

# DÁIL ÉIREANN

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## AN COMHCHOISTE UM SHAINCHEISTEANNA RÍTHÁBHACHTACHA A THÉANN I GCION AR AN LUCHT SIÚIL

### JOINT COMMITTEE ON KEY ISSUES AFFECTING THE TRAVELLER COM- MUNITY

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*Dé Máirt, 12 Samhain 2019*

*Tuesday, 12 November 2019*

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The Joint Committee met at 11 a.m.

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Comhaltaí a bhí i láthair/Members present:

Joan Collins,	Paudie Coffey,
Gino Kenny,	Fintan Warfield.
Éamon Ó Cuív.	

## **Business of Joint Committee**

**Vice Chairman:** Apologies have been received from the Chairman, Senator Colette Kelleher, and Deputies Colm Brophy, Marcella Corcoran Kennedy, Martin Ferris and Fiona O'Loughlin. I propose that we now go into private session to deal with housekeeping matters. Is that agreed? Agreed.

*The joint committee went into private session at 11.03 a.m. and resumed in public session at 11.12 a.m.*

## **Traveller Education: Discussion**

**Vice Chairman:** I welcome members and viewers who may be watching this meeting on Oireachtas TV to the meeting of the Joint Committee on Key Issues affecting the Traveller Community. The purpose of today's meeting is to begin our deliberations on the topic of education and how it impacts the Traveller community. We will meet representatives from the National Traveller Women's Forum and the Tallaght Traveller Community Development Project, and Ms Catherine Joyce. On behalf of the joint committee, I welcome Ms Eileen Flynn of the National Traveller Women's Forum, Mr. Patrick Nevin of the Tallaght Traveller Community Development Project, and Ms Catherine Joyce.

In accordance with procedures, I am required to draw attention to the fact that by virtue of section 17(2)(l) of the Defamation Act 2009, witnesses are protected by absolute privilege in respect of their evidence to the committee. They are directed that only evidence connected with the subject matter of these proceedings is to be given. They are asked to respect the parliamentary practice to the effect that, where possible, they should not criticise or make charges against any person, persons or entity by name or in such a way as to make him, her or it identifiable. Members are reminded of the long-standing parliamentary practice to the effect that members should not comment on, criticise or make charges against a person outside of these Houses, or an official either by name or in such a way as to make him or her identifiable.

I remind members and witnesses to turn off their mobile phones or switch them to flight mode as they interfere with the sound system and make it difficult for parliamentary reporters to report the meeting. They also adversely affect the television coverage and web streaming. I wish to advise that any submissions or opening statements that witnesses have made to the joint committee will be published on the committee's website. After the presentation there will be questions from members of the committee.

I call Mr. Patrick Nevin to make his opening statement on behalf of the Tallaght Traveller Community Development Project.

**Mr. Patrick Nevin:** I thank the committee for the opportunity to attend. We have almost come to the 100th anniversary of the Irish State's foundation. From the beginning, Travellers were denied ownership of their identity and historical place in its foundation. This is very obvious in the 1952 Irish Folklore Commission survey. In this document we see how it was the sedentary members of society who were given the opportunity to speak as well as name, place and deny Travellers the ownership of their position in the broader sphere of Irish society. This document is used as a key source by academics at home and abroad as a starting point in their academic discourse on Travellers. We see how Travellers were to become either idealised or

denigrated and made into objects of representation and investigation. Yet, at no time do we hear the voice of the Travellers in this document.

From the 1960s onwards, we seen a deepening interest in the Traveller community and we see the State taking a more active role in the problem of Travellers. I use the statement the “problem of Travellers” openly as this was how the State viewed the Traveller or tinker community. This was to culminate in the Government publication of the report of the Commission on Itinerancy in 1963. In this report we see again that the voice of Travellers is not represented. The commission was made up of various representatives of official Ireland. The opening statement by the chairman to the commission outlines what the commission was intent on doing. The statement makes it clear that the solution to the Traevller problem was the complete absorption of the Traveller community and it follows that there can be no final solution of the problems created by itinerants until they are absorbed into the general community. We must see this as the starting point when we are looking at the barriers and the key issues affecting Travellers, whether they are accessing education, accommodation, health or unemployment.

This open and transparent assault on the Traveller community way of life and identity must be acknowledged as a major contributory factor to the exclusion of Travellers from the State and its various institutions. To respond to the serious issues Travellers face in their everyday lives we must accept that the State needs to look at the issue of reparations. We have to acknowledge this injustice as we have acknowledged the injustice committed upon the women who were institutionalised in such places as the Magdalen laundries. A total of 60 years of State-sponsored denial of Traveller identity and culture has not only impacted on their educational attainment but has created an internalised oppression, barriers and lack of self-worth within the Traveller community. What I mean by reparations is that the State must remedy this at a structural level. It could start by addressing the deficit of Traveller culture and history within the education system. This must be a priority for the State if it is serious in trying to reverse six decades of assimilationist policies. It must also put in place affirmative action programmes to mirror those in the United States, Canada and Australia. While there are still major issues impacting on the various communities affected in these countries, the overall picture is one of positivity.

Since March 2017 our ethnicity has been acknowledged. However, this on its own does not acknowledge or repair the damage that has been inflicted on the Traveller community by the State with its policies of absorption and assimilation. The State and its institutions need to accept their direct role in the catastrophic damage to the Traveller community. We must have an open transparent and honest discourse like we have had in recent years in regard to other State and institutionalised wrongs. Our submission, Tallaght Travellers, has to some extent outlined several recommendations and ways that we can move forward in partnership and achieve a more equal and improved society. While addressing education we must remember that State policies have also had a negative impact and created inequalities and poor outcomes for my community in other areas including health, employment accommodation culture and language. My thanks to the committee.

**Ms Eileen Flynn:** I am actually used to being on the other side or out at protests for Traveller rights and women’s rights, so it is strange to be where I am today. On behalf of the National Traveller Women’s Forum I thank the committee for giving us the opportunity to present today.

I have dyslexia and I cannot stand reading out loud. I usually go from the top of the head so I am challenging myself today.

There are many levels of inequality that face Traveller women and girls compared to the

general population in the sense of reaching towards their achievements in the education system and curriculum. This inequality has widely impacted women's human rights and equality.

**Vice Chairman:** Ms Flynn should feel free to speak off the top of her head because we have her submission. If she does not want to read from the page and feels more comfortable speaking as she always does, she should please feel free to do so.

**Ms Eileen Flynn:** Traveller girls and women have always experienced inequality in Irish society. We are not just second-class citizens as women, we are third-class citizens because of the intersectionality that goes with being a Traveller. For many Traveller children, it is a struggle to get to school every day due to their living accommodation and schools and the system often do not understand that. Traveller children have little or no support from the education system.

I will have to call on Ms Joyce to do the presentation because I do not want to feck it up. I have just had a baby and I did not realise it would be so difficult. I am really sorry.

**Vice Chairman:** That is okay. Ms Flynn can stay in her seat and Ms Joyce can sit beside her. We will go into private session for a few moments. Is that agreed? Agreed.

*The joint committee went into private session at 11.21 a.m. and resumed in public session at 11.23 a.m.*

**Vice Chairman:** We are in public session. I call on Ms Joyce to continue the presentation.

**Ms Maria Joyce:** I will pick up from where Ms Flynn left off.

We want to focus on the experience of Travellers within the education system. Earlier this year, we spoke to a Traveller woman who was making every effort to support her daughter in finishing her last two years of secondary school. Her daughter is bright and well able for the academic work, but was lonely as there were no other Traveller girls in the school with her. The advice of the principal at the time was that nothing could be done but that if she wanted, she could be put on a reduced timetable. The mother told us that schools need to have a real understanding of the ongoing racism and exclusion experienced by Traveller students instead of burying their heads in the sand and pretending they believe that everyone is treated the same when they know that is not the case. She went on to say that children respond well to honesty, so from the outset teachers should not be afraid to talk to Traveller children as Travellers. Traveller children should not have to hide their identity in school and should be made to feel that school is a safe place to stay. The context of that conversation and the statement from that mother was that three young Traveller girls that her daughter had been friends with at junior certificate level were put on reduced timetable. Within months of that happening, they had dropped out of secondary school.

Every child in Ireland has a right to education. It is enshrined in our Constitution but what about every child's right to go to a school in a safe environment that is free from racism where he or she will be treated with dignity and respect and have his or her culture recognised and valued?

Every child should have an absolute right to equality of access, participation and outcomes. This is not so for very many Traveller children and we cannot say this enough. There needs to be equality of access, there needs to be equality in terms of participation and there certainly needs to be equality in terms of outcomes. We know from anecdotal evidence that there is no

longer a 100% transfer rate of Traveller children from primary to post-primary education. We also know that the attainment levels of many Traveller children are lower than children from the settled majority. Only 1% of Travellers are in third-level institutions and 82% of Traveller women are unemployed. Our submission also references a range of statistics highlighting the inequality in outcomes from education for Traveller women and girls. Racist bullying from their settled peers and educators is a daily experience for many Traveller learners. Low expectations of Traveller learners on the part of teachers is a clear example of the bias and stereotyping that take place in our education institutions. Discriminatory practices are still evident, for example, enrolment processes that exclude Traveller children and growing numbers of Traveller children being inappropriately placed on reduced timetables, which significantly impact on their educational opportunities and outcomes. There was a real opportunity last year with regard to enrolment processes and the discriminatory and racist practice of giving a child first preference if his or her older siblings were in the school that adversely impacted some groups, including Travellers where there is no history of second-level education. Unfortunately, it fell short. All of these practices and more such as some schools' refusal to take Traveller children have a significant impact on the progression of Travellers in second-level education and engagement with third-level institutions.

Regarding recommendations, the Department of Education and Skills needs to develop an action and implementation plan for all 14 actions for which it is responsible under the national Traveller and Roma inclusion strategy in partnership with Traveller organisations. Outstanding recommendations from the education strategy that was launched in 2006 should be addressed in a similar manner. A range of stakeholders, including Traveller organisations, put significant effort and time into developing that education strategy and there were really high expectations that it would have brought change. Other than the fanfare on the day of the launch in the Department of Education and Skills in Marlborough Street, it fell flat and failed to address the failures of the system with regard to Traveller children in education. Efforts must be made to ensure that a strong and robust inclusion of Traveller culture is present in curricula and the whole school environment. The Traveller Culture and History in Education Bill should be passed without amendment and we hope it will. There is a need for compulsory anti-racism and intercultural training pertaining to Travellers as part of pre-service and in-service teacher training and there is a need for visibility of Traveller culture in curricula. Additional recommendations can be found in our submission to the joint committee, including recommendations on the use of reduced timetables in Irish schools made earlier this year to the Joint Committee on Education and Skills, about which we are still very concerned. We have written to the Department again as it is developing guidelines for schools with regard to reduced timetables. There are a number of key points in our submission that need to be addressed, including the role of the inspectorate, to ensure this discriminatory and racist practice with regard to Travellers is stamped out.

A final point I would like to leave the committee with is that while the Department of Education and Skills has made some efforts in the past two years, and I use the term "some efforts" loosely, to begin to address these issues, major institutional and systematic change is needed to ensure equality of access, participation and outcomes for Traveller children and learners in education. As Ms Flynn said, when we were developing this presentation, it is essential that Traveller women and girls have real opportunities for success and outcomes from education. I will leave the committee with that final thought.

**Vice Chairman:** I thank Ms Joyce and Ms Flynn. Reduced timetables come up a lot. The witnesses have been very generous with their time with regard to the Oireachtas Committee

on Education and Skills. Reduced timetables have been used as a tool to reinforce inequality and to further increase the level of racism and segregation that is happening in schools. It is something that, like the Joint Committee on Education and Skills, this committee has to make sure there is an end to.

**Ms Maria Joyce:** Absolutely. While we appreciate this opportunity to speak here again, reduced timetables are being mentioned repeatedly with regard to the underpinning racism that underlines all of this and also the ineffectiveness of the implementation of education policy to address the absolute failure by the State with regard to Traveller education.

**Vice Chairman:** I now call on Ms Joyce to make her opening statement.

**Ms Catherine Joyce:** I thank the committee and, indeed, Senator Kelleher, who I have met on a number of occasions, who has a particular interest in Traveller education.

My name is Catherine Joyce. I am one of the managers of Blanchardstown Traveller Development Group. Our area is Dublin 15 but we serve the surrounding areas such as Meath, Cavan and Fingal County Council.

As Ms Maria Joyce and Mr. Nevin have already said, education is not a luxury. It is a right that all children have in this country. However, it is as important to have the right to be treated equally within the education system and that cannot be achieved if the lived experience, culture and identity of Travellers is not reflected positively within schools. For that to happen, we must look at the curriculum, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, how books are developed in relation to promoting aspects of Irish culture and identity within the system, and not being able to do that and reflect Traveller culture. They are looking at it now but it is way overdue. It is badly needed in terms of making sure that the curriculum reflects Traveller culture.

Every statistic one ever hears about education is a child, like my child, Johnny, who is 14 years of age, or the child belonging to those who are in this room. It is the next generation that we are talking about in the Traveller community who are children, who are pupils, who are life-long learners and who are going through an educational system that, as Ms Maria Joyce stated, is racist towards our culture, identity and, indeed, community. When we are thinking about it, we have to think about the individuals who are involved in these statistics that are getting thrown out left, right and centre.

In my catchment area, there are Travellers who live in a range of different types of accommodation. There are Travellers who live in Traveller-specific accommodation - halting sites and group housing schemes. There are Travellers who live in the private rented sector who live in mainstream housing. There are also Travellers who, like a lot of people in this country, are homeless. These Travellers have an added challenge of trying to get to school - when they might be in the geographical area of Dublin 15 but are travelling from Swords and other areas - to make sure that they adhere to their commitments in relation to their child's education. They are detached from their extended family and community but they also have a logistical difficulty in terms of finances and distance in trying to get their child to school and in getting him or her to stay the correct school hours. That causes great difficulty without schools forcing reduced hours on Traveller children and stating that, because one is a Traveller child, it is okay to miss a subject such as English, Irish or mathematics. Whatever the subject, that limits their opportunities of being able to progress in education and into second-level education. It also limits their employment opportunities in this country. Projects, such as my own, spend a lot of time and energy trying to undo a lot of damage that was done in the educational system in



this country where we are trying to re-educate Travellers who left at an early school age or who were forced into segregated classes in this country. We spend a lot of time and energy educating people who have only had a limited number of years, if any, in mainstream education. Considerable financial resources of the State have gone into doing that through a number of Traveller projects, such as our own, around the country.

When we are looking at education, we must look at the cuts. We cannot go any further without saying that the cuts have been detrimental to education. Up until the cuts in 2008 and 2009, we had 100% transition of Travellers in Blanchardstown from mainstream primary school education into second-level education. We had all the challenges of trying to keep children in education. We ourselves provided homework support clubs. Other people provided breakfast clubs. We had the resource teacher for Travellers, RTT. We had the visiting teacher services. We had all of those services, including transport, to maintain that 100% transition. It only lasted for two years. As soon as the cuts occurred, it was no longer the case that we had transition.

If one looks at the possibilities that could be open to Travellers if they transferred into second-level education and the opportunities they might have if they go on to college and further education or learning, that has been limited because of the State's cuts in Traveller education.

We have also got a situation where all of those people have gone through a school system that does not reflect their culture, identity or lived experience. We have a position whereby the Traveller children are being taught by their parents and extended families. When they are taught in that environment, they are also being taught to be guarded about how they expose their identity to people who are not Travellers. They are taught to be guarded in how they conduct and present themselves to settled people in schools. Travellers do not want their children to have to face racism and discrimination just because they are proud of their Traveller identity, their culture and their way of life. We must ensure education is not just about educating Travellers about Traveller culture but also about educating settled people about Traveller culture.

Unfortunately, the State has neglected its duty in this area in a big way. Projects like mine are trying to undo much of the damage with the education programmes we provide to schools and teachers, as well as some of the development work we do locally. We are doing work that could have been done by the State 20 years ago in order to ensure that interculturalism would have included Travellers in the space where we could talk about different cultures and identity. It is particularly important given the announcement in 2017 where the State recognised Traveller ethnicity that schools would start to take on that responsibility in a real way and ensure they teach all children in schools about the identity of Travellers, as well as the important role that Travellers have played in the economic survival of the country and in the area of traditional music. There are also other elements of their contribution to consider, including the landscape of the country, farming, etc. That is not reflected but it could be in the whole school curriculum rather than just one subject.

Travellers might have to endure teachers who do not know anything about Travellers teaching a subject in one class or one year. Children like mine have excused themselves when the subject was taught and did not go into school for the day. Other children belonging to me who sat in those classes when the topic was taught had to endure racism and discrimination from the other children in the classrooms and had to come to their own defence in challenging it. Sometimes they got into physical arguments in the yard because of comments made in the classroom setting because a teacher was not able to handle the information coming through. It was one subject and one piece of a curriculum. It is a lot of responsibility to place on a 14 or 15 year

old from the Traveller community if they must educate Travellers and settled people, including their friends, as well as teachers of the subject in the first place.

None of the Travellers in our area lives in a DEIS area so they do not have any special resources or significant support going into the schools. They are treated the same as everybody else. In an ideal world, we would like it to be the case that no other resources are needed but when people are targets of racism, discrimination and cultural erosion, there is an important need for DEIS schools to be expanded where there is a significant number of Travellers who could access such additional support. As I stated, the visiting teacher service is gone and the loss of posts for RTTs has had a significant impact on Travellers. There is also the question of significant other supports, including capitation grants to help Travellers in schools.

The national survey in 2017 indicated that four out of ten Travellers stated that their Traveller children had been bullied in school because of their identity. I know that is the case as my children were bullied in school to the extent that they were called “knackers” in the school yard. They were asked to pick up a tissue paper and this and that. When a teacher tried to respond to the incident in the yard, the response was to ask my child to explain who Travellers were; my child had to come up with the solution when the other person should have been reprimanded. It is an awful indictment of our school system if we are asking children to be judge, jury and executioner when a racist comment is made against Travellers.

Interculturalism is important and it is vital the whole school learns about Travellers. It is important that non-Traveller children learn about different cultures that make up society and that we look at the historical context of Travellers. We must also consider the contemporary context of Travellers and we do not want people learning about Travellers who lived in wagons 40 years ago. My children do not even know what it is to live in a wagon. We must look at contemporary Traveller culture and trying to reflect that in the school curriculum. Any negative stereotypes or views in the wider society should not be reflected in either the delivery of teaching or books used in that delivery. Some good programmes, such as the Yellow Flag programme, deal with interculturalism in school but, unfortunately, in some cases Travellers are a tag-on. The programme looks at other cultures and new communities but does not necessarily put Travellers to the forefront.

A programme could be developed to ensure that the schools have a role in prioritising the Traveller culture within programmes, specifically where they are about cultural identity and look at the native culture of Travellers in this country. Traveller culture and history are not visible in the preschool, primary school and post-primary curricula and there are no mandated guidelines for schools on this matter. Schools can teach what they want. Even in the Yellow Flag programme they can leave it to the pupils, the teachers or the parents of the children who are in the school to teach it. Very often much will be hidden because they do not want to expose Traveller culture and identity and they do not want that to be a reflection on their children who may be attending the school. We must get it right and use the experts who are there for doing that, and it must be across the school setting and not just in one area.

Many Traveller groups are doing this work *ad hoc* through music, theatre and dramas. My husband is involved through a play he wrote about it. It is a cultural thing and he has contacted many people, but it should not be the responsibility of Traveller organisations. It is the responsibility of the Department of Education and Skills to ensure that the educational system is at least reflective of the native Irish people who live in this country, if not ensuring that we include the new people who have joined our society.



There is a need to monitor the data relating to Travellers in schools and, in particular, on why Travellers are leaving school early, the locations of those schools and what the impact is in terms of the user of the school. There is a need to establish a new education strategy. I was involved in the last one and I am sure it is a door stop for a room somewhere in the Department of Education and Skills because I have not heard it quoted by many Ministers or people who are involved in education. It took a great deal of time to do that. It is not about spending another five years on an education strategy. It is about a strategy that has targets and goals and adequate resources to implement it. The last time I was involved in a discussion about education with the Department, when the cuts took place in 2008, the first thing it did was cut Traveller training centres. While Traveller training centres categorically needed to go, they did not need to go as the first port of call when cuts were sanctioned. The impact of that must be addressed in terms of the adults who have gone through a system where there are no adult learning spaces available. They are coming back to us on community employment, CE, and other programmes, but they are not suitable for adult learning. We must examine that.

We must resource Traveller organisations in respect of picking up the tab for education. We have picked up the visiting teacher service and the roles of the after-school programmes and breakfast clubs, yet we do not have an education worker or a youth worker. Our project is left with the fallout from the cuts and we are trying to respond and deal with that.

I realise I have gone over time so I will finish quickly. The intercultural awareness programme should be mandatory for trainee teachers and all teachers, regardless of whether they are teaching Traveller children or children from other communities. There must be a situation where there is mandatory intercultural and anti-racist teaching for the teachers who are teaching in these schools. It does not matter who the pupil is. They should be educating everybody who comes through the door about interculturalism and anti-racism in school life and in the school setting.

The Department of Education and Skills has called for the inclusion of Traveller history and culture. I welcome that. I realise many people are questioning why they must learn about Travellers and not all the other cultures. They are questioning why Travellers are so important and asking why Travellers cannot teach their own children. The reality is that Travellers have been recognised as an ethnic minority group. The State did that after much campaigning on behalf of Traveller organisations. There is a responsibility on the State to educate its pupils, regardless of whether they are in preschool, primary, secondary or third level education. If it is a private school one can look at the logistics of doing that. Regardless of the type of education, the State has a responsibility to ensure that whatever is taught in schools does not damage the life of the young person who is going through that educational system.

I am speaking as a mother and a grandmother. Some of my grandchildren are of Traveller extraction and some are of settled extraction. When they are going through the school system they will be further disenfranchised by a situation where a teacher does not know how to teach the pupils in the school who come from a different culture or race or come from two cultures or identities. There will be more of that, and not just in respect of Travellers. We will have it in respect of people who come from Africa, China and elsewhere in the world to live in this country. It is vital that we do not do the same wrongs we did to Travellers to other settled people or people from other cultures. Traveller children and young people should be as important to the State as they are to me and our community. If I am forced to put my children into mainstream second level education, the least that I can expect is that the Government will out for my child and not damage their health or mental well-being by telling them that it is not good to be a

Traveller.

**Vice Chairman:** I thank Ms Joyce for her very strong presentation. It contained little with which I would disagree. One of her first points was how education is a right. Unfortunately, there are still people who do not have rights. Rights can exist theoretically but where people come from communities which have never been in a position to facilitate, support or exercise their rights, and they do not have the avenues to demand them and feel as though they deserve them, do they really have those rights at all? People feel as though they no longer deserve to be supported and helped because they have been excluded for so long.

I will open up for questions from the members, beginning with Deputy Ó Cuív.

**Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív:** Many issues have been raised, many of which are cross-cutting. The very obvious one would be how a child in education might be living in very bad accommodation or moving in homelessness from one bed and breakfast accommodation to another, which is something I often encounter. It is an impossible challenge for a child compared to one in a settled home, in a settled place in a settled school.

At the end of his presentation, Mr. Nevin said he had some suggestions for things we could do. I am interested to hear a synopsis of those. Ultimately, the committee will write a report. It will have a page or two of recommendations at the beginning. My experience is that if the recommendations are fairly tight there is a greater chance of delivering them. If one includes everything that would solve the world, it is probably harder to get them to deliver. Mr. Nevin made a very powerful submission. His points are valid about what happened or did not happen in the past, that is the sins of omission and of action, as it were. We have to say how we move forward from here, taking that into account.

The reduced timetable seems a lazy way out. On what basis, unless there was a health reason or some overriding issue why would it be a standard response to someone in the Traveller community to say that they cannot do the full curriculum rather than saying that they need more supports to do the curriculum? That has been the response. Some years ago, a Traveller woman came to me in Tipperary and asked if her child could study Irish. An outrageous proposition had been put to her. Obviously the school could not be bothered teaching a Traveller child Irish and thought that something that was their right was not their right and was suggesting that the exemption from Irish would be taken. What they were saying is that the child had to take it and that a Traveller could not do Irish. Of course, I said that the child could and if this woman wanted her child to do Irish that was her choice. I believe that there is many a Traveller child who has lost out significantly because the more that a child does the full curriculum the more chances he or she will get in life. Therefore, unless there was some reason equivalent to the reason a non-Traveller child would have for not doing Irish there was no reason to deprive them of something that was important to them.

We talk vaguely about teaching Traveller culture but there is no fixed curriculum, with every school paddling its own canoe. Human beings are ingenious at finding ways not to do a thing as it should be done. How do our guests believe Traveller culture should be delivered in schools so that it has the desired effect, and not the opposite effect? DEIS status for schools which have a large proportion of Travellers was mentioned. I was astounded that a school with a large number of Travellers is not guaranteed DEIS status. Would we be better to focus funding on extra resources for the Traveller pupils in such schools or to give it to the school in general, which the school might disburse in a way that does not necessarily assist those from the Traveller community?

One issue that is raised continually in front of this committee is that disadvantage in education and health is interlinked and people in bad accommodation find it equally difficult to learn. Travellers are in halting sites while we are sitting here talking about the issues around those sites. We witnessed a kid trying to do homework. The kid was amazing because they were complicated sums and every one of them was correct but I do not know how the child was meant to concentrate amid the hubbub going on in the vicinity. Another child would have a room or space to themselves if they wanted to study.

We need to look at the challenges faced by the Traveller community. If parents are denied access to education, directly or indirectly, they cannot be of as much assistance to children with the various tasks they have to complete. Should resources be focused and guaranteed to reach Traveller children or is there a danger that, by giving DEIS status to a school, the funds will simply be dissipated throughout the school, notwithstanding the fact that DEIS status is given on account of the number of Travellers at the school?

I remember the day the announcement on ethnicity was made. I was very pleased it was made but I was worried that official Ireland would think it had done its bit. My experience has been that it has made very little real difference. I would be interested in the comments of our guests on that point. The settled community needs a huge amount of education. Sociological surveys state that settled people's attitudes to all different ethnic groups across the world are prejudiced but that they are most prejudiced, by far, against Travellers.

**Vice Chairman:** Perhaps Mr. Nevin could deal with the points relating to reparation and some of the other suggestions. Other speakers can come in on the delivery of Traveller culture and history and how this would be facilitated in a school setting. They can also comment on ethnicity and indicate if that has had any impact. Please also respond to the last point Deputy Ó Cuív made about educating the settled community. That topic loops back into the other question on the implementation of Traveller culture in schools in terms of our future adult population.

**Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív:** I am interested in hearing the replies and urge the witnesses to give it from the shoulder.

**Mr. Patrick Nevin:** Quite a lot of issues have been raised. I will leave our suggestions aside for a moment and explain what I meant by reparations.

We need to consider how the State responded to Travellers in 1963. We cannot separate that starting point as it is one of the most seminal dates for Travellers in this country. I say that because from 1963 to 1973 the Traveller community moved from a nomadic transient population to one that was forced to become sedentary and settle in urban centres within the State. I made a point about the membership of that committee being made up of official Ireland and one will realise that when one reads the report.

**Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív:** Yes, I know.

**Mr. Patrick Nevin:** On what Ms Catherine Joyce spoke about at the end of her presentation, and what Deputy Ó Cuív said about new communities and the treatment of Travellers, we should not nor can we separate the historical othering of Travellers at the hands of the State and its institutions, and how that has impacted on the mindset of the majority population and their relationship with the new communities. We have witnessed that in recent weeks in terms of what has happened in Oughterard, Ballymore and the fire-bombing of direct provision centres or hotels that were earmarked for direct provision accommodation. To me, that points to the

fact that we, tinkers or Travellers, were the template for all of what is happening at this moment and what is to come. That must be acknowledged.

In terms of reparations, the State needs to take ownership of Traveller identity and culture. It needs to acknowledge that we have been part and parcel of the State since its foundation in 1922 and long before then for the previous millennia; we have existed and coexisted. It is now time for reparations. I have submitted my ideas for reparations as we all have. The State needs to hold up its hands and say, “We need to take cognisance of what we inflicted on the community”.

In 2017, the ESRI compiled a report entitled A Social Portrait of Travellers in Ireland, which showed the difference in improvements in educational attainment of the non-Traveller population from the 1960s onwards when compared with what happened to Travellers. It is important to note from the research that from the 1960s onwards Travellers were subject to an assimilationist-absorption policy for Travellers yet for the majority population the policy was one of education and investment in its culture, identity, history and place. That did not happen for Travellers. The State needs to acknowledge what happened and take ownership of its actions, which is what I am talking about in terms of reparations.

Ms Catherine Joyce made the point, as we all have, that State acknowledgement is not just important to Travellers. We are not here to educate the majority population. It is up to the State and its institutions to provide such education. They need to take ownership of that task, which is important for the new communities but also for what is happening with Brexit and Northern Ireland, and where we are going in a new Ireland, the new discourse and what we are attempting to do. At the heart of this situation is that Travellers have been used as a template for everything else that has happened to the new communities. The State has perfected its othering on the back of Travellers so now is the time for reparations and not willy-nilly projects. The State needs to take on board what has taken place in Canada, New Zealand and other places. Such initiatives have, by and large, not resolved the issues in those places but a real genuine attempt has been made to address past wrongs, which is what this State needs to do. I will respond further, if needs be.

**Vice Chairman:** It is up to this committee to analyse the research that Mr. Nevin has referred to and what has happened in other jurisdictions for our own deliberations.

**Mr. Patrick Nevin:** Yes.

**Ms Catherine Joyce:** I am not promoting the idea of identifying a DEIS school just because it has 20 Travellers. I am saying that in areas of disadvantage that may coincidentally have schools - Mulhuddart, where I work, is an area of disadvantage and there are other areas around there - resources should be provided on the basis of need, not just identity. Where an area has a large contingent of Travellers and schools are struggling to keep Travellers in school or to keep Travellers at the same attainment level as their settled peers, there should be a way of managing that. I am not saying DEIS is the ideal scenario, but in the absence of the visiting teacher service, where the teachers were able to make a joint assessment of the need in a particular school, there must be some type of programme or a way of making sure that, particularly in DEIS schools that have Traveller pupils, they are resourced to include Travellers. Where there are no Travellers in the DEIS schools that are available, there should be some way of monitoring that. Again, it is to do with reviewing the current state of play on the ground.

In regard to the history of Travellers, there are many Travellers in this country who were put

into a segregated classroom from as early as four years of age. My husband is one of them and he was put into a prefab at the back of a girls school in Finglas. He went through his school life in segregated provision. There were two teachers in that classroom and they taught very basic mathematics and English. There were no other subjects such as Irish and history taught in the classroom. There was a range of ages in the classroom setting, and when they left school they could write their names and addresses. They were well lucky after coming out of those schools. The schools were provided by the Catholic Church and the State. The development of those schools was a joint collusion. We must get an apology for those adults, who are only in their 50s and some might be even younger, for the segregation and deliberate isolation of Travellers within the education system. Those people need an apology on behalf of the State. Some type of recourse must be made in respect of those people and their education.

Regarding the culture and identity of Travellers being taught in schools, I do not believe every settled person going through school needs to know everything about Traveller culture and identity, but there are certainly areas where there are gaps. Consider the economic change in Ireland through the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. We talk about the industrial revolution here and tinsmithing being done away with by the arrival of plastic and so forth. There was a genuine role for the tinker in this country in mending pots and pans. The experience of settled people who used that service was predominantly good. It might not be the case for people who are sitting here, but their parents and grandparents certainly would have had tinkers calling to the door and mending pots and pans. There are parts of that which could be put into the economic modules in the education system.

I am not an academic and I am certainly not a teacher so I am not in a position to go through every schoolbook and subject in the classroom, but there are people who can go through them and Traveller-proof them with the positive aspects of Traveller identity, the positive role Travellers played in Irish music and so forth, and the hawkers and sellers at the door. Travellers were recycling in this country before it was popular. They were involved in recycling on the tip heads and the dumps. They were recycling in markets with old washing machines, lawnmowers, bicycles and the like. Those things have been ignored in the education system and in the awareness of recycling in this country. I got a glimpse of a programme on RTÉ last night and there was no mention of the people who were recycling before recycling was popular and trendy. They were the Traveller community. They were recycling long before it was the thing to do. There are ways in which we can go through the curriculum and include Travellers and the positive role we played in society.

Musicians in this country would not deny the contribution that Travellers made not only in creating a style of music but also in preserving Irish music at a time it was under severe threat by the English in this country. When Travellers used to go from door to door selling ballad sheets, they used to bring the songs and stories from another county. They could not be written down because if a person was caught carrying the papers, he or she was done for. They kept them in their heads and passed them on from generation to generation. Some very famous musicians always credit Travellers for the role they played in that. There are many opportunities to include Travellers. I am not just talking about the history of Travellers but also contemporary Traveller culture.

I have children who went through the education system and every year they had a new book because the previous year's was not useable. Books are being developed all the time. Why are we not talking to the companies developing the books and saying that the books cannot go into schools unless there is Traveller-proofing of the books for the curriculum? It can and



should be done.

**Vice Chairman:** I agree. It is an important point around the delivery of Traveller culture and history and not a justification for the existence of Travellers in a country. It should take in everything that Travellers have contributed to Irish life for a very long time. It seeps into every one of our subjects but it is excluded from books. It is a good place to start.

**Ms Eileen Flynn:** No two people on the island of Ireland are the same. We are all very different but should be treated with equal value, including every child on the island of Ireland. Why is it different for a Traveller child? I struggled through the education system. This was not because I lived on a halting site and had family around me. That part of being a Traveller is absolutely lovely to me and living on a halting site was a great experience. What was not lovely for me were the conditions we lived in. We could go a week without heating. In my family's home now, the roof has nearly collapsed on top of us. We need to get landlords who can fix problems in our homes. If this happened in the settled population, the services would be provided but they are not provided on halting sites. There are challenges faced by young Traveller children. On a Christmas morning, we could have Traveller children coming to the house for water at Labre Park, where I was born and reared. It is not because we come from a close-knit community, although there is a lovely sense of community; it is not the halting site that is the problem but rather the living conditions and the services not being provided to the Traveller community. This has a dramatic impact on education and health.

With regard to ethnicity, on 1 March 2017, Travellers were recognised as an ethnic minority group in Ireland. Unfortunately, this was just a statement and off we had to go with that recognition. The idea was that these were happy days for Travellers. Unfortunately, those happy days have not yet come about. It is one thing to say Travellers are recognised as an ethnic minority group but another to see action and for Travellers to feel valued. I am a new mother and my child is 50% Traveller, 50% settled and she is 100% of both cultures. My husband and I were chatting the other day about what will happen if our child gets called a knacker in school. I had never thought of this before and I hope it does not happen to my child. I hope she never has to go through the struggles I had in the Irish education system. That was just 12 years ago and going through second and third level education was a real struggle because of cost, accommodation and not having the support at home that I needed.

My father was literate but my three older siblings were in segregated schools, unfortunately. I am dyslexic and my family did not understand homework so could not help me with it. With all those struggles I still managed to get a degree. I was a very lucky Traveller woman who was able to get a degree with supports from some services but not every child in my community is that lucky. We need schools to know that a Traveller girl or young man does not necessarily want to go off and get married. Our children should be valued in the education system, especially as now times are changing, as my brother always says. We should be normalising Traveller recognition and it should be okay to be different. We should teach Traveller culture in the same way we teach maths. There are great Traveller people who are qualified teachers and they can teach Traveller culture and be part of that educational change. It needs to change in order that we can have a better future for our children.

Ms Joyce and others have spoken about history. To know where one is going, one must know where one came from. If I was a Traveller child in primary or secondary school and told that I was going to learn about Traveller culture, I would feel more valued in the education system. I came through years of school not being valued and wondering who I was and why was there nothing in the books about who I am, or having others tell me who I am. I always knew

I was different because of my background but I do not want that for Billy or any other Traveller child and to go through what I went through in the education system, and I was very lucky. There are worse stories in the education system than mine and we cannot have that in future. We must change. We can start with the people in this room and start today. We are discussing recommendations. Let us work together on the Traveller Culture and History in Education Bill 2018 and pass it. That could be the first step.

**Vice Chairman:** Ms Flynn referred to normalising difference. That is such a powerful thing. Unfortunately, people sometimes think normalising something is about making us look and sound exactly the same. That is not what it is at all. If we take anything from today it should be how amazing it is that we can get to a point where we normalise and value difference.

**Ms Maria Joyce:** Deputy Ó Cuív spoke of cross-cutting issues in the areas of education, accommodation and homelessness. He is absolutely spot on. Research has shown that Traveller children are among the highest percentage of children in homelessness in Dublin and elsewhere.

**Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív:** It is 50% in Galway.

**Ms Maria Joyce:** That is very telling in itself. In one short generation, we have gone from there being no homeless Travellers because of the way of life and the culture to greater numbers of children in homelessness being Traveller children. There is also the wholly substandard quality of Traveller accommodation, particularly Traveller-specific accommodation. There are low levels of provision and what is there is wholly substandard and unsafe because of overcrowding. The numbers of Travellers living in unauthorised accommodation, without the most basic of services, is significant and growing. All those factors combined makes it amazing that our children survive and come through an education system in anyway half intact. That is testament to the strength of the culture and way of life but it does not take away from education and the State's responsibility towards and its failings of Traveller children. When the committee looks at accommodation after Christmas, it could consider site visits to some of those accommodations. That would be very useful and a big eye opener to anyone who has not been in those spaces.

Deputy Ó Cuív asked if reduced timetables being a lazy way out for schools. The only answer to that is "Yes". He asked about additional supports. One response by an educator to the rationale for using reduced timetables in a school was that the child did need additional supports but they did nothing to make that happen, they just put a reduced timetable in place. There is no way that child will stay in the education system. They and many others will fall through the cracks. The history of Traveller children in this State, even those within the system in schools, has been of exclusion. Extra resources should follow children but it cannot be done in the same way as has been the case in the past. Extra resources, when attached to children not just on need but on identity, ensured segregated provision for Traveller children and sustained itself until very recently. As somebody who has come through what were then called special classes for Travellers, I can tell the committee that it does not meet the needs of Traveller children. Yes, resources should follow the child where there is need, but there needs to be a real way of looking how that happens because otherwise it gets soaked into the schools.

Between 2008 and 2013, Traveller-specific supports were cut by 86.6%. Those supports were in place to address the big gap between the educational attainment rates for Traveller children and the outcomes for settled children. That has been rowed back on and we no longer have a 100% transfer from primary to post-primary education. Given that it is a legal requirement in this country to be in school until 16, the State in itself is violating those rights.

In terms of ethnicity, it has already been done to some extent but there has been little progression. It is not about needing to come up with a whole new strategy or way of doing things. It is about implementing the policies and strategies that already exist across the board for Travellers in terms of health, accommodation and education. The State's newest policy, the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy, makes a whole range of recommendations across all of those areas. The Departments and agencies of this State that are responsible for those areas need to implement those recommendations. Again, it is implementation, implementation, implementation.

On the final point about prejudice and racism against Travellers, that seems to be the greatest and most acceptable. Research undertaken not just by Travellers but by wider bodies demonstrates that it is one of the most acceptable forms of racism and is not being challenged. There is no leadership approach in this country, from a top down perspective, in relation to racism against Travellers. We have seen again the most recent tweets about Travellers that have come out from people who want to fill the political space, and they are incredibly racist. That has followed on from many examples over the years.

**Vice Chairman:** On the transition from primary to second level and the illegality of it, unfortunately, the State has got around that by its use of reduced timetables because they are actually keeping Traveller kids on the books while in fact they are being sent home. They are finding ways for that not to come up as much as it could if the reduced timetable issue were exposed more than it is.

I know Catherine wants to come back in, but she might just work her contribution in after Deputy Kenny asks some questions.

**Deputy Gino Kenny:** I will be extremely brief because Eileen has largely answered the question I was going to ask her. I thank all of the witnesses for their contributions. It is always very enlightening to hear the history of the Travelling people and their suffering at the moment. As public representatives, we want to highlight that a great wrong has been done to Traveller people over the past number of generations, and we want to right that wrong together.

I have a question for Eileen, and she has largely answered it very eloquently. Obviously, 1% of the Traveller community go into third level education, so there is a huge deficit in terms of primary to post-primary and then to third level education. I understand there are economic issues and reasons for that. When I was growing up, the vast majority of people never went into third level education and went to work. They had to because the economic reality was they had to go to work. There are always different reasons people do not go into third level education. Some people want to get a job and so forth. What was Eileen's experience when moving from secondary to third level education? I do not say this in isolation. Did she encounter different attitudes than second level education when she entered third level education? What was her overall experience? I am sure many people look up to her. Does Ms Flynn say to all Travellers, "This was my experience and you do not have to follow it"? What initiatives would help to increase participation from 1% to 5% in the next few years?

**Ms Eileen Flynn:** I thank the Deputy.

**Deputy Gino Kenny:** Gino.

**Ms Eileen Flynn:** Gino, thanks. I was trying to be professional. I started my studies at Trinity College 12 years ago. It was such a struggle because I was in a big institution by myself and

did not feel I had a place there. I did not feel that I belonged but I was probably my own worst enemy. I used to bunk on the Luas - I should not say that - and buy a cup of tea, which got me through my whole day in college. Unfortunately, I had no supports in Trinity College but that was 12 years ago. I did not enjoy the experience.

Next, I went to Ballyfermot College to do a post-leaving certificate, PLC, course on pre-nursing and caring for people with special needs. I loved the smaller college. Next, I went to Maynooth to get a degree because in Ireland one is nobody without a piece of paper. Unfortunately, nowadays the leaving cert is not the norm, a degree is the norm. Education has become more challenging for Traveller people and many of them do not want to get that piece of paper.

As Ms Maria Joyce has said, between 2008 and 2013 Traveller education supports were cut by 86%. Other costs include the cost of going to university and the cost of travel especially if one does not drive. For the wider community, these things start at a young age and in primary school, and starts with the value placed on a young person within the school system. To succeed in education all it takes is for one person to believe you can do it. I only ever felt valued as a Traveller woman when I worked in the organisations of the Traveller community. Previous to that I never felt valued as a Traveller woman in Ireland, and it was not that I was not good enough for society. On reflection, as a 30 year old Traveller woman, I think that Irish society was never good enough for us. Travellers need to live in a society where we feel we are valued. We are not the same as everybody else but we need to be treated with dignity and respect. If we are shown that in primary school and secondary school, and belief is shown to our young people, then our young people will progress to third level education. If one gets a sense of not belonging then why would one put oneself through any more torture?

**Ms Maria Joyce:** I shall make two brief points. The issue of targeted measures for Traveller children in school and special measures is really important in terms of supports and resources across the board. We also need Travellers as teachers. There are some Travellers who are teachers but their number must be significantly supported to enhance the visibility of culture and how that is taught within schools. It is important for a Traveller child to be taught in the classroom by a teacher who is a Traveller. A significant number of measures must be put in place to ensure scholarships and supports are available across the board in terms of whatever choice of education Travellers go into. Having more teachers who are Travellers would have a significant impact on changing some of this. On ethnicity, it was a hard-fought battle through 30 or 40 years to achieve the recognition that came in 2017. It was just a start. Very little has been done since then. There has been an overall lack of implementation of the recommendations within the existing strategies. This issue needs to be taken in a serious and significant way by the State, which needs to ensure that the recommendations are rolled out because there is increasing disillusionment. It was an incredibly important announcement, particularly for our young people in terms of their identity and self-esteem to which significant damage has been caused through the years. Action is needed to deliver on the recognition and bring about the change in education and other policy areas that is needed for Travellers so that we do not continue to have these conversations in ten or 15 years. The point made by Ms Flynn on what she wants for her daughter, Billy, in the education system is what we representatives wanted for our children because our experience in education was very negative. The State failed us in that regard, as it has failed our children. I want for my grandchildren what Ms Flynn wants for Billy. I hope that they will not be damaged by the Irish education system.

**Vice Chairman:** It is very difficult to persuade people to go to third level education when they have been rejected in every other educational experience they have had. A very small

number of Travellers in relative terms do the leaving certificate. Spaces could be opened up on every degree programme in the country and every bar or criteria such as the leaving certificate removed. That is what happens for access programmes, through which successful applicants do an access year. Every degree course in Trinity College must hold one or two spaces for mature students. There is no reason there could not be targeted Traveller-specific spaces. It is not always a matter of economics; it is often more to do with social and cultural factors and everything that has gone before.

**Ms Catherine Joyce:** On ethnicity, it is important to note that Travellers have various opinions on the impact of the announcement in 2017. Some Travellers have stated that it has made things worse because it created an expectation that Travellers would be accepted and our cultural differences would be promoted and recognised. As Ms Maria Joyce pointed out, it took us 30 years to get that announcement made. I was actively involved in that campaign, as were many others. It was what it was - an announcement. No programme was put in place to explain what ethnicity is, how it is developed or why it is important for wider society as well as the Traveller community. Particularly in counties Kildare and Kerry, Travellers who had never been involved in Traveller organisations, protests or campaigns took cases against pubs and hotels in the expectation that the announcement would give them some standing and back-up in terms of challenging the people discriminating against them. However, it did not do so. Rather, it did the opposite and polarised the issue to a greater extent. More focus was put on the difference between Travellers and settled people in a negative way. Although the announcement was welcomed by Traveller organisations, Travellers on the ground may have a very different experience in terms of what it means to them.

Likewise, it is important that we consider the fall-out of any actions being taken in the education system - I acknowledge that issues other than education are also being considered - and ensure that they do not further disenfranchise the Traveller community. We should not pursue a good idea or gesture or goodwill without putting in place programmes, as well as sanctions for discriminating against Travellers, and removing any discrimination against or marginalisation of Travellers by the State. The recognition of ethnicity meant nothing to many Travellers. That is the unfortunate truth.

I remember talking to a woman from the Sámi community about their ethnicity being acknowledged in the 1970s and the difference it made for them. It did not make a difference overnight; it took 25 years of programmes, state intervention and rolling back on laws that prohibited the Sámi people from living as an ethnic minority group within Sweden and other Nordic countries. Some of the by-laws that inhibited their traditional way of life were rowed back on. One such by-law which is very relevant to the Traveller situation prohibited reindeer herders from travelling at particular times of the year or on particular paths that were traditional to the Sámi people, all of whom were reindeer herders. Some of those laws were rowed back, which opened up those traditional ways for the Sámi people to retain and develop their reindeer herding culture. It is a bit premature to ask what difference the 2017 announcement made. In 25 years' time, after ten or 20 years of positive State intervention and undoing of the damage done to Travellers by the State, we might be able to see-----

**Mr. Patrick Nevin:** Reparations.

**Ms Catherine Joyce:** -----the positive impact of that statement in a real way. To assess it now is premature.

The biggest obstacle to third level education for many Traveller children and many people



with whom we deal who are no longer children and have come through the programmes we develop is their opinion of it. Their opinion is that it is not for them, will not lead to a job in which they will not be discriminated against and is not something they can bring back and use in their community. Unfortunately, that is the situation. Many members of the Traveller community who go to third level - only 1% of Travellers do so - end up getting jobs in mainstream employment where they do not identify as Travellers. There are Travellers who are gardaí, nurses, teachers or working in mainstream employment and may even encounter Travellers in their everyday life but they do not identify as Travellers in their employment situation out of fear of what that would mean in terms of discrimination and racism in that employment. Third level education is not in the psyche of many young Travellers.

On the possibility of attending third level, if one is discriminated against, marginalised and receives reduced hours in school, the possibility of progression through the second level education system and into third level is nil because one does not have the same academic achievement as one's settled peers. Academic achievement is measured by points and marks and so on. It will not happen for many Travellers.

Access programmes are brilliant when they work well for people, but there is a financial burden involved in going back to education at 24 years of age. A 24 year old member of the Travelling community is probably married with children and may have additional issues such as homelessness or a lack of access to accommodation, services or goods. All of those factors prevent a person from taking on third level education because, as a parent, they become more important than personal achievement. I can categorically make that statement as a person who left school at 12 years of age. Through the years, I had opportunities to go back to education but family life took over. That is the situation for many people.

The reality is that adult Travellers miss out on such opportunities because our culture is different from that of settled people. Settled people can go back to education at 20 years of age or 40 years of age. Many go back to education as grandparents. The role of Travellers has changed within Irish society. I work with Traveller children who were in the foster care system. One of the biggest challenges with those children is to try to promote their dual identity. Many of them are placed in care with settled people; very few are placed in their own community. I try to educate the foster carers to look after the dual identity of Traveller children. Many of those families are really good, but many others are settled people with their own prejudices, experiences, and racist attitudes towards Travellers. It is important to think of third level education as a practical thing which Travellers have a real possibility of accessing, progressing in and getting some kind of employment from. We have to think of the lived experience of Travellers when discussing such matters. It is okay to talk about hypothetical things and what positive impacts they could have, but we have to look at and acknowledge the lived experiences of Travellers when it comes to the developments or changes that need to happen in programmes and policies.

Finally, if a new educational strategy is to be developed, it must have measured and targeted goals as well as financial resources. This Minister and the next one must address the cuts made to the Traveller education budget, which are having a detrimental effect on our community and our young people. Their possibilities are being limited by the State.

**Vice Chairman:** I thank Ms Joyce. I call Mr. Nevin and I will then call Senator Warfield. Any other points that arise from this question can be brought back in at that point.

**Mr. Patrick Nevin:** I will be brief because almost everything has been said already. Little more than 50 or 60 years ago, we were a self-sustaining, self-sufficient people who had a pur-

pose and co-existed. Within the space of 50 years, we have become, and are commonly accused of being, a parasitic people on the settled, sedentary system. Some 50 or 60 years ago we were a sustainable, self-sufficient people with our own language, culture and history. That has all changed in a short period, due to the monocultural mindset that came from the formation of this State in 1922. It is a monoculture which was based on extreme nationalistic ideology. I emphasise that because it is important. We cannot underestimate the acceptable and open racism and discrimination that has been propagated against Travellers from the top down. An episode occurred just yesterday which I will not go into, but it is there. It comes from extremely educated people within official Ireland. It is the feeding ground for the right-wing racism that we are now seeing with new communities. The Irish State and those in positions of power within it must accept that they created that culture and othered Travellers. They set about it. All the research showing that is there, from both Traveller organisations and other institutions. The only way forward is for the State to take ownership of that, acknowledge it, and make reparations. “Reparation” comes from the word “repair”, meaning “to mend what was broken”, which is what they have done.

**Senator Fintan Warfield:** I thank all the witnesses for their contributions. They have been very informative. If I take one thing away from our parliamentary work, it will be that we must hold the State to account for the implementation of its various ongoing strategies. It can often be difficult to get a sense of how a strategy, such as the inclusion strategy for 2017-2021, is going midway through it. We might get a sense from witnesses at committees or whoever the strategy concerns, but it can often be difficult to get a sense based on updates from the Department. We must hold the State and the Department to account for the implementation of such strategies.

I acknowledge what the witnesses have said about Senator Kelleher’s Bill and the Civic Engagement Group of which Senator Ruane is a member. I and others on this committee will do everything we can to get that Bill over the line before an election is called.

I was not great at school, but I always said it was not a gay place to be. I primarily learned about history and politics through Irish music and songs, many of which were saved, collected, preserved and passed on by the Traveller community, as Ms Catherine Joyce mentioned. I have previously mentioned John Reilly from Boyle in County Roscommon, who preserved many of the songs I know and sing. I did not learn about him through leaving certificate music. We should be looking at specific classes and a specific learning session should be embedded. I should have learned about John Reilly in leaving certificate music.

I do not have much more to add. I am interested in what Mr. Nevin said about reparations. He mentioned open honest discourse. I am sure his community does not have much trust in the media, which often informs these discussions, to have an open and honest discourse. They might not have much trust in this place either, though I sometimes feel we do a better job than the media. The dinner table is a great place for discussions, but I wonder in what kind of forums those appropriate, open honest discourses should be held. I would welcome any comments on that. How can we undo decades of assimilation? I again thank everyone for their contributions.

**Vice Chairman:** I will call on Mr. Nevin first as the Senator addressed a question to him directly.

**Mr. Patrick Nevin:** We do not have to go very far up the road to look at the discussions which led to the Good Friday Agreement. Parity of esteem, recognition of cultural difference, recognition of dual identity, and recognition of place in society are all set out in that document.

That has never happened for Travellers.

Ms Catherine Joyce made a point about the Sámi people. Legislation specifically targeting Travellers was introduced within a seven-year period, namely, the Control of Horses Act 1996, the Casual Trading Act 1995, and the trespass legislation in 2002. That legislation was specifically targeted at Travellers. No other state in western Europe has introduced such a number of targeted Acts since Nazi Germany in the 1930s. People will say I am being melodramatic, but those three Acts culturally and economically target a people.

Ms Maria Joyce noted that we went from a nomadic people to a homeless people in a short period of time. We were once self-sustainable and self-sufficient. When I say we need an open and honest discourse, I mean that it has to come from the State and the powers that be. They are the dominant norm and the single story or narrative. The State needs to initiate that discourse and we need to look at what happened with other communities and how they changed the conversations. We do not have to go very far to see an example. The difference is that there are more of the guys up North than there are Travellers on the island of Ireland, and so they had much more power to play with. That is the reason they have parity of esteem. That is what I am talking about.

**Senator Fintan Warfield:** It has to come from the State but people have to move with it as well. Nelson Mandela was great on gay rights, but I have a friend from South Africa who has been granted asylum here.

**Mr. Patrick Nevin:** Sorry?

**Senator Fintan Warfield:** My point is that Mandela could say great things about gay rights but South Africa is still not a safe place to be gay. That happened over many years. We need to be serious about bringing people with us as well.

**Mr. Patrick Nevin:** That is what I mean. The legislation that has impacted detrimentally on Travellers needs to be reversed. Those three pieces of legislation must be looked at seriously if the State is to take the impacts on Travellers seriously. The State needs to look at those, and at the trespass legislation in particular. We used to be a nomadic people, but it is now essentially illegal to be nomadic in this country. That is the truth of it. There needs to be real investment. We need to get away from platitudes and small amounts of funding. We need together to look at what has happened, and this process must include Travellers and Traveller representatives on an equal footing.

The root of the word “ethnicity” is the Greek word *ethnos*, meaning people or nation. I would argue, as would many Travellers like me, that we are a nation in a nation and have been since the foundation of this State, but we have never been given the resources or the investment required to enable us to play an equal part in society. There are quite a few Travellers who would agree with me on that. We need and deserve our place and our recognition. I studied Irish history in college. Unless we take this seriously and acknowledge the wrongs that have been done to Travellers, we will perpetrate the same wrongs on the new communities. We are witnessing some of that now, which is what makes this so serious. We need to acknowledge what has taken place in recent weeks and the potential for it to get to another level.

**Vice Chairman:** We will quickly go to Maria and then to Eileen, after which we must wrap up.

**Ms Maria Joyce:** On the last point, political leadership is key within that. We need political

will and leadership if we are to see the necessary shift or change. While there have been some positive policy developments since the task force was set up in 1995, the delivery of services to Travellers still takes place within a very negative policy context. We have had an assimilation approach, but through segregation, which did not benefit Travellers. Where there is positive policy development, we need to see implementation. In the context of what Patrick was talking about, three specific pieces of legislation were introduced which had an adverse effect on Travellers. The trespass legislation that was introduced, for example, has never been used against anybody but Travellers.

Reference was made to the need to hold others to account for their failure to implement policies. Accountability in the context of Travellers and the implementation of positive policy developments has been in very short supply. We need to see accountability. Where Departments or State agencies have failed to deliver on key policies in areas like the environment or roads, responsibility has been taken from them. Local authorities have been stripped of their responsibilities in a number of areas because they were not delivering, but that has not happened in the context of Traveller accommodation. Not only have they failed to deliver, they have made the situation far worse in some areas.

Earlier we discussed third level education and the fact that adult Travellers cannot see themselves in third level education, but there is an onus on the State to address that. There are examples of third level institutions that have put measures in place to improve access for Travellers and to increase their participation. Some of these measures enable Travellers to enter third level as mature students, particularly Traveller women. While participation levels are nowhere near where they need to be, those third level institutions that have introduced specific Traveller related measures have had more success than others. Such measures need to be mirrored and captured. I would argue that it is the responsibility of third level institutions to play their part. The Higher Education Authority, for example, has an equality section and a gender section but the last two or three key strategic reports published by the authority did not mention Traveller women. In that context, what is needed is both institutional and systemic change.

**Ms Eileen Flynn:** We are not looking for special treatment. We are simply looking for equal access to opportunity. Our community has craved equality for many years and we deserve it. Young Travellers who use social media see racist comments being made about them by those who are better off. That has a negative effect on them. It makes them feel inferior and lowers their self esteem. The Traveller community is not looking for special treatment. Travellers have always valued education. I want this committee to understand that it is not the case that Travellers do not value education. What we want is to be able to get through the education system and feel that we belong.

**Ms Catherine Joyce:** This committee is our voice. We do not have the political voice that is needed to represent the issues affecting our community. The committee members here and those members of other committees that examine Traveller issues are our voice. We are relying on them to project the needs of our community in a positive way and to show the consequences of policy decisions in terms of how they affect our community. When I think of policies, I think of the amount of work that Traveller organisations put into working with the State but we are unequal partners in that relationship. At the local Traveller accommodation consultative committees and other national fora, we are giving information and providing whatever expertise we have but we are not equal partners at the table. It is important that the members of this committee understand that. Unfortunately, any individual in the settled community who has championed our cause at a political level has not been re-elected. In that context, we are not

asking individual committee members to stick their heads above the parapet but, as a collective, they have great strength. The committee is able to look at these issues and at the State's responsibility to the Traveller community. Members must take this on from the point of view of the parents and children who suffer at the hands of educators in this country. I always look at my own children now when considering these situations. I never used to do that because I was never one for telling personal stories. However, since becoming a grandmother, I have realised that this is where it is at - the nuts and bolts of it. When one looks at the treatment of one's children and grandchildren, one sees how much wrong is being done to them as individuals. They are members of this society but they do not get treated as such. Traveller children like my children and grandchildren have become the educators of the teachers in schools and of their peers. They have become the educators by default because the State has not done its duty. My children are answering questions that no child should ever have to answer. They are taking on their shoulders the responsibility for and the weight of the entire Traveller community and the wrongs within it. There are some wrongs in our community that we need to tackle internally. We have to challenge some of the stuff that goes on in terms of racism, sexism and the racist views of some Travellers towards other communities. At the end of the day, however, victims are not to blame for State persecution. Unfortunately, in the areas of education and homelessness, it is the policies of the State that have negatively affected us and it is that negative impact that we are trying to undo.

**Vice Chairman:** I thank Eileen, Maria, Patrick and Catherine for their contributions. I have had many conversations with Patrick in particular but have learned a huge amount from every person in the Traveller community who has been a part of my life since I was a child. When I listen to the speakers here today, I realise that the onus should never have been on the Traveller community to be a part of my learning or understanding. That is a huge amount of responsibility for anyone to have to carry. No child should sit in a classroom and be made to feel that he or she has to find ways to justify his or her identity, community, heritage, family or peers.

We cannot finish this session without acknowledging the discourse that happened on Twitter over the last few days and that happens more generally and constantly on social media. It is hard to have to be an observer and watch those conversations go back and forth between people who think or assume they know and start to speak for the Travelling community or think they are advocating for it when sometimes the advocates are in there taking up the space. We can say or I can say that I care about Travellers' progress in education but sometimes the advocates need to move over too. It is really only representative if people represent themselves here or in the educational system. Our job is only done when we are not needed any more. I hope that we and this committee can continue to get to a point where we facilitate not just consultation but equal partnership.

Mr. Nevin and Ms Joyce have raised questions about laws that exist that need to be amended or rolled back that have been part of that assimilation and the culture around horses etc. My passion for horses as a child came from the Travelling community. We would not have had so much access to animals in Tallaght if it was not for our Traveller friends teaching us how to ride horses up and down the Kiltipper Hill. That was an important part of my childhood. We have stood in the way of some of those natural cultural practices in the Travelling community and as a committee we need to seek a review of all that legislation. That is very important.

I thank all the witnesses for everything that they have brought to this discussion.

The joint committee adjourned at 12.56 p.m. until 11 a.m. on Tuesday, 19 November 2019.