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Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality - 2020

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## Submission to 2020 Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality

### Reporting Organisation:

The National Traveller Women's Forum is the National Network of Traveller women and Traveller women's organisations from throughout Ireland. We recognise the particular oppression of Traveller women in Irish society and are working to address this issue through the provision of opportunities to Traveller women to meet, share experiences, ideas and develop collective strategies and skills to work towards the enhancement of their position in society. Traveller women are one of the most marginalised groups in Irish society. Traveller women's experience of inequality and discrimination differs to that of the majority population or other minority groups, and their experience of racism and discrimination is different to those of Traveller men. The needs of Traveller women may not be met by responses and strategies designed to confront and tackle gender inequality or ethnic discrimination alone, i.e. without an examination of the interaction of ethnic disadvantage/discrimination. Acknowledging and addressing this experience is central to outcomes for Traveller women, as the experience of a Traveller woman will sometimes be distinctive because she is a woman, sometimes because she is a Traveller, and sometimes because she is both.

We welcome the opportunity to make a submission to the 2020 Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality. Below we have outlined the Citizens' Assembly's four main themes of concern and will present Traveller-specific issues that arise and urgently must be addressed under each heading. Beyond these four main themes, however, and especially within instances of domestic violence and gender-based violence, Traveller women experience inequality in every facet of their lives. We also would welcome and make a submission to a separate Citizens' Assembly on Violence Against Women.

From constant stereotyping and casual racism to systemic barriers to accessing healthcare, education, and going forth for political roles, glaring injustices are clear throughout Irish society. It is urgent that Traveller women are not only included in the work of this Citizens' Assembly, but that they are prioritised so that the issues impacting on Traveller women are addressed without delay. Traveller women are invisible in many, if not most, mainstream strategies, research and reports that have been conducted to highlight gender inequalities in Ireland. There is a real need for the state to address the intersectionality of gender and equality and the invisibility of Traveller women.

## Theme 1: Gender norms and stereotypes

Irish Travellers are a minority ethnic group that has been part of Irish society for centuries. They have a value system, language, customs and traditions which make them an identifiable group to both themselves and others. Their distinctive lifestyle and culture, based on a nomadic tradition, sets them apart from the general population. For ethnic minority groups, expression of identity and pride in identity are important aspects pertaining to a sense of belonging in society. Such identity being positively received and welcomed by the majority population is also a critical factor in the extent to which people experience a sense of belonging in society. The extent to which that experience is positive or otherwise will affect confidence and self-esteem both from a community standpoint and on an individual level. Traveller women, like other women in Irish society, are disadvantaged in multiple ways.

Broadly speaking, gender roles are clearly divided in the Traveller Community with distinct divisions between experiences, expectations, decision-making authority and the sense of value attributed to each sex. Overall, with clear exceptions, men are the dominant group with more access to power, control and decision-making authority. However, this is a changing dynamic and the increased number of Traveller women in voluntary work, paid employment and education is having a positive effect on the choices and experiences of Traveller women.

Challenging gender norms, expectations, stereotypes, racism and discrimination is a complex issue for Traveller women. The Traveller Community as a whole is subject to widespread negative stereotypes and perceptions within Irish society. This has far-reaching consequences in terms of access to education and other services which affect Traveller women.

In the thirty years since the enactment of Prohibition of the Incitement To Hatred Act (1989) and indeed before it, there are countless examples of the use of racist stereotypes and hate speech used against Travellers. To give a recent example, in September of 2019, a video involving a member of An Garda Síochána and a member of Dublin Fire Brigade began circulating widely across all social media. The purpose was to promote a charity boxing fight but the result instead was to mock Travellers and reinforce racist stereotypes of one of the most marginalised groups in Irish society. We are concerned with such a flagrant display of discrimination from a member of an institution which sets out to protect civilians and serve communities with ‘human rights and ethical behaviour as the foundation upon which we will deliver policing services.’<sup>1</sup> As a Traveller women’s organisation, we were particularly concerned with and disgusted by a reference that appears to be made to “beat the wife” (approximately 49/50 seconds into the online clip). It is a poignant example of how Traveller women can be stereotyped by even those meant to protect Irish society. The Garda in question was suspended<sup>2</sup> and an investigation was undertaken.

Unfortunately, Travellers are commonly the negative focus of political debate in Ireland. It is a feature of every local and general election and even recently came into focus in a presidential election. A 2018 presidential candidate, Peter Casey, went from languishing last in the presidential polls to placing

1 Organisational Objective from An Garda Síochána own mission and strategy statement 2019 – 2020

2 Gallagher, C. (2019) ‘Garda who appeared to mock Travellers in online video has apologised’, *The Irish Times*. [Accessed 30 October 2019]. Available: <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/crime-and-law/garda-who-appeared-to-mock-travellers-in-online-video-has-apologised-1.4028926>.

second in the election after comments he made that Travellers are ‘basically people camping on someone else’s land.’<sup>3</sup> This was given much coverage in the media which had an extremely adverse impact on the families at the center of Casey’s comments. This is one of many instances in which the media exacerbates racism in its coverage. Even more recently than Casey’s comments, Tweets from Fianna Fáil Senator Lorraine Clifford Lee, also a member of the Seanad, were found to be extremely offensive, using outdated stereotypes and derogatory terms. While Clifford Lee’s apology was welcomed, this kind of racism is only held to account when a leader’s career is in jeopardy.

The impact of this type of hate speech directed at Travellers is distressing and painful and has a hugely negative impact on the day-to-day stresses of Travellers’ lives and their mental health. The suicide rate for Traveller women is five times greater than the general population and 62.7% of Traveller women reported their mental health to be poor for one or more days in the last 30 days compared to 19.9% of female General Medical Service Card holders.<sup>4</sup>

There is an absence of positive visibility of Traveller culture in the curricula and in the school environment as a whole. Bullying and racism is experienced by Traveller learners from their settled peers but also from educators.

The Prohibition of Incitement to Hatred Act of 1989 simply has not been sufficient in protecting the Traveller community from verbal abuse, identity-based attacks, and other insidious forms of hatred. According to documents released by the Courts Service under the Freedom of Information Act, there have been 44 prosecutions under the Act of which five resulted in convictions.<sup>5</sup> By any measure, this is a very poor conviction rate in relation to a piece of legislation that spans three decades.

St. Stephen’s Green Trust Travellers in Prison Initiative released research in 2017 in a published report entitled ‘Hearing their Voices Traveller Women in Prison.’<sup>6</sup> This research highlighted that for Traveller women and women of ethnic groups throughout the world, experiences of racism, discrimination and oppression are often compounded by sexism, sexual stereotypes and gender-based discrimination. Traveller women therefore struggle with the oppression, sexism and gender stereotypes faced by all women while simultaneously dealing with racism, exclusion and isolation from the majority population. The report also highlights the significant stigma experienced by Traveller women who have been imprisoned in Ireland, particularly post-release.

In February 2017, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women CEDAW, in considering Ireland’s most recent report, asked the Irish government to provide information on specific measures to address the overrepresentation of Traveller women in the prison population and the prevalent stereotypes that increase their risk of imprisonment. The All-Ireland Traveller Health Study concluded that the relative risk of imprisonment of Traveller women was 9.8-11.5 per 10,000, and 18-22 times that of non-Traveller women.

3 O’Halloran, M. (2018) ‘Taoiseach condemns Peter Casey comments about Travellers.’ [Accessed 12 December 2019]. Available: <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/politics/oireachtas/taoiseach-condemns-peter-casey-comments-about-travellers-1.3668051>.

4 <http://www.paveepoint.ie/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Handout-Mental-Health-A5-8pp.pdf>

5 <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/crime-and-law/courts-service-reveals-five-convictions-for-hate-crime-since-1989-1.3124352>

6 <https://www.ssgt.ie/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Hearing-their-Voices-Traveller-Women-in-Prison.pdf>

### Recommendations:

- National Traveller Women's Forum made a submission to the National Consultation on Hate Speech in December 2019 and supports the updating of The Prohibition of Incitement to Hatred Act of 1989.
- It is also essential that racism and discrimination be condemned by politicians and leaders in Ireland. NTWF wrote to members of the Dáil and Seanad before the General Election 2020, calling for a debate on racism in politics. We hope the interest expressed in participating will be carried through to the new government.
- The Traveller Education bill was passed last year and we look forward to its full implementation in school curricula throughout the country. We believe that a more positive portrayal of Irish Travellers from a young age will help in eroding the deep-seated stereotypes and racism experienced by the Traveller community, especially Traveller women.
- Compulsory anti-racism and intercultural training is required for key HSE staff part of pre-service and in-service.
- Discriminatory practices in schools need to be stamped out. For example, any enrolment practices that impact Traveller children more than other children.

## Theme 2: Work: gender discrimination and occupational segregation by gender and the gender pay gap

Unfortunately for Traveller women, conversations around the gender pay gap are hardly applicable because access to education and progression into mainstream employment remains extremely difficult due to systemic and societal barriers. Traveller women first and foremost need greater access and pathways to the workforce.

Traveller women experience high levels of unemployment due to low educational attainment, discrimination, racism, childcare and family commitments and welfare issues. For many, hiding one's identity can be the only option to secure and maintain employment. 55% of Travellers have experienced discrimination at work.<sup>7</sup>

- Less than 1% of Travellers are in third level education <sup>8</sup>
- 81.2% of Traveller women are unemployed <sup>9</sup>
- Only 4.8% of Travellers are employed or self-employed <sup>10</sup>
- Traveller unemployment increased from 74.9% in 2006 to 84.3% in 2011

<sup>7</sup> Kelleher et al.,2010

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Central Statistics Office, Census 2011 Profile 7 Religion, Ethnicity and Irish Travellers, 2011.

<sup>10</sup> Kelleher et al.,2010

High cost of childcare acts as a major barrier for Traveller and Roma women in accessing employment, further education and training.<sup>11</sup> Many women also fear losing secondary benefits, particularly the Medical Card.<sup>12</sup>

Regardless of this, no gender-specific employment or training opportunities have been introduced for Traveller women. The national training authority, FAS, initiated a Special Initiative for the employment of Travellers in 2005 named FAS SIT. However, this programme was cut by 50% during the recession, and there was an underspend of 40% of the allocated budgets.<sup>13</sup> Eight of the projects were reportedly still running in 2012 but there is no information on Traveller participation after this date. In 2008, a small grant fund by the Department of Social Protection, Activation and family support line was established to support unemployed Travellers return to employment. However, there are no available figures of spending or allocations, nor any evidence on its outcomes. An internship scheme in government departments, which was popular and over-subscribed, has also been discontinued.<sup>14</sup>

A lack of access to education has wider human rights consequences in that it exposes Traveller and Roma girls and women to low educational attainment, future unemployment, poverty and social exclusion.

55% of Travellers have experienced discrimination at work<sup>15</sup> and for many, hiding one's identity can be the only option to secure and maintain employment. This is unacceptable reality for Ireland in 2020.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Introduce targeted and adequately resourced employment and training measures for Traveller women to improve and increase access to the labour market.
- Adopt temporary special measures to ensure Traveller women can access affordable childcare; retain secondary benefits while participating in training; and retain medical cards for a set period of time after entering employment.
- Develop a Traveller Employment and Enterprise Strategy in conjunction with Traveller organisations and other key stakeholders.
- Support the rollout of recommendations contained in the St. Stephen's Green Trust report Mincéir Gruber Malaid Streed (Traveller Hands Work Hard) which will be launched on the 17<sup>th</sup> June.
- Resource recommendations coming from the NTRIS working group on employment.

11 Ireland has the highest childcare costs in the EU as a percentage of family income, making it inaccessible for many Traveller and Roma women. For low income families including lone parents, childcare can cost up to 40 per cent of their total income compared to 24 per cent of the income of a family with two incomes; however even this lower percentage is still double that of the EU average. See OECD, Benefits and Wages: Statistics, 2014, cited in Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Submission to the UN Committee on Economic Social and Cultural Rights, June 2015, [www.ihrec.ie](http://www.ihrec.ie).

12 Within the context of poor health outcomes for Traveller women, this fear is not unfounded. Kelleher et al.,2010 (9);

13 Harvey, B., Travelling with Austerity, 2013.

14 Ibid.

15 Kelleher et al.,2010

### **Theme 3: Care, paid and unpaid, as a social and family responsibility**

Traveller women play a central role in the Traveller community. In the domestic sphere, they assume responsibility for child-rearing, care of the home and the welfare of both their immediate and extended families.

Similar to women in the settled community, Traveller women are often the key point of contact with frontline service providers such as GPs, PHNs, local authority personnel with responsibility for accommodation, schools, etc. In this context, the well documented existence of institutional discrimination and prejudice directed at members of the Traveller Community is more likely to affect Traveller women than Traveller men.

An NWCI publication describes childcare as ‘the dominant employment barrier for women.’<sup>16</sup> Traveller women have primary responsibility for children. Without access to childcare, Traveller women cannot work, cannot work on a full-time basis or cannot obtain the further education or training that would enable them to access work. Traveller women are marrying and starting a family at a younger age than the general population. Given the poor education outcomes for Traveller women ability to access further education and training is crucial. Universal childcare, available as a right, is absolutely essential. Without it, there will never be education equality for and between women, nor will there be employment equality for and between women.

One in three Irish Traveller women (32.7%) were looking after the home and family, nearly twice the rate of the general population (17.5%)<sup>17</sup>. Traveller women have traditionally cared for their children within the extended family, one reason being the high costs of childcare as outlined above. This is a major barrier for Traveller women in accessing employment, further education and training,<sup>18</sup> therefore relegating Traveller women to the home.

In addition to quality childcare provision being provided the specific needs of Traveller children must be recognised and included in the policies and approach of the early years setting if Traveller women are to have the confidence in their children being cared for outside the immediate family.

In discussing Traveller home life, it is impossible to not mention the issue of accommodation. Accommodation is one of the key determinants of health and the appropriate type and standard of Traveller accommodation does impact greatly on life expectancy and on all other aspects of Traveller lives such as economic, social and cultural. The significantly high number of families living without permanent accommodation or living in inadequate accommodation has particular consequences for Traveller women. Housing has a particular effect on women as they spend more time in the home and are the primary carers. As such they bear the brunt of having to cope with unacceptable conditions such as lack of clean running water, lack of adequate refuse collection, poor sanitation and unsafe

<sup>16</sup> Dr. Mary Murphy. (2012). *From Careless to careful activation making activation work for women*. NWCI.

<sup>17</sup><http://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/census/documents/census2011profile7/Profile,7,Education,Ethnicity,and,Irish,Traveller,entire,doc.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> Ireland has the highest childcare costs in the EU as a percentage of family income, making it inaccessible for many Traveller and Roma women. For low income families including lone parents, childcare can cost up to 40 per cent of their total income compared to 24 per cent of the income of a family with two incomes; however even this lower percentage is still double that of the EU average. See OECD, *Benefits and Wages: Statistics*, 2014, cited in Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Submission to the UN Committee on Economic Social and Cultural Rights, June 2015, [www.ihrec.ie](http://www.ihrec.ie).

areas for children to play. Furthermore, problems with accommodation can lead to ill health and other issues. Unstable accommodation status has a correlation with socioeconomic disadvantage, poor health and increased drug use among Traveller women, with 32.5% of female Traveller drug users staying in some form of unstable accommodation.<sup>19</sup>

Almost 1 in 3 Traveller households living in mobile or temporary accommodation have no sewerage facilities and 1 in 5 have no piped water source. A significant number of families in group housing or sites report lack of footpaths, public lighting, fire hydrants and safe play areas.<sup>20</sup> A review of fire safety in September 2016 found significant shortcomings in Traveller accommodation units with 76% not having a working smoke alarm; 72% having no working carbon monoxide alarm; and the condition of electrical installations being an issue in 78% of the sites. The National Traveller Health Strategy in 2010 states ‘There is little doubt that the living conditions of Travellers are probably the single greatest influence on health status, stress and infectious disease including respiratory.’ As one of the key determinants of health, accommodation has also contributed to Traveller children being 3.6 times more vulnerable to fatality in their first year of life. 50% of this group are not expected to live beyond the age of 40.<sup>21</sup> Consequently, in addition to their work in the home and childcare, Traveller women must grapple with the precarious, unsafe, and sub-standard conditions for children in their living environment.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Following the Traveller Accommodation Expert Review<sup>22</sup> carried out last year, the National Traveller Women’s Forum has publicly emphasized the need for urgent implementation of all 32 of the recommendations contained in this review in its entirety.
- Adopt special measures to ensure Traveller women can access affordable childcare; retain secondary benefits while participating in training; and retain medical cards for a set period of time after entering employment.
- To ensure quality childcare for Travellers requires the implementation of anti-racist policies, and the use of culturally and developmentally appropriate curriculum and the visibility through positive measures of Traveller role models employed in the service.

#### **Theme 4: Women’s access to, and representation in, public life and decision-making:**

Traveller women experience significant exclusion from decision-making and wider political processes due to discrimination and marginalisation. There is a real need for Traveller women to have an attainable opportunity to participate in spaces of power and decision-making. Regardless of the recommendations made by the Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection

19 National Drug Treatment Reporting System (NDTRS) 2007-2013, cited in Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre, Submission to Department of Justice and Equality: National Substance Misuse Strategy, 2015, <http://www.paveepoint.ie/wpcontent/uploads/2015/04/drugssubmission.pdf>

20 Kelleher et al.,2010

21 Kelleher et al.,2010

22[https://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/2019\\_july\\_expert\\_review\\_group\\_traveller\\_accommodation-final\\_reportrt\\_00.pdf](https://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/2019_july_expert_review_group_traveller_accommodation-final_reportrt_00.pdf)



of National Minorities,<sup>23</sup> CERD,<sup>24</sup> and former Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights,<sup>25</sup> the State has not adopted positive action measures to improve on the underrepresentation of Travellers in political institutions and public affairs.

The UNCESCR has also raised concerns over the lack of meaningful consultation by the Irish State within civil society in developing and implementing policies and legislation relating to Travellers. Consultative mechanisms have emerged in structures devoted to Traveller issues.<sup>26</sup> Traveller women have invested large parts of their time in resourcing these consultative spaces on health, accommodation and education in particular with little outcomes overall. The role of these committees also remains only advisory in nature without any decision-making powers. Consultation with Traveller women's representative organisations should not be seen as a panacea for women's participation. Consultative mechanisms can often be inaccessible for women who have low levels of literacy and education and/or who bear childcare responsibilities.

In 2019, four candidates in local elections openly identified as Travellers, three of which were women—none were elected.<sup>27</sup>

Last November, the research launch of 'Beyond the Dáil: More Women in Local Government' research report was launched in Mansion House. Local councillors were asked what issues they considered important to address in their role as leaders. 'Cash' is cited as one of the barriers to women running for office. 'Poverty ranked high for women with 59% of women reporting it as a priority issue compared to 42% of men.' Additionally, racism was indicated by 51% of women compared to 31% of male respondents. 10% of men reported that racism was not important, indicating that they do not see this as an issue related to local government.<sup>28</sup> Maria Joyce spoke on a panel detailing the particular barriers Traveller women face in becoming involved in politics and the blatant racism that must be addressed by politicians and political parties.

### Recommendations:

- Adopt quotas for Traveller and Roma women in formal political structures with specific seats in the Dáil, Seanad, Constitutional Convention and local councils. Seats should also be reserved in local and national government community engagement structures.
- Set targets for Traveller Women in mainstream gender quotas, party political gender quotas and state agencies quotas to ensure visibility of the most marginalised women.
- Quotas are needed for Traveller women's participation on state boards. The existing quota of 40% for women on state boards has been reached but there is no visibility of Traveller or other marginalised women.

23 Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, 2012.

24 CERD, 2005 and 2011.

25 Council of Europe, *Report by the Commissioner for Human Rights Mr. Thomas Hammarberg on His Visit to Ireland, Strasbourg, 2008*, [https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?p=&id=1283555&Site=CommDH&BackColorInternet=FEC65B&BackColorIntranet=FEC65B&BackColorLogo=FEC679&direct=true#P402\\_100717&direct=true](https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?p=&id=1283555&Site=CommDH&BackColorInternet=FEC65B&BackColorIntranet=FEC65B&BackColorLogo=FEC679&direct=true#P402_100717&direct=true).

26 These include National Traveller Roma Integration Steering Committee, National Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee, Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committees, Traveller Education Strategy Advisory and Consultative Forum, and the Traveller Health Advisory Committee.

27 [https://www.ipa.ie/\\_fileUpload/Documents/LA\\_Times\\_Summer\\_2019.pdf](https://www.ipa.ie/_fileUpload/Documents/LA_Times_Summer_2019.pdf)

28 Dr. Cullen, P. and McGing, C. 2019, 'Beyond the Dail' p.16. Available: [https://www.nwci.ie/images/uploads/15176\\_NWCI\\_Research\\_Report\\_WEB.pdf](https://www.nwci.ie/images/uploads/15176_NWCI_Research_Report_WEB.pdf)



- Targeted training, mentoring and other initiatives to support Traveller and Roma women's participation/uptake in political structures.
- Additional resources to further develop Traveller women's groups at local level.