

DÁIL ÉIREANN

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

JOINT COMMITTEE ON KEY ISSUES AFFECTING THE TRAVELLER COMMUNITY

Dé Máirt, 10 Nollaig 2019

Tuesday, 10 December 2019

The Joint Committee met at 11 a.m.

Comhaltaí a bhí i láthair / Members present:

Joan Collins,	Lynn Ruane.
Marcella Corcoran Kennedy,	
Fiona O'Loughlin,	
Éamon Ó Cuív.	

Seanadóir / Senator Colette Kelleher sa Chathaoir / in the Chair.

Traveller Employment: Discussion

Chairman: I welcome members and viewers who may be watching our proceedings on Oireachtas TV to this meeting of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Key Issues affecting the Traveller Community. The purpose of today's meetings is to start our deliberations on the topic of employment. This is our first hearing of four examining the disproportionate levels of unemployment among Travellers. By listening to presenters from the Traveller community and others, we hope to get a sense of the scale of the problems facing Travellers in accessing jobs and how to remove those barriers to employment. Since we started our public work in September, this joint committee has become aware of the key issues affecting and bearing down on Travellers. These issues do not stand alone; they are very much connected. Members of the committee will know that Travellers are seven times more likely to take their own lives. According to the Irish Traveller Movement, an estimated 30 people, including children, died by suicide up to the end of August this year. A trend in that regard is also emerging among young mothers. The Minister of State with responsibility for mental health admitted that there is a crisis in mental healthcare among Travellers. Members of this committee will also know that there are gross disparities in the general health of Travellers and that of the general population. The mortality rate of babies born to Traveller families is almost four times that of the general population. A Traveller baby is therefore four times more likely to die than a non-Traveller baby in the cot next to him or her in the hospital. Travellers die young. Some 70% of Travellers fail to reach their 60th birthday. The committee is aware that Travellers are 50 times more likely to leave school without a leaving certificate. Travellers are disproportionately affected by the practice of reduced hours timetables in a curriculum where their culture and history are neither taught, understood, nor respected and where children and young people not so much, acknowledged the issues and indicated they are willing to consider the committee's recommendations.

Poor educational attainment among Travellers has knock-on effects for employment, which is our topic for examination today. The statistics in this regard are stark. On foot of the census carried out by the CSO in 2016, we are aware that 80% of Travellers within the potential workforce are unemployed in comparison with 13% of the general population. Some 1.1% of Travellers are self-employed, compared with 16.6% of the wider community. Self-employment was such a big source of employment for Travellers in the past. According to the ESRI's A Social Portrait of Travellers in Ireland, the employment rate of non-Travellers is six times higher than that of Travellers. Whatever way we slice and dice the statistics, the disparities are vast. Comparatively speaking, the Traveller employment rate national is just 9% among those with a primary level education, 15% among those with lower second level education, which is the junior certificate, 27% among those with a leaving certificate and 57% among the very small number of people with a further or higher education. This compares with a figure of 85% among members of the wider community. In the national Traveller survey, of the 60% of Travellers who participated in a trainee scheme, only three in ten went on to get jobs. A total of 43% of Travellers have stated that they experience discrimination in accessing employment and only one in ten of non-Traveller employers said they would employ a Traveller. This is prejudice and discrimination on a pretty grand scale. The topic is very important, and there are huge tracks back to education, health and mental health. The off-the-scale rate of unemployment is a waste of people's potential and it affects people's mental health and life chances. Such disparities at a time of full employment and skills shortages merit a major investigation. We hope to make that start today.

I welcome Mr. Patrick Reilly from Pavee Point. He is back before the committee to tell

his story and he is very welcome. We hope the story will lead to action. I am conscious of the effort and energy put in by so many people like Mr. Reilly. Ms Kathleen Sherlock and Mr. T.J. Hogan from the Minceirs Whiden Society are regularly come before the committee to discuss the key issues affecting Travellers. I welcome Dr. Mary Murphy, Ms Sinéad Burke and Ms Orla O'Neill from the St. Stephen's Green Trust. I also welcome Mr. James O'Leary, director, Involve, Mr. Michael Power, editor of *Travellers' Voice* magazine, and Dr. Sheila Cannon, director of Shuttle Knit. We have a lot of people to hear from.

I draw our guests 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 and 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 they should not comment on, criticise or make charges against a person outside the House or an official either by name or in such a way as to make him or her identifiable. I ask witnesses, members and visitors in the Gallery to turn off their mobile phones or place them in flight mode. I advise witnesses that any submissions or opening statements they make to this committee will be published on the committee website after this meeting. After the opening presentation, members will ask questions. I invite Mr. Reilly to make his opening statement.

Mr. Patrick Reilly: I thank the Chairman and the committee for giving us this opportunity to address it on the issues relating to unemployment. The committee members have received a copy of our detailed submission. I do not intend to cover the full submission in my opening statement. I will instead give a brief overview.

In November, the committee heard testimony from Traveller and Roma representatives about the experience of our communities in accessing, participating in and delivering good outcomes from education. Today's discussion is focused on employment, but educational disadvantage and poor levels of educational attainment are key factors in the significant employment gap between Travellers and Roma and the majority population. Therefore, dealing with unemployment in our communities must occur in parallel with targeted and mainstream measures to address educational inequalities.

Data from the 2016 census show an unemployment rate among Travellers of 80% compared with 13% among the majority. Data from the national Roma needs assessment indicated that approximately 17% of Roma respondents were in employment. Traveller and Roma participation in employment is hampered by a range of barriers. The key barriers are: low levels of educational attainment at all levels compared with the majority population; high levels of reported discrimination in accessing education, employment and key supports and services; failure by statutory stakeholders to accommodate cultural differences; and high levels of social exclusion and socioeconomic disadvantage, which hinder access to education, training and employment networks and opportunities. There are additional barriers for the Roma community: lack of access to State supports and benefits, where Roma find it difficult to meet the habitual residence condition or where they cannot provide proof of residence; and low levels of proficiency in the English language and, for some, low levels of literacy and numeracy in their language of origin.

The barriers facing Travellers and Roma in accessing and participating in employment suggest the need for sustained and targeted measures involving action from a number of stakeholders across the statutory, NGO and private sectors. The stakeholders involved in the national

Traveller and Roma inclusion strategy have a key role to play in supporting any such initiative.

We would like to bring the committee's attention to a number of areas and forthcoming opportunities that hold the potential to improve Traveller and Roma participation in employment and further education and training. However, this will require commitment on the part of the State to increase its ambition to secure good outcomes for our communities in the area of employment.

The forthcoming Pathways to Work - the new job strategy - is being prepared by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection. Since there is almost full employment in the State, there is an opportunity to focus the new jobs strategy towards a stated principle of active inclusion. Pavée Point has made a number of recommendations to the Department in respect of the strategy. These are set out in our submission and include the following: the strategy should set out a number of targeted actions and mainstream approaches aimed at increasing the quality of Traveller and Roma engagement with and outcomes from the public employment service delivered through Intreo centres; targeted initiatives could be developed to support Traveller and Roma enterprise in conjunction with local enterprise offices, LEOs; an increase in Traveller and Roma participation in apprenticeships in conjunction with employers, SOLAS and education and training boards, ETBs; and the development of targeted training and employment pathways through the social inclusion and community activation programme, local employment services and mainstream employment services.

SOLAS is preparing a new national further education and training strategy. SOLAS funds the 16 ETBs around the country. These are key providers of training and further education to early school leavers and marginalised communities, including members of the Traveller community. Pavée Point has made a number of recommendations to SOLAS regarding this strategy. Specific targeted measures by providers are required to address the diversity of needs within the Traveller and Roma community. For example, apprenticeships and training should be tailored to respond to and take advantage of the potential in the cultural practices and economic nature evident in the Traveller community, such as apprenticeships and training in the equine industry, tinsmithing and recycling. Career guidance models that are culturally sensitive, with access to specific learning pathways that include positive action measures to address the needs of Travellers and achieve an acceleration of their learning pathways, should be developed. SOLAS could usefully develop and pilot a pair model of further education training and support based on the successful Traveller primary healthcare project developed by Pavée Point.

The public sector equality and human rights duty is an important part of equality and human rights legislation. The duty requires public bodies, including Departments, to take proactive steps to promote equality and human rights and prevent discrimination. This duty could be an important means of driving greater equality in how our public services are designed and delivered. Key public services providers in the areas of employment, education and training, accommodation and health have enormous potential to reduce inequalities in society. There is an onus on such public sector bodies to therefore discharge on their obligations under their public sector duty.

There are three areas where positive outcomes for Travellers and Roma could be driven. Our submission contains more detail than I can cover in my opening statement. I thank the committee for its attention and I am happy to answer any questions that I can.

Chairman: Mr. Reilly will be pleased to know that we have invited the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection, Deputy Regina Doherty, before the committee and she

may be able to give an update on Pathways to Work when she appears before us. We have also invited Mr. Andrew Brownlee, the chief executive of SOLAS, to appear. Those are very important questions we will be able to put to him.

Mr. Patrick Reilly: Thank you.

Ms Kathleen Sherlock: On behalf of Mincéirs Whiden, cant for “Traveller talking” and Ireland’s only all-Traveller forum, I thank the committee for the opportunity to come here and speak today and for its ongoing commitment on the hearing of key issues relating to Travellers.

We know from the census that Traveller unemployment is over 80%, which is unemployment on a mass scale. It can create no other outcomes for the community involved aside from poverty and deprivation for those who must deal with it. To understand how this is possible and how any community could be left in this position, particularly in a prosperous country like Ireland, we must look at the underlying causes, including anti-Traveller bias and racism that has been allowed to go unchecked in this country for generations. The country has been discriminating, isolating and excluding the only indigenous ethnic minority community.

The negative impact of the mistreatment of Traveller communities is all too evident. As a community, we are dealing with multiple crises. For example, there is short life expectancy, much of which is due to poverty-related illnesses, and chronic ill-health is due to having to live in substandard and hazardous conditions. A decades-old crisis in Traveller accommodation has led to escalating levels of homelessness in our community and more recently we have seen a frightening rise in the numbers of Travellers with depression and addiction and who commit suicide. Each death leaves a painful legacy of suffering, altering forever the lives of the families left behind, including bereaved spouses and, very often, young and orphaned children.

The Irish Traveller population currently comprises fewer than 40,000 people. Bright and talented Traveller children leave school with little or no education, some barely literate, and this limits their ability to access employment. Even the few who are able to navigate the educational system and achieve educational qualifications struggle to find employment. All over the world, people see employment and education leading to better employment as routes to break free from poverty in an honest and dignified way but for the majority of the Traveller community, this opportunity does not exist. Doors to employment are closed to them because of their Traveller identity and many members of the community feel they have no other choice but to hide their identity in order to get a job or out of fear of losing a job or being subject to anti-Traveller racism in the workplace.

Anti-Traveller racism continues unchecked in workplaces. It also continues to go unchecked in the education system and in society as a whole. The result is a community in crisis due to poverty and want. A proud and once self-sufficient people are now overly dependent on the State while their skills and talents go unused and wasted. Our community is corralled in dead ends because of discrimination, low educational attainment and a lack of work opportunities. We are stuck in poverty and this leads to depression and addiction.

In some cases, people demonstrate antisocial behaviour and criminality because they see no other way out. The negative impact of this is not just on the Traveller community but on society as a whole. For decades, the elders in our community have highlighted the need for work and jobs for Travellers because they could see far off the negative impacts of not having anything to do was having, and would have, on our people with no opportunity for work or jobs. To highlight this, I will read some lyrics from a song called “Campfire in the Dark”, which was written

in the 1980s by Paddy Houlihan during his time in Ennis:

My father rises early and he makes a sup of tea
He lights the kitchen fire and then he calls me
His days are often empty, he's nothing much to do
So he sits and tells me of the travelling life he knew.

The song was made famous by the Fureys. The situation is far worse now for Travellers than it was at that time. Back then, Traveller men could still gather scrap and get some casual work.

Mr. T.J. Hogan: Mincéirs Whiden believes that Traveller employment should be addressed in a meaningful way. In order to turn matters around, the Government must acknowledge and address the anti-Traveller voices and racism that are causing deprivation among the Traveller community in terms of accessing meaningful employment. It can do so by means of education, training and legislation. The Government must also work with employers in the public and private sectors to open doors for real employment opportunities for the Traveller community that will lead to better outcomes.

The Traveller community is diverse and is filled with talents and capabilities. Our people just need an opportunity. Many of our people have tried very hard to access employment but have had no success. That is not because of a lack of willingness or ability but because of anti-Traveller bias.

We must take on board the view of both the skills and abilities that exist within the Traveller community. One fit does not suit all. There are many of us who are ready and willing to take up suitable employment immediately but others need supports in order to bridge the gap and obtain recognised qualifications relating to their natural talents. Among the members of the Traveller community, there are many talents. Our community of Traveller men and women are gifted with their hands. As a result, they are natural craftspeople. Many of them are artists, seamstresses, beauticians, hairdressers, carpenters, builders and mechanics, even though they have no formal qualifications. There are Traveller men who know everything about horses. A growing number of academics have come through the third level schools and institutes but they cannot access meaningful employment.

Our people are natural leaders, learners and teachers. To date, the educational result of our community does not reflect this. The Traveller community just wants what everyone else wants. We want a fair, equal and just society, and an ability to contribute, live with dignity and provide for ourselves and our families. If the members have any questions, we will be glad to answer them.

Chairman: I thank Ms Sherlock and Mr. Hogan. There is always a particular welcome extended to people who have travelled from Cork. This is the first time that Mr. Hogan has presented and I say well done to him. Another star is born in terms of presenting a really strong case on the lived experience and I thank our guests for their recommendations.

I welcome Dr. Mary Murphy, Ms Sinéad Burke and Ms Orla O'Neill from the St. Stephen's Green Trust. I call on one of them to make the opening statement on behalf of the trust.

Ms Sinéad Burke: I thank the Deputies, Senators and the Oireachtas staff for inviting us here this morning.

St. Stephen's Green Trust is a small grant-making foundation. I have been employed as the Traveller enterprise and employment policy officer. To enhance the work that I do, my position

is seconded to the Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed. I am joined this morning by a trustee of the board, Dr. Mary Murphy, who is a senior lecturer in the Department of Sociology of Maynooth University.

St. Stephen's Green Trust is not a Traveller organisation but it works in solidarity to contribute to improving the situation for Travellers. My role is around contributing to the increased participation of Travellers in employment and enterprise. Another programme of St. Stephen's Green Trust, the Travellers in prison initiative, has previously made a submission to this committee as part of the mental health module. Information on the other work of the trust and the source of its funds is available in our annual report. In May 2019, St. Stephen's Green Trust published a short report entitled, *Mincéir Gruber Malaid Streed: What Next for Traveller Employment?* This report has been included as part of our submission. Its objective was to contribute to knowledge on how and why high numbers of Travellers are unemployed, to reflect the policy context and to make some recommendations. As members will no doubt be aware, more than 80% of Travellers are unemployed. In the 2016 census, this equated to 8,541 individuals although many more will be affected. The 2016 census also found that one in eight Travellers was unable to work due to a disability. That is almost three times the rate among the general population.

A major issue with finding solutions to the low level of Traveller participation in the labour market is the invisibility of Travellers in policy and practice. There are no targets for Travellers in the public employment services. None of the agents of the State counts whether it engages Travellers or whether it is successful in moving Travellers into employment. Our report cites examples of Travellers having to hide their identities in employment to avoid racism and discrimination. A 2017 Behaviour and Attitudes survey found that only 17% of the general public said they would employ a Traveller. This can be contrasted with a 2019 SOLAS survey in which more than 60% of employers said that they would employ an ex-prisoner. A 2017 Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission report on workplace discrimination found that the number of Travellers among survey respondents was too low to examine workplace discrimination. The 2018 SOLAS review of pathways to apprenticeships acknowledges the proven links between ethnic and socioeconomic status and access to, and progression in, education. It references Travellers and commits to taking additional practical steps to improve Traveller participation but it does not specify what these steps should be. We are not aware of any progress in this regard.

Other reports reviewed in our research do not mention Travellers or specify targets for service providers. The main Government strategy encouraging access to employment, Pathways to Work 2016-2020, does not mention Travellers, nor does the 2017 action plan for jobless households, the 2018 Action Plan for Jobs, or the 2019 Future Jobs Ireland report. The social inclusion and community activation programme, SICAP, names Travellers as a target group but does not include targets. Travellers' access to, retention in and progression through SICAP is very low, accounting for just 2% of the total programme caseload for the period from 2015 to 2017.

Barriers to Travellers' access and progress include inadequate public services and discrimination. In some cases, Travellers do not view education as the best route to income generation. Programmes are not designed to take Traveller-specific culture into account. Enablers of the successful design and delivery of programmes for Travellers include leadership and accountability, effective administrative structures, a person-centred approach, and creative and flexible progression measures. Our recommendations with regard to participation include more inten-

tional action by the public employment services and the inclusion of Travellers in the design of solutions. The local employment service, LES, guidance and counselling model, which is grounded in a person-centred approach, is considered to be more appropriate than the current transactional approach in the public employment services, which emphasises deficits in education and skills. A national action plan to mainstream Traveller employment across all facets of the public service should be established with targets set for all relevant agencies. There should be more ambitious targets for Traveller participation and outcomes from supports under SICAP. Cognisance of the particular needs of Travellers should be included in all employment policy, including Future Jobs Ireland, Pathways to Work and implementation of the public sector duty. There is also a need to gender-proof policy in respect of Traveller women. More detail on the rationale for these recommendations is included in our research report. I thank the committee for its time and interest.

Chairman: I thank Ms Burke. It is her first time before this committee. Has she presented to other committees before? Two points made in her presentation stood out. I was interested to hear that too few Travellers were identified by the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission to enable it to examine discrimination. It tells its own story. Ms Burke also mentioned that there are no targets for Travellers in Pathways to Work, which does even not mention Travellers. I thank her for raising these significant points with us. I invite Mr. James O’Leary, who is the director of Involve, to address the joint committee.

Mr. James O’Leary: I thank the committee for having us here. Involve provides youth work services to young Travellers and publishes the *Travellers’ Voice* magazine under the management of Mr. Michael Power. We sit on the Traveller and Roma inclusion strategy group, which is known as NTRIS. I had the privilege of chairing the employment subgroup of NTRIS. I have spent my entire professional career working with the Traveller community. My background is in this line of work. As a professional, I suggest that the issue of Traveller unemployment can be addressed and resolved with the right strategic approach. My professional belief is that if we address the question of employment, other challenging issues, including education, accommodation, health and racism, will resolve themselves more easily. We need to be under no illusion that in addressing the issue of Traveller unemployment, there needs to be targeted State investment in strategic programmes and projects. These programmes and projects need to go the extra mile to achieve the desired outcomes. They need to be led by a Traveller organisation. Having said that, the investment will be cost neutral. As progress is made in reducing the 80% unemployment figure, there will be payback for the State.

I suggest that we take serious note of the fact that 20% of Travellers who are eligible for the labour market are employed against all odds. This dispels the nonsensical myth that Travellers want to be on social welfare. Travellers are employed in roles such as landscape gardeners, labourers, security personnel, general practitioners and barristers. I will not go through every line of my prepared statement because I would be covering some of the stuff that has already been mentioned by other speakers.

I would like to mention a case study. Two Traveller men in their mid-20s applied to a local pharmaceutical company for employment. They both had qualifications from a third level institution to help them to get an interview. They submitted their CVs and letters of application with support from their third level tutor, but they received no further communication from the company. Their tutor advised them to reapply using their Irish language names and the home addresses of the tutor and a colleague. Both of them were interviewed and subsequently employed. When their probationary period was completed after six months, the tutor made contact

with the head of recruitment in the company to discuss what had happened. The head of human resources acknowledged that when the CVs were originally submitted, he did not review them after he saw their names and address. He acknowledged that both men, who are still employed by the company today, are excellent employees. This is an example of the practical experiences of Travellers.

I would like to speak about access to employment services and the adequacy of funding for these services. In recent years, there have been well-funded initiatives to help unemployed people to return to work, primarily via Seetec, Turas Nua, the social inclusion and community activation programme, and previously the local employment services. In general, these initiatives have had very limited success with the Traveller community. Anecdotally, our information suggests that most employment liaison people do not believe that Travellers will be employed. They are beaten from the gate. It should be taken into account that mainstream services have failed the Traveller community. As a community, Travellers do not have great faith in such services and their engagement can be sporadic. As employment services are generally centre-based, they do not engage in outreach work with communities. The initial approach of any employment and enterprise agency with the Traveller community needs to begin with where Travellers can be found in their communities and must involve collaboration with local Traveller community development groups. That is the starting point. Involve is currently engaged in a number of pilot employment projects in Ballina, Longford and Tullamore. We are also researching different working approaches over the last 20 years to address long-term unemployment. We have been to the UK and looked at initiatives in London and Manchester. We will compile a report with more detailed recommendations on our findings from this work in early 2020.

Among the barriers and challenges to gaining employment identified by young Traveller and Roma people were that they had little or no experience of working and the employers were looking for experienced workers. They also referred to low levels of education and skills; employers who would not give them a chance; low pay for young people; not knowing what work they wanted to do; not liking having a boss; and wanting work to be practical and not to involve much paperwork. That was the young people's feedback around employment. The barriers identified in the recent report, *What Next for Traveller Employment?*, referred to inadequate public services, discrimination, education not being viewed as the best route to income generation, and the pragmatic issue that Traveller culture is not taken into account.

On the recommendations, as the chairman of the national Traveller and Roma inclusion strategy employment subgroup, I believe the strategy needs to be supported by a small fund to help deliver on its work, and representation from trade unions and employers also needs to be achieved. All Government Departments and public bodies identified in the national Traveller and Roma inclusion strategy's employment actions must actively engage and deliver on their remit. The actions are listed out and it is the responsibility of Departments to step up to the mark on them. We also need champions in the public service and Civil Service and positive affirmative actions similar to the disabilities champion in the Public Appointments Service.

There is a requirement for an internship traineeship apprenticeship model of recruitment via the Public Appointments Service for all Departments, with set targets for Traveller recruitment and support in the early stages of employment. There are many individual examples of positive affirmation actions that should be replicated. There were champions at senior level in all cases. One such case that is always cited is that of the late Joe Horan and the changes he made on South Dublin County Council. Interestingly, Tusla has realised that it needs to have Travellers

trained as social workers in order to provide foster care supports. Tusla now has an initiative in place to support young Travellers going through third level education in that regard. It is very practical and makes sense. Again, it is an example of somebody taking action.

There is also a requirement for a targeted fund to be established and tendered for, with a clear outcome of reducing Traveller unemployment, initially by 50% over the next six years. This would be an increase from 2,112 employed to 5,326 employed. Pilot programmes could initially be established, as outlined in a proposal submitted under the Dormant Accounts Fund scheme and which is part of our larger submission to the committee.

Finally, we suggest that quotas be put in place for Traveller employment. Government Departments, public bodies, agencies and NGOs funded by the State should have quotas for employing Travellers.

Chairman: I thank Mr. Reilly for those very practical suggestions. Mr. Reilly referred to a report that will be published in early 2020. Will he let the committee have a copy when it is published and we could use it in our report? I invite Mr. Michael Power, editor of *Travellers' Voice* magazine, to make a statement.

Mr. Michael Power: I do not have a statement as such. I was involved in making a previous submission.

Chairman: That is fine. Perhaps Mr. Power will answer some questions later.

Mr. Michael Power: Yes.

Chairman: I invite Dr. Sheila Cannon, the director of Shuttle Knit.

Dr. Sheila Cannon: I thank the Chairman. It is a pleasure to be here. I am very impressed by the data presented by my colleagues and their expertise on barriers to employment faced by the Traveller community. I have the lucky job of having a positive story to tell, but it is a useful example of one of the ways we can address these massive challenges.

I am assistant professor of social entrepreneurship in the Trinity business school. Members are probably wondering what I am doing here. It is a completely different context. My area is social enterprise, which has been part of social policy in Europe since the early 1990s and has addressed issues of unemployment, in particular in areas where there are major barriers to employment such as multigenerational unemployment and marginalised groups that are discriminated against, including people who have been incarcerated or have experienced periods of homelessness. There are various situations in which people might find barriers to employment that are more systemic than individual.

This summer a new policy for social enterprise in Ireland was launched. We advised on how best to roll that out, under the Minister for Rural and Community Development, Deputy Michael Ring. A national conference on social enterprise in Ireland was held in November. While there is a rich and active social enterprise sector here, there is a lack of data and we do not quite know what the numbers are. Benefacts is a database of civil society organisations. A search for Traveller organisations on it shows there are just over 5,000, but they are not all social enterprises. They include various community groups and other groups of all kinds. The database includes small community type groups as well as larger NGOs.

Some mapping exercises have taken place to try to determine what kind of social enterprises

are in existence, but there is no overall picture. Beyond that, we are not sure of the impact of social enterprise on a macro level and how effective the policies are. We have data from other countries which show that social enterprise is an effective strategy for dealing with issues of unemployment as part of social policy. However, we do not yet have many data on that for Ireland. We hope to develop that.

I have been a board member of Shuttle Knit, a social enterprise that employs Traveller women in Wicklow town. It was founded in 2001 and I joined last month. I am fairly new to the area, although I have worked with other Traveller organisations over the years as I was involved in the non-profit sector for 12 years. I have since moved on to academia to study non-profit organisations.

The purpose of Shuttle Knit is to support Traveller women in Wicklow town through employment. It builds on their existing skills of knitting and embroidery. It employs 12 women, ten from the Travelling community and two from the settled community. It is a partnership. One of the benefits is that it was founded by the Wicklow Travellers Group, with an understanding of the barriers to employment. It is located in a community centre owned and run by the Wicklow Travellers Group. It is very much a safe space where people from the Traveller community can go knowing that they will not be discriminated against. As we heard in the other submissions today, discrimination is a major problem.

Through their experience at Shuttle Knit, the women take part in various training opportunities. They can take part in literacy training and training specific to the work they are doing, such as digitalised embroidery. All of the crests for schools and sports clubs in the area are now done by Shuttle Knit. The women work with shops on the high street to get orders for crests, which is a source of employment. The training on the digital part of the process is an added aspect, rather than just doing embroidery.

I will outline another specific example of one of the benefits of the project. The women in Shuttle Knit recently took part in an initiative which did not specifically come from the project, namely, an international excursion to Lourdes. It may sound unrelated to social enterprise or not important, but it was of significant benefit to the women, many of whom had never been on an aeroplane before. Many had never travelled outside the country and several got passports for the first time. It shows the empowering effect of being part of an organisation where women are employed and have skills.

There are different ways to classify social enterprise. One is the relationship between the mission and revenue generation. Shuttle Knit is mission-centred. That means that the means of generating revenue is the same as the mission, as opposed to a charity shop run by a cancer charity, which is not related to the mission but exists to raise funding. The advantage of having the mission as the means of generating revenue is that it is very empowering for the people involved. That might be a subtle distinction but it is quite a significant one when categorising social enterprises.

Regarding capacity building, we find a difference between generations. Some of the women who were first employed there are learning and advancing their skills in knitting. That is not necessarily training them for future employment. For them to have this experience is beneficial in itself. They are part of a community and they can take part in literacy training and other events. Moreover, their daughters see them employed. That has an intergenerational knock-on effect. We cannot judge the impact of social enterprise merely based on whether it trains people to enter the mainstream labour market. In some cases the answer is “No”, and that is fine. We

have to look at the longer-term impact. There is no massive hand-knitting industry in Ireland. We are not training people to work in knitting companies or to be their CEOs.

Chairman: Why not?

Dr. Sheila Cannon: Why not indeed? That brings me to a point about future opportunity. There is a growing interest in sustainable fashion and sustainable products. The rise of the plastics industry put many Travellers out of work. Nobody wants tin buckets when they have plastic buckets. The same applies to knitting. A consumer can buy a cheaper product made in Bangladesh under very dubious circumstances. However, we are becoming increasingly aware of the disadvantages of fast fashion and of plastic. That opens up opportunities for social enterprises that could build on Traveller traditions and heritage and offer chances of employment.

Chairman: I thank Dr. Cannon. I am conscious of the time.

Dr. Sheila Cannon: I did not get to the disadvantages, but maybe that is all right.

Chairman: I am sure the members will be able to ask some questions.

Senator Lynn Ruane: I have several questions. I hope I can remember them all. I will start with Dr. Cannon because she was the last speaker. I have a huge interest in the area of social enterprise. Ireland is very far behind other EU countries when it comes to the culture of social enterprise. I wonder if we are creating another system. I believe in social enterprise and I work in social enterprises, but I see the number of middle-class people who make applications to, say, the Department of Justice and Equality, which recently offered funding for social enterprises, or other such avenues. Income is created for the person who has the idea. Some of the funding streams allow a social entrepreneur to generate his or her own income while running a social enterprise like Shuttle Knit. I am just using Shuttle Knit as an example. Is enough being done to empower Travellers to build their own social enterprises so that they are the founders, they are the ones applying for funding, and they are the ones benefiting from the top level of income generated by them? I fear we are creating another system to benefit very middle-class people who are comfortable with applications and systems and who have connections in the Department of Justice and Equality.

We are not necessarily helping the most vulnerable groups to be the designers of their own social enterprises. I am thinking of the equestrian centre in Tallaght. I can look out at the Dublin Mountains right behind my house. Tallaght has a huge Traveller population and none of us is doing anything connected to horses or horse riding lessons at the foot of those hills. It really bothers me. Are we doing enough to ensure that social enterprises and social entrepreneurs within the Traveller community are developed and supported, rather than just providing them with another service?

That is a question on social enterprises. I believe in the concept of them and the circular economy. I would cite the example of women who gain income from knitting or sewing. While the intergenerational impact of such social enterprise is one of the important pieces of the puzzle, those who knit or sew are fearful of losing income benefit as they would not be gaining enough income to earn a living from knitting or sewing. Are we doing enough to ensure those women are no longer petrified of the State intervening and removing their social welfare benefits because the social enterprise in which they are engaged has brought them over the income limit allowed but the income they gain from it is not enough for them to sustain a living from it? The feel-good factor from engaging in social enterprise is always great but how do we measure

the impact of it on those engaged in it in terms of progression?

Perhaps Ms Sherlock, Mr. Reilly or Mr. Power might answer a question I have regarding employment. We know people have confidence, numeracy and literacy issues all due to having been failed to date by the education system. Regardless of those issues, do they think there is still a stigma attached when it comes to employment? Mr. O'Leary pointed to this when he referred to the employment application process for the pharmaceutical sector where, regardless of those applicants' numeracy and literacy skills, Travellers would not have been employed in that sector in any event. A person nearly has to create his or her own employment. What work is needed to address the stigma issue in society, including among employers, so that Travellers would be employed in the mainstream workforce, be it in the retail sector, the pharmaceutical sector or in the teaching profession?

In relating the following, I am in no way comparing the Travelling community to the people concerned in the other work in which I am engaged. I have been doing a large body of work on people with minor convictions in their backgrounds. We found the biggest challenge was to address this issue with employers. We have had events where only people with past convictions developed and worked the event but the employers who attended it did not know that. They were being served all night by people who had past convictions. They did not have a clue. We had to push past those employers' preconceptions and show them they were losing out on the great potential these people presented and whom they would dismiss simply because they had a conviction in their background. How can we begin to address that issue with employers?

I was petrified when I brought those employers into the room with those people in my community, whom I love and care about and who I had got to work the event. I was afraid of the conversations. I was petrified I was walking my friends and the people I care about into a situation where those employers would say they would not have those people work for them because they would only rob their shop because they had been locked up for thieving. I probably feel overly protective of them, but as the night wore on, that did not happen, my fears did not come to pass and those employers got to address their bias and preconceived ideas about people. How can we do more of that integration work with employers and have those conversations? Quotas are very important and I would love to know how others feel about quotas in respect of Traveller employment or in any sphere in terms of the Traveller community.

Chairman: The Senator asked questions on social enterprise and ensuring the people directly concerned gain from that rather such gain going sideways to the middle class or others. She asked questions about prejudice and preconceptions among employers and the best way to break them down and then a question on quotas. Does Mr. Reilly want to speak first?

Mr. Patrick Reilly: I will answer as best I can the second half of the Senator's questions on the integrated element with Travellers and employers. We have been calling for a long time for intercultural training for staff. Something we have been pushing for is the ethnic identifier, which came out of almost all the submissions to the Oireachtas.

Mr. O'Leary referred to examples. I know Travellers who are doing security work and they have told me that they have been trained how to watch out for Travellers and Roma. That is all part of the training. Travellers are in security jobs and are being trained to watch out for Travellers and Roma in particular. That is sad because these men want the work. They are not confident enough to say, "I'm a Traveller and what you're doing is wrong." They have to make ends meet. That is the harsh reality. They are hiding their identity.

On the integration strategy for Travellers and Roma, it has to be across the board. Children going to school are our future doctors and solicitors. We cannot talk about employment without education. The two are linked. We see that on the ground. One of the saddest things I heard as a Traveller was from my nephew, who got good results in the leaving certificate examinations. He said he cannot get any work and is struggling, even in respect of work experience. His younger siblings are hearing this and asking what the point is.

Therefore, mainstreaming and the ethnic identifier have to be considered, and the intercultural piece. We get asked questions all the time and are sick and tired of having to defend the negative, but we have a lot of positives. Mr. Hogan spoke about that. There are vibrant young Travellers who want to work and go into the mainstream. The Chairman asked why not. A whole-of-government approach is required from grassroots level to the top.

Ms Kathleen Sherlock: There has to be a national strategy. Travellers have been completely left out of the labour market. They have not been considered part of it forever. Travellers, by nature, work in social enterprise. They would have worked in a family unit, whether it was collecting scrap or, in our case, at the beach. We picked winkles and sold them. That was our business. It was a family business. From a young age, Travellers worked collectively for the good of the family. This has started to change, simply because there are no jobs. The types of social enterprise that existed in the past no longer exist.

I was very glad I was asked about accessing employment. I know Travellers whose parents have put in a great effort to ensure their children would go to school. The children attend school every day and have never missed a day. I will give two examples. The children of one family whose children went to school every day came out barely literate. Therefore, the system has completely failed not only the children but also the family and their expectations. It is wasting children's time and setting them up for failure if they are not being taught and steered towards being productive, contributing members of society.

We encounter Travellers who are not even able to get a job in a supermarket. There are examples of young fellows who came out of school and who did not get jobs in supermarkets that they had applied for, although their friends got them. The supermarkets may still be advertising positions but the Travellers will not get them. I encountered the case of a young Traveller girl who looked for work experience in a second-hand shop but who was told she could not get it. The turnaround in the shop is high. We have to have a national strategy, therefore. From a Traveller perspective, there is a need to send children to school not just for the sake of it but to have an education that will result in employment. We also need to consider this from a Government perspective and deal with the barriers. There has to be a national strategy.

Travellers are getting corralled into dead ends, for the most part. It does not affect Travellers alone as people in deprived areas are experiencing exactly the same thing. The education system is failing them. They are unable to get jobs. The outcomes, therefore, will be dead-end outcomes. The outcome will be over-dependence on the State. There is a high risk of addiction, depression and suicide because people cannot cope. A small percentage are engaging in anti-social behaviour or crime. That is where they are being corralled, however. We blame people for being at their destination without considering all the contributing factors that got them there. We need a national strategy. It is not always a question of education as there are those who are well trained and well qualified but who cannot find a job. Employment needs to be targeted to address that.

To return to an earlier point, there needs to be diversity. One size will not fit all. Some

people are already trained, educated and ready to enter employment, while others are competent, capable and talented in specific areas. Some Travellers can strip apart a car and put it back together with a blindfold, some know everything about horses, while some young female beauticians are naturally talented in various areas. Such people just need a little training towards qualification to fill that gap because they are naturally talented in their areas. It is a different strategy but we need a national strategy to deal with employment.

Chairman: There need to be pathways to work.

Ms Kathleen Sherlock: Yes, exactly.

Mr. T.J. Hogan: To echo what Ms Sherlock and Mr. Reilly stated, there are five and six year old Traveller children in primary school who are not asked what they want to be when they are older because there is an expectation that soon after they enter secondary school, they will leave in any event. We need to change the culture within the education system and how Travellers are viewed therein because it can have a severe knock-on effect on confidence, not least when a child in fifth or sixth class is asked to make a decision as to which secondary school he or she will attend. It does not matter to the Traveller child because by second or third year, he or she will want to leave. If a five or six year old child says he or she wants to be a firefighter, garda, solicitor or doctor, he or she should be supported in doing so, but unfortunately our education system excludes Travellers to an extent and does not give the appropriate supports, as we all know.

At the tail end of education, many more Travellers come through secondary school, but that is not necessarily good. More Travellers are now illiterate after finishing secondary school than ever before, a category I fell into. I have dyspraxia and dyslexia but that was not picked up until I entered third level education or even thereafter. We promote third level education but some people who graduate cannot find meaningful employment unless they are within Traveller organisations. I do not know how many CVs I have handed out to State organisations without hearing anything in response. The only meaningful employment I have ever had was with non-governmental organisations. That is not a good message to send to any Traveller, given the time and commitment it takes to attend education and sit exams and the stress that causes. Moreover, a person must take a break if he or she wants to start a family, particularly in the case of women, and that can cause stress.

We must encourage Travellers to stay in secondary school, because otherwise it will be a significant barrier. We cannot promise there will be jobs for them because the likelihood is that if they want to go into business or to the private sector, including anything apart from community development or social care, they will be on social welfare when they leave third level education. That is not acceptable and we need to examine it strategically to support Travellers and to challenge the barriers of discrimination and biases. Many positive aspects are emerging from our community but they are never highlighted. It is always negative and we always have to explain what people in Longford or from a different culture do, even though I am from Cork. We are all tarred with the same brush and employers see that. We just need to be given a chance, which can be done through pilot schemes. Targets need to be met.

Chairman: Quotas also need to be met.

Mr. T.J. Hogan: Yes.

Ms Sinéad Burke: There certainly need to be quotas, not least for the Public Appointments

Service, PAS. It behoves PAS, as the largest employer in the State, to lead by example. It is all about meeting people at their level. It could be particular internships or placement schemes. It could be looking at the entry level and procedures for bringing in new recruits to the service. The Oireachtas has a good history of doing this. In 2006 and 2007, the Department of Finance had a good internship with young Traveller boys and girls which worked incredibly well. The shame was that it happened in 2007 which meant it was not duplicated because we ran into many other problems then.

Chairman: It sounds like a recommendation for our committee.

Ms Sinéad Burke: Yes.

Dr. Mary Murphy: I concur with what was just said. I want to refer to the underlying structural institutions and policy environment into which any of these innovative ideas would need to fit. We are seeing the shaping of the next pathways to work programme for 2020 to 2024. There are some really deep structural decisions that need to be made in that context which will in fact determine whether any of these innovations will work. Take the case of the pay-by-results mechanisms in place, for example, with JobPath. If organisations are geared towards having to deliver services in the context of being paid by results, it leads to creaming and parking. It also leads to Travellers being dumped on the side because they are considered to be too much work to get the result from to put it crudely. There are some key structural issues such as this.

Even the metrics for success, such as is the programme of getting people into employment or intergenerational equality and sustainment, need to be considered. On the length of intervention needed, people are cycled through JobPath, Intreo and the local employment service. They get a year in each and then they are moved from institution to institution. All the evidence shows that for many of these good interventions to work, people need a lengthy intervention where they can actually get a sustainable pathway back to work of three or four years. Unless the underlying institution allows for that type of creativity, many of the good ideas are going to be like pushing a square peg into the round hole.

Chairman: Is it correct then that it is not enough to have a target but it is the method that counts?

Dr. Mary Murphy: It is the underlying shape of the policy structure that these interventions have to fit into that we need to be mindful of.

Chairman: Involve is a good case study of the opposite of that.

Dr. Mary Murphy: Yes.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: I have to say this morning has been fascinating. I spent 18 years of my life working for what effectively was a community co-op. We started with nothing and built it up. Over that time, I saw people developing. People got a week's work and then a year's work. Then some of them went out on their own to become successful. I was working in a rural area with high unemployment at the time. Now it has extremely low unemployment. We must recognise that we have to build into the future and take a long-term perspective.

Listening to the debate, it seems that if we look at Travellers as a community, one has a young enough coming group who we would hope will get better education and, therefore, their future should be one of more choice. The second group are those who are already adults, be

they on their 20s or their 60s, who have finished their education and are unlikely to go back into it. It might happen in the future depending on how one builds it up. One has to look at the different groups and pick each person individually deciding what is the best for the individual rather than everybody together. There will be as many choices as there are people.

Having run a community organisation which had a commercial aspect as well as a social aspect at the same time, I am firmly of the view that everybody – this does not just apply to Travellers - should have an opportunity to work. I do not agree with work programmes which force people to work. That is absolutely negative. Everybody should have an opportunity to work. My experience is that if one gives people a reasonable opportunity, they will take it. There could be a few quick wins which would be in the gift of the State. Currently, if one gets onto a CE or Tús scheme the time is limited, no matter how well a person has worked and no matter how important their job; if one does not progress, as society defines progression, one has to go. Someone might look after the local community centre and keep it open, making it available every day and it does not matter whether or not they are replaceable, it is still a case of “out you go”. Someone might be employed elsewhere as exactly the same thing as an employee and there would be no limitation. Perhaps starting with target groups, there should be no limit to the time one spends on the scheme. I initially set up Tús in December of 2010 and I was gone by February 2011. I took what I was getting but I did not agree with Finance’s one-year rule. What was meant to happen was that an individual would get on a CE scheme for three years, get training and if he or she had performed well but had not got a commercial job, he or she would transfer to Tús and get a job providing some vital service to communities, which would be of indefinite duration. If a person got another job, obviously he or she would move on but if not, they would stay where they were.

Dr. Cann’s reference to the social economy is interesting. The biggest social economy scheme in the country is the community services programme. I had quite a bit of experience with that. Its big advantage is that a person who is on the programme can stay on indefinitely. They can get the minimum wage and a company can pay one extra if they can earn the money, and they must have an income. Unfortunately, job initiative, which was also a good scheme, has been run down systematically. We should have a big increase in community service programmes because there are many services which will never be economic, such as heritage facilities. Dr. Cann also mentioned Wicklow. I have some connection with Wicklow. I went down to visit them in their early days, when I think they were in Bray. They asked me if they could get sewing machines. We went to the ESB and asked if it had any sewing machines lying around somewhere. It had a whole heap of sewing machines so we got them for the project and I am glad to hear it is still working well. There is also a very good scheme in Galway which is totally Traveller run, from the management down. It was set up in my time and the model has been proven very effective. It has broken into a particular business which I will not mention here which one would not normally associate with male Travellers, and which people would think unlikely because of social prejudice. It has been hugely successful in getting the job done. There is much that we can do in those and I would be interested in Dr. Cann’s reaction.

Work experience in the private sector is a huge opportunity. My experience of work experience was that if one got someone in who was good, one would get them a job or one would retain them. It is important that people can get in there and prove their worth. We have discussed internships in the public service, including in this House, among ourselves. It is absolutely vital.

I hate JobPath. I have a total aversion to it. Most people who get jobs through JobPath

would have got the jobs anyway. It is a total waste of money. I have my suspicions about JobPath because people come to me who were called for JobPath who did not want to go to it for their own reasons, which might be valid but I have many Travellers who come to my office every week - a high percentage of those who come to my office are Travellers - but JobPath has never come to me for Travellers. I wonder whether Travellers are actually being called for JobPath or if there was a subtle, quiet instruction to the effect that "we do not want those". I do not think that it is a good model that gets people into employment.

Chairman: We will get some reaction to the Deputy's interesting ideas. We have two more

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: I will be very brief. There is no point in talking about education for young people if there is discrimination in getting into the job, but it should provide diversity of choice and opportunities. The Civil Service and public service need to operate a quota system. We need to look at the skills of adult Travellers of both sexes and match employment to skills either through employment or self-employment. We have disempowered every type of self-employment a Traveller ever got involved in. Some of it has been conscious disempowering. For example, Travellers in my area used to sell things outside sporting matches and so on. We introduced licences and then refused to grant the licences.

There is one final thing I have a problem with. In the old days individuals were simply appointed to State boards and one could say that that was abused. However, I do not like the present system because it selects the person who has the best paper qualifications, not who is the best person or who is the best person matched to the board. It is leading to a gentrification of State boards. The PAS looks at CVs and appoints a person who has enough degrees, work experience or whatever. This means the boards no longer do what they were designed to do, which is to represent the totality of society. What is the experience of the witnesses, particularly the Travellers, regarding the chances of getting on a State board?

Dr. Sheila Cannon: Senator Ruane brought up a really good point when referring to creating more structures that might be just as discriminating as the old structures. That leads to the idea of policy alignment. If we have a national employment for Travellers policy it must be in alignment with the social enterprise policy because the social enterprise policy does not specifically mention Travellers and it needs to. That will help to address that issue.

There are two different approaches to social enterprise. There are the high fliers who get all these awards. It is very middle class - I think that was what the Senator was referring to - and often very influenced by America. In rural areas local development offices support the creation of social enterprises. There are almost two separate approaches. It is important to understand the different approaches and ensure that these social enterprises are in the interests of Travellers and support them and are not sabotaged by these other approaches to social enterprises.

Chairman: We have invited the Galway group to appear before the committee.

Mr. T.J. Hogan: I want to pick up on what the members have said. The older generation of Travellers were seen to be uneducated because they do not have a piece of paper. A great model is being used in third level institutions at the moment - recognition of prior learning, RPL. We need something like that within employment so that Travellers can go for jobs based on their experience, such as within the horse industry. Travellers are one of the most skilled minorities in this country and with the knowledge they have particularly around horses, they could contribute in a very beneficial way to the horse industry both professionally and for leisure.

The community employment, CE, scheme is not working for Travellers. They give employment and provide resources for training, but the time runs out and Travellers end up seeking social welfare again because they are unemployed. We need to have resources put in place, not just resources in terms of time but also in education and training. That needs to be provided for Travellers within the CE scheme. It also needs to lead to employment. We need to support those individuals gain access to employment or even setting up employment within house. We have a lot of community development workers. Many good people on CE schemes would be great for the organisations they are currently in, but unfortunately their time runs out, they go home and the opportunity is lost.

There is considerable emphasis on the social enterprise stuff. The lads in Galway are doing it right. I know the same crowd. There needs, however, to be an individual approach and not one that is one size fits all. In social enterprise, if a policy is developed targeting Travellers, then Travellers should have access to be able to put themselves forward with their own ideas. That would be really good.

Chairman: There is endorsement, then, of the lifting of the time limits and an approach that is not just one size fits all. We need an approach that will work for particular individuals.

Mr. T.J. Hogan: Yes, that is correct.

Ms Kathleen Sherlock: To answer the question, I do not know any Travellers who are sitting on any State boards. That is the truth and I do not know if anybody else here does. Returning to a point made about Travellers having moved out of self-employment, when we consider one of the largest industries that Travellers were involved in, namely recycling, that was privatised and Travellers were sidelined completely. We are looking at a broad scope when we examine Traveller employment. We look at people in different spaces who may have different long-term objectives. We focus on the younger people or Travellers looking to build careers.

I refer to people who have gone to school and who are doing well. They want to branch out and get opportunities in a broad range of areas. We have Travellers who are very good with computers and have good IT skills. They do it at home, and they are brilliant at IT and naturally inclined in that direction. We need to focus on areas like that and all of the different things that Travellers are good at. I state that because, while I welcome the idea that community employment schemes would be extended, where necessary, and they are a correct fix for some people, allowing them to be exactly where they need to be, at work-----

Chairman: We do not want people to be stuck there either.

Ms Kathleen Sherlock: We have to broaden that out, however, and understand there is great potential within our community. We have young girls who are as good as any make-up artist anywhere and hairdressers as good as the top in the world. We have Traveller men who are brilliant carpenters and, potentially, in every type of arts and crafts.

Chairman: Teachers are also coming through the system.

Ms Kathleen Sherlock: They are, and we have a growing number of Travellers who are very academically minded. I refer to Mr. Oein De Bhairdúin, who worked with the Chairman as well. That shows what is out there. We need to focus in where we are opening doors that are, and have been, closed to Travellers because of a narrow-minded bigoted view, fear or stereotyping. Those doors need to be opened.

Chairman: I am glad Ms Sherlock mentioned Oein. He was a paid intern who worked with me and helped me do the work I do in this House.

Ms Kathleen Sherlock: Yes, that experience has made him.

Chairman: I call Deputy O'Loughlin.

Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin: I apologise for being late and I will be brief. I was at something not completely unrelated. I am part of the Oireachtas Women's Caucus, as are the Chair and Senator Ruane. Today's meeting concerned trying to set up caucuses within our counties with local women who have been elected to councils and other community groups. It struck me then when I came in that there should be input from local Traveller women to those caucuses. I apologise to the gentlemen here, but this concerns how women can progress issues in respect of their local authorities.

The figures are stark. It is horrific in this day and age and in this society that some 80% of Travellers are unemployed. I have met Mr. Reilly a number of times in connection with the education committee, where we have examined many issues regarding education for Travellers and other vulnerable groups. I refer in particular to reduced timetables. There is certainly a linkage. One of the people who will forever be in my mind presented at that session, and I know that Senator Ruane will agree with me. I refer to a young Traveller boy who came from Galway to speak to us about his experience. All he wanted in life was to be a community garda, from the time he saw a garda in his community. I understand that in many cases Travellers may feel alienated from the gardaí. This young man, however, fell in love with the uniform and consistently met and was asking gardaí about how he could become a community guard, what is the job and what is the focus. He also spoke about how a homework club had completely turned around his life. This was a homework club set up in the city for young Travellers. He believes that because of it, he now has a realistic chance of becoming a community garda. I have no doubt that he will become one and that when he does it will have an impact on the people in the Traveller community who feel alienated from the Garda. As a former teacher who taught Traveller children in an integrated setting, I was always aware that many of the children's parents did not like coming to the school because they felt alienated from it. They would feel much more involved and welcome if we had Traveller teachers within the system. I am not 100% convinced about segregated employment. While it has worked in the past and there may be some need for it, integration is the key, but I accept that may take a generation. We need to have a quota of Traveller teachers in the system.

I am interested in hearing the views of the witnesses on a possible quota for State jobs. I agree that there should be a quota. I know a young man who joined the Army and has had a really good career. His children are now in third level education. This man did not get to join the Army on the basis of a quota. He applied to join and was successful, which is a better system. I am interested in hearing the witnesses views on the State jobs where a quota would be useful.

On internships, I was involved in setting up the internship scheme in Leinster House for people with a disability. It has been incredibly successful. Deputy Ó Cuív mentioned that there is no reason we could not run an internship in Leinster House. Would it be a good idea or, again, is that singling out Travellers in a way that they may not want to be singled out? This relates to Dr. Cannon's point regarding the alignment of career pathways and opportunities and one policy lying in with the other.

Chairman: Deputy O'Loughlin's questions were directed to Mr. Reilly, Ms Sherlock and

Mr. O'Leary.

Mr. Patrick Reilly: There were many questions in a short time. On the young Traveller who wants to be a garda, it is important that he follows his dreams and achieves it. For Travellers to see him in that position would be positive and uplifting. The issue of segregated employment was mentioned and reference was made to meeting Travellers where they are at. It is about more than meeting Travellers where they are at. This is about not leaving them where they are at. We support targeted employment but we want to see Travellers in mainstream employment. Mr. Hogan and Ms Sherlock mentioned that one size does not fit all. We have to be careful when we speak about treating everyone equally because in doing so we could do more harm than good. I have a form with me today, a copy of which I will circulate later to everyone to complete. Travellers who left school early and cannot read and write will walk away from completing forms. I am not an expert when it comes to employment, but I am an expert on me and the issues that face Travellers. Travellers want to work, some of them as farriers working with horses. Travellers love horses. Not all Travellers want to be in suits and coats, which is fair enough, but we would like to see a targeted approach to mainstream employment for Travellers.

Ms Kathleen Sherlock: There are Travellers who are not in a position to go into employment. This has to be acknowledged. For the young Travellers who are actively looking for work but the doors are closed to them, we need to open those doors. We cannot allow them to remain closed. On the quota system, I cannot put a figure on what it should be. That is an issue for the national Traveller organisations and Traveller groups to discuss. There definitely needs to be positive discrimination. It had to be in place for African American communities not because of a lack of ability or to create a level playing field but to give people an equal starting point. The starting point is not equal so we need to do this. We do not really know the number of Travellers who have been rejected. I know anecdotally of Travellers who have applied for positions and did not hear back. Employers who state they received a certain number of applications from Travellers and they were rejected are not asked why they were rejected.

Senator Lynn Ruane: I do not think there is legal aid for a Traveller to take a discrimination case and there needs to be an avenue for that so employers can be challenged.

Chairman: It was disappointing that the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission would not take it up because of the small numbers. Perhaps we will bring the IHREC before the committee and ask it the question.

Ms Kathleen Sherlock: I will mention one thing that involves somebody else. I helped somebody to do up a CV for an application for the Garda when it was specifically looking for Travellers. I was hopeful he would get the position. He is a very positive young man and has gone on to work in another area. In three spaces in his application he specifically said he was a member of the Traveller community. He did not get past the aptitude test. To meet this young man it is unbelievable. There needs to be a little bit of accountability. We know Travellers are applying for positions and they are being rejected out of hand and not even being considered. There needs to be a certain amount of accountability from employers as to why they are not even being considered. What is going on here? During the recession there was a lot of competition for jobs and highly qualified people were taking very low level positions but we have gone past that. We are at a different stage now.

Mr. T.J. Hogan: There are a lot of activists in our community and we have a lot of men and women who are role models. If we wait another generation, unfortunately we will lose those

activists. The truth of the matter is that three weeks ago I was asked a question in my employment as to whether I wanted to set up a pension. Looking at the statistics on Traveller men, there is a high suicide rate and only 1% of Traveller men live beyond the age of 60. Given the age of retirement, do I really want to put money into a kitty that I will never use? The truth of the matter is many Travellers are in this space. The health statistics are shocking. The suicide rates are so high and there are eternal issues among the community. It is very hard to ask Travellers to think about employment when all of these issues are going on. If we do not have a targeted approach, we will lose the Travellers who want employment and are asking about jobs in our primary and secondary schools. If there are no options for them now, we will lose another generation of Travellers to poor health, poor accommodation and high suicide rates.

The ideology that if we wait a generation so we can be all-inclusive is an idea that we will further marginalise Travellers. Recently, we heard comments from a political standpoint and on a national basis. If we go on Facebook and pull up a video of a night out or wedding posted by a Traveller, the discrimination and what is said on social media and in public are absolutely disgusting. We are not going forward far enough on hate crime, particularly regarding the Traveller community, and this has a knock-on effect on how we view employment. We need to take a collective approach to allowing Travellers to progress, and their progression needs to be supported and targeted.

Regarding the quota, the community needs to have a conversation internally. If we do not provide supports now, we will lose another generation. It will be too late and we will be wiped out.

Chairman: I thank Mr. Hogan. Those were stark words.

Ms Kathleen Sherlock: It is the reality, unfortunately.

Chairman: Absolutely. I thank our guests for bringing us back to that point.

Mr. Michael Power: My point will be brief. For the past 12 years, I have been working with *Travellers' Voice* magazine and have been its editor for the past five. I have noticed a trend in education in that time whereby young Travellers are excelling in education, but it is not something that we are speaking about loudly enough. There is a trend of Travellers staying in education and going to third level but falling off the radar. They must hide their identities in third level or to get employment. They do not raise their heads above the parapet at all.

I agree with the idea of internships, albeit not ones that are tokenistic. They should lead to actual employment. It should not be a case of just ticking boxes to say that an employer has a member of the Traveller community sitting on a seat and is doing his or her best by that person. An internship is only as effective as the follow-up.

To reiterate what Mr. Hogan and Ms Sherlock stated, quotas are a fantastic idea, but there needs to be a conversation among the Traveller organisations about what we feel is acceptable for our community.

Chairman: I thank Mr. Power. Deputy Joan Collins has been patient.

Deputy Joan Collins: It is no problem. Many issues have been covered. The witnesses spoke about what was needed to improve the Traveller community's prospects in education and beyond. I had contact with an individual who had been homeless for approximately four years. He eventually got accommodation in a bedsit. For the past four years, he has found it difficult

to match his skills with the Intreo office. His money was cut off at one stage because he was afraid to attend the office. In employment, social protection, education and all of those other areas in which the State has a role to play, the organisations involved will need to develop affirmative policies so as to link with the community immediately and ask it where they can direct long-term strategies to get people into work and an environment where they can feel positive and confident. The individual I mentioned has no confidence in himself and is nervous of the community around him. All of these factors come into it. Departments have no awareness of people from the Traveller community.

Is any Traveller organisation involved in the Pathways to Work strategy? I presume there is.

Mr. Patrick Reilly: Not that I know of, but I can follow up, get that information and give it to the committee.

Chairman: The national Traveller and Roma inclusion strategy committee is the nearest thing. Does Mr. O'Leary chair a sub-committee of that?

Mr. James O'Leary: Yes.

Deputy Joan Collins: Is it involved in the Pathways to Work strategy?

Mr. James O'Leary: We are trying to get the Department to ensure representation on the employment subgroup.

Chairman: How is the sub-committee tracking to the Pathways to Work review that is under way?

Mr. James O'Leary: We have had four meetings. The Department of Justice and Equality is undergoing a transformation in how it functions. There used to be an equality unit, but that is not there any more. I cannot remember the different silos that personnel are working in now, but let us say that there is policy, funding, etc. I will be polite and say that they are in a state of flux and that making progress is challenging.

Chairman: Employment is a justice matter but it is surely also relevant to the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection. Who is responsible for the Pathways to Work strategy?

Dr. Mary Murphy: That is a really important question. One of big deficits in the Pathways to Work model is that there is no a governance system to oversee it. There was a labour market council but it was stood down. There is some consideration being given to reconstituting that council. It largely comprised civil servants and some employers. Direct representation of Traveller and other groups experiencing particular challenges relating to employment is very important in that respect. One example relates to the quota. Who sets it and would there be Traveller input into that? What sort of supports are needed to make a quota work? One of the problems with quotas as they are currently set is that they are not working in practice because none of the underlying supports to enable people to stay in positions once they get in is there. Post-employment sustainability for quotas is really important.

In the past there was talk of a job offer guarantee and a former Minister, Deputy Ó Cuív, was around at that time. If there is the idea of owing the value to the Traveller community for the banishment it experienced from the larger society, a job offer guarantee could be meaningful. It could come in the form of a quota, internships, social enterprises and a wide range of opportuni-

ties. The idea of a guarantee of an opportunity could be very important.

Chairman: It is something we could certainly consider in our recommendations.

Mr. James O'Leary: I met representatives from the Public Appointments Service in the past when it developed an inclusion and diversity strategy. One of the points I made is that having a generic inclusion and diversity strategy would most likely mean Travellers would be left out again. We have a major blind spot in this regard so there must be targeted initiatives to support the Traveller community. We speak about the Public Appointments Service but we only get these people to the door; it is up to Departments to tell us what they want. The Public Appointments Service does as it is requested by the different Departments. At one point, two Traveller ladies were on an internship with the public service. They were doing extremely well in their work and they got on well with their colleagues. They liked working there and their colleagues liked working with them. It all sounded good. The computer kept saying "No" to them. I suggested to the Public Appointments Service that it was way behind the curve with that computer. Other countries are going further down the road with regard to internships and apprenticeships and the service must open that avenue if it really wants diversity.

We heard a statistic to the effect that only 10% of employers would give Travellers a job. I could be wrong but if we had a targeted initiative, it is most likely there would be more than enough employers to employ Travellers. We need a targeted service to find these numbers. The roles must be researched and people must be pulled out from wherever they are. A targeted service is really important if we are to see progress.

Deputy Joan Collins: To the editor of the magazine I say "Fair play". It is a great magazine.

Ms Kathleen Sherlock: I will just come back to something that Mr. O'Leary said. Many of the issues that we see developing and which Travellers must deal with, including addiction, suicide and depression, are by-products of a rejection by society. Many of those will start to fall away when we see people being treated a little better and having opportunities around employment. One of our colleagues, who sits on our council, works in the Prison Service. The number of people in prison, not just Travellers, who are basically illiterate is unbelievable. Would these people have taken the direction they took and ended up in the destination point they are at if the system had started to support them at a much earlier age? For the vast majority of them the answer is probably "No".

This comes back to how we value people in society. Do we value Travellers and people from working class and disadvantaged areas in the same way as we value people from other sections of society? The reality is, and the evidence shows, that we do not. Some people are set up for success while others are set up for failure. We need to level it out and understand that there are long-term consequences. If we fail children at a very young age, many of them will become a burden on society whereas, with the right supports, they could be an asset to society. Each and every one of us has skills, abilities and talents and we should have the opportunity to contribute them.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: The first thing I did when I became the Minister for Social Protection was ask the chief medical office whether he had evidence on the effect of unemployment on people's health. His stark one-page reply stated that people who are unemployed suffered increased mortality and morbidity, visit the doctor more and take more medication, etc. He also made the interesting point that securing employment provides a 99% cure. Employment is part

of human existence. We are programmed in our DNA to work so why tell one community that its is more or less excluded from employment?

I do not believe that community employment, Tús and other schemes are the limit for anybody. As far as I am concerned, a human's limit should be where he or she wants to go and where he or she is capable of going. We should give people the maximum opportunity to go there. However, we must recognise that we have a cohort of people who have been so disadvantaged in life that to even get useful employment doing useful work in a State-supported system is hugely important. The key point the witnesses made was that the next generation benefits hugely from their parents being out working. That was my life's experience. An emphasis must be placed on the individual but we must consider what will create the best opportunity for each individual and tailor to the realities.

Chairman: Yes.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: We would like everybody to get the same opportunities as everybody else but we would not be in this room if that were the case. We must tailor to the current reality and make sure the next generation does not suffer disadvantage.

Chairman: I thank the members and witnesses. We have spent a really interesting couple of hours discussing this matter and we will spend more time discussing three more modules. The 80% unemployment rate among Travellers is beyond shocking. When one says it is shocking that almost sounds banal and trivialises this issue. We have no choice but not to leave Travellers where they are, as Mr. Reilly so eloquently put it.

The Pathways to Work review is a clear opportunity. Travellers need to have a meaningful role in this, with programmes that work for them. We need a range of targeted and generic interventions. We need mainstream access but we also need specialised and specific assistance. We need the whole gamut of interventions if we are tackle the current rate of 80% unemployment. I heard what was said about quotas but they should only be introduced in consultation with the Traveller community. Interns must be paid and internships must be meaningful, rather than just a box-ticking exercise. Work experience in the private sector opens doors. The social capital that children gain through work experience and in school and university is huge in terms of their future prospects and getting into the workplace. We have to name and tackle the prejudice that exists in society and carries into the workplace. This prejudice results in people having to hide their identities or change their addresses to get a job for which they are probably overqualified. We have a lot of food for thought. I thank everybody very much. I thank committee members for their patience, particularly Deputy Joan Collins who waited right until the end. I thank everybody who contributed this morning.

The joint committee adjourned at 1.05 p.m. until 11 a.m. on Tuesday, 17 December 2019.