

DÁIL ÉIREANN

AN CHOISTE COMHAIRLIÚCHÁN POIBLÍ AN TSEANAID

SEANAD PUBLIC CONSULTATION COMMITTEE

Dé Máirt, 9 Iúil 2019

Tuesday, 9 July 2019

The Select Committee met at 10 a.m.

Comhaltaí a bhí i láthair/Members present:

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| | Jerry Buttimer, |
| | Maria Byrne, |
| | Martin Conway, |
| | Máire Devine, |
| | Colette Kelleher, |
| | Pádraig Ó Céidigh. |

I láthair/In attendance: Senators Victor Boyhan, John Dolan, Frank Feighan, Paul Gavan, Alice-Mary Higgins, Kevin Humphreys, Terry Leyden, Pádraig Mac Lochlainn, Gabrielle McFadden, Joe O'Reilly, Niall Ó Donnghaile, Aodhán Ó Ríordáin, Neale Richmond and Lynn Ruane.

Seanadóir/Senator Paul Coghlan sa Chathaoir/in the Chair.

Travellers Towards a More Equitable Ireland Post-Recognition: Discussion

Chairman: I am pleased to open the public hearings of the Seanad Public Consultation Committee on Travellers Towards a More Equitable Ireland Post-Recognition. These meetings are the second part of a process which began in May with a public invitation to make written submissions to the committee. On behalf of the committee I sincerely thank all of those who sent in submissions on this important topic.

I warmly welcome that members of the Traveller communities will today speak in the Seanad for the first time since Travellers were formally recognised as an ethnic minority. When the Irish State formally recognised the ethnicity of Irish Travellers in March 2017, it heralded a new era of mutual understanding in relations based on respect and on an honest, open dialogue. Today, in a follow-on from that milestone moment, these hearings are an opportunity for positive engagement with the Traveller community as we shape our future. Through this consultation process we wish to reach out, to consult with and listen to Travellers and others, to consider proposals to support Travellers for full equality post-ethnicity, and to make recommendations on the way forward.

Following on from these hearings a draft report will be prepared for the committee by our rapporteur, Senator Colette Kelleher. The committee will review the draft report and publish its final report as soon as possible.

Today's public meeting will consist of two sessions under the following themes. Session 1 will cover Traveller Participation and Politics. Session 2 at 12 noon is entitled Dialogue and Traveller Social Inclusion.

On behalf of the committee I welcome the following witnesses to this first session: Deputy David Stanton, Minister of State with special responsibility for equality, immigration and integration; Mr. Martin Collins, Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre; Mr. Patrick McDonagh, PhD student, Trinity College Dublin; Ms Kathleen Sherlock, Co-ordinator, Mincéirs Whiden, Cant for Travellers Talking; Ms Rosaleen McDonagh, Mincéirs Whiden, Cant for Travellers Talking, who has not arrived yet; Mr. Bernard Joyce, director, Irish Traveller Movement; Ms. Joanna Corcoran, Galway Traveller Movement; Ms Rachel Doyle, national co-ordinator, Community Work Ireland; Ms Ann Irwin, Community Work Ireland; Mr. Kevin Burn, CEO, Exchange House Ireland; Ms Minnie Connors, Wexford Traveller Development Group; Ms Deirdre McGarry-Barker, Wexford Traveller Development Group; and Mr. John Lonergan, who is well-known to us, former Governor of Mountjoy Prison.

All of our witnesses are most welcome and we thank them for their engagement with the committee in its consideration of this important topic.

Before we begin I must draw attention to the following procedural matters. By virtue of section 17(2)(l) of the Defamation Act 2009, witnesses are protected by absolute privilege in respect of their evidence to this committee. However, if they are directed by the Chairman to cease giving evidence in relation to a particular matter and they continue to do so, they are entitled thereafter only to a qualified privilege in respect of their evidence. They are directed that only evidence connected with the subject matter of these proceedings is to be given and they are asked to respect the parliamentary practice to the effect that, where possible, they should not criticise nor make charges against any person, persons or entity by name or in such a way as to make him, her or it identifiable. I also wish to advise that any opening statements that they

make to the committee may be published on the committee website after this meeting.

To commence proceedings I invite Senator Colette Kelleher to make some introductory remarks at the beginning of this session. I will then invite each witness to make a short presentation to the committee. Guest speakers may share their time with colleagues if they so wish and if so please indicate this to me when invited to speak. I ask that presenters keep their opening statement as brief as possible. Overall, our time is limited. Following the presentations, there will be time for questions and comments from the Senators and responses from the witnesses.

I have pleasure in calling our rapporteur, Senator Colette Kelleher.

Senator Colette Kelleher: I thank the Chairman, An Leas-Chathaoirleach. As he did, I warmly welcome everyone here today. Gralti tome geels, a muni feins an beoirs ar crush ain nesdes talosk. I am sorry for ruining the language but I got those words from the lovely Oein De Bhairdúin. I thank people for coming here today from far and wide and for making what has been a record number of diverse submissions to this open call, all of which will be included and reflected in the inevitable report we will produce. I thank my fellow Senators, members of the Seanad Public Consultation Committee, members of the Senate Civil Engagement Group, supporters across parties and Independents.

I acknowledge and thank Bridget Doody, Carol Judge and the Seanad team for making today happen and also the ushers for their great support. I would also like to mention my little team Ben, Sarah, Katriona and Hazel. I particularly thank the Irish Traveller Movement, Traveller non-governmental organisation and, above all, Oein de Bhairdúin, who advised me and helped put together a programme of work to advance Traveller rights, which I am pursuing in different ways in my role as Senator.

The date, 1 March 2017, was a historic day for Ireland and for Travellers. This was the first day when the State formally recognised the ethnicity of Irish Travellers and in doing so ushered in a new era of mutual understanding and relations. When the then Taoiseach, Deputy Enda Kenny, spoke to the Dáil recognising Traveller ethnicity he said “our Traveller Community is an integral part of our society for over a millennium, with their own distinct identity - a people within our people”. He went on to say “that recognition of Travellers could have a transformative effect on relations between Travellers and the wider society”. Despite the State’s formal recognition of Traveller ethnicity and, by extension, language, culture and history, the everyday efforts that Travellers make to develop their cultural literacies are systematically ignored in public and policy discourse.

I am always taken by the writings of African American writer, civil rights activist and gay man, James Baldwin, writing on identity. He was a man who grew in 1950s Harlem and also spent many years as a writer in Paris. He wrote “my inheritance was specifically limited and limiting; my birthright was vast, connecting me to all who live, and to everyone, forever. But one cannot claim the birthright without accepting the inheritance.”

Ireland’s inheritance includes our Traveller history and culture. We must cherish, celebrate and know it for us as Irish people to claim our birthright. We must cherish, celebrate and know it to redress the stigma, the longstanding prejudice, discrimination, racism, social exclusion and identity erosion experienced by Travellers. We must move beyond stereotypes and begin to bring into our awareness our unconscious bias, though formal cultural awareness and reflection.

There have been attempts at assimilation of Travellers and denial of difference. There has

been segregation in many forms which makes constructive conversations and dialogue well nigh impossible. Today we have an opportunity to do something different, to create a new narrative by having a different kind of conversation, a dialogue that systematically engages with Traveller cultural literacies and seeks to appreciate and understand them - to link the private troubles of Travellers into the public issues that the State, Government, agencies and bodies must connect with and address. The State looms large particularly in the lives of Travellers and the onus is on the whole of society, the machinery of the State, Government Departments, agencies, public bodies, the Oireachtas and for leaders and people in schools, hospitals, communities everywhere to have such dialogues.

Recognising the almost total absence of Travellers in the Oireachtas, either as Members or behind the scenes, or at least people who have self-identified as Travellers, and with the same absence across the public sphere, this is why I, a settled person and not a Traveller, sought to make space, make room, make common cause in different ways with Travellers in my privileged role as Senator, not to set an agenda or the agenda or to speak for Travellers, rather to listen and use the power I have to advance rights, justice and well-being, and to be part of the gateway to an even fuller participation in politics and public life by Travellers. It would be my privilege if Travellers could and would consider and accept me as an ally, learning from them and the community as I go.

It is good that we are here today in Seanad Éireann, one of the Houses of the Oireachtas, to have a good exchange, to speak, to listen, to come up with good ideas and proposals for Travellers to be Members of this House, to be Members of the Dáil, to be councillors, to work behind the scenes, to reach the upper echelons and all parts of the Civil Service, the Garda, the Judiciary, and health and social care systems. For too long Travellers have been invisible in and excluded from these worlds or even when in those worlds hide their honourable identity, like so many LGBTI people felt they had to do to survive.

As I conclude my opening remarks and we embark on our day of hearings, I cite words of two black Civil Rights Activists. Martin Luther King said: “Nothing in all the world is more dangerous than sincere ignorance and conscientious stupidity.” Put more simply and directly, Maya Angelou told us: “When you know better, you do better.” Those of us on this side of the House today will be educated by Travellers and others; our consciousness will be raised. We have many important voices to hear so that we may know better and, most important, do better.

Chairman: I thank the Senator for those opening remarks. I now have pleasure in calling the Minister of State, Deputy Stanton, to address us.

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality (Deputy David Stanton): Good morning everybody, Senators, ladies and gentlemen. I thank the committee for inviting me here today to this unusual but very important event to speak at the committee hearings on the specific theme of Traveller participation and politics. These hearings promise to provide valuable insights on the current situation of Travellers in Ireland and on issues needing to be addressed. Those here will be aware of my long-standing commitment to improving the situation of Travellers, both as Minister and formerly as chair of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Justice, Defence and Equality. I apologise as due to my diary commitments I will not be able to stay for the full session but I will take note of what is going on and record it later, and I will stay as long as I can.

Significant progress has been made to recognise the contribution of Travellers to Irish society. The recognition of Travellers as an ethnic minority, as was said by Senator Kelleher, by

the then Taoiseach, Deputy Enda Kenny, in March 2017 was a landmark occasion. The historic debate that night on Traveller ethnicity was memorable, each party acknowledging the significance of what was being done and of the importance of recognising and celebrating Travellers' distinct identity within Irish history and life.

As the Chairman may be aware, I chair the Steering Committee of the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy, NTRIS. The strategy is a published and living document. I was glad to be able to invite Senator Kelleher to the last meeting of that steering committee. I am sure she will share with colleagues later her impressions of what she saw at that meeting. NTRIS is a whole-of-Government strategy, which I launched in June 2017, aimed at improving the lives of the Traveller and Roma communities in Ireland. It has been developed and is being implemented in a partnership approach with Traveller and Roma organisations so that their concerns are considered when national policy is being developed and so that collaborative responses can be put in place to address the challenges which remain to be addressed.

The strategy contains a number of actions that relate specifically to this theme of Traveller participation and politics. These actions were developed following an extensive consultation process during 2016 and 2017. That consultation process enabled a wide range of Traveller voices to be heard on the actions needing to be included in the strategy.

The steering committee for the strategy is made up of departmental and agency representatives and of representatives of the Traveller and Roma organisations. They have the role of monitoring each of the actions of the strategy. Departments and agencies have to report on progress on individual actions to the committee. NTRIS is being monitored according to a traffic light system which enables progress on each action to be clearly evaluated. In addition, specific actions have been prioritised for attention in 2019. These form an implementation plan for the year and are subject to quarterly updates at the steering group meetings.

There is no tokenism in the inclusion of the Traveller organisations on the committee. The members of the committee from the Traveller organisation are strong and influential. Their role is an important one in monitoring the implementation of the strategy. They can and do call Government Departments and agencies to account on the delivery of the various actions. Their participation is vital as they can shed light on the actual experience of Travellers at national and local level. They are able to confirm whether initiatives are working in practice.

The strategy commits my Department to fund Traveller organisations at national and local level not only to represent and advocate for their community but also to build the capacity within the community for the future. It is very important that the Traveller community has strong representative groups that represent the community at all levels of society, including nationally, locally and in the media. Such organisations rightly seek to improve outcomes for Travellers as well as providing a crucial link for the State to interact with its Traveller citizens through its various consultative mechanisms. They can also provide an alternative narrative to the criticisms that members of the community see, hear and read in the media on a regular basis. That funding is of importance in developing capacity within Traveller organisations to undertake the political participation process within national and local decision-making structures.

My Department has a budget of €3.8 million in 2019 to fund Traveller and Roma community groups, many of which are represented here, and national-level NGOs. The funding is generally used to cover the costs of community development posts in Traveller and Roma organisations. It has also been used to support Traveller participation in decision-making and political fora. This is in response to actions 132 and 133 of the national Traveller and Roma inclusion

strategy, NTRIS, which are focused on supporting Traveller and Roma people to participate in the political processes at local and national levels, as well as facilitating political engagement and leadership in their communities. More specifically, action 132 calls for the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government to support Traveller and Roma organisations on voter education and voter registration initiatives for the Traveller and Roma communities. Action 133 calls for the Department of Justice and Equality to support the development of mentoring programmes to build and develop the capacity of Travellers and Roma to represent their communities at local, national and international levels.

The funding provided to Minceirs Whiden, for instance, allowed it to hold a conference on political participation in February of this year. I was delighted to address the conference and launch its handbook on mobilising Traveller political participation before, during and after elections. I have a copy of the handbook with me and Senators may wish to have a look at it. The conference was held in advance of the local elections in May. At the time, Minceir Whiden had two members of the Traveller community committed to run in the elections. I believe that figure rose to five, although I stand to be corrected in that regard. I commend those candidates for taking the brave step of running for public office. Regardless of the results, it is important that young Travellers, male and female, see their community members taking an interest in, and running for, public office. All politicians know that campaigning is not an easy task.

I also have responsibility for migrant integration policy and have supported initiatives to promote migrant political participation. It is important that the diversity of our society be reflected in the membership of the Oireachtas and in local politics. The progress we have made to achieve better gender balance in politics shows that more balanced political participation can be achieved. However, if this is to be sustained, it will require the support of political parties, Independents and the electorate. If we want Irish society reflected in our political institutions, we are dependent on Travellers, migrants and women to be brave enough to take the giant step of running for public office. We as citizens - members of the Traveller community and otherwise - must ensure that we are registered to vote and that we use that vote to ensure that all of society is reflected in our institutions.

I thank the committee for the invitation to address it. I am pleased with the range of activity being undertaken within Leinster House on the situation of Travellers in Ireland. I welcome the work being done by the committee, the Traveller Oireachtas group and the recently announced Joint Committee on Key Issues affecting the Traveller Community. I look forward to reports and recommendations from those groups. I will ensure they are included on the agenda of the NTRIS steering committee. Traveller colleagues will also ensure that happens because they are very strong and vocal on the committee, as they ought to be and I encourage them to be. I believe that working together, in collaboration with Traveller organisations, we can achieve better outcomes for Travellers such that their contribution to Irish life and society can be properly understood and valued.

Mr. Martin Collins: Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre is delighted to have this opportunity to address the committee at this historic event and to impress on members the importance of Traveller participation in the development, implementation and evaluation of policies and programmes designed to address inequalities and racism and promote equality and inclusion.

For almost 35 years, Pavee Point has been working at local, national and international levels in the promotion and protection of Traveller and Roma human rights. One of the values that informs our work is the community development approach. At its core is creating the conditions for the full and meaningful participation of Travellers and Roma in analysing and identifying

our concerns and issues and identifying potential solutions. In fact, Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre is based on the premise that there can be no significant or sustainable change unless Travellers and Roma themselves are empowered to fully participate and influence policy that creates positive change for our communities. To this end, Pavee Point has participated in a range of consultative mechanisms at local and national levels dealing very challenging issues such as accommodation, education, health, employment and equality. This is what one may call a participative democracy. We are all still challenged to identify how we might straighten and make more effective these consultative mechanisms in terms of policy development and implementation. It is vitally important that we enhance and further develop community development funding lines for autonomous community development. This work must be based on the all-Ireland standards for community work. Many of the Traveller activists and leaders who are presenting or present today have been through a community development process. We are very fortunate to have such strong and articulate Traveller leadership at local, regional and national levels.

Far more effort and work is required to support Traveller and Roma participation in the political process at local and national levels. Through the years, Pavee Point and many other groups have engaged in voter education awareness initiatives to encourage Travellers to register and vote and to stand as independent candidates or members of a political party. I ask Senators to note that Pavee Point is apolitical and is not affiliated to or tied with any political party.

In June, the advisory committee on the implementation of the framework convention for the protection of national minorities, a legally binding instrument of the Council of Europe, published its opinion on Ireland. One of its recommendations was for “the Irish authorities to consider, in consultation with the representatives of the Traveller and Roma communities, legislative and practical measures to create the necessary conditions for their political participation, including representation at all levels, to more adequately reflect the composition of Irish society and better take into account the needs of the Traveller and Roma communities”. The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, OSCE, of which Ireland is a member, published a set of recommendations, entitled the Lund recommendations, on the effective participation of national minorities in public life. The recommendations provide guidance to member states on how best to ensure the participation of national minorities within their states. They cover general principles such as participation in decision-making, including arrangements at central, regional and local levels, in elections, advisory and consultative bodies and self-governance structures.

I am fortunate to have been appointed as a member of the advisory committee on the framework convention on the protection of national minorities. Article 15 of the convention refers to the participation of national minorities in various political structures. I have visited Georgia and Spain, which have created very inclusive structures for indigenous ethnic groups to be involved in decision-making processes. A very innovative structure has been created in Romania whereby Roma have a voice in the national parliament. I am aware from reading material that the Sámi community has its own parliament in Finland. There are innovative ways to create inclusion and participation and give a voice to indigenous ethnic groups such as Travellers. We can do so by creating affirmative action policies. For example, we could consider having quotas for Travellers in our Parliament or explore the concept of reserved seats, which is a tried and trusted method of supporting the inclusion of indigenous groups across Europe.

I wish to take this opportunity to highlight a relevant example. As members will be aware, Dr. Sindy Joyce was recently appointed to the Council of State. That was a significant and very

symbolic development and we need to see far more in that regard. Travellers need to see their faces reflected in the Houses of the Oireachtas. If that were to happen, it would deconstruct the notion that our Parliament is the sole preserve of the majority population. I look forward to the hearings and to engaging in the questions and answers sessions. More important, however, I look forward to the report, the recommendations it might contain and, most important of all, their full implementation. We have had many strategies and policies but the challenge of full implementation remains. If these policies and recommendations are implemented fully, there is no doubt they will enhance and improve things greatly for Travellers and the Roma community.

Chairman: I call Mr. Patrick McDonagh, a PhD student at Trinity College Dublin.

Mr. Patrick McDonagh: Good afternoon. I am pursuing a PhD in medieval history at Trinity College Dublin and I have been invited to contribute my opinions on how to strengthen Traveller participation in politics. One of the first steps that would make an important difference would be the creation of senatorial seats for Travellers, or indeed, just one. Our current political system has a similar provision for the universities, which have six seats in the Seanad. My own university, Trinity College, has three seats while the National University of Ireland also has three. Article 18 of the Constitution makes that provision. If a similar proposal for a separate constitutional provision to provide for a Traveller seat were made, it would be in line with this. It would be a useful first step because, despite the good work of the Minister of State, Deputy Stanton, and Senator Colette Kelleher, the trust of Travellers in the State is more or less non-existent. That is not unique to the Irish State; it applies also to the United Kingdom. I am from Northern Ireland myself. As a way forward, a Seanad seat would create a symbol. Irish Travellers do not see Irish Travellers being present when they look at our political system. Of course, Senator Pádraig Mac Lochlainn was a Dáil Deputy some years ago for Donegal. While his mother and grandmother were Irish Travellers and that was an important step, he is an exception and a rarity. There seems to be no sign that this participation will become part of the mainstream. It would also be important for the four major parties of Fine Gael, Fianna Fáil, the Labour Party and, indeed, Sinn Féin to increasingly select Travellers to run for seats at all levels, including at local authority, Dáil, MEP and Seanad levels, the last separate from my proposal above.

The best way to strengthen Irish Traveller participation is through education. I am the first person in my family to go to university and I am the first to be asked to speak in this room. Irish Traveller participation at university level is essentially non-existent and almost irrelevant. I am one of a few and the only one currently pursuing a PhD in Trinity College. Dr. Sindy Joyce from the University of Limerick is the only one to have been awarded a PhD. I will be very surprised if that number goes above ten in the next ten years. The creation of an Irish Traveller-specific scholarship is a proposal that should at least be considered. When Travellers view the universities or, indeed, the secondary school system, they do not see something that fits for them. There are barriers and it is not as if their parents went and can explain the system to them. Barriers include the financial cost, fear of being identified as a Traveller and questions about what it actually results in. Great work could be done between Irish Traveller organisations and the State to promote that participation but the provision of a dedicated financial scholarship for Irish Travellers on the island to study at university would go a long way towards encouraging them. Once people enter the education system and become more aware of how the State operates, they become less mystified and more willing to effect change. They are more willing to refuse to be lectured by someone else. Irish Travellers cannot expect others to speak for them if they are not willing to speak for themselves and education is one of the great motivators and drivers for change in that regard. It is good to see that there are more Irish Travellers attending

third level education, but there is a long way to go before we approach participation rates that are proportionate to our population. There are 40,000 Irish Travellers in the Republic and 6,000 in Northern Ireland but there are fewer than 200 attending Irish universities. It is an insignificant number.

Linked to the idea of increasing Traveller education, the Traveller Culture and History in Education Bill 2019 is on First Stage before the Seanad. It is legislation on which Senators Lynn Ruane and Colette Kelleher have done great work. Passing the Bill would be an important step. Apart from ensuring Travellers enter education, if Irish Travellers are to participate in the State, they must know their history, prior and subsequent to the foundation of the State. It is not that long ago that the myth that Irish Travellers date from the Famine was current. There is then the idea that Irish Travellers date from the Cromwellian period or from the period of the dissolution of the monasteries in the Tudor period. These are questions that can only be answered if more work is done on those areas and thoughts. There were nomadic groups in late medieval Ireland. Dr. Katharine Simms, a former lecturer at Trinity College Dublin, has an article on nomads in medieval Ireland focusing on an O'Connor clan who were pushed to the west of Ireland. While it would be difficult to establish whether they were Travellers, they were certainly a nomadic group. Bringing in legislation to teach Traveller history and, more broadly, the history of Irish nomadism, would give Travellers and others from a nomadic background on the island a view of how they fit into Irish history. All too often, Irish Travellers are seen as the aberration or freaks - whatever one wants to call it - and as a problem that needs to be fixed or dealt with through assimilation or simply by ignoring them. Introducing legislation like this, promoting Irish Traveller participation in education and encouraging political participation by deliberately selecting Travellers to run in local or national elections and by creating of a Seanad seat would mark the beginning of what will still be a long journey to give Travellers a role in the State is proportionate to their population and place within it.

Ms Kathleen Sherlock: On behalf of Minceirs Whiden (Cant for Travellers Talking), Ireland's only all-Traveller forum, I thank the Seanad Public Consultation Committee for the opportunity to provide our organisation's input. I thank also the Minister of State, Deputy Stanton, who has been completely supportive to Minceirs Whiden and better outcomes for Travellers. I thank also the committee members who are here today. My submission today is on the importance of political participation for Irish Travellers but before moving to that subject, I will provide the committee with a brief profile of Minceirs Whiden and our objectives and work.

Minceirs Whiden - Cant for Travellers Talking, Ireland's only all-Traveller forum, was formed in 2004 with a focus on creating a safe space in which Travellers could come together to discuss issues affecting our community and to identify collective responses to them. Our membership is open to all members of the Traveller community and our mission is to promote the recognition and understanding of Irish Traveller culture and identity as Ireland's only indigenous ethnic minority group who have been part of the fabric of society for more than a millennium. Minceirs Whiden works towards the full participation and inclusion of Irish Travellers in all aspects of economic, social, cultural and political life in Ireland whereby our community is treated with respect and equality and our people can be proud and confident to hold up their Travellers identity without fear or prejudice. We believe in equality and justice and work in solidarity with human rights groups and organisations. When we talk about the issues affecting our community, we must be clear about what those issues are. These are critical issues of life, death and the actual survival of our people and do not only involve culture and cultural identity, albeit these are also of very great importance to Travellers.

Ireland has a total Traveller population currently of under 40,000 people, which is an astonishingly small number for a community of people who have been part of this country for more than a millennium. To get to grips with why the Traveller population is so small, we need only look at the findings of research conducted on the Irish Traveller community, including the 2010 all-Ireland health study, the ESRI report on the Traveller community and behaviour and attitudes research on Travellers. From this research, we know that 75% of Travellers are under the age of 35 years and that half of all Travellers will die before the age of 40 years, while the remainder will only live into their early 60s, with a tiny number reaching 70 years of age and beyond. That is the painful and devastating reality for the Traveller community. For this to be the reality for any community anywhere in the world in the 21st century would be shocking. That it is happening in Ireland, one of the most developed and advanced countries in the world, is difficult to understand but understand it we must. That means looking directly at the experiences for and the challenges the Traveller community faces such as the deepening crisis in Traveller accommodation provision, the escalation of suicide rates, chronic ill health as a result of poverty and poor living conditions, an 84% unemployment rate and poor educational attainment.

We are excluded and marginalised and experience blatant discrimination on an ongoing basis because of our Traveller identity. For decades Traveller groups and activists have campaigned for fair treatment and equality for the Traveller community, but it continues to be an uphill battle as we see our community rapidly deteriorate before our eyes. As Traveller activists and development workers in the community, we are aware that the Traveller community is going through a crisis, the likes of which we have never experienced before. We recognise that the anti-Traveller bias in society plays a part in this crisis. However, it must be stated, as painful as it is, that the root cause is the result of successive Governments' actions and inactions related to the Traveller community. No community of people has been impacted on so negatively by political decisions and inactions than the Traveller community. We certainly hope no other community will experience what we have experienced.

Mincéirs Whiden is calling on political leaders and politicians in all parties to recognise the underlying cause of the crisis in the Traveller community. We call on them to take decisive action and implement policies to undo the damage of the past which will set about creating better outcomes for the Traveller community now and into the future. An important step was recognition by the State of Traveller ethnicity on 1 March 2017. Mincéirs Whiden recognises that for real change to happen for Traveller people, the Traveller community must have a voice in decision-making arenas. To that end, in the past few years it has dedicated a significant portion of its time and energy to raising awareness of the importance of political participation within the Traveller community, as well as delivering Traveller-specific voter education training. In February we held a national Traveller political participation conference, the first of its kind, at which we launched our political participation training handbook, *Mobilising Irish Travellers' Political Participation Before, During and After Elections*. At the conference three Traveller candidates launched their campaigns for the 2019 local elections. As a result of the conference, two other members of the Traveller community also ran as election candidates. Having five members of the Traveller community running as political candidates was historic for the Traveller community. It is important to build on this and support future Traveller political participation.

As a society, we have to recognise the challenges facing members of the Traveller community in contesting elections, including anti-Traveller bias and how small our community is. Travellers make up just over 0.5% of the general population. There is a need to implement

legislative positive measures to ensure Traveller inclusion in political participation at local and national level. Travellers remain largely excluded from decision-making and the wider political process. Regardless of commitments in the national Traveller and Roma inclusion strategy, NTRIS, recommendations made by the advisory committee for the protection of national minorities and the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, to date, the State has not adopted actions or positive measures to improve the representation of Travellers in political institutions and decision-making. We recommend that the State undertake legislative and positive measures to ensure the inclusion of Travellers in political participation in local and national government; reserve specific seats for members of the Traveller community in the Dáil, the Seanad and on local councils; and support Traveller political participation and political representation training.

Traditionally, Travellers have been on the margins of society. They do not have a background in being part of the decision-making process. To address this, there is a need for in-depth training within the Traveller community. We must ensure meaningful consultation with Traveller organisations and enhance their role in developing and monitoring policy responses to Traveller developments. We must incorporate decision-making powers within the Traveller consultative structures. We must resource independent national and local Traveller organisations to ensure Travellers will be mainstreamed into a range of social inclusion initiatives at local and national level. We recommend the creation of employment opportunities for members of the Traveller community in all Departments and internships as a measure to address the 84% unemployment rate in the Traveller community.

There is a need to implement effective hate crime-speech legislation to protect the Traveller community which continues to be impacted on negatively by discrimination and racism, as well as enacting strong measures to ensure Travellers will not be negatively targeted by political candidates in election campaigns. There is a need to develop new housing Traveller accommodation legislation which will include sanctions for local authorities which do not meet their obligations to the Traveller community. The Department of Health and the HSE must publish and implement the national Traveller health action plan as a matter of urgency, including the establishment of a planning advisory body on Traveller health, with dedicated staff and budgets to drive its delivery and implementation. Alongside this as a priority, the Government needs to address the serious mental health crisis in the Traveller community which is claiming far too many lives and leaving families devastated and young orphaned children behind.

Chairman: I thank Ms Sherlock. I call on Ms McDonagh to make her opening statement.

Ms Rosaleen McDonagh: I thank the Chairman for giving me the opportunity to contribute.

As a graduate of Trinity College Dublin, I ran as an independent candidate four times for election to the Seanad. Although I was generally warmly and well received, for me as a Traveller, the atmosphere was hostile. I did not have the social connections or political mobility to find support in the Oireachtas. As a result, I was at a huge disadvantage. During my Seanad election campaigns I received letters and phone calls that were absolutely derogatory about my gender, ethnicity and disability. In one of the letters I was told to go back to where I was born and live on an island, away from the rest of the population, in order that Irish democracy would not be ruined by the likes of me running. Despite this, personally I found the experience of running as an independent candidate fruitful and learned a lot from it. I concur with my colleague Mr. Martin Collins who highlighted the need for various actions and dedicated seats for Travellers. There are no Traveller senior civil servants; therefore, the impetus to elevate Travellers in democracy falls short. I refer to a gateway into politics. I would not be the first to say having

in the Seanad someone from a working-class background such as Senator Ruane has really enriched the debates in it in various ways. To enrich democracy and make it more diverse, we need Travellers. This is the time. This is the moment. We need courage and political assistance to open the gates.

Mr. John Lonergan: I was asked to share my experiences of prison. From my experiences during the years, crime and antisocial behaviour give the greatest amount of oxygen to the negative perception of the Traveller community. The media play a big part in this and sometimes politicians do too. The highlighting of an individual crime, if it is related to a member of the Traveller community, will arouse instant anger and considerable antagonism, leading to violence and prejudice. It is one of the main areas in which crime can have a very negative impact on perceptions and attitudes.

In some ways, the more progress one makes in achieving integration, the greater the difficulty in other ways. In prison in the old days - I can go back 50 years - members of the Traveller community were readily and easily identifiable. They often lived together. Believe it or not, there was a cell in A division in Mountjoy Prison that was known as "the Caravan". It got its name from the fact that perhaps ten or 12 members of the Traveller community in prison resided in it. Other prisoners christened it "the Caravan" and one can see the consequences. It meant that Travellers were stigmatised. In those days all of the dirty jobs in prison were given to members of the Traveller community. That meant that they were unconsciously discriminated against. They did not participate in a wide variety of other activities. The prisoner community - it continues to this day - had a very negative attitude towards members of the Traveller community which saw itself as better than it. That is an old Irish attitude which can surface regularly in prison and it creates a difficulty.

The matter of identity is one for the representatives of the Traveller community and society in general to take on board. The greater the progress in achieving integration, the more difficult it is to identify Travellers. I was governor of Mountjoy Prison for many years. There were many inmates from the Traveller community and I never knew it. The only time I knew was when they said it themselves. Sometimes they argued that they were discriminated against because they were Travellers, but we would not have had that information without them saying it. Often people do not understand the information it is assumed comes when a person goes to prison is not known at all. Very little information on a prisoner's background - sometimes none - comes with him or her when committed to prison. Therefore, the idea that the establishment has information on people's backgrounds is questionable. The issue of identity certainly presents a difficulty in putting in place facilities and support systems.

One of the greatest facilities to change perception is, as mentioned, participation. I came across some amazing performances and achievements by members of the Traveller community when they were involved in activities in the prison, including creative and educational activities. Opportunities for participation are crucial.

The second element which is major is confidence. Many from the Traveller community whom I met would not participate because they did not have the confidence to do so. They did not believe they would be able to do so. They felt inferior, which prevented them from participating. Even if they were encouraged to participate, they still found it difficult to do so.

Health care was mentioned. It is a major issue. The one positive about prison is that it can and does provide for an intervention that would not take place on the outside. Health care is a very significant element. I noted the difference between male and female Travellers in prison.

The women were certainly more likely to involve themselves in health care issues and look after their health. Men - it is not confined to those in the Traveller community - are reluctant to participate in preventive medicine or go for check-ups to prevent illness. Prison affords an opportunity to do so, but it requires involvement. One of the difficulties often is getting consent and motivating individuals to participate. The services are in place, but they are not availed of because prisoners do not come forward to use them.

The same applies to education. To support the comments made by Mr. Patrick McDonagh, there is no question in my mind but that education is the most significant element of the change process. The more educated people are, the better they know their rights and the more confidence they have to fight for them. Sometimes one has to do so. The education of the prisoner community is a considerable issue if awareness is to be achieved. Believe it or not, the greatest discrimination and bullying takes place among prisoner populations because of the culture. Part of the culture, irrespective of what wrong is done to a prisoner, is that incidents are not reported. One does not grass or rat, as it is known in the prisoner community. It is a major impediment to bringing about the equality and human rights that are essential. If the information and support are not available, the difficulties often cannot be dealt with. Therefore, there are many issues. The prisoner community is small by comparison with the population as a whole. The number of Travellers in the community is also very small but very significant. My experience is that members of the Traveller community find prison very difficult because of its confinement and structures. Those who are used to open space and the associated sense of freedom find the confinement of prison very difficult.

Deputy David Stanton: I must excuse myself at this stage.

Chairman: Of course. I thank the Minister of State. I call Mr. Joyce, director of the Irish Travellers Movement.

Mr. Bernard Joyce: I thank Senators and the Minister of State. I welcome the members of our community who are in the Visitors Gallery. As director of the Irish Travellers Movement, a national membership based, Traveller-led organisation, I welcome the opportunity to present on Traveller affairs after the recognition of their ethnicity in 2017. Our submission covers all themes and includes a range of recommendations. From here, I will focus on specific challenges to Traveller equality and opportunities in public decision-making. Many reasons have stopped and curtailed Travellers from accessing and contributing to key decision-making structures, locally and nationally. The biggest cause is our experience of social exclusion and discrimination which has alienated us from mainstream systems of governance. Ironically, all too often those decision-making structures have been at the heart of further marginalisation of Travellers by imposing draconian laws that have impacted on our culture and nomadic traditions in a negative way. Critically, we have not had national political representation since the foundation of the Irish State and we continue to be invisible within the political establishment.

The invisibility of the diversity, capacity and insight which we as Travellers can contribute across all aspects of Irish life is contradictory to an open, inclusive democracy and is not coherent with the recommendations of the advisory committee on the implementation of the framework convention for the protection of national minorities, the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, CERD, and the former Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, all of which noted that the Irish State has not adopted positive action measures to improve the representation of Travellers in political institutions and decision-making. Despite that, Traveller community activism has challenged inequality and advanced a politicised human rights movement underpinned by community development values and which

is best placed to advocate on the issues affecting our community.

There are many strong advocates within our community, some of whom are here today. Some of them participate in local traveller accommodation consultative committees. However, that role is often not valued. They have not been listened to or heard and have been patronised at times. Some have walked out in recent years with no positive outcomes to show for their participation. These tokenistic, ineffective structures are counter-productive to what should be the collective aim of the State and communities. They cause great frustration given our experience of the crisis in mental health, suicide, homelessness, unemployment and racism. Our health statistics show that only half of our community lives beyond the age of 40. That is absolutely shocking.

The impact of these developments has been profound. Travellers ask me and others if our representation holds any value, or worse. After all these years, we have had poor outcomes from our participation and this can undermine Traveller participation. Are we actually colluding with the State and being dominated by non-Travellers in respect of the *status quo*? The political system until now has not created mechanisms to confirm the voice of Travellers, as it has done with gender quotas. We must be proactive in changing the system. The following recommendations from the Irish Traveller Movement are important for this reason. There should be a designated place for Travellers in the Seanad and that Senator should be elected by the community. A rapporteur for Travellers should be appointed to the Houses of the Oireachtas and should continue to work on a newly-established joint committee on Travellers. An expert group panel should be appointed to work with State partners and regulating bodies and participate in matters of potential relevance arising from the work of organisations such as the Residential Tenancies Board, the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland, the Press Council of Ireland, Enterprise Ireland, and the Workplace Relations Commission. The Government should direct local authorities to ensure Traveller representation in local democracy and to actively target Travellers on boards, committees and decision-making forums.

Public participation regarding public partnership networks should include Traveller inter-agency committees across all local authorities and strategic policy committees. In the areas of tourism, heritage, arts, sports, community development, enterprise and social inclusion, Traveller representation should be visible and should not be restricted to voluntary efforts. There should be specific national strategies to tackle Traveller employment with a priority requirement on State bodies, semi-State agencies and the public service to double their efforts and also to establish a paid internship for Travellers across all public bodies. There should be an adoption of universal ethnic identifiers across Departments and semi-State bodies.

I want to add that being here today is a historic moment. I acknowledge that. People have come before us, such as Nan Joyce, who ran for election in 1982. She never got here but we are here now. That is significant and we need to ensure this progression and these steps are moved forward. I will finish with the words of Nelson Mandela: “to deny and person their human rights is to challenge their humanity”. For a long time, Travellers have been challenged but so has our humanity. I look forward to the recommendations that will emerge from today’s meeting and to the implementation of those recommendations on Traveller participation across all sectors of society, including the political establishment.

Chairman: I thank Mr. Joyce. I call Ms Joanna Corcoran of the Galway Traveller Movement.

Ms Joanna Corcoran: I am a member of the Traveller community and I live in Galway

city. I am one of the community employment supervisors with the Galway Traveller Movement and I have worked from a human rights and community work perspective for the past nine years. I am passionate about equality challenging social injustice and I am willing to work to improve the situation for my community but I also need a system that is willing to work with me to address these issues. I am thankful for the opportunity to present today.

According to the 2016 census, Galway is the county with the highest population of Travellers in the country. The Traveller population numbered some 4,245 individuals which represents 1.6% of the total population. I will give some information on the background of the Galway Traveller Movement for those not familiar with the group. We were established in 1994 and we are an independent Traveller organisation for Galway city and county. We are made up of Travellers and non-Travellers. We have worked for more than two decades to challenge and respond to the structural inequalities being experienced by the Traveller community. The work of the Galway Traveller Movement has always been rooted in an understanding of and respect for the distinct culture and ethnic identity of the Traveller community. It is important that the official recognition of Traveller ethnicity is translated into tangible improvements in the situation and experiences of the Traveller community. The vision of the Galway Traveller Movement is to achieve full equality for Travellers and the full participation of Travellers in social, economic, political and cultural life as well as the broader enhancement of social justice and human rights.

Moving on to the subject of promoting and supporting the increased involvement of Travellers in decision-making processes in the public sphere, the Galway Traveller Movement recommends that the State ensure the meaningful inclusion of the voices and perspectives of the Traveller community at all levels of decision-making. To ensure that Traveller participation is meaningful, checks and balances need to be put in place and systems need to be developed to ensure transparency and accountability. We need to ensure that members of the Traveller community are protected under all legislation. We also need to ensure the full participation of Travellers in political and public life at local, regional and national level. This needs leadership and resourcing at institutional level. Barriers to Traveller participation must be removed and greater value needs to be put on the expertise that the Traveller community brings to the decision-making table.

Traveller cultural action needs to be meaningful. An independent assessment should be carried out on all legislation and policies that may have a negative impact on the Traveller community or on the expression of Traveller culture. Legislation and policies found to have negative impact need to be reviewed in line with the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014. Equality of outcomes for the Traveller community needs to be prioritised across all social policy areas. The Galway Traveller Movement calls for the full implementation of the public sector duty as defined in section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014, which states:

- (1) A public body shall, in the performance of its functions, have regard to the need to—
 - (a) eliminate discrimination,
 - (b) promote equality of opportunity and treatment of its staff and the persons to whom it provides services, and
 - (c) protect the human rights of its members, staff and the persons to whom it provides services.

The development of a new national anti-racism strategy is essential to ensure that equality issues for the Traveller community are made mainstream. There needs to be an interdepartmental, cross-sectoral approach to eliminating racism towards the Traveller community. We need to develop and enact hate crime legislation in which Travellers are named as having specific protection. We need to ensure that Traveller children's rights are protected as part of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Traveller representation on the local Traveller accommodation consultative committees, LTACC, is set out in the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act 1998, to which Mr. Joyce referred. Members of the Traveller community are represented on LTACCs but we are not protected from the very real anti-Traveller discourse that is allowed and accepted in these meetings. The negative attitudes and prejudice that are widespread in Irish society are reflected in these meetings. I have experienced this first-hand as a local representative. This should not be allowed to continue. The power imbalance needs to be redressed and respect and dignity need to be central values for success in all representation. The Galway Traveller Movement recommends a full review and overhaul of the LTACCs to include, though not be limited to, the development of agreed terms of reference; the development of a communication strategy and working protocol for members; monthly progress reports to be circulated to all representatives; and the provision of anti-racism, equality, non-discrimination and cultural competency training which should be mandatory and repeated regularly for all LTACC and housing strategic policy committee, SPC, members. There should be meaningful participation in decision-making, with a view to getting real results for the Traveller community and public accountability with an LTACC which is accountable to the Traveller community.

The Galway Traveller Movement has produced two reports detailing the violation of the Traveller community's human rights in living in substandard conditions in most Galway city and county home sites and group housing schemes. Members can get a copy of those reports from us if they email us. There has been a complete lack of political will to date to deliver on Traveller accommodation programmes. Traveller children, young people and adults should enjoy an adequate standard of living compatible with a life of dignity. Traveller children should be able to live and grow up in a safe, healthy, sustainable and child friendly environment that supports their developmental and learning needs.

We need to challenge structural inequality and all its manifestations. Members of the Traveller community should have a right to participate. There need to be public campaigns to address the negative public attitude towards the Traveller community. Members of the Traveller community need to be central to the development of any such programmes because there should be nothing for us without us being involved. Members of the Traveller community to be legally protected. I want the recognition of my Traveller ethnicity to be more than a symbolic gesture. Our culture matters and we are proud.

Chairman: I thank Ms Corcoran. The next speakers are Ms Rachel Doyle and Ms Ann Irwin from Community Work Ireland. Are they sharing time?

Ms Rachel Doyle: Yes.

Chairman: Two and a half minutes each?

Ms Rachel Doyle: That is fine. We are doing a double act this morning.

Chairman: That is all right.

Ms Rachel Doyle: I thank the committee for inviting us to present this morning on key issues of importance for Travellers. We will describe the background of our organisation, present some of the issues relating to the participation of Travellers in decision-making and also present some recommendations, some of which are in our submission. I am community development worker and I have been involved in Traveller organisations for the past 25 years, as has my colleague, Ms Ann Irwin, who will speak later. We have both been involved in producing reports recently. I was involved in writing the report on Traveller women in prison, produced by the St. Stephen's Green Trust. Ms Irwin recently produced a publication on Travellers and horse ownership. Community Work Ireland is a national network of community workers that supports and promotes community development as a means of intervention for social change and equality.

Mr. Collins and Mr. Joyce both referred to community development as a process underpinning the work of many Traveller organisations. Community development is a discipline and an internationally recognised approach to promoting equality, social justice and human rights. Community development works on the principles of participation, collectivity, community empowerment, social justice and sustainability, human rights, equality and anti-discrimination. We look forward to the forthcoming production of the new strategy which the Department of Rural and Community Development is about to publish on community development and supports for the community sector. That will be very relevant for work with Travellers. Over the past 35 years, our organisation has had strong ties with the other organisations present, including the Irish Traveller Movement, the National Traveller Women's Forum and Pavee Point. People working in those organisations have helped to shape our organisation and community development in Ireland. Travellers have led much of that work over the past three decades. In turn, Community Work Ireland has tried to share that space in promoting rights for Travellers.

A key focus of our work is on ensuring that the voices of those who experience the highest levels of social exclusion, inequality and discrimination are present, listened to and heeded in the decision-making and policy-making structures and processes that affect their lives. Ms Irwin will run through some key issues related to this theme.

Ms Ann Irwin: I will address a number of issues regarding the work of Community Work Ireland and the perspective that Ms Doyle and I share as non-Traveller members and supporters of the Traveller movement. We were both very involved in the Galway Traveller Movement when it was established in 1994. Despite developments in advancing the position of Travellers in Ireland, most notably the formal recognition of Traveller ethnicity and the more recent launch of the national Traveller and Roma inclusion strategy, it is clear that little has changed for many Travellers. Travellers' experience of oppression, discrimination and racism is well documented and acknowledged nationally and internationally. While these themes will be discussed in the next session, the issues are pertinent and require specific attention when discussing the matter of Traveller participation in decision-making processes in the public sphere. As Ms Corcoran alluded to, such processes and the structures, committees and boards established to promote them are frequently reflective and representative of society at large and the attitudes and values that prevail. It is, therefore, not surprising that while some of the experiences of Travellers are positive, the majority can be characterised by Travellers not being listened to, tokenism, frustration and even experiences of obstruction, direct hostility, and expressions of prejudice and discrimination from non-Traveller committee members in a range of fora. We need to ask how people are appointed to decision-making committees, particularly those that affect Traveller lives at a local and national level. In many instances, there appears to be no prerequisite for members of these committees to have a track record in the promotion of equal-

ity and human rights. As mentioned, some are proactively anti-Traveller and hostile to progress with regard to Traveller rights.

We draw attention, as Mr. Joyce did, to the fact that representation by Travellers tends to be limited to Traveller-specific committees, issues and themes. We argue that this needs to change so that Traveller voices are heard in a variety of fora, dealing with a variety of themes, such as planning, arts, culture, climate change, etc. The committee will hear later from the National Traveller Women's Forum but we take this opportunity to highlight the need for a specific focus on Traveller women in the development of any programmes or policies seeking to promote the participation of Travellers. As highlighted by the National Traveller Women's Forum, Traveller women play a central role in Traveller society. Within the Traveller movement in Ireland, Traveller women have played a significant role in the development of Traveller organisations and made a valuable contribution to the improvement of lives of Travellers. Over the past ten years, a significant number of Traveller women have progressed from working in Traveller organisations in a voluntary capacity to a paid capacity, representing a significant and positive development for both Traveller women and Traveller organisations. The national strategy for women and girls, the monitoring committee on which my colleague, Ms Doyle, sits, notes that if women are to change their circumstances fundamentally, they must have greater access to the levels of power across Irish society. We also need to ensure that disadvantaged women, older women, women with disabilities, Traveller and Roma women and migrant women can participate in key decisions concerning their lives. The strategy states that, in view of the historic under-representation of Traveller and Roma women in leadership positions, measures will specifically be taken to provide greater opportunities for Traveller and Roma women to participate in leadership, including in the community and voluntary sector.

I will pass over to Ms Doyle to talk about a short number of recommendations but, before I do, I have a note on the critical role that community development has played in the development of leadership within the Traveller community. As a number of my colleagues have already stated, community development is usually behind many of the Traveller leaders who have emerged over the past number of decades and we strongly suggest that specific support should be given to this.

Chairman: I thank Ms Iriwn. We now move on to Mr. Kevin Burn.

Ms Rachel Doyle: I wanted to finish with a couple of recommendations if that is okay.

Chairman: We will allow that, even though the witnesses have gone two or three minutes over time.

Ms Rachel Doyle: Okay.

Chairman: I hope they warned the witnesses about the time limits back there.

Ms Rachel Doyle: They did; it is our fault.

Chairman: As if Senators know when it comes to time. The Senators are very welcome and we will come to them for questions in a few minutes.

Ms Rachel Doyle: We are calling for a gender focus in any actions or initiatives that result from today's hearings, as well as for positive action to address the deficit in policy and decision making for Travellers. We recommend, as an immediate first step, a quota system for Travellers on public decision and policy making structures. We recommend an audit of the experiences of

Travellers who are now participating on these structures to see what their experiences are like and what kind of a review of structures is needed. We recommend sanctions for those on decision making bodies who make anti-Traveller statements or encourage anti-Traveller statements to be made. We recommend community development funding for autonomous community work with Travellers where Travellers have an independent voice outside the State.

To highlight the public sector equality and human rights duty, public bodies must be brought up to speed on their responsibilities under the Act and ensure that they operate in a manner consistent with the duty. We are calling for resources to Traveller organisations to provide training on anti-racism to public decision-making structures. We recommend the immediate implementation of, and additional resources for, the national Traveller and Roma inclusion strategy. The following recommendation is one we all really need to get behind: the development and implementation of a new national action plan against racism. The most recent one finished in 2008. We need it for Travellers and other minority groups.

Mr. Kevin Burn: I thank the committee for inviting me here today. I represent Exchange House Ireland National Travellers Service and to add our voice to the excellent submissions that the committee has already heard from partners with whom we work. I am sure the committee will also hear excellent submissions later today.

Exchange House Ireland National Travellers Service is an organisation of Travellers and non-Travellers and has been a leading provider of front-line and support services to some of the most marginalised Travellers in Ireland since 1980. We are a multidisciplinary front-line service and provide education and training services, children and young people services, family support and crisis intervention services, addiction services and the national Traveller mental health service.

We also deliver partnership services through training, provision of expertise and dual working with other organisations to provide services to Travellers in Ireland. Our aim is to break down some of the barriers and discrimination to facilitate Travellers to access the range of services they need in an equitable way. One of the key things that we notice, in our day-to-day work, is that it is not about Travellers not trying or not wanting these changes to take place, but the barriers exist and it is difficult for them to break down those barriers without the support of some of these structures. I will go into that further.

We utilise a distinctive, multidisciplinary approach and work with the service user group who often face multiple social issues and barriers. We have a skeleton staff team throughout the organisation who can work with members of the Traveller community to instigate positive outcomes.

We support a number of the recommendations we have already heard today about clear representation of Travellers in the Oireachtas, whether in the Seanad or the Dáil. We believe that a rapporteur for Travellers should be appointed to the Houses of the Oireachtas.

We believe that we should establish a specific national strategy to tackle Traveller unemployment with the priority requirement of statutory bodies, semi-State agencies and public services to proactively employ Travellers. It is important that this is seen in the context of decades of exclusion whereby there have been multiple barriers, tangible and intangible. We are coming from a point of view where that employment has not been there for a long time and the changes needed are big ones. It will not happen without big changes. When a group has been excluded, in large part, from this type of employment for years, it takes more than a slight

opening up to change things. There needs to be a commitment and resources with high level support to harness the knowledge and skills of members of the Traveller community. Putting in high level resources over the first years would mean that successes would become the future support network as others follow in their footsteps. This is an example of if one does not see it, one does not think one can be it. We work with a number of young Travellers within our organisation and we are constantly trying to show them that they can be these things but, without the support at a structural level, they are not going to believe that.

We should hold to account the requirement of the public sector duty and for the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection to direct the establishment of a paid internship scheme across public bodies by directly targeting Travellers. Without doing this, we do not feel it is ever going to happen. One can say that it is open to everybody and continue to make those claims but without clear policies that are putting in place a pathway, that is still not going to happen.

We also believe we should look at the issue of hiding ethnic identity and why it is taking place. We believe support networks should be offered to people in employment and apprenticeship roles so they do not feel isolated and are able to voice their concerns over the barriers they face. Some of these concerns and barriers are often the reasons why people are hiding their ethnic identity. They do not want to lose the position they are in.

We should be willing and able to address the inevitable bumps in the road without giving up on schemes, or the people on them, because that gives the message that the Government is happy to provide additional and needed support until things become difficult and then it is no longer worth it. It is about sticking with it and understanding that, when we are trying to make a big change and involve people who have been excluded from society for such a period of time, there will be bumps in the road. We must stick with these things.

I looked at with the following with an eye to getting more Travellers into employment and roles where they can make a difference. The National Football League, NFL, of American Football had a problem with getting head coaches from minority backgrounds and implemented what was called the Rooney rule. Under this rule, teams had to interview candidates from ethnic minority backgrounds for head coach positions. A version of this, or something similar, would give opportunities of fair interview to Traveller candidates for statutory roles or internships. A change is being made by even just offering the interview. Travellers would gain experience of interviews and powers at that level and it would mean that the people conducting the interviews and making the decisions would begin to see the talent within the Traveller community.

That should be in addition to reserved job roles and internships for Travellers as, without big changes like this, it will be impossible to reverse the decades of overt discrimination that has been faced. The benefits of this to both employment and relationships between Travellers and the majority population would be huge. It is only by getting prominent Travellers, who have the skills and knowledge, into these positions and working alongside the majority population that the change to society we all want to see will be made.

Ms Minnie Connors: I thank the committee for inviting me to speak here today. Members have already got the social and political submission from our group and now I want to tell them the context of where they came from. I am a 40 year old Traveller woman. I was brought up in a trailer with my parents, five brothers and seven sisters. They were the happiest days of my life, living out in the open with our horses, dogs, chickens and goats, with all my extended family around me. Back then we lived without water, electricity or toilets. My extended family are

now living on the same site I was raised on in four trailers, without water, electricity or toilets. Nothing has changed in a generation. I went to school in Wexford, to the same school that my five children have attended. When I left at the age of 12 I could not read or write. In Youthreach I learned to read and write in a few weeks.

The very same thing has happened to my children. They have been treated as children with special needs from day one. They do not get the same lessons as other children, do not learn Irish, do not get homework, and are told to colour in pictures and play computer games. They stay in at playtime to avoid discrimination. The same level of abuse and bullying is still there. If a child touched off me in school, they would have to touch off somebody else to get rid of the Traveller germ. A generation later, this is what my children experience everyday.

When I had three children I was living happily in a caravan on the family site when council officials told me that if we did not leave, they would impound our caravan and I would have to go to a women's refuge with my three children, and my husband Jim would have to go into a men's hostel. Finding a landlord to rent to a Traveller family is near to impossible. The council offered the alternative of going into a council house, in a group housing scheme of ten houses built especially for Traveller families. All of the other Traveller families have been replaced by settled families and my family and I are now isolated on that scheme away from our own community.

We accept that there are many things we need to change in our community and in our culture. For example, we want to give Traveller children the best chance in life. Yet there are priests in this country who charge €1,000 to €2,000 to perform fake marriages on underage Traveller girls and boys, taking advantage of our anxiety about protecting our culture.

I have had breast cancer. My GP did not examine me when I presented with a lump. He gave me antibiotics. I have to see five different doctors before I could get a mammogram. The cancer was then discovered. I still have to have the support of settled friends to get doctors to treat me properly as a person. I am one of the 83% unemployed people in the Traveller community claiming social welfare. When I attended a social welfare appointment recently, the officer tried to get me to sign a document I had not read. It was a contract with Tús Nua to do a course I had already completed the previous year. When I asked for time to read it I was accused of pulling the Traveller card. If I did not sign, I was told that an old signature of mine will be put on it. When I said I had had the opportunity to do a counselling course to assist members of the Traveller communities suffering with mental health issues, the official told me that Travellers do not want to work, they just want welfare. It is soul-destroying to be treated in such a disrespectful way by a person in a Government Department.

The committee is hearing from me today because my beautiful sister Alice took her own life last year. She was 24 years of age. She was the ninth suicide in my family in the last 30 years. Suicide in the Traveller community is seven to ten times higher than in the settled community. In spite of this Governments do nothing to deal with the crisis.

There was no help for Alice when her crisis arose. We were told half an hour before she died that because it was a Saturday, she would have to wait to Monday to see her own family doctor. She had already seen her doctor two days before but to no avail. There is still no support or help for shocked traumatised families. The school advised me to act normal although both my children had been in the house that morning when Alice was found dead.

Healthcare professionals do not understand Traveller culture. One counsellor I attended

told me that she had never counselled a Traveller before and would need training to work with them. We all need culturally-appropriate mental health services. Our entire way of life is being stripped from us and we are still held in contempt by the settled community.

Travellers have a fear of organisations like Tusla. After my sister's death I went to see the Traveller mental health co-ordinator. Her response was to report to Tusla that my family are living on a site without basic amenities. This filled us with fear that the children would be taken into care. This has been the experience of many Traveller families in the past.

As an example of Traveller culture, horses hold special meaning for us but we are hounded for owning them. Last week my brother's horse was legally grazing in a field when it was cut from its ropes and taken. Two days later he traced it to the pound in Cork. He proved he was the legal owner but was then told that the horse had died during the night at the pound, even though a vet had reported the horse to be in good health on arrival at the pound the previous day.

Traveller life in Ireland is a constant daily struggle to be treated with respect and dignity like everybody else. It takes every ounce of our strength every day to battle against the feelings of shame and worthlessness that are heaped on us wherever we go.

Recently I attended a party held for Syrian refugees hosted by the local council. It was so nice to see them welcomed and their culture being respected. I could feel the hurt and disrespect that I had felt throughout my life. Why can this same respect not be there for me and for my people?

Chairman: I thank Ms Connors and all of our witnesses for their presentations. I will turn now to my illustrious and dear colleagues who are all very welcome and I thank them for their presence here today.

Some I am sure will have questions and I ask that they be kept brief and to the point. Who would like to speak first? I call Senator Devine.

Senator Máire Devine: Céad míle fáilte to our guests, they are all very welcome. I commend the wonderful rapporteur, Senator Colette Kelleher, and the recent establishment of the Oireachtas committee and I hope that today's proceedings will get somewhere.

Picking up on various points, Ms. Sherlock referred to surveys and mental health issues. I worked for a long time as a psychiatric nurse in a previous life and I have my own issues as to how in retrospect Travellers were treated within the health service, which was so eloquently and sadly talked about by Ms Connors. The reference to traits that several people saw as not belonging to them formed a diagnosis of the traits of Travellers as being something apart. This, in a psychiatric sense, was then seen as something that needed to be treated. We have come a long way since I started out as a student nurse, but we have still a long way to go.

Ms Connor's heartfelt story of accessing vital healthcare for herself together with the recent survey which has shown the increase in the massive suicide issue within the Traveller community prompts the question as to whether there is one thing that can be done to get that message out there. Much has been done around the services but it is not impacting on the community itself.

It is interesting to note the comparisons with the prisoner issue, as referred to by Mr. John Lonergan, where much mental ill-health is captured within the prison and is not treated as a mental health issue either.

Chairman: Has the Senator a question?

Senator Máire Devine: We have reduced school timetables, which are illegal in education, and are being imposed in primary schools with the threat of absolute expulsion. How does Ms Connors believe when talking about schooling for her children that this policy will impact on her children later in life, being made feel so different and alienated? Alienation is one of the words that comes to mind with the massive implications of the negative experiences in education.

The issue of accommodation with the 50% underspend needs to be looked at. My area of Dublin South Central has three such areas - one behind Guinness's, St. Michael's Estate, and we have Labre Park, redevelopment that is 15 years in the making and has been stalled again. Some 50% of that funding goes back into the Exchequer. Should we be thinking of penalising local authorities when they do not spend the money allocated for Traveller accommodation and should this unspent money be given to councils that are willing and able to spend it as opposed to having it swallowed back up by the State? My contribution touches on many issues; I thank the committee.

Chairman: I call Senator Aodhán Ó Ríordáin to speak.

Senator Aodhán Ó Ríordáin: I thank the Chairman. Our guest speakers are all very welcome; this is a wonderful occasion, which one speaker has called historic, which it really is. I thank Senator Collette Kelleher and the civic engagement group for organising this meeting and being so persistent in pursuing the rights of the Traveller community in this House for the past three years that I have been here. Political representation in these Houses has been mentioned a lot. It is something we want to support. Having a designated Seanad seat for the Traveller community is an excellent idea, one that has been mentioned before in many different fora. Has how that would come into play been examined? Would it require an overhaul of the entire Seanad electoral system? Would it require a constitutional amendment because it is a feature of the Constitution? It is a constitutional House. Alternatively, is it something that could be done much more simply? I would prefer something that was written in stone rather than being at the whim of a Taoiseach because that post can change.

My second question concerns hate speech legislation. We have struggled for a long time to get around to strengthening our hate speech laws because there is a strong lobby that promotes the idea of free speech, which is understandable, but those who are at the rough end of hate speech are members of very vulnerable groups. The Traveller community are at the rough end of hate speech. There are journalists who write opinions that they would not get away with in any other country but they can write them in this country because of our hate speech laws and there are political parties and representatives within political parties who have made comments that would have landed them in court in any other country.

My questions concern the mechanisms about how we can enshrine that Seanad seat for the Traveller community as a permanent seat in the Houses of the Oireachtas and the witnesses' views on hate speech legislation and how we can turn the tide on the racist views that are given out about many different communities in society, but particularly the Traveller community, without check. Of all the communities with which I, and I am sure, my colleagues, have worked, the Traveller community always comes back to the table with solutions and positivity when often it would be an awful lot easier to walk away from the table and believe that nobody will ever listen. I congratulate the witnesses. I am humbled by their presence and their presentations.

Senator John Dolan: I am very happy to be present and to contribute on this issue. I thank Senator Kelleher for all the work she has done on this issue since the day she entered this House. In particular, I welcome someone who spent an afternoon in this Chamber in June 2003. That is Ms Rosaleen McDonagh, if she remembers, when both of us made presentations to the 11th review of the Seanad. Perhaps it was the 12th or the 15th.

Chairman: I appreciate it.

Senator John Dolan: Absolutely.

Chairman: Ceisteanna anois.

Senator John Dolan: We see the results of it. That is just to make the point that there has been an ongoing wish to be able to play a stronger part in the Houses of the Oireachtas. The Chairman is encouraging me. There are loads of things I would love to be able to say.

Chairman: I am very conscious of the clock.

Senator John Dolan: The clock is bearing down.

Chairman: I want to get to our witnesses and get a few answers.

Senator John Dolan: I will make a couple of observations. Let there be questions out of that, particularly contributions made by two people, Minnie Connors and John Lonergan. I must remember Ms Connors's sister. I thank her for sharing that story. We talk about suicide but it is different when one talks about a person and their life and relationship. That is a horrendous issue. I thought Ms Connors captured the real day-to-day grind - education, housing, how it has been hard to see change for over 40 years and health. I found this to be the most compelling and grounded presentation.

I thought Mr. Lonergan was tempting us to look at this issue in a way that perhaps we have not looked at it previously and to look at some aspects of it that have not been given enough consideration

Chairman: The Senator will have an opportunity when we have the report. I am sure we will have a debate. Forgive me-----

Senator John Dolan: The clock-----

Chairman: Are there questions? This is a question and answer session.

Senator John Dolan: Believe it or not, I was-----

Chairman: It is not about Second Stage speeches.

Senator John Dolan: Many contributors today rightly made reference to different participation channels but what Ms Connors and Mr. Lonergan were getting at or what was helping me to understand more was how we take an historic occasion like this and make something of it. What is the game changer? Both the settled community and Travellers have a problem here. I am not saying there should not be more processes. Neither community has on its own shifted the lived experience of people. Is it to do with trust? Is it leaving aside how we victimise or say it is their fault and we are the victims or they are victims? Something like this must happen and the core of that is whether we can chance trusting each other with some things?

Chairman: I am very grateful. Everything everybody is saying is very important but they must be brief and to the point and ask questions.

Senator Martin Conway: Unfortunately, I have to go but I was keen to commend the contributors, particularly Ms Connors.

Chairman: We all commend them.

Senator Martin Conway: This is a public session. I am sure that when it hits the airwaves, as I have no doubt it will, the people in Wexford will hold their heads in shame because we need to look at laws where when that type of thing does happen, these people can be brought to account.

I have experienced the next issue myself. People who try to assist members of the Traveller community end up being harassed and harangued for doing so. I recall how back in 2006, I had a house that I was very happy to rent to members of the Traveller community who then lived there very happily for ten years. There was no issue high up or low down, as I knew there would not be. However, the level of harassment I received as a result of making the house available to members of the Traveller community was outrageous. That gave me a very clear example of what members of the community must suffer on a daily basis in terms of prejudice, harassment and dealing with a society that clearly has not lived up to its duties and responsibilities. I would say “Well done” for being here. That is how one makes a difference because if one keeps grinding away, eventually, one will get a result. We are here to help.

Senator Lynn Ruane: I have three questions. Mr. Joyce said something that stood out regarding collusion. I zoned in on that straightaway. Could he elaborate on that because as a working-class woman, I have wondered whether I am colluding and becoming part of a system and whether this is all worth it? If we do not see outcomes and change, is it collusion, box-ticking, a case of, “Look, we spoke to Travellers”, and being able to point to these occasions that happen from time to time without ever seeing any real outcome or change in equality of conditions?

I thank Mr. Patrick McDonagh for his presentation. I think I am right in saying that he studied law for his primary degree.

Mr. Patrick McDonagh: History and economics.

Senator Lynn Ruane: I remember first meeting him when he was in second or third year. It might have been an event we were doing. Could he elaborate on the financial scholarship idea? Would that be done by the educational institutions or would it be a national support system? Over the next few years, it will be said, “Look what Patrick has done. He has a PhD. Why aren't the rest of you getting that?” That happens all the time. The person is held up as a weapon against his or her own community. How important is it to keep battling against that? We can keep saying that education is the way out but we make it impossible for people to engage in education. We can say education all we want to minority groups but that puts a personal responsibility on the person to engage and get his or her education instead of acknowledging the years of assimilation and oppression that stopped that person getting to the point where he or she can even consider education. Can the witnesses talk about how we get further in terms of supporting people at community level before they even begin to engage in an educational process?

Perhaps Mr. Martin Collins can speak to the issue of political representation, which is most

important. I am completely in favour of positive discrimination. We can have gender quotas all we want, but if that 50-50 split is made up of affluent middle-class people, it does not matter whether it is men or women. It is about what the representation is made up of. In the recent local elections, what stood out to me was the number of women who were put on posters by parties but then not supported. How can we ensure if we move towards a place where we encourage Travellers and tell them they need to put themselves forward but then not meet them with anything on the other side that it will not become tokenistic. The fear is Travellers putting their names up on posters on lamppost but political parties and structures still keeping every support from the Travellers and preventing them from being able to have the support and a community network to be elected in the first place. It is one thing putting women, Travellers or working-class people out there for election, but I worry that they will not be met with the systems and structures to help them get elected the way others come together to get their friends elected. There are many mediocre people in here but it is as if a working-class person or Traveller has to be exceptional. They must prove themselves before they are even considered. How can we move past that and acknowledge that many people in here are fairly average. There is nothing exceptional about any of us and there are so many people within the Traveller community who are expected to do the most amazing things before they are even considered to be put on a ballot.

Chairman: I thank Senator Ruane for her questions. Finally, a question from Senator Joe O'Reilly.

Senator Joe O'Reilly: It would be important to show no displays of mediocrity after that.

Chairman: The Senator never does.

Senator Joe O'Reilly: I thank the Chairman for that endorsement. I welcome our visitors, the Traveller people, who are with us today. It is historic, as my colleague, Senator Ó Ríordáin, stated earlier. It is wonderful that they are here. It is also wonderful that it is a public session. I warmly welcome them and endorse it, and I hope it is part of an ongoing dialogue.

I commend my colleague, Senator Colette Kelleher. I have had the privilege of serving on the Council of Europe with Senator Kelleher for some time. I have first-hand knowledge of how proactive the Senator is on issues and how committed and sincere she is. This is a wonderful initiative of Senator Kelleher and I commend that.

We all must say to the Traveller community - I am coming to a sequence of questions-----

Chairman: Unfortunately, we do not have all day.

Senator Joe O'Reilly: I anticipated the Chairman's interruption.

Chairman: I must come back to these good people for brief closing comments.

Senator Joe O'Reilly: They are the victims of prejudice and ignorance on the part of our community. We should begin by admitting that and that there is much wrong at our end. It is an important starting point. There is no point in avoiding that or dressing it up in any other form. The onus is on us as community leaders to try to lessen that. I served on the Traveller accommodation committee on my local authority and worked to do that, and I taught a Traveller class. We are all not doing enough - I myself am not doing enough - but we have a duty to breakdown those prejudices.

I have a couple of issues to raise with the witnesses. I missed their contributions because I was travelling up from Cavan, and unavoidably so. I would like to ask about the suicide issue. I gather from the questions that there was a very human personal testimony there. It is a very real issue. It is an issue in all communities but I gather it is a very special one with the Traveller community, tragically. The great empowerment and key to emancipation, self-development and strength in their communities is knowledge and education. Therein lies the key.

Chairman: We are supposed to finish for 12 o'clock.

Senator Joe O'Reilly: I understand the Traveller community has a problem with bullying in secondary schools but I would like to ask the witnesses about the transition to secondary. How is that transition evolving? At the stage where I was leaving teaching, there was a movement into secondary education of a greater degree. There is bullying there and there are also some barriers. I would like to ask them about that.

How does the Traveller community deal with the minorities within it? How is the Traveller community performing when it comes to LGBT rights, persons with disability and minorities? I always felt, and I say this with the greatest respect, that there was a level of hierarchy in the Traveller community too, which sometimes can be damaging to weaker people. That is in all our societies and it is wrong. I would be interested in how the Traveller community deals with the challenges it faces.

It is great that the Traveller community is here. I hope there are more days like this to come. We are not doing enough. We must say publicly that we are not and the Traveller community must challenge us to do more. Today, the representatives should challenge us to do more.

Chairman: Thanks to our own rapporteur, Senator Kelleher, no doubt we will have a brilliant report. That will go to Government. There will also be a debate. I am sure the Leader will facilitate a debate on that. I am coming to the witnesses from the Traveller community. They have heard the questions, if they could find them in all of that. In their brief summing up, I ask them to deal with anything they have heard. I will start with Mr. Collins.

Mr. Martin Collins: Before I respond to some of the questions, it would be remiss of me if I did not acknowledge a number of people here today who have been great champions of Traveller rights over the years. Senators Ruane, Kelleher and Ó Ríordáin have been consistent in their support in advocating for Traveller's rights. It is really appreciated. We need that support because we cannot take this journey on our own. It would be great if many more politicians showed some leadership and began to support and advocate for Traveller and Roma human rights.

We are beyond the point of having to prove or provide more evidence that Travellers continue to suffer oppression, exclusion and racism. We are beyond that point. There is independent evidence from the human rights commission, from the ESRI and from internationally recognised human rights bodies. Earlier, Senator Dolan asked what the core issue was and whether it was a lack of trust or what. Before we can begin to resolve the issues, there has to be an acknowledgement of and an agreement and a consensus on the core problem. This is where we need leadership as it has to be named. Without a shadow of a doubt, the core problem here is racism, at both the individual level and the institutional level. Sometimes our political establishment is complicit in perpetuating that racism. We see the manifestations of that racism. Ms Minnie Connors and others spoke about suicide. That is a manifestation of the racism. The poor living conditions are a manifestation of the racism. So too are the low educational attain-

ment and the high unemployment rate. These are all manifestations of the individualised and institutional racism. If we are serious about addressing these issues, supporting the inclusion of Travellers, and respecting the human rights of Travellers, let us name it for what it is and stop pussyfooting around. That is one issue.

In response to Senator Ó Ríordáin on the Seanad seat, let us be realistic. It would be a good symbolic starting point if there were a Traveller in the Seanad, nominated by the Taoiseach or by some other means, but that on its own will not be a panacea. It is a good starting point. It will not resolve all the issues. We still need the so-called participative democracy, that is, the national and local consultative committees dealing with health, education, etc. Let us be realistic about that because when Traveller ethnicity was acknowledged on 1 March 2017, somehow or other an unrealistic expectation was created in the community that suddenly the symbolic recognition of Traveller ethnicity would resolve all of the issues that we face. That has not happened and it will not happen. In fact, the Travellers feel let down and disillusioned as a result because the recognition has not translated into rights on the ground for Travellers.

On the Seanad seat, I would agree with Senator Ó Ríordáin. Rather than leave it at the whim of the Taoiseach of the day, if it could be copper-fastened from a legislative point of view whereby it is guaranteed on an ongoing basis, I certainly would favour that option.

We do not want tokenism. That is absolutely not something we want. What is required is proper and appropriate support systems and structures to ensure that Travellers participating in the Seanad and Dáil can do so in a meaningful and significant way.

There are, of course, challenges and issues in our community. We are the first to say that when it comes to feuding, children's rights and LGBT issues. To be fair, Traveller organisations have gained the maturity, confidence and skills to be able to look at these issues and deal with them. Mr. Chris McDonagh is here from the Traveller Mediation Service and will speak about some of these issues later. To provide an example of the progress we have made, it is only a few weeks ago that we had at least 50 Travellers and people working with Travellers taking part in the Dublin pride festival. That would not have happened ten or 15 years ago. I am not saying it is by any means resolved, but that is an indication. We have a long journey ahead of us.

Chairman: I ask Mr. Patrick McDonagh for a brief comment or reply.

Mr. Patrick McDonagh: I thank members for the questions. I was asked whether the scholarship I propose should be national or offered by a particular institution. While it would be great if every university offered a Traveller scholarship, it would work best if it was a national scholarship. It should not matter if I go to Trinity, UCC, NUIG, Maynooth or UL. That is the wrong approach. It should be national programme to which Travellers could apply to cover fees and maintenance. A good point was made about tokenism. Right now, it is easy to put someone like me on a pedestal or to use my example as a stick to beat others. I am quite aware of even my own tokenism. I will probably be the first Traveller awarded a PhD from Trinity and it will be considered in a tokenistic way for quite a long time.

The big step is in primary and secondary education. I have been fortunate in my circumstances in a way that others have not been. I never had a teacher at primary or secondary level who told me I could not do something or that this was not for me. Ms Minnie Connors said her children had been given reduced hours, for example. I never had a reduced hours timetable and that can obviously make a substantial difference. In primary school, I was taken out separately for an hour a day which, in hindsight, was probably related to my background rather than to

actual need. In some ways, the major issues come down to teachers themselves and how Travellers are treated in the classroom from a young age. If they feel bullied and are told they are different, they will be less likely to continue.

Education does not need to mean university education. I have proceeded to university but education can include apprenticeships and other careers. Obviously, people should be encouraged to complete primary and secondary education but university is not the be-all and end-all of education. There are other career paths that require other forms of education. This is an issue that does not apply just to Travellers but to the population in general. Education does not purely mean university. It is varied and includes apprenticeship and other forms.

Ms Kathleen Sherlock: I will reply on three separate questions. I was asked a specific question on mental health. The expert here on Traveller mental health is Thomas McCann, who will speak in the afternoon session.

Chairman: That was supposed to start five minutes ago. I do not know what I am going to do. I had Second Stage speeches on this side. I have asked everyone to be as brief as possible and it is Ms Sherlock's right to reply now to the questions.

Ms Kathleen Sherlock: I will try to keep this very brief.

Chairman: That would be appreciated.

Ms Kathleen Sherlock: To look at mental health and suicide as separate issues will not get us anywhere. Suicide is a result of underlying issues. We cannot say that every suicide has the same cause. There are many different reasons for it but we cannot remove from the equation the discrimination, racism, exclusion, lack of employment opportunities and the lack of educational attainment that our community has received. We cannot look at it in isolation. It is a symptom of a much larger problem that we must address. The bigger problem is exclusion and discrimination against the Traveller community.

Senator Terry Leyden: I was late coming up.

Chairman: Sorry, Senator.

Senator Terry Leyden: I am here to welcome the witnesses to the meeting.

Chairman: Please, Senator.

Senator Terry Leyden: I agree with so much of what was said.

Chairman: Senator, please respect the Chair. We have had questions and it is now the time for these good people to reply.

Senator Terry Leyden: The Chairman is telling me I am being silenced as a Member of the Seanad.

Chairman: You are not. It is a matter of the time.

Senator Lynn Ruane: Senator Leyden should definitely be silent. He was not here for the contributions but he has now come in and interrupted the witnesses' responses.

Senator Terry Leyden: I only arrived in. I am sorry.

Senator Lynn Ruane: Stay quiet until the next session then. The Senator is interrupting the session.

Chairman: This session started at 10 a.m.

Senator Terry Leyden: I want to welcome them here.

Chairman: That has all been done. Please do not be disorderly. I am trying to conduct this session sensibly. I ask the witnesses to forgive that interruption. Ms Sherlock is answering questions.

Senator Terry Leyden: This is-----

Chairman: Please, this is a public consultation.

Ms Kathleen Sherlock: To come back to how we address this, we need to deal with Traveller children receiving meaningful education. We continue to see Traveller children come out of school who can barely read and write. That must be addressed and we need to understand why that is. There has been a great deal of discussion recently around reduced timetables and that needs to be addressed. Ireland is one of the most developed countries in the world. People are coming from around the world to work here and find better opportunities, yet we have 84% unemployment in the Traveller community. It is not just the Traveller community. There are working-class areas that have high levels of unemployment also. People are being left behind. We need to ensure we have positive discrimination in employment but we also need to assess children to ensure they benefit from proper educational attainment.

We were asked about Traveller representation by way of a Seanad seat. Over the next year or so, we hope to work within national organisations and local Traveller groups to build a Traveller constituency whereby every Traveller has the right to vote for a Traveller who represents them. With the help of God, we will get a Seanad seat. If we do, Travellers can nominate themselves or be put forward for the Traveller community to vote on the holder. We do not want simply to have one Seanad seat, however. We need Travellers to be represented where the political decisions are being made and that is in local and national government. I will come back to a point I made earlier. Without a doubt, there is no community in Ireland that has been as negatively affected by political decisions and indecision as the Traveller community. We need positive discrimination and we need seats to be allocated for Travellers. However, we also need to provide training. One of the things Minceirs Whiden has done was to put together videos at the conference to educate Travellers on why they should register to vote and how and on how they should cast their votes. We must look at where people are at. People who are being excluded from the political system or who have not been part of it do not understand the mechanics of it. We need to look at where they are at. I hope that answers the question.

Chairman: The next speaker is Mr. John Lonergan. I ask Mr. Lonergan to be brief in any reply.

Mr. John Lonergan: Very briefly, I am a great believer in education and I agree completely with Mr. Patrick McDonagh on that. If we are not getting primary education right and if the experience expressed this morning is widespread, which I believe it is, that is where it begins and ends. The child's experience of education must be positive. Unless that is the case, education will suffer. I am a great believer that it must be a happy and inclusive experience. We must put the emphasis on that where the child starts in primary education. That is where it all begins and it must be a good experience. I agree completely with Mr. Patrick McDonagh about the idea

that it has to be third level. It does not. Education is far broader and far more significant than that. For young children it must be a normal thing to do, like everyone else. There is a connection between extreme poverty and education. That is what I highlighted in Mountjoy many years ago. The poorer the area one comes from, the less opportunity one will have in education. That is a fundamental discrimination. It does not apply exclusively to Travellers but they do suffer greatly from it.

Chairman: I call Mr. Joyce. I ask him to be as brief as he can be.

Mr. Bernard Joyce: To respond to the commentary on diversity and equality within the Traveller community, yes, we have come so far but we still have a long way to go. The Traveller community must lead the way on human rights, equality, participation and inclusion. At the same time, the wider community has a lot to learn from the Traveller community's progression.

Senator Ruane's question about inclusion is important. As for participation, the question is where one stops in terms of outcomes. The Traveller community and Traveller activists have been engaged in all these different structures - and been asked to do so - but the big question is about the implementation of policies. I refer to the 1995 task force report and all the recommendations that came out of it. We have not seen all the recommendations applied. This is what I mean by participation and inclusion in terms of outcomes. The outcomes have been poor for the amount of time and resources we put into this. We have made progress but we need to see a lot more in the form of real change and outcomes. The position is not acceptable in the context of suicide, the housing crisis, racism and exclusion. All these issues are at crisis point for the community.

Chairman: Does Ms Corcoran have anything further to add?

Ms Joanna Corcoran: Yes. There are two parts to this. Regarding the underspend of the Traveller accommodation budget, I agree that there need to be consequences and accountability, but this should not be achieved to the detriment of the Traveller community. Funding should not be taken from one local authority and brought to another; it should be spent by the local authority that has received it. The accountability and consequences should not be for the Traveller community but rather for the authorities that are refusing to spend the funding on much-needed culturally appropriate Traveller accommodation. The local authorities should be held to account and should face consequences. The funding should not be spread around. It definitely should not be given back because we have all seen the consequences of that.

As far as the hate speech legislation is concerned, we as Travellers - I know I would not be alone in saying this - have experienced hate speech in a way that would not be acceptable to other people in this country, let alone in other parts of the world. My view on this is that a code of conduct needs to be put in place and that people need to be led by example from the Government and the local authorities. In addition, the development of the national anti-racism strategy would definitely be essential to addressing this, and we definitely need to develop and enact the hate crime legislation in which Travellers are referred to, as I said earlier.

Chairman: Does Ms Doyle or Ms Irwin have a brief point in response?

Ms Rachel Doyle: No.

Ms Ann Irwin: We are happy to defer to Traveller colleagues for the responses.

Chairman: Of course. I am sure that anything that is overlooked here can be taken up in the

dialogue on Traveller social inclusion when we get to that. Does Mr. Burn have a brief point to make in response to anything?

Mr. Kevin Burn: Yes. The only way past the matter of collusion is for members of the Traveller community to be in significant positions, working alongside their majority counterparts. The more experience people have of working alongside people from the Traveller community, the more they will recognise the contribution they make and the knowledge and skills they have, and that immediately breaks down those negative stereotypes. Therefore, getting Traveller people into those positions is how we stop that collusion from happening.

Chairman: Ms Connors was asked a few questions.

Ms Minnie Connors: I could not get them all because they all came at once.

I will talk about the children in the schools. I am a mother of five. My oldest daughter is 18 and the youngest will be ten in September. They got the very same schooling I got - no difference - in the same school. They were treated the same. I looked at my children being treated at school the way I was treated. To give the committee a better sense of this, I ask them to imagine how a Traveller child at four years old, before ever going to school, is so proud of who they are, so proud of their mammy and daddy, their brothers and sisters, so proud of all their horses and dogs. They are so excited to head off for their first day in school, their new uniform on them, their schoolbag on their back. The very first day that child arrives at the door of the school, they are given a special needs teacher. The child is treated differently by the teacher. Then the other classmates will say, "My teacher is treating you differently, so you are different." They are now different in baby infants and will be different until sixth class, so they are going nowhere in their life. All the Traveller child wants to do then is fight to get out of school any way they can. My children choose sitting in the classroom over going out to play because they have no friends. They were born and reared in Wexford and went to the same school that their mammy went to but they have no connections at all in the school. If we were to try to do something about this, we would have to have Travellers in the schools. A small step would be having teachers get culturally appropriate training on Traveller children and Travellers. We should just be kind to them and let them know they are young. We should let teachers know that it will not be a waste of their time if they teach a Traveller child like all the other children in the school.

Chairman: On behalf of the Seanad Public Consultation Committee, I thank all the witnesses for their presentations. It has been a good session, both informative and productive, and I think we all learned from their insights and observations. Full account will be taken of all today's discussions when a draft report is prepared by Senator Kelleher, and copies of the final report will be sent to all contributors.

I propose that we suspend until 12.30 p.m., when we will deal with Traveller dialogue and social inclusion, if that is agreeable.

Sitting suspended at 12.20 p.m. and resumed at 12.35 p.m.

Chairman: On behalf of the committee, I welcome the following witnesses to the second session on Travellers and social inclusion: Mr. Chris McDonagh of the Traveller Mediation Service; Mr. Denis Robinson, doctoral candidate at University College Cork; Ms Lynn Scarff and Ms Rosa Meehan of the National Museum of Ireland; Ms Maria Joyce, co-ordinator of the National Traveller Women's Forum, Mr. Oein de Bhairdúin of the national action group for LGBT Traveller and Roma rights; Dr. Karl Kitching, director of equality, diversity and

inclusion at UCC; Ms RoseMarie Maughan of Hearing Autistic Traveller Voices; Mr. Thomas McCann of the Traveller Counselling Service; Ms Brigid Carmody, co-ordinator of the Cork Traveller Women's Network; Ms Louise Harrington, community development worker with the Cork Traveller Women's Network; and Ms Eilis Barry, chief executive of Free Legal Advice Centres, FLAC. They are all most welcome and I thank them for engaging with the committee in its consideration of this most important topic.

Before we begin, I draw their 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. However, if they are directed by the Chair to cease giving evidence on a particular matter and continue to do so, they are entitled thereafter only to qualified privilege in respect of their evidence. They are directed that only evidence connected with the subject matter of these proceedings is to be given and 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. Any opening statement witnesses have made to the committee will be published on the committee's website after the meeting.

I invite Senator Kelleher, our co-ordinator and, more importantly, our rapporteur to whom we are most grateful - we would not have this subject matter before us without her - to make some introductory remarks. I will then invite each witness to make a short presentation to the committee. They may share time with a colleague if they so wish. If they do, I ask them to indicate that to me when invited to speak. When the presentations are finished, I hope there will be time for questions and comments from Senators and responses from witnesses. I am conscious that the Seanad will be sitting in this Chamber later this afternoon.

Senator Colette Kelleher: There will be a cup of tea for everybody at 2.30 p.m. That is probably more important than anything else I will say today.

When the State formally recognised the ethnicity of Irish Travellers on 1 March 2017, the then Taoiseach, Deputy Enda Kenny, stated: "I hope that today will create a new platform for positive engagement by the Traveller community and Government together in seeking sustainable solutions which are based on respect and on honest dialogue." For too long, Travellers' identity was not recognised. The 1963 report of the Commission on Itinerancy caused damage which we are only beginning to undo. It socially constructed Travellers as failed settled people, denying the reality of their true and proud identity. It was an obliteration of people's true essence and presence from the public sphere. What happened as a result was very wrong, personally and politically. Travellers are still living with many of the consequences, as we heard in this morning's session. It was bad for Travellers and, by extension, for Ireland.

Today, we will examine ways to foster inclusion, dialogue and relationships between Travellers and the wider community. We will hear directly about and name the very real stigma, prejudice, discrimination, and racism that exists. As Mr. Martin Collins identified, racism is at the heart of this matter and that is what we need to face up to and understand. We must also confront the consequent social exclusion and identity erosion, which is shamefully and sadly an everyday reality for Travellers as eloquently described by Ms Minnie Connors. Some Travellers experience double discrimination by virtue of gender, sexuality or disability and Ms Rosaleen McDonagh spoke eloquently in that regard.

We are discussing this matter in the era of fake news. The accurate and fair treatment of Travellers in the media is of critical importance. The recent coverage of a certain presidential

candidate whom I will not dignify by naming did not reflect well on our media. That kind of discourse generates hate speech and hate crime. We need good and effective laws to deal with this.

We must also understand the impact of hate speech on people's participation in the world. The "K" word, and its harmful and hurtful effects, is particularly odious in terms of internalised oppression and mental ill-health. There is not a Traveller family in Ireland that has not been affected by suicide, and the statistics are truly shocking and far-reaching. Traveller men and women are seven and six times more likely, respectively, to take their own lives than the general population. We heard an eloquent first-hand account of that earlier.

The media have a responsibility in propagating stereotypes and bias. It was encouraging that the Office of the Press Ombudsman made a submission to this committee's public call. However, despite codes of ethics, Travellers still experience unequal participation in reporting, delivery and visibility within the media. Historically, Travellers were, and often still are, presented in the media as subjects of news rather than being visible throughout mainstream broadcast materials as commentators or presenters who influence the narrative. We need to move beyond our segregated worlds and look at ways to foster inclusion and dialogue. We can collaborate nationally and locally. We need to get it right, and we need to create more spaces like the one we have here today. We are now going to hear more voices and continue our conversations and deliberations.

Mr. Chris McDonagh: I thank the Chairman and Senators for inviting me here today. I represent the Traveller Mediation Service, TMS, where I have been working as a mediator for five years now. The service is a partnership initiative, supported by Restorative Justice in the Community, RJC, and funded by the Department of Justice and Equality. TMS is based in Athlone in County Westmeath, and we have four mediators working there at the moment. TMS, which was originally called the Midlands Traveller Conflict Mediation Initiative, MTCMI, was founded in 2009 as a response to conflicts in the midlands. We work to assist our clients and stakeholders in finding ways to prevent, manage, and transform conflicts peacefully and effectively.

The TMS's work can be broadly divided into two main strands: conflict intervention and conflict prevention. Conflict intervention involves mediating conflicts between Travellers, between Travellers and agencies, and between Travellers and the wider community. TMS accepts mediation case referrals from Travellers, communities, and agencies nationally. We have seen a substantial increase in the number of referrals coming directly from the Traveller community over the past three years, which now make up more than 90% of referrals. Previously, the majority of referrals came from the Garda and other agencies.

As part of the conflict prevention aspect of our work, we run a number of conflict skills workshops and mediation training programmes. TMS has been running peer mediation training programmes for prisoners in Castlerea Prison, Cork Prison, Loughan House Open Centre, and the Dóchas Centre since early 2017, and we were recently asked to deliver this programme in Midlands Prison in the autumn as well. Peer mediation training teaches prisoners skills to defuse conflicts on their landings, but it also builds relationships between the Traveller community, the wider community in the prison, and prison staff. TMS runs intercultural awareness workshops about the culture of Travellers with trainee prison officers. We also provide young people in Youthreach centres and Traveller youth groups with conflict resolution skills, and run workshops for staff and Travellers in Traveller projects nationwide.

There are a number of factors to consider when attempting to develop and foster positive and productive working relationships between Traveller communities, Travellers and the Garda, and Travellers and local communities. The relationship between Traveller and settled communities in Ireland today is complex and is influenced by a number of factors, including a lack of contact and knowledge on the part of each community about the other. It is imperative that both communities play a role in fostering understanding, consideration, and respect for each others' culture. Increased levels of contact, both formal and informal, must be encouraged, particularly at local level, as local authorities and other local stakeholders also have a vital role to play in building relationships.

Following the ethnic recognition of Travellers by the State, we need to build a new relationship between the majority community and the Traveller community. This relationship should be founded on respect for culture, identity, and ethnic differences, and be based on inclusion, equality, and opportunity for all regardless of their ethnic or cultural background. We in TMS would like to see trust being built, and see a real relationship develop between Travellers, agencies and the wider community, through key trusted members of these communities who can act as bridge builders. For example, several local Traveller projects work with local county councils and have developed relationships with local councillors and politicians, which we would like to see happening in more areas.

We would like to see the continuation of dialogue days between the Garda and Travellers, and their expansion around the country with the support of the Garda and local Traveller projects. This year, we ran a dialogue day in Maynooth university, between ten or 12 Traveller mediators and 15 local garda, which looked at building relationships between gardaí and local Travellers. TMS would also like to see a pilot of an area-based agency dialogue between settled and Traveller communities, with the aim of improving understanding and communication between all stakeholders.

Mr. Denis Robinson: I thank Senator Kelleher for encouraging me to make this presentation today. I will make a few non-specific points, referencing the submission I have made. I work with a community in Rathkeale that is made up of 80% Travellers and 20% mainstream settled community. It is an unusual dynamic compared to the rest of the country, as the minority are a settled group and the majority are of an ethnic minority group. I have encountered some insights in the past few months that I can now acknowledge.

It struck me that engagement between Travellers and State agencies is always a source of contention for people in the community. Members of the Traveller community are afraid they will lose benefits and feel they are not believed. There is a sense that they are always starting on the back foot when applying for social benefits which are rightfully theirs. There is a huge need for training of front-line staff to meet the specific needs of the Traveller community. A predecessor of mine, Mr. David Breen, did a lot of advocacy work for the community, and he said that when it came to accessing services or social welfare benefits, people were often refused their benefits automatically. Their applications would go through a review process where they were refused again, and would then go to a third independent appeals process, which was often the only successful appeal. While other people in the community applied for benefits, received them, and were entitled to them as was their right, members of the Traveller community generally had to go through three levels before they were even heard.

I again refer to the dynamics of the community in Rathkeale. When we are working there as a group, the issues that stand out are about who always has a say in that community, and who rarely or never has a say. None of the agencies or community groups within the town of

Rathkeale has any Traveller representatives. That raises huge questions which we have not fully addressed. I keep referring to the 80% to 85% of the community who are members of the Traveller community and who own approximately 80% to 90% of the property in the town. All decisions regarding the town are made independently of Travellers and are generally made against their wishes. This is a beautiful country market town that is predominantly owned by the community but when it comes to making structural decisions about the town this community has no access and no voice. That is disturbing.

There is some international evidence and research in the literature that refers to how trauma is carried by some ethnic groups across the world. There is again a sense of internalised rejection about which people and colleagues talk when I speak to them. They have a sense that they will not be accepted, allowed in, or listened to. That is a disturbing place to be. The recognition of ethnicity does not eradicate the trauma that some Travellers whom I have met encounter and feel.

Ms Lynn Scarff: I thank the Chair and the committee for the opportunity to speak today. I am the director of the National Museum of Ireland. I am joined today by my colleague, Ms Rosa Meehan, one of our curators, who has been the lead in all of the work we have been doing with the Traveller community.

By way of background, the National Museum of Ireland is Ireland's largest national cultural institution with four public sites including one in Turlough Park, Castlebar, County Mayo. We collect, conserve and interpret the largest holdings of portable heritage, comprising more than 4 million artefacts. We welcome more than 1 million visitors per annum. There are currently 170 staff employed across all four of our sites. Following our recent submission, we are very honoured to be here today to share our experience in collaborative practice with the Traveller community. We very much wish to acknowledge the people in the Seanad Chamber today. We have been working with many of them over recent years and we thank them for their contribution and work with us.

The National Museum of Ireland holds and interprets our national collection. It is a critical value of the museum that this collection is reflective of all of the people of Ireland and our shared experiences. It is also crucial that individuals and communities are co-curators of that story with the museum and are editors of their own narrative and experience. It is with these values in mind and in our role as a public institution that the museum is taking an increasingly socially engaged and intentionally collaborative approach to its work. Of particular focus is the manner in which it engages with communities that have been traditionally marginalised and under-represented in our national cultural institutions. While the museum views this work as critical to our values as an organisation, in the context of today it is important to note here that the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014 emphasises our public sector duty to embed equality and human rights considerations in our policies and programmes.

While our museum is free to enter, the actual barriers to entry are many and sometimes invisible to those of us within the institution. It requires the building of long-term and trusted relationships where mutual understanding is sought and forged and relationships nurtured to enable the addressing of these barriers. This community-led, co-curated and participative approach sees the museum and communities working together to identify objects that tell our national stories. It very much values the expertise of communities in telling that story. In doing so the museum's goal is to give a platform and power to voices that have been marginalised or overlooked in our cultural spaces in the past. While the museum is never neutral, we are a safe, non-partisan space that provides and can facilitate prolonged dialogue about culture and iden-

tity. We want the museum to be a space where visitors can engage with and explore Traveller material culture and ethnicity. We know there is no one definition of Traveller culture and we recognise the importance of the Traveller community in framing its own stories. Crucially, the museum wants to work in collaboration to enable visibility of, and engaged conversation about, Traveller culture across place, space, time and generations, by and with visitors to the museum.

Our recent experience of making visible and exploring Traveller culture has been based around the museum's temporary exhibition and associated programme, Travellers' Journey - Mincéir Misl'd. This involved a year-long exhibition opened by President Michael D. Higgins in July 2018 and a series of events and talks on aspects of Traveller culture and identity, including the publication of "This Giant Tent", a wonderful collaborative project with local schools, the Traveller community, Kids' Own Publishing, and local artists and writers. It also included the CAMP project and panel discussions such as "I am Traveller: Our History and Heritage". Many people in the room took part in that particular event. Our approach towards this project aimed, at its heart, to be inclusive, collaborative, respectful and authentic. While expertly led by Ms Meehan, it has also involved the National Museum of Ireland board, the senior management team, curators, our education and marketing teams, and, crucially, our visitor security teams. We also engaged with museum-wide training on Traveller culture, identity and awareness for all our staff on all our sites. Ultimately, as an institution, the experiences of working in collaboration on this project have greatly expanded our knowledge and experience and have changed our own practice.

We have some key learnings and recommendations to share today. The first relates to reaching out. As a national cultural institution, it is critical that we reach out, support and participate in Traveller events as a way of making and growing connections with the community. Partnerships are critical. We worked in partnership with the Western Regional Traveller Health Network on Travellers' Journey, but Traveller community expertise is core. One must work with representatives. It is also important to provide pathways to those in the community not associated with organisations through open calls, events to engage and a chance to develop networks.

We very much recognise that the Traveller community as an ethnic group has a shared and connected history with many different expressions. There are challenges in consulting inclusively with the whole community and it is important to work in partnership to achieve this. Consultation and partnership take resources for all involved. As a large cultural institution, it is important to note that sustained engagement can be challenging and that there is a need for more dedicated resources and supports. In working in partnership, discussion and the embedding of shared goals is essential. The review and allocation of resources in partnerships and collaborations are also essential.

With regard to widening the audience, public programmes are an integral part of our work. Broader public programmes increase visibility and promote conversations beyond the already engaged. Our awareness of cultural appropriation and sensitivity to the imbalance of power between our institutions and traditionally marginalised voices is important. For this reason, every effort is made to ensure members of the Traveller community lead our events about Traveller culture. No event will ever be held without their involvement. It is not enough to say that all are welcome. Particular initiatives are needed to encourage participation of the Traveller community within the museum space and to address the invisible barriers about which I spoke earlier. Traveller-specific events can give participants a sense of belonging within the museum and help to break down those barriers.

We aim to widen the collaborators' reach and to bring artists, poets, and writers into the

cultural community. Seeking out collaborative creative projects is an important way to broaden the conversation and the exploration of Traveller culture in a meaningful way. We engaged in a number of projects with a range of Traveller communities and age groups.

The inclusion of members of the Traveller community on any curatorial selection panel for commissioned projects is also essential. It is not just about having one person from the Traveller community, but multiple people with different voices and different perspectives. We recommend that a specific fund for Traveller culture creative projects be established in partnership with organisations such as ours that could reach out and enable more Traveller artists and communities to participate in artistically expressing Traveller culture and identity. Creative and other partnerships foster links and build relationships. Our experience of creative projects such as the “This Giant Tent” book, which was a project by children for children created as part of the exhibition, demonstrate the importance of creating quality Irish-produced material on Traveller culture and identity. The museum also wants to support a diverse workforce. We require expertise from the wider community to inform our strategic planning. While collaboration provides an opportunity for lasting engagement real change requires a diverse workforce in our cultural institutions. We need to look at mechanisms to enable traditionally marginalised voices and people to join our teams. We value support from equality agencies to implement ideas around good practice in that space.

The National Museum of Ireland deeply values the relationships it has developed over the past years in these projects. As we are now in the process of developing a new permanent exhibition on Traveller culture and history in our Museum of Country Life we wish to grow these relationships further. We recognise that we are only at the beginning of this journey. We aspire to be a museum that recognises and celebrates the diversity of a wide range of communities and ethnicities. We note, however, that at the root of all these programmes are trusted relationships between individuals and communities. This kind of relationship requires multi-annual, long-term, sustainable systems and resourcing that recognise the complexities of this process and enable the initiatives.

Chairman: I gave the witness injury time there.

Ms Lynn Scarff: Thank you.

Chairman: I take it that all witnesses have been advised about trying to keep contributions to five minutes.

Ms Lynn Scarff: I apologise.

Chairman: I would have given a bit of latitude if necessary.

I now invite Ms Maria Joyce, the co-ordinator of the National Traveller Women’s Forum.

Ms Maria Joyce: I thank the committee and An Leas-Chathaoirleach for the opportunity to speak at this committee today. As requested we will speak on the need to address the stigma, prejudice, discrimination, racism, social exclusion and identity erosion experienced by Travellers.

Traveller women are one of the most marginalised groups in Irish society and Traveller women’s experience of inequality, oppression and discrimination differs from that of the majority population or other minority groups. Traveller women’s experience of racism and discrimination is different from that of Traveller men. The needs of Traveller women may not be

met by the responses and strategies designed to confront and tackle gender inequality or ethnic discrimination alone. There also needs to be an examination of the intersection of ethnic disadvantage, discrimination and racism - as women and as Travellers - to ensure that the multiple forms of discrimination and racism are addressed.

As was said earlier, Traveller women have invested heavily of their time and their lives in building and supporting the Traveller infrastructure, in representational roles and in challenging agencies with regard to inequalities and Travellers. We also need to keep in mind the diversity within the community and the challenges this poses for some of our members - as referred to earlier - such as LGBTI Travellers and young Traveller women in particular, in attempting to negotiate their way around differing expectations and opportunities.

The recognition of Traveller ethnicity in 2017 was a very welcome development but this is still largely symbolic. We need to bring this to the next level to ensure it delivers real change for Travellers. For ethnic minority groups, expression of identity and pride in identity is an important feature in creating a sense of belonging to society. For the Traveller, ethnic recognition has always been about respect and inclusion. It is about recognising Traveller culture and acknowledging the valuable contributions Travellers have made and continue to make to Irish society. It was also about taking into account and addressing the inequalities Travellers experience. I will not detail the whole list of statistics -the committee heard them earlier - but they include significantly higher mortality rates and suicide rates that are six and seven times higher than the national average and which account for 11% of all Traveller deaths. The statistics also show an infant mortality rate three times higher than the national average. Unemployment rates are above 80%. There continues to be a significant gap between the participation and attainment of Traveller children in education compared with children from the majority population.

The identity erosion experienced by Travellers has particularly impacted on our young people leading to low self-esteem, poor self-image and a lack of pride in Traveller culture. It can also cause stress, shame and depression and can lead to drug and alcohol abuse and in some cases more severe mental health difficulties.

The extent of racism and discrimination against the Traveller community in Irish society is such that it is not uncommon for Travellers to make deliberate attempts to hide their identity, to deny their identity or to choose not to disclose it, especially when seeking employment. This has had a particularly negative impact on the opportunities and well-being of young Travellers trying to access and stay in employment. We would not have enough time today to talk about all of those examples. Our children do not have equality of access, participation and outcomes in education access. There needs to be visibility of positive affirmation of our culture within the schools so children can have a sense of belonging and being part of something.

In our submission the NTWF - among others - calls for a new national action plan against racism to be put in place with an oversight committee to include representation by key stakeholders such as Travellers. The evidence for this need is borne out in a range of studies and reports: 79.6% of settled people would be reluctant to purchase a house beside Travellers; 40% of respondents to an Economic and Social Research Institute survey in 2017 stated that they would be unwilling to employ a Traveller; more than 18% of respondents stated they would deny Irish citizenship to Travellers. The 2010 Traveller health study shows significant discrimination against Travellers in the health system, which the providers recognise and acknowledge. The census shows stark statistics: less than 1% of Travellers are in third level education and 81% of Traveller women are unemployed. Reference was made earlier to a study in 2016 by the Travellers in Prison Initiative. This study shows that Traveller women represented 22% of women in

prison in 2016, out of 1% of the population. This is reflective of major inequality and racism.

Racism and discrimination experienced by Travellers is all too acceptable within Irish society and at institutional levels. In late 2018 we saw a presidential candidate who had been last in the polls coming second in the race, based on his racist and inflammatory comments about Travellers. We also see it in our Judiciary and in the political sphere and it largely goes unchallenged. This gives credence and acceptability for the really blatant and casual racism that happens at societal level in the denial of access to shops, to restaurants and to pubs, as experienced by Travellers in everyday life.

The negative attitudes, racism and stereotypes need to be comprehensively addressed with the introduction of appropriate hate crime legislation that would also govern new mediums such as social media platforms disseminating Traveller hatred and racism. Ms Brigid Carmody will speak about that experience in a Cork context, but we can be sure it is reflective of a national issue.

With regard to monitoring and implementation - I have given the case statistics - the accommodation situation of Travellers in Ireland is appalling and at crisis level. The State's own numbers say there have been 20 years of failed implementation with 585 families now living in unofficial, unrecognised and unserviced accommodation, which means without water and sanitation. More than 1,000 families are sharing accommodation and 15% of Travellers are homeless. In the midst of all of this the local authorities refuse to spend their budgets for Traveller accommodation. The homeless crisis is disproportionately impacting on Travellers. Traveller children are the highest percentage of homeless children in Dublin and Travellers are 22% more likely to become homeless. The introduction of the Criminal Justice (Public Order) Act 1994 - as amended by the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 2002 - gives increased powers for eviction of Travellers and it needs to be stopped. Evictions need to be stopped.

If the stigma, prejudice, discrimination and racism is to be eliminated within the State it needs to ensure that existing strategies and policy developed in consultation with Travellers are delivered. There needs to be appropriate monitoring, departmental oversight committees, and implementation plans including targets, indicators, timeframes and reinstatement of appropriate budgets including targeted measures.

I shall conclude. The committee will see from the information we have provided in our submission that an overwhelming lack of progress and implementation is a common theme across all areas of Traveller policy. Overall there are no accountability or sanctions for Departments and State agencies when they do not deliver on their own policy contents. The two most recent overarching strategies were published in 2017 - the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy 2017-2021, NTRIS, and the National Strategy for Women and Girls 2017-2020. The NTRIS strategy contains 149 actions across ten themes. There are, however, no implementation plans, targets, indicators, timeframes, or monitoring and special measures. Likewise, the national women's and girls' strategy does not have an implementation plan for the five actions contained within it for Traveller and Roma women. There needs to be an examination of all actions contained in the strategy to ensure they benefit the most marginalised women including Traveller women. In earlier sessions of this committee, and from the NTWF submission, members will have heard that Traveller women are invisible in mainstream gender policies, reports and quotas. The target of 40% gender quotas on State boards has been reached with regard to women. There is no visibility of Traveller women within that. Breaking through the glass ceiling on gender equality is even further out of the reach of Traveller women than it is for other women in Ireland. Having even their basic human rights realised is so far from where

we are that it needs to be addressed. Ms Minnie Connors spoke passionately about her situation, which was very telling of the experiences of many Traveller women. We should not have do that in this day and age with all the evidence and strategies with regard to the conditions in which Travellers and Traveller women live. It should not come to having to share this level of personal experience to have these issues addressed.

Chairman: I hope I do better with this name than I did the last time. I call Mr. Oein de Bhairdúin of the national action group for LGBT and Traveller and Roma rights.

Mr. Oein de Bhairdúin: I thank the committee members for inviting the national LGBT Traveller and Roma action group to attend the meeting, with specific recognition of Senator Kelleher, who campaigned so positively for creating this space for inclusive dialogue. Our aim today is to give the committee an understanding of the specific challenges facing LGBT Travellers and the potential space available for creative, empowering and progressive endeavours that could, and we believe should, be undertaken.

The LGBT Traveller and Roma action group provides growing supports and advocacy towards, within and throughout associated groups on issues raised throughout our community. Community-led responses, training sessions, individual and family supports directly involve our advocacy work. It is these experiences that inform our submission and input today.

In addition to the general statistics and understanding of the issues and barriers experienced by Travellers, about which committee members and other guests have spoken so eloquently and horrifically today, LGBT Travellers experience an additional compression of these issues due to factors such as taboo, internalised and external discrimination, fear, lack of awareness, lack of discussion on sexuality, sexual health, accessible and culturally aware avenues of support and the likelihood that local organisations will have family members associated. This often results in hesitation to engage.

The national Traveller health study did not include LGBT Travellers but two studies were conducted by the Clondalkin Travellers development group, one in 2012 and the other in 2019. The results reveal deeply concerning statistics on the standards of mental health among LGBT Travellers. In 2012, 42% of those surveyed had a history of self-harm within the previous year and a total of 33% had suicide ideation and enactment within the previous year. A total of 83% of these stated this had a direct relationship with their LGBT identity. The average age of suicide attempt was 17.4 and the average age of coming out - for the few who did - was 19.7. In 2019, 100 Travellers were surveyed in the Clondalkin, Palmerstown and Lucan area. Among those surveyed eight identified as LGBT, 46 reported they did not know any LGBT people, 56 stated that being LGBT was something to be ashamed of and 84 stated they would not be interested in LGBT awareness training. We understand this is a small sampling but it highlights some of the issues we face within the community alongside many other pressures that Travellers experience outside the community.

As a group we recognise the very legitimate past, ongoing and upcoming support options available for LGBT Travellers. In the past year alone, along with LGBT Ireland and the Department of Justice and Equality, we launched a support poster and a series of training videos and have undertaken specific training with Traveller organisations. However, there is so much more to be done.

I want to take this opportunity to make some recommendations. The objectives of the Department of Justice and Equality's national Traveller and Roma inclusion strategy and the

Department of Children and Youth Affairs's LGBTI+ national youth strategy include accepting and protecting LGBT Travellers in their own communities and in wider Irish society, particularly with regard to encouraging and supporting links; the development of inclusion strategies, training modules and so forth; as well as challenging homophobia and transphobia with the support of Traveller families. However, the conduits through which these objectives are to be undertaken need clarity, resourcing and reinforcement if they are to be realised in any way.

We strongly recommend that a national LGBT Traveller and Roma awareness campaign that includes Traveller organisations, community groups and primary health networks be created and set up, as well as avenues for Travellers who live outside of these networks to be included, supported and led by LGBT Traveller voices. We also recommend that in the current draft of the national LGBTI inclusion strategy that is to be implemented in the near future, the measures to address intersectional discrimination that impact LGBTQI Travellers be strengthened to include families.

While there is a deficit in research and statistics, it is clear that the impact of the young marital age, which is 18.9, has resulted in a significant number of LGBT Travellers being married. The Department of Health's national sexual health strategy makes no mention of Travellers. With this strategy due for renewal in 2020, we recommend the inclusion of LGBT communities including LGBT Travellers. We also recommend that all governmental materials that include LGBT issues specifically mention LGBT Travellers not only as a means to provide visibility but also to recognise specific issues and barriers that are encountered by LGBT Travellers. We also recommend support for the Traveller Culture and History in Education Bill. As many LGBT Travellers experience a sense of disassociation and a genuine sense of distance from our culture and community, increased positive awareness and understanding can only benefit LGBT Travellers greatly, as well as our community and society as a whole.

We also recommend that all community based networks, addiction and suicide prevention programmes should specifically include LGBT Travellers and that further research into mental health, substance abuse and a combination of support factors for LGBT Travellers be undertaken.

I thank the committee for taking this time. I wish to take this opportunity to really impress on people that we need to act as soon as possible. If we are to turn the tide on stigma, social isolation, discrimination and the all too common suicide, now is the time.

Chairman: The next speaker is Dr. Karl Kitching, the director of equality, diversity and inclusion in UCC.

Dr. Karl Kitching: I thank the Chairman for the opportunity to speak today. I am very conscious of the privilege I have as a member of the settled community speaking among members of the Traveller community. I am also conscious of the voices that are not here today. I will speak about one educational proposal that would align with the work of the Traveller culture and history Bill.

Members of the Traveller community in Ireland are routinely presented in statistics on formal education as deficient, underachieving and underparticipating learners. Community-based State support can maintain this deficit representation of Travellers if they seek to fit communities into a school-shaped box instead of examining what and who are valued by schools and education policy and bridging home and school cultures in a meaningful way. Members of settled communities such as me should never allow statistics on Traveller participation and

achievement at formal education mask the everyday community learning of which Traveller children, young people and families are part. Furthermore, we must recognise that institutionalised anti-Traveller racism, as a number of people have said today, is the cause of problems in formal education and beyond.

As a society we need to take more account of the fact that, as Professor Sonia Nieto argues, children learn how to learn as defined within their own particular cultural context. It is quite clear that the ways of learning and thinking about the world that are valued in our schools reflect the culture of the majority of the white settled population. We know the community wisdom and cultural literacy that Traveller children and young people have developed to negotiate their world are rarely used in their formal education. This places them at a systemic disadvantage. One simple example of this from my supervision of teaching practice in schools with student teachers is how those teachers when teaching students about the Irish language topic of “sa bhaile” almost always present their learners with vocabulary regarding a two-storey house but never a caravan, a halting site or even a flat. Schools and teachers need to be able to bridge who students are with the economic demands and social expectations that society places on them. In other words, they need to make education relevant to all students and not just those whose received cultural norms and biographies are similar to their own.

Community wisdom and community cultural literacy are described by Professor Luis Moll as funds of knowledge. He states that funds of knowledge are historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being and, of course, community functioning and well-being. Professor Moll and his colleagues developed systematic projects with schools and Latin American families whereby teachers visited and carried out in-depth research in their students’ communities, examined classroom practices, held after-school study groups for teachers and brought in community members to speak at schools.

The type of knowledge explored by teachers with communities in funds of knowledge projects include economic and household management, such as making, saving and spending money, childcare budgeting and paying bills, oral traditions and storytelling, play and physical activity, religious practices and moral codes, food and cooking, negotiating institutions such as schools and hospitals, mechanical and technological knowledge, such as repairing engines or using smart devices, animals and the environment and issues with regard to horse care, pollution, safety and protection. When brought into schools these kinds of knowledge can form the basis of a whole year’s worth of literacy work, numeracy activities and historical and human geography lessons. There are practical examples of how community knowledge can be brought into the classroom and how formal school learning can be enhanced by doing so. For example, in the research of Hughes and Greenhough, parents were asked to encourage their child to decorate a shoebox and fill it with items such as photographs, toys, postcards, a book or magazine, some writing or pictures, and anything else special to him or her. This can be used in a simple way to introduce children to their new teacher at the start of the school year, or the teacher can use the contents of shoeboxes across the curriculum. In a maths lesson, for example, the items can be weighed and measured. In a history lesson, children could exchange boxes and ask what could be told about their owners from their contents. A most obvious area is in literacy, whereby a teacher can design weeks of writing around the contents of shoeboxes. Funds of knowledge cannot be reduced to a nice little shoebox that can be put on a shelf, however. Rather, they require ensuring that teachers are active co-researchers with the marginalised communities they teach. I am saying “teachers” assuming most of them are not members of the Traveller community.

The concept of teachers as researchers of their own practice is becoming increasingly common in our schools through the work of the Teaching Council and other forums, yet teachers' engagement with students' communities, such as the Traveller community, is often limited to the work of home-school liaison teachers. This represents a missed opportunity for teachers, who are overwhelmingly white and settled, to understand the lived experience of Traveller children and to move more practically beyond all too common assumptions of Traveller learners as deficient. Failure to systemically use a funds of knowledge approach presents a missed opportunity to have the wealth of Traveller community knowledge take a meaningful place in schools and for more honest classroom and professional conversations about the racism Travellers experience to be held in schools.

National and cultural guidelines for schools, which have never been supported by systemic professional development for teachers, are simply not enough. I propose that we seize the opportunity to establish a funds of knowledge commission, designed in a similar way to the recent schools excellence fund, as a new element of Irish education policy. The purpose of this commission would be to fund teachers but, more important, Traveller communities to co-develop projects on how Travellers' community knowledge and cultural literacy can be brought more effectively and systematically into the classroom and used to inform and reshape formal school learning. I propose that this commission prioritise funding applications from school communities with greater proportions of Traveller communities in the first instance. The notion of a commission indicates this work would be a valued part of systematic education policy to ensure policy discourse on Traveller education outcomes never starts from a negative deficit position and recognises the debt the education system and Irish society owe to Travellers owing to the failure to engage on and challenge institutional racism. Ultimately, the commission would seek to produce a range of materials documenting insights into Traveller culture literacies and community knowledge and ways in which schools need to fundamentally reconsider how formal literacy and a variety of cultural literacies, including those of the Traveller communities, must be aligned.

Chairman: I call Ms RoseMarie Maughan, who will speak about hearing autistic Traveller voices.

Ms RoseMarie Maughan: I thank the Chairman and Senators for the opportunity to raise the need to include the voice of autistic Travellers. It has been said this is a very historic day for Travellers - it is - but it is more historic for autistic Travellers because this is the first time they have been mentioned. I hope to focus on issues affecting autistic Travellers that have come to my attention as a Traveller mother to an autistic child. The first concern we all should have is that I am not autistic, just a Traveller mother to an autistic Traveller child. This clearly highlights the lack of an autistic Traveller voice representing autistic Travellers at present. This is very concerning to me as a Traveller mother and an activist. To understand the issues, we first need to understand what being autistic means and how it affects one's life. My understanding of autism, from rearing my child so far and speaking to autistic adults, is that it is a neurological difference involving the central, peripheral and autonomic nervous systems and that it results in experiencing, thinking about and responding to the world differently from most people. It is not a disease in need of a cure. Autistic people should not be expected to be non-autistic. They should be loved, accepted and appreciated like everyone else.

Currently in Irish society, there is very little meaningful understanding and acceptance of autistics. It is no different in my community, unfortunately. We, too, have a lack of understanding and awareness of autism. In fact, as a community, we do not talk about being autistic. The

autistic Traveller voice has not been heard and is still missing in the development and implementation of national Traveller policy, coupled with general policy, affecting the lives of those affected to date. An alarming example of this is in the current national Traveller and Roma inclusion strategy. Out of 149 actions, there is only one that could be applied to autistic Travellers, that is, the action pertaining to a space for children with disabilities, but only in regard to the promotion of the early childcare and education preschool scheme and facilitated access via the access and inclusion model. Therefore, we have no statistics on autistic Travellers. We have no record of issues they are facing, be they children, teenagers or adults, including elderly adults. This is a major gap for our community.

We do not have useful statistics on the general autistic community that we can rely on and compare with ours. When it comes to a Traveller autistic child's development, we constantly hear early intervention is the key to success and growing up to reach true potential. Services are currently based on waiting lists, with over 100,000 on waiting lists nationwide for services such as speech therapy, occupational therapy, physiotherapy, assessments of need and a diagnosis, according to recently released HSE figures. Once a child is finally assessed, he or she is put on another waiting list to be diagnosed, which can take up to 14 months. Until diagnosis in many cases, the child can avail of no appropriate services and gets no support whatsoever. It is unclear from the statistics how many Traveller autistic children there are and the services they require. It is unclear whether the services are both clinically and culturally appropriate.

We have already heard that over 84% of Travellers are unemployed. With the majority of Travellers well below the poverty line, we cannot afford to avail of private therapy for our children. Therefore, we are highly dependent on a domiciliary grant. This is another battle for parents, who have to wait for a period of six months for a decision, which more often than not is a refusal. Parents then have to go through an appeals process, on which a decision again takes months. This takes from the crucial intervention time for an autistic child.

A recent article in *The Irish Times* reported that in 2018, 81% of the domiciliary grant applications were won on appeal. Clearly, there are needless refusals that affect children's lives. One example of an autistic Traveller child that should alarm everybody in this room is that of a three and a half year old boy who is not speaking and has been waiting on early intervention and for an assessment of need for two years. In that time, he has had no service, intervention or guidance for his parents on how to support him. He has no preschool place for September, he has no home tutor, and his family cannot afford private therapy. His family was not aware of its rights and entitlements and felt very isolated and helpless, with nowhere to turn for support. This autistic Traveller child is being failed at every level imaginable. This, if not overturned, will lead to a very negative outcome for him at so many levels. The State is failing him and many more autistic Traveller children like him. My question for everybody in this room concerns what we are going to do to help turn his life around so his basic needs, as an autistic Traveller child, will be met and his rights vindicated.

A recent report, *Invisible Children*, launched by AsIAM in April 2019, is based on a survey of families of autistic children facing barriers in securing school places. It found that of the 54% of respondents who were waiting for a school place, 24% were waiting less than a year, 76% were waiting for six months or up to three years, and 66% had applied to at least four schools. It is again unclear how many, or if any, Travellers were consulted in that survey, whether they came forward or even if they were aware of that survey. It also found that autistic children who have a school place must travel long distances outside their community to their school.

At present, autistic children, including autistic Traveller children, are being failed by the

State. I will give one example of a Traveller autistic child within an autistic spectrum disorder, ASD, unit, which should concern all of us. The parents of a young Traveller girl who is not speaking but who uses her iPad as her preferred means of communication, which is sent with her in her bag to school on a daily basis, requested that the iPad be used but it was not used. She also suffered several kidney infections from being unsupervised while attending toilet breaks, which resulted in her being in great pain and distress and requiring hospital attention, despite her parents requesting on numerous occasions for her to be supervised during her toilet breaks. It is clear that this autistic child's needs are not being met and her rights are being violated.

I believe all children should be taught within the mainstream setting equipped with capacity to teach them alongside their peers within their own community. ASD classes and special schools are segregation, similar to the segregation Travellers face within the education system, and as we heard from Minnie Connors, over the generations it still exists; nothing has changed. I want to quote a disability organisation, Starting with Julius, which sums that up:

When we remove children with a disability from the diversity of our own community - from their rightful place in our regular classrooms - and place them in 'special [needs] classrooms' - no matter how good the intention - we separate them from their peers, stigmatize them in their eyes and weaken the strength of their entitlement in the future to be part of that same community.

Segregation in life leads to greater risk of segregation later in life.

Autistic Traveller children who cannot secure a place in school are entitled to a home tutor. As a Traveller, I can see the extra barriers autistic Traveller children will face in trying to access this right if required in terms of tutors not understanding Traveller culture or wanting to home school a Traveller child in a Traveller specific setting such as a halting site. I refer also to the lack of trust Traveller parents have in inviting a stranger, who is not a Traveller, into their home alongside their child because of the general oppression they would have faced from the mainstream population.

The July provision system throws up similar issues coupled with Traveller parents not being aware of the system. Respite provision involves another waiting list. That again throws up cultural issues for autistic Travellers and their families, which need to be discussed and designed with them.

Autistic Traveller children and adults are part of the general autistic community yet they are invisible. They have no real voice and are not even being heard. I am hearing the alarm bells to conclude but if I may I will outline my key recommendations.

Chairman: Ms Maughan has injury time.

Ms RoseMarie Maughan: I hope I do, as a Traveller. As I said, autistic Traveller children and adults are part of the general autistic community yet they have no real voice, and there is no voice coming forward within the Traveller community itself. There are no statistics on the autistic community or the Traveller autistic community. However, we can branch out as far as Sweden, which carried out research on premature mortality in ASD sufferers. It found that the life expectancy of autistic adults is 54 years, and 40 years if one is autistic with an intellectual disability; suicide is the second highest cause of death within the community; and suicide was the primary cause of autistic adult death. They are very alarming statistics and very similar to Traveller experience in general terms.

We are currently facing a human rights crisis among the autistic community, which includes autistic Travellers. That is a tragedy in terms of our history. The tragedy is not being autistic but the way society and the State are failing the autistic community and, even more so, autistic Travellers because it is an additional violation of our human rights. We need to ask ourselves how we can turn this crisis into a positive for everyone, in particular for autistic Travellers. I have some recommendations that can progress matters in a positive way. Traveller policy in progression needs to actively seek and include autistic Traveller voices; there needs to be access to timely and appropriate services for all autistic children, including Traveller children, from qualified staff regardless of location; there must be access to assessment of need and diagnosis within three to six months; the emulation of behaviourism methods and behaviour orientated intervention; parent, clinical and teacher training designed and developed by the autistic community members, including autistic Travellers; and the learning environment design led by autistic community members. Delivery of services must include the respect and acceptance of the cultural background of each autistic individual to be served by that service.

The support of structures that allow autistic Travellers to self-advocate, both within community settings and inter-community platforms, would be vital to facilitate the space for autistic Travellers of all ages to engage in a more meaningful way. Being autistic is also very much a natural part of the Traveller community. However, the lack of awareness, understanding and acceptance by others creates additional barriers, fears and frustrations. Ensuring that autistic awareness and acceptance, visibility and inclusion in all relevant Traveller specific health promotional material, including mental health, and Traveller identity, would be essential in changing the narrative from one of fear. I have many more recommendations but I am getting the pressure to conclude.

The key point is that we have no staff. The Traveller voice has been missing for the past 30 years. As Mr. de Bhairdúin said, it is now or never. We will leave nobody behind. The key is to bring in the Traveller autistic voice, analyse their needs, have their staff at the table and, importantly, have the autistic Traveller voice at every table from now on, including the upcoming autism empowering strategy.

Chairman: Ms Maughan might submit her presentation to the committee. I was told she had five minutes but she has spoken for 13 or 14 minutes. That could impact on the time given to other speakers. I must ask all speakers to contribute for five minutes because there will be questions later and we must finish by 2.30 p.m. I am sorry about that. The next speaker is Mr. Thomas McCann, Traveller Counselling Service.

Mr. Thomas McCann: I thank the Chairman for the opportunity to briefly touch on some of the issues. I will try to keep within the time. It is a pity the clock is not on the other side of the wall because I do not have a watch.

Chairman: I will give Mr. McCann an indication of the time.

Mr. Thomas McCann: I would appreciate that.

I manage a Traveller counselling service. I am a Traveller and I have been involved in Travellers' rights for about 35 years, although some people say it has been for a bit longer than that. Much has been said, and some of the issues I will touch on have been raised. My area of work is mental health. I had intended starting the session by answering one of the questions asked earlier on suicide. A key aspect in that respect is implementation of the recommendations of the all-party Oireachtas committee on mental health. That would be a good start in terms of the

implementation of a national Traveller mental health strategy, which was recommended by the all-party Oireachtas committee. It would be a very good start in addressing some of the issues.

I will talk about erosion and exclusion and then touch on the issue of the media. The erosion and exclusion of Traveller culture and identity is due in no small way to State policy of assimilation and absorption, which gave, whether directly or indirectly, permission to all the institutions of the State, including the media, to exclude Traveller culture and identity. The Commission on Itinerancy report stated that all efforts to support Travellers should always have as their ultimate aim the absorption of Traveller culture. In that regard, the State has responsibility for addressing the issues facing Travellers.

The erosion of Traveller culture has created major problems. As we have heard, some people hide their identity. Employment and other topics were mentioned. If someone is known to be a Traveller, he or she will be let go, excluded or discriminated against. Many young people on training courses cannot say that they are Travellers. According to a newspaper article, when people start talking in a canteen about Travellers, Travellers feel like they are being put on the spot and cannot address the comments. They feel helpless.

This reality erodes people's identity and eats away at their self-esteem and confidence. As children, people learn by internalising their external environments. Travellers internalise a certain shame about our identity. That can impact on our mental health and we struggle with it for the rest of our lives, which can lead to, for example, drug use and addiction.

Travellers have experienced extreme levels of racism and discrimination. Structural exclusion has been a key part of that. I will cite two studies, one from 2017 and, in 2000, the Citizen Traveller study. According to them, 36% of people said that they would avoid Travellers, 97% said that they would not accept Travellers as members of their families, 80% said they would not accept Travellers as a friend and 44% said they would not want Travellers as members of their communities. The majority of these people had had no direct contact with Travellers. If so, how were their attitudes, perceptions and biases shaped? One must ask about the role of the media in this.

Chairman: Mr. McCann has 30 seconds left.

Mr. Thomas McCann: I had better move on, so. The media carry a significant responsibility. Peter Casey was given a platform, with a local Traveller accommodation issue being used nationally to spring support for his campaign from less than 3% to, as far as I know, 21%. What was involved in that local issue was not well explored in the media. There has also been reporting of sensationalist issues, particularly around conflict. There was a conference in Dublin Castle in April on the impact of conflict on mental health in the Traveller community, but where were the media to be seen? There were 180 people at that conference, the majority of whom were Travellers. There was very little media presence at it. However, if there is an argument somewhere in the middle of nowhere, half the media will cover it.

I will make a few recommendations and then stop.

Chairman: If Mr. McCann and Ms Maughan feel they have not covered something, they should feel free to provide it by way of written submission. It will be taken on board.

Mr. Thomas McCann: Okay. I thought that five minutes would stretch further.

Chairman: Ms Kelleher will be happy to take on all of the written submissions, and we will

deal with them as a committee.

Mr. Thomas McCann: I will make recommendations about a couple of things that need to happen.

Chairman: Mr. McCann-----

Senator Colette Kelleher: Let him keep going.

Chairman: Go on so. Fire them out fast.

Mr. Thomas McCann: There needs to be an advisory council in the press ombudsman's office, comprising Travellers and members of the media, to consider reporting in the media. Likewise, the national broadcaster, RTÉ, has a responsibility to ensure that programmes about and reporting on Traveller issues are fair and accurate. That is where the advisory group comes in. There should be a national action plan on racism that addresses the media's inclusivity.

My final point is on participation by Travellers. It can bring about change. However, it can also cloak the inequalities in power and the business as usual approach unless it is properly resourced and placed on an equal footing.

Chairman: I thank Mr. McCann. Next is the Cork Traveller Women's Network, with Ms Brigid Carmody and Ms Louise Harrington, co-ordinator and community development worker, respectively. I gather they are sharing time at two and a half minutes each.

Ms Brigid Carmody: I will also speak about media coverage of Travellers, which is something that our project has taken a particular interest in in recent years. We understand that the media can shape the public's understanding of us, especially for many of the public who have had little or no face-to-face contact with the Traveller community. People can often have an assumption of who we are and what our culture is based on media stereotypes.

Media coverage also has a major effect on Travellers, especially our young people, who are connected with media, particularly social media. I will read out a statement made by the media in Cork in the past year. Unfortunately, it is not unusual. Under the headline "The northside is ruined", the article reads: "I am sending this email as a distraught northsider who is sick of seeing the northside being ruined every day by travellers ... Now just wait for the bleeding hearts, the ethnic minority and the "its [sic] our culture" campaigners to start." Unfortunately, we have seen at first hand in Cork the local media using this type of feature to invite members of the public to phone in and air every gripe they can think of with sweeping negative statements against Travellers. Imagine this happening three or four times per year on a local radio station, which is usually playing in the local shops, garages, taxis and hairdressers. Imagine having to use those services with one's children. When this happens, Traveller projects are inundated with phone calls from distressed Travellers talking about the hurt and shame of being stereotyped and rejected in the communities they have lived all their lives. Travellers are calling on our project to respond to this type of media coverage, but we are struggling and need support to do it.

There needs to be a targeted Traveller-Roma communications initiative to promote the many positives within our community and set out a national Traveller-Roma inclusion strategy. This initiative also needs to include supports for local community development projects in dealing with the media.

I will bring the committee's attention to the online and social media pages of newspapers and radio stations. While we do not have the resources to monitor these fully, we have been informally recording some of the public comments that follow pretty much any mention of Travellers, good or bad. I will provide a few examples. Following a story of a Traveller family in need of accommodation, there were comments like "Inbreeding does not make you a race, sweetheart", "Blacks are human, knackers are not", "Burn them out", "Just bring in a tank of slurry and start spraying", "Bring them to the shooting range - good target practice for our boys in green" and "A few litres of petrol and a match will sort them out". Under a recent positive article on the Cork Traveller pride celebrations, one of the first comments was "Traveller pride - what have they got to be proud of?" Another was a suggestion that Travellers were thieves and had stolen the items that were on display for Traveller pride.

It is unrealistic to expect Travellers and Traveller projects to police and report every single racist comment on social media pages, in newspapers or on radio stations. This needs to be done by the newspapers and radio stations that also broadcast their news online and through social media. They must be obliged to pre-moderate comments on their pages and remove hate speech and racist comments.

Ms Louise Harrington: I will talk about raising the bar and creating a more proactive media around challenging racism with a number of practical suggestions. Currently, the role and standards of the press ombudsman and the Press Council of Ireland do not include the online pages of their media members. We would like to see this aspect reviewed and an obligation to be placed on their members to be proactive in monitoring and pre-moderating comments and eliminating hate speech from their online platforms. The same would apply in respect of bodies under the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland. We would like to see the development of media standards around racism and the coverage of minorities and ethnic groups to include the development of an anti-racism protocol and training for journalists on the duty to report in a fair, balance and non-racist manner. Once standards around anti-racism and the media were developed, a system of merit could be awarded to recognise media channels and journalists who champion good practice. Media reporting on minorities and ethnic groups is a powerful communication tool that can shape society's attitudes. We would love to see a platform created for the media to review and reflect on their role in exposing racism by reporting on it, which can also normalise and reinforce racism versus their role in challenging racism. To expand on this, we give the example of some of the media coverage around the most recent presidential campaign, which was mentioned already, which gave considerable air time to targeted anti-Traveller sentiments and effectively normalised and gave an air of respectability to these sentiments and to Traveller ethnicity denial.

We are also concerned about racist views being justified in the media by an understanding that it represents journalistic balance. As it would not be morally acceptable today to introduce a misogynist to comment on International Women's Day for journalistic balance, it should no longer be acceptable to include the comments of a Traveller ethnicity denier or an anti-Traveller spokesperson to give journalistic balance every time Travellers are talking about human rights in the media.

I believe Traveller groups, certainly the Cork Travellers Women's Network, would welcome the opportunity to build closer strategic links around building trust with journalists and media outlets who are open to supporting human rights and the fair treatment of Travellers in the media.

Chairman: I thank Ms Harrington for that. I call Ms Eilis Barry, chief executive of the Free

Legal Advice Centres, FLAC.

Ms Eilis Barry: FLAC warmly welcomes the opportunity to make this submission and opening statement to this very important committee. Our recommendations are based on FLAC's experience of the JUSTROM programme, which was a Council of Europe initiative. Within this programme we supported the running of legal clinics for Travellers and Roma people. As part of that programme, we were very struck by the level and extent of unmet legal need that Travellers experience, particularly in housing, standards of accommodation, evictions and discrimination in access to good and services, including licensed premises. We believe access to justice is essential to addressing the unmet legal need and is integral and essential for social inclusion. We hope access to justice will be a foundational theme in the committee's report.

The enforcement of rights and obligations regarding the provision of services, education and accommodation under the equality legislation is critical to access to justice for Travellers. However, rights are only effective insofar as they can be enforced and there is currently no legal aid available for persons to bring claims of discrimination under the equality legislation and regarding social welfare appeals and claims, no matter how complex or important the issue is, how few resources a potential complainant may have, or what capacity the complainant has to represent himself or herself. The Minister for Justice and Equality can enable the Legal Aid Board to provide legal aid in discrimination claims and social welfare matters by simply designating the Workplace Relations Commission, the Labour Court and social welfare claims and appeals officers within the Civil Legal Aid Act. It does not need legislative change.

There is also a misperception and lack of clarity as to the extent to which the Legal Aid Board can deal with housing issues. We believe there is nothing in the Civil Legal Aid Act which stops it providing legal aid in cases dealing with the legal responsibilities of local authorities and the State regarding housing and homelessness. However, the Act needs to be amended to ensure that legal aid is available in eviction cases. FLAC has furnished the Minister with an amendment which, if enacted, would ensure that legal aid would be available.

We note with surprise that the number of complaints, under the equality legislation, made to the Workplace Relations Commission with respect to the Equal Status Act is reducing. We also note the number of discrimination claims against licensed premises has plummeted since the jurisdiction for such claims was transferred to the District Court, even though legal aid may be available for claims against licensed premises. We would like the committee to recommend that the Legal Aid Board engage in an information campaign about legal aid entitlements with respect to housing and discrimination claims against licensed premises. We would also like it to recommend that a targeted co-ordinated information campaign about the important provisions in the equality legislation be carried out by bodies such as the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, the Workplace Relations Commission, the Citizens Information Board and Traveller non-governmental organisations.

Regarding accommodation, FLAC recommends that the committee seek a commitment from the Minister to take immediate steps to implement the recommendations of the expert review group when its report is published. With respect to standards in Traveller specific accommodation, we recommend the immediate review of guidelines published in 1998 on Traveller accommodation and extending standards for rented housing under the Housing (Standards for Rented Houses) Regulations 2019 to include halting sites, including transient, temporary and permanent halting sites. A range of legislation allows for summary evictions and in our submission we call for the Minister to review such legislation to ensure that, other than in the most exceptional circumstances, a family home can never be interfered with in the absence of

a merits based determination by a court, and to place an onus on the local authorities to offer alternative appropriate accommodation.

We echo previous submissions that the positive duty is a very important national mechanism for mainstreaming equality and human rights for Travellers. We believe the very broad range of public sector bodies covered by the positive duty will not be able to establish they have complied with this unless they engage in meaningful ongoing consultation with groups representing the discriminatory grounds that are covered in the equality legislation.

With respect to hate speech, we request that the committee ask why Ireland still has a reservation regarding Article 4 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination which deals with incitement to hatred. We ask the committee to recommend that Ireland incorporate the convention in law.

Regarding fair and accurate treatment in the media, defamation actions are expensive and very difficult to pursue and there is a blanket exclusion of defamation proceedings from the Civil Legal Aid Act, which means, in effect, that claims under the Defamation Act are only available to people with significant resources. Further, the protection afforded by the Defamation Act is limited in that it only protects an individual or a corporate entity targeted, so more generalised speech against a group is not in fact covered. We recommend that this matter be reviewed to provide a civil remedy for groups who are targeted by hate speech. A review of the Prohibition of Incitement to Hatred Act has been ongoing for some time. We recommend that this review be carried out in tandem with the review of the Defamation Act to ensure there is a civil remedy available for hate speech.

Chairman: I thank Ms Barry and the other witnesses for their interesting contributions. I remind everybody that we must vacate the Chamber by 2.30 p.m. I propose to take questions from Senators who will have two minutes each to ask a question and to refrain from making Second Stage speeches such as heard earlier. The witnesses will then respond.

Senator Pádraig Ó Céidigh: The representatives are all very welcome. It is great to see them here and I thank them for attending. I also thank Senator Colette Kelleher, in particular.

Chairman: I am timing the Senator. I ask him to put his question.

Senator Pádraig Ó Céidigh: I will be brief. I ask the representatives to give me two or three points they would make on the key areas of health, education and culture. They also spoke a good deal about the media and free legal aid. They might indicate two or three points on those areas that we need to learn and take on board. I would very much appreciate that.

I am from Galway and I am also part of a minority. I had to learn English as I grew up speaking Irish in the Connemara Gaeltacht. There is racism against us too in Gaeltacht regions. There is up to 40% unemployment in many cases, and up to 40% of people do not even go to secondary school in some Gaeltacht areas.

There was a young man who made me very proud as a Galway man when he, back in 1996, carried the Irish flag in the Olympics in Atlanta, and that is Francie Barrett. A year or two afterwards, he was barred from going into a nightclub in Galway. He had to bring an action as a result, which he won. A film was made about it called Southpaw which won an important award at the 1999 film festival in New York. Nothing has changed since. We all need a good big kick up the backside to make it happen.

What Senator Kelleher has done is one small but critical step along the road. What people like Mr. McDonagh and others are doing on her behalf is important. Travellers have a culture that is very important to Ireland and it is very important that it be maintained and kept.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: I commend Senator Kelleher on this meeting today. As a member of the group, I thank all the participants for attending. Based on the two presentations in the two sessions, what is a realistic outcome that we can expect from today? We have heard many informative, provocative and challenging contributions and I thank all those who gave presentations. The one thing I hope we all take from today is that, institutionally, we can challenge each other and that there can be a better relationship with the media and a better presentation of Travellers. As I know from Cork as a former chairman of the Traveller accommodation committee on Cork City Council, great work is being done that is not told.

Senator Terry Leyden: I commend Senator Kelleher on arranging this as rapporteur. Her appointment to this House, on the recommendation of Deputy Micheál Martin, was a very wise choice by then Taoiseach Enda Kenny. It has proved very successful.

Senator Máire Devine: That is not to the point.

Chairman: Is it a relevant point? We are dealing with questions.

Senator Terry Leyden: The calibre of Senator Kelleher is very relevant to the point today. Earlier I was coming up by train and heard many of the contributions. I commend those who have attended and spoke on the need for the fundamental issues of education and housing. This is a great exercise today. The contributions were most enlightening, and I will not respond to any or all but I will put a short question. Former Taoiseach, Deputy Enda Kenny, made a statement in Dáil Éireann on Wednesday, 1 March 2017. He announced formal recognition of Travellers as a distinct ethnic group within the State. For many years the Traveller community campaigned for this to have Travellers' unique heritage, culture and identity formally recognised by the State. Will those here, who know the situation, say if there been any legislation to bring that into reality? It was an aspirational statement by the Taoiseach, but to my knowledge there has been no real legislative follow-up.

Senator Lynn Ruane: I have four questions for different people. I direct my first question to Ms Joyce, Mr. de Bhairdúin and Ms Maughan. They will answer them slightly differently but they are along the same thread. How are the mainstream movements in each of the areas failing in being culturally sensitive to gender, LGBT, and invisible disabilities such as autism? There has been great movement and progress in the mainstream in these areas but it has failed to be intersectional or have the understanding of the cultural aspect that is in gender, LGBT, or disability. What can those of us in mainstream groups do better to be more inclusive and progressive in our policies and efforts to ensure all people are included while understanding that there are cultural differences and respecting them?

Ms Scarff spoke of the collaborations with the National Museum of Ireland with Traveller participation and Travellers contributing their experiences and time. She spoke about equal leadership and collaboration between the groups. How many Travellers are employed officially in those processes? Are Travellers being paid for their time, experiences and the resources they put in? Is there an equal partnership between the National Museum of Ireland and the Travelling community?

I have a question on funds of knowledge for Dr. Kitching. It is very well suggesting that

we establish a commission of teachers, those researching the Travelling community and so on, but has history not shown that those who put their time into researching the area already care? Schools are full of people who hold great prejudice and who do not want to teach Traveller children. How do we get to those people? Anyone willing to engage with the funds of knowledge part will care enough to have challenged themselves, whereas there are large numbers of teachers who have not made progress in examining their prejudice or unconscious bias in their classroom.

Senator Alice-Mary Higgins: I thank all the speakers. I will try to be brief. Some of the points -----

Chairman: A question please.

Senator Alice-Mary Higgins: They are questions. The use of prejudicial language in the media, hate speech and the framing and allowing of debates was outlined well. I was very struck by the fact that a conference would not be covered whereas an individual incident would be. Travellers find the media framing the agenda around them, which may put them in a responsive or defensive position. How does that affect Traveller voices being heard on the big collective issues of the State, areas of LGBT issues, autism and disability, and the collective project?

I note the positive input of Traveller voices, culture and perspectives on the State. There is also a historical issue where the Traveller contribution to the Irish State has sometimes become a little bit invisible, in that where someone does contribute a lot, that aspect of his or her identity can disappear. What would it look like if Travellers had positive participation in the media?

The national anti-racism strategy was raised. There used to be a National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism ten or 11 years ago. Do the witnesses feel a kind of infrastructure similar to the National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism should be in place now?

I mirror the point on education made by my colleague, Senator Ruane. It is important that it is not optional and that Traveller history and culture should be part of education for everybody, as outlined in the legislation put forward by Senator Kelleher of the Civil Engagement Group. It is about ensuring all voices participate in the State and that they bring their full identity to the conversation.

Chairman: I call Senator Gavan. We are asking questions.

Senator Paul Gavan: I thank everyone for their presentations today. I apologise that I could not attend all of them. I commend Senator Kelleher especially, who has been passionate about this topic from day 1 in here.

My first question relates to the horrific media contributions over the past year, particularly talk radio but also a very well-known journalist from one of the large media groups. Some of these people, with some of the most hate-filled speech, make Donald Trump sound like a liberal. What can we as public representatives do after today - collectively, as there seems to be goodwill across the board - to make a difference to challenge those prejudices and that hate speech? On education, what changes could be made to the teaching profession, especially in training, to make a difference in achieving a more inclusive approach from teachers?

Senator Máire Devine: There is the idea of the nomadic culture but there is also just ordinary stuff like visiting family and friends. We need to go north to south. Leaving Brexit aside,

will anybody give examples now of the difficulties at the Border? What is the legislation there as opposed the legislation in the Twenty-six Counties? I would like to know how that can be understood and whether we can do something about raising the profile of what happens at the Border. There are echoes of borders across Europe and the US, imposed ones, and what happens there. I would like to have a sense of what goes on when Travellers cross the Border to visit family and friends. Is it extra difficult?

Mr. Chris McDonagh: From the mediation side of it, we have disputes in different towns in Ireland. What gets me all the time is that local gardaí, if they do not know Travellers, and the media are constantly calling them feuds. That is throwing petrol onto the fire. A lot of them are just disputes. They could be a one-to-one neighbourly thing. As Thomas McCann has said, there should be more put on reporters and what they can say. Just telling the truth, just to be fair, is all we look for.

Mr. Denis Robinson: Education is such a wide topic. Certainly, we have to look at the curriculum and how it mentions or does not mention this unique ethnic group in our country. That has to be included further. We also need to investigate the shortened timetables that some students still experience in Ireland, for example, where Traveller students are sent home earlier or start later, to see how rampant the practice is in our schools. We also need to encourage younger Travellers and get them involved in becoming teachers. We need to see how attractive we can make it. We are awfully quick to run back to Dubai or other places where Irish teachers are working to bring them home. Let us nurture it among younger Travellers. That would be important.

Ms Maria Joyce: On some of the wider questions, there were a couple of points around health, education and culture. The answer is that they are all there. There is a platter of strategies and policies with regard to Travellers. There is the Traveller health strategy of 2010, the education strategy of 2006, and the current national Traveller and Roma inclusion, NTRI, strategy. Going right back to 1990 and the first task force report, there has been a shift in the policy direction away from assimilation through segregation to inclusion. The reality is that we have not seen implementation of those recommendations and that is very unfortunate.

In terms of education, we have sought a number of hearings with the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Education and Skills since the beginning of this year. It published two reports last week, one on the wider issues pertaining to disadvantage with regard to Traveller children in secondary and third level, and one on reduced timetables. We need to see implementation of the recommendations contained in those reports in the education strategy and with regard to the NTRI strategy on education. There is terrible inequality, as the committee has heard, with regard to Traveller children in school. There is invisibility of Traveller culture. There is no sense of recognition or belonging. Discriminatory practices within schools need to be stamped out, including in terms of enrolment policies. There was an opportunity for our legislators to do this last year in respect of enrolment policies that disproportionately impact on Traveller children and other groups of children where there is not a previous history of educational involvement. Under these enrolment policies, if a child's father or older siblings did not go, that child is immediately excluded. There is a need for proactive, positive measures across all of this policy. Encouraging Traveller teachers within the system will go a long way to starting to enable a child to sit in a classroom and see Traveller teachers. There are Traveller teachers and they are identifying, but we need more of that. We need data across all of these areas. Data are beginning to be collected in primary schools but it needs to be done right across all levels of education. We need to have the data to respond to the needs that exist and to put in place the

monitoring around that.

On the question from Senator Ruane on the wider gender piece, the reality is that Traveller women are lost within the wider gender movement. Traveller women are at the coalface trying to address the very stark issues impacting on Travellers. The committee has heard throughout the day about women just getting their children to school, having access to those schools, and trying to battle with services around basic rights in terms of accommodation and health. They have got lost. In some ways, the whole gender movement in Ireland is a bit middle class and it would not be just Traveller women who are lost within it. There is solidarity from some groups out there but there needs to be consideration of the wider gender policy. When we talk about quotas and systems for gender, there needs to be diversity. There needs to be Traveller women quotas within them. The policies need to be specific to Traveller women. Of the actions and recommendations contained in the national women and girls strategy, five pertain to Traveller and Roma women. There is a platter of others, some of which are being marked as implemented but with no evidence of what that means for Traveller and other marginalised women. Those are the kind of things that need to happen.

I went to a number of events to mark the centenary of the 1916 Rising and also to an event at the beginning of 2017 marking the first woman in the Dáil and 100 years of our independence. I was standing there with President Higgins, Senator Higgins's father, and it struck me that we are still without visibility of Traveller women across all of those structures. There is an onus on the wider mainstream groups to address this and on the State to force them to address it.

Ms Lynn Scarff: To come back on Senator Ruane's question about collaboration and contribution, the diversity of our workforce within cultural institutions is very important, obviously within selection panels but in also terms of our recommendations, and that is not there right now. We need to do much more work on that and think about how to set up programmes to enable it.

Mr. Thomas McCann: From a Traveller perspective, what would go a long way to begin to heal some of the hurt would be an apology from the State to Travellers for the difficulties and the exclusion that the State has caused the Travellers. That is what Travellers on the ground are looking for and it would be a starting point. There needs to be accountability for the lack of implementation of policies. Political participation and the drawing up of policy is one side of it, however. In terms of implementation, there needs to be accountability. If there is no accountability, we will continue with a lack of implementation. As Ms Joyce says, that has been the way since policies have been developed. We need a national body, as was said, with responsibility for developing and implementing a national action plan to combat racism, not just for Travellers but across the board. This is a multi-ethnic society. As a State we really need to develop it collectively. That is something that needs to be there. It was there and was developing, but unfortunately it was cut and that was the end of that.

In terms of health and other services, we need an ethnic identifier for Travellers. Traveller organisations have been calling for at least ten or 15 years for an ethnic identifier across the services but particularly in the health services and mental health services. How can we plan a service when we cannot get the exact figures? I am not talking about individuals. I am talking about the members of the community. We need implementation of the all-island Traveller health study, which was carried out with many Travellers and is still on the shelf.

Mr. Oein de Bhairdúin: I will try not to repeat any of the good points that have been made but I wanted to respond on ethnicity. We can continue to have that discussion. At the moment

we are struggling as a community to get basic supports such as accommodation and healthcare. While ethnicity is incredibly important, our basic needs are still not being met.

I refer also to the importance of inclusion within the institutions. That cannot be underestimated. Travellers are not a part of the overall LGBT movement. We are visible every so often at Pride parades and at one or two events. However the movement is sometimes very anti-Traveller. It often asks usually young cisgendered men how other Travellers have treated them badly. The narrative is not about inclusion. The current LGBT strategy's engagement around Travellers is very weak. That in itself is a testimony. How are policymakers including us in the formation of those policies?

The next consideration is hate speech legislation. I think everyone totally agrees with that today. The point about nomadism and the Border is very interesting. We cannot even move. Most people do not even consider the Border. We are not a community that is allowed to be nomadic. Even my local Traveller accommodation programme, TAP, is only for those indigenous to our local county. Thankfully it is currently in draft form. We will be challenging it. Temporary sites are being terminated and there is no mention of the idea that Travellers cannot travel. That is a much wider discussion. While Brexit will have an impact on us, we already are in a crisis.

Dr. Karl Kitching: I wish to respond to the questions on education. Senator Ruane asked about forms of knowledge. The national Traveller and Roma integration strategy and the migrant integration strategy call for anti-racist and intercultural training and professional development for teachers. I have not seen that happen. It needs to be prioritised but unfortunately it is sitting on a shelf. To get people involved who would not otherwise be interested, that training needs to be mandatory.

Second, I mentioned the school excellence fund as an example which could be emulated and the inspectorate is very much involved in that. The inspectorate's involvement in working with schools to fund applications would incentivise schools and communities to work together. I would be the first to say that sometimes we are preaching to the choir. It can be very difficult to reach people who would otherwise not be interested.

On wider professional development, we have seen strands 1, 2 and 3 of the programme for access to higher education, PATH, achieve some good success, particularly PATH strand 1 for under-represented groups' access to teacher education and becoming teachers. We really need to support and expand the PATH schemes and focus on the experience of Traveller teachers in that respect. More needs to be done there. There are a lot of good recommendations out there but we must make them real.

Ms RoseMarie Maughan: The most important thing I wish to say in raising the voice of autistic Travellers is that no policy or legislation should be developed, designed or implemented without their input. Otherwise we are doing an injustice to the voice of the most vulnerable, which is not being heard and has not been heard.

I agree with the good points that have been made about education. It must be a truly inclusive setting where Travellers are welcomed and celebrated. This applies across the board within the educational curriculum. Teachers should not be qualified as teachers unless they have undergone mandatory training on what it is to be autistic, what it is to be a Traveller, how these things impact on a child's life and how to appropriately teach that child.

I wish to make another very important point, picking up where Mr. de Bhairdúin left off on nomadism. As he rightly said, we are not able to move in any corner of this country, North or South. The 1995 task force on the Travelling community called for the development of 1,000 units of transient sites. Fewer than 50 have been developed. They are not used as transient sites. It is illegal to be a Traveller; it is illegal to travel. Therefore our culture has been eroded and wiped out, right under our noses, without meaningful consultation with us. If we do travel we are faced with evictions from pillar to post, from one corner to another. If we try to engage with the mainstream residential caravan parks we face discrimination. That is not even our culture. Our ethnicity was recognised on 1 March 2017. Let that mean something. Let that mean we can have our culture and we do not die without the right to be nomadic. Let us travel rightfully across the land of Ireland.

Chairman: Do Ms Carmody or Ms Harrington wish to comment?

Ms Brigid Carmody: Legislation around media must be put in place. Our children cannot continue to have to hide their identity in school and work. I work with a young girl who works in a hairdresser's salon. She had to stand there and wash a woman's hair while she talked about her family and her people. She had to take part in that conversation. Travellers are carrying all of that. Having to justify their community all the time has a huge effect on our children's mental health.

Ms Louise Harrington: I wish to make a couple of comments to Senators who asked what a more positive media environment might look like. Communication around culture can also be done with partners such as museums and other cultural institutions. Our submission includes some examples of how that might work. This allows another actor to validate and support. Regarding the media, we mentioned the fact that the national Traveller and Roma integration strategy recommends a targeted Traveller and Roma communication initiative. It is really needed, because at the moment public perception is at the mercy of the approach taken by individual journalists. There must be some kind of sanction system, whether through hate speech legislation or another model. The committee heard the examples Ms Carmody read out. People are basically inciting murder against Travellers. We can do nothing except report, report and report.

We also need a platform for Travellers to come together with media people and set standards. We need training for Traveller projects, to allow people to learn more about how the media works, and we definitely need training for journalists and media.

The citizen Traveller campaign was run several years ago. That was a big national communication strategy highlighting the many positives. It gave visibility. I recently spoke to one of my colleagues, a Traveller woman who has been an actress for many years. She spoke about how it made a profound impression on her as a young woman to see that positive visibility around identity and culture. Our approach must involve partnership, some kind of sanction mechanism and standards.

Chairman: We are up against the clock. Does Ms Barry have any concluding responses?

Ms Eilis Barry: The recognition of Traveller ethnicity did not actually require specific legislation. Travellers have significant rights under equality legislation and housing legislation but they are not enforced. That is why legal aid is so important and should be extended to discrimination claims. There should be a clear entitlement to legal aid in housing cases.

Senator Colette Kelleher: All the speakers spoke so eloquently that I will not even attempt to capture it. We will have more conversations with the witnesses in drafting the report. Today we are only beginning a conversation. There are so many challenges and so many heartbreaking, hurtful and dreadful stories that people unfortunately feel obliged to share to move us and to make us move. I also want to hold on to hope. There is a poem that always gives me some comfort when I feel the world is against us. It is “Sometimes” by Sheenagh Pugh.

Sometimes things don't go, after all,
from bad to worse. Some years, muscadel
faces down frost; green thrives; the crops don't fail,
Sometimes a man aims high, and all goes well.
A people sometimes will step back from war,
elect an honest man, decide they care
enough, that they can't leave some stranger poor.
Some men become what they were born for.
Sometimes our best efforts do not go
amiss; sometimes we do as we meant to.
The sun will sometimes melt a field of sorrow
that seemed hard frozen;
may it happen for you.

I hope that our good efforts today do not go amiss and they lead to some better things but I recognise the enormous challenges.

The final word has to go to the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. who said:

I refuse to accept the view that mankind is so tragically bound to the starless midnight of racism and war that the bright daybreak of peace and brotherhood can never become a reality ... I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word.

Senator Jerry Buttimer: Hear, hear.

Chairman: On behalf of the Seanad Public Consultation Committee, I thank all those present for their worthwhile contributions. It has been a worthwhile session and we have learned a lot. There is much we can take from it. We look forward to working with Senator Kelleher who will be compiling a report. Full account has been taken of today's discussion and copies of the final report will be sent to all delegates. Before the public hearing on this topic concludes, I record my gratitude to all members of the committee for their hard work in recent months. In particular, I thank Senator Kelleher who proposed this topic for discussion and worked extremely hard in the background in preparation for the hearings. I sincerely thank all those who made submissions to the committee and the delegates who appeared before it. I express my gratitude to the secretariat and, in particular, Ms Bridget Doody in the Seanad Office for their valuable input in this public consultation process.

SPCC

The select committee adjourned at 2.30 p.m. *sine die*.