectional obstacles and often limited educational opportunities, including vocational training and skill development programs, family responsibilities and social exclusion.

Entrepreneurship presents a pathway to economic empowerment, yet Travellers encounter barriers in establishing and sustaining businesses. Financial constraints including the fear of loss of benefits, access to business development resources and information pose challenges for Traveller entrepreneurs.

What works: Pockets of good practice are evident locally in the creation of Social enterprises and employment, however these are few. In 2023, the Traveller Apprenticeship Incentification Programme, led by the Irish Traveller Movement, was launched and is supporting Travellers to access and retain apprenticeships. To date there have been almost 200 expressions of interest leading to 47 Travellers receiving bursaries. Five challenges are:

1. Finding employers who are willing to employ Travellers,
2. Support from umbrella bodies and representative bodies to fully support and promote the initiative
3. Supporting Traveller women to take up apprenticeships
4. Benefits trap and fears of losing medical cards etc.
5. Access to a greater number in more locations of Pre Apprenticeship (ETB) and Access to Apprenticeship (TUS) training courses.

The programme needs to be core funded and further developed to have a greater reach and impact.

What is needed:

- A national innovative strategy to mainstream Traveller employment across all facets of the public service with implementations plans, KPI's and monitoring and evaluation processes laid out for all relevant agencies, and a multi-level cross Departmental action plan with ring fenced investment.
- A peer led comprehensive assessment of need and skills audit to determine the current community status in employment needs and experience to inform the much needed National Traveller Employment Strategy.
- A public sector wide cultural competency and anti-racism training for all staff and especially those working in employment activation and support.
- Government funded bodies should be required to develop strategies that increase diversity.
- Employer research, and both a sectoral and public education plan to combat attitudes and prejudice towards Travellers contributing to exclusion
- Expediting Traveller recruitment to the public sector with targets identified and a review of the minimum entry requirements. Where progress has not been made, despite plans.
- The introduction of Ethnic identifiers across public services as necessary, and the Equality Budgeting Strategy.
- With the launch NTRIS 2 imminent, it is essential that the strategy is adequately funded with ring fenced budgets, department leads and Ministerial oversight across the actions under each department.

For further information please contact Andrew Chapple employment@itmtrav.ie, RoseMarie Maughan rosemarie@itmtrav.ie, or Jacinta Brack Jacinta@itmtrav.ie The Irish Traveller Movement