

Traveller Inclusion in a New National Agreement

19th October 2005

“The [United Nations CERD] Committee encourages the State party to work more concretely towards recognizing the Traveller community as an ethnic group.... And recommends to the State party that it intensify its efforts to fully implement the recommendations of the Task Force on the Traveller community, and that all necessary measures be urgently taken to improve access by Travellers to all levels of education, their employment rates as well as their access to health services and to accommodation suitable to their lifestyle.”

***United Nations, April 2005. Concluding Observations
on Ireland’s First and Second Report under the International Convention on the
Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD)***

Introduction and Summary

Pavee Point welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the development of a new National Agreement and in particular to urge the Government to make a renewed effort to ensure the inclusion of Travellers in all relevant sections of the agreement. In this submission Pavee Point outlines a range of issues and concerns and specifically calls for a Special Initiative on Travellers in line with the 10 Special Initiatives identified in Sustaining Progress. Pavee Point believes that Traveller organisations should be consulted and included in the negotiations for a New National Agreement and in particular this submission calls for the establishment of an intercultural strand through which the Government and social partners can discuss issues related to key issues such as immigration and ethnic and cultural diversity in Ireland and that this strand would be inclusive of organisations not presently part of the community and voluntary pillar.

Previous National Agreements have been recognised as contributing to Ireland's growing economic prosperity and social cohesion. However it has been recognised by many commentators that the benefits of economic prosperity have not been evenly distributed and according to recent statistics from the Central Statistics Office and other sources, Travellers remain one of the most disadvantaged groups in Irish society.

All key stakeholders have a role to play in improving the socio-economic conditions of Travellers, the Government; the social partners; the community and voluntary sector as well as Travellers themselves and the organisations that represent their views.

Pavee Point Travellers Centre is celebrating its 20th anniversary in 2005 and has worked in partnership with many government agencies over that period to secure a number of improvements in the policy thinking and planning over that period. The work and impact of Pavee Point would not have been possible without Government EU and other funding. Pavee Point has contributed in a significant way to the emergence of key developments that have impacted on Travellers and on the broader equality/anti-racism agenda in Ireland (see Annex 1 and www.paveepoint.ie for further details).

During that time there has been significant developments. Twenty years ago Traveller spokespersons and Traveller needs had little visibility in Irish society. Over the past 20 years there has been significant progress in the identification and analysis of needs leading to the drawing up of policies aimed at improving the socio-economic needs of Travellers including the important Report on the Task Force of the Travelling People (1995). Over the past years there has been some albeit patchy progress in implementing the outcomes of the Task Force report.

However, despite the emergence of progressive policies and a number of innovative pilot programmes, there remains significant gaps between agreed policy, its implementation on the ground and its impact on the lives of Travellers. This is the result of a range of obstacles which have remained difficult to remove, despite good will and intentions on the part of many including senior civil servants and Government Ministers. In particular the institutional mechanisms and the targeting of resources to implement agreed Traveller policies have proved inadequate.

Pavee Point Travellers Centre is calling for a special initiative on Travellers to be part of the next National Agreement. Pavee Point contends that the continuing high level of need and the slow pace of change in the socio-economic status of Travellers which are probably the most marginalised group in Irish society warrants a significant fresh Government initiative with concomitant resources and institutional and policy change.

This submission is not an exhaustive list but seeks to focus on some of the key policy areas that might be prioritised under the National Agreement.

Proposed Mechanism for Inclusion of Travellers and Traveller organisations in a New National Agreement

Travellers are probably the most marginalised community in Irish society. The negotiating structures developed to discuss the next National Agreement must be as inclusive as possible. Pavee Point urges that a specific mechanism is developed to ensure that Traveller organisations can be party to the negotiations on a New Agreement that differs from the approach that was adopted in the past.

Pavee Point proposes an intercultural strand under the new National Agreement which would provide a mechanism for the inclusion of a broad range of interests related to cultural and ethnic diversity in Ireland, including migrants and refugees and asylum seekers.

This would provide a distinct focus to both new and existing issues related to the significant demographic and cultural changes that have taking place in Ireland in recent years.

1. **Obstacle: The lack/slowness of implementation of Agreed Government Policy on Travellers**

The lack/slowness of implementation of agreed Government Policy is widely acknowledged in successive reports from NGO's, including Pavee Point but also in the Government's own reports for example in relation to the implementation of the Task Force on the Traveller community.

Examples of the lack/slowness of the implementation of Government policy includes:

- The lack of commitment by many local authorities to progress their 5 year Traveller accommodation programmes and the lack of effective remedial action by the Department of Environment and Local Government.
- The failure to develop a Government employment and training action plan for Travellers arising out of the Traveller Task Force Report (1995).
- The failure of Local Authorities to monitor and enforce health and safety standards in relation to Traveller accommodation because they have effective responsibility for both tasks.
- The slow progress in impacting on the high illness and mortality rates among Travellers and in particular the infant mortality rates experienced by Traveller children and the morbidity and premature deaths of older Travellers.
- The continuing high levels of illiteracy and lack of completion of second level schooling beyond second grade by most Travellers, despite some improvement in primary school attendance.
- The continuing lack of statistics and data to provide baseline figures on which to measure the success or otherwise of government policies and interventions.

The weaknesses in implementing policy and policy gaps can be illustrated by the following comments/criticisms by international bodies and through admission by the Irish government itself:

Government of Ireland:

‘In general the Government is concerned that the Task Force Committee found that, in general, improvements on the ground in the position of Travellers since the publication of the Task Force Report has been disappointing. More specifically, the Committee found that the monitoring of progress was difficult due to the lack of good quality data on the number of Travellers availing of services.’¹

The United Nations CERD Committee's Observations (2005):

‘While noting the efforts made so far by the State party with regard to the situation of members of the Traveller community in the field of health, housing, employment and education, the Committee remains concerned about the effectiveness of policies and measures in these areas. (article 5(e))

¹ Government of Ireland. First and Second Report under the International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination App 1: Para 6.

The [CERD] Committee recommends to the State party that it intensify its efforts to fully implement the recommendations of the Task Force on the Traveller community, and that all necessary measures be urgently taken to improve access by Travellers to all levels of education, their employment rates as well as their access to health services and to accommodation suitable to their lifestyle.²

The Framework on National Minorities Resolution (2004):

‘Increasing efforts have been made, since the 1995 Report of the Task Force on the Travelling People, particularly at central level, to improve the situation of persons belonging to the Traveller community. Notwithstanding these efforts, much remains to be done in the implementation of the Framework Convention, in particular in areas covering accommodation, education, employment, health care, and access to certain goods and services by members of the Traveller community. Gaps also remain between central policy and its successful implementation at local and national levels.’³

The Council of Europe body ECRI Second Report on Ireland (2003):

‘One of the main barriers to improvement of the situation as regards accommodation is reported to be the unwillingness of local authorities to provide accommodation and resistance and hostility among local communities to planned developments, often resulting in injunctions and court cases. In this respect, it has been commented that the fact that no sanctions are provided for in the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act against authorities who do not take measures to provide accommodation for Travellers may weaken its effectiveness’.

1.1 Recommendation: Establishment of a statutory Traveller Agency to Monitor, coordinate and where appropriate, enforce the implementation of Government policy on Travellers.

The Government of Ireland, the Council of Europe and the United Nations have variously described progress on the implementation of the Traveller Task Force Report as ‘disappointing’; ‘much remains to be done’ and the State ‘needs to intensify its efforts’. The major question is what is to be done and how can all ensure that what is written in policy is translated into effective action.

The present arrangements for the monitoring, co-ordination and enforcement of Government policy in relation to Travellers are wholly inadequate. This is not a comment or reflection on the civil servants who presently are responsible with monitoring progress, but of the structures themselves. To date the emphasis has been on the ‘monitoring’ of progress rather than implementation. To date policy has been monitored through a series of committees. To date there has been no adequately resourced agency to ensure that policy is implemented.

When the State was faced with an increasing number of asylum seekers it established the Reception and Integration Agency (RIA). In the face of (often strong) local opposition, hostels for asylum seekers were established throughout the country. In a

² United Nations Committee on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination (2005). Concluding Observations on Ireland’s First and Second Reports

³ European Union. Resolution ResCMN(2004) on the implementation of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities by Ireland

matter of months, accommodation, the immediate crisis experienced by both Government and asylum seekers was resolved. While aspects of the policy have drawn criticism from NGOs, it is at least an example of what can be achieved if the political will and the resources are applied.

Other examples of what can be done exist outside the jurisdiction. In Northern Ireland when local authorities failed in their statutory duty to provide sufficient housing for the Roman Catholic community the Government established the Northern Ireland Housing Executive which has been widely commended in its approach to housing provision and management and indeed many of its management reforms have been adopted by local authorities in Ireland.

Pavee Point has presented a number of options for consideration by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform in relation to a Traveller Agency. The preferred option of Pavee Point is for an agency responsible for the implementation of all aspects of the Report of the Task Force on the Traveller Community. However, the development of an agency which has roles assigned to it on a phased basis could also be a useful option. The development of the office of a Traveller Ombudsman would also merit consideration as an interim measure before the establishment of a full agency.

1.2 Recommendation: A special initiative on Travellers should be included in the new National Agreement

In Sustaining Progress there were a number of special initiatives focussing on key socio economic issues facing Irish society. Pavee Point recommends that a special initiative on Travellers be included in the next National Agreement which would focus on some of the institutional and policy issues identified in this paper. This special initiative must be *additional* to the measures already in place by Government to progress Traveller policy and must be focussed on implementation and outcomes.

1.3 Recommendation: Pavee Point welcomes the National Action Plan Against Racism 'Planning for Diversity' and urges that the Plan continues to be inclusive of Travellers and their needs and in particular calls for an increase in the budget for the Plan for 2006.

2. Obstacle: The unacceptable living conditions on many Traveller sites and the failure of many Local Authorities to implement their own 5 year Traveller Accommodation Programmes

A recent health report stated ‘Conditions on Traveller sites are unacceptable. Travellers reported that the most common problems arising include: illegal dumping; sewage and drainage problems; poor building fabric; site design problems; water hygiene; pest infestation; and environmental hazards from land adjoining Traveller sites.’⁴

Many Travellers continue to live on the side of the road without access to basic facilities and without access to halting sites or other forms of Traveller specific accommodation. Many others continue to live in sub standard official and temporary halting sites. The 2002 Census of Population showed that 55.6% of Travellers are in permanent accommodation and 36.9% in temporary accommodation (with a further 7.6% not stated). There are some 25-30,000 Travellers in Ireland who constitute roughly 0.5% of the population, roughly equivalent to filling the Hogan Stand in Croke Park. In this day and age it is surely not beyond central and local government to provide a decent standard of accommodation for such a relatively small group. The recent example of Government intervention in relation to accommodating asylum seekers show what can be done if there is sufficient will.

The most recent official figures available on accommodation needs (2002) show that 2,567 units of permanent accommodation are needed to meet existing demand. This compares with 2,100 in 1995. Even allowing for natural increase in the number of Traveller families there is little evidence from these figures that much progress is being made in meeting either the current or projected accommodation needs of Travellers. To give an example to illustrate the snail pace of accommodation provision, between 2000 and 2003 local authorities throughout the country succeeded in building just 90 permanent halting site bays which is even less than the already poor achievement of 137 units built between 1996-1999⁵.

In its report to the United Nations CERD Committee, Pavee Point highlighted major weaknesses in the Irish Government’s provision of accommodation for Travellers, including:

- Failure by the Irish Government to adequately acknowledge the very poor progress that has been made in providing additional units of Traveller specific accommodation since 2001
- Obscurity and confusion caused by recent changes in data presentation by central and local government which prevents comparison with previous figures
- Failure of the Government to acknowledge and reverse the damaging impact of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act (2002)
- Because of a lacuna in the law and the way Environmental Health Officers are managed, local authorities above the law in relation to health and environmental standards, including those relating to Traveller accommodation

⁴ Traveller Health Unit Eastern Region, (2004). Environmental Health Concerns of Travellers.

⁵ Report of the NTACC to the Minister for Housing and Urban Renewal.

In a letter to An Taoiseach Bertie Ahern in November 2004, the three national Traveller organisations: Pavee Point, the Irish Traveller Movement and the National Traveller Women's Forum came together and wrote:

‘We are saddened to see...Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government figures which demonstrate that there are 788 families still living by the side of the road, there are an additional 323 families sharing basic facilities with other family members, with a further 352 families in emergency and temporary facilities, this brings a total of 1,463 (22% of Traveller families), still living without permanent quality accommodation 5 years after the adoption of Local Authority Traveller Accommodation Programmes’⁶.

The Government ordered a review of the effectiveness of the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act which requires local authorities to implement 5-year plans for accommodation. This review was completed with the publication of the Report in January 2005.⁷ Despite the fact local authorities have failed in their statutory and humanitarian duty to provide adequate accommodation for Travellers, with the exception of some progress on the refurbishment of some existing sites, there is little evidence that the Government is willing to address the slow pace of accommodation provision through institutional or policy reform.

2.1 Recommendations on Traveller Accommodation

In the context of the lack of adequate progress on Traveller accommodation provision, Pavee Point has recommended the establishment of a Traveller Agency to update and ensure the implementation of the outcomes of the Task Force Report including in respect of accommodation. As previously stated, this agency would both coordinate and where necessary enforce policy where Government and Local Government bodies have consistently fail to meet their own targets and standards, as well as encouraging good practice. Such a body could have similar powers, (though not structure) as RIA, the Reception and Integration Agency (shortly to become the Immigration and Naturalisations Service INIS).

Alternative proposals that could be considered could be the establishment of a National Traveller Accommodation Agency or a Traveller Ombudsman Office. Pavee Point calls on the Government to reconsider a statement made in December 2004 by the Minister of State at the Department of Local Government and Heritage when he ruled out the possibility of establishing a National Traveller Accommodation Agency ‘for it is not clear if such a body would be better able to deal with issues and problems arising’.⁸ As in the case of other areas of policy, local authorities that have consistently failed to implement their 5-year plans for Traveller accommodation should now be faced with sanctions including the threat of dissolution.

⁶ Letter to An Taoiseach, (Prime Minister) Bertie Ahern TD by Traveller Organisations, November 2004

⁷ National Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee to the Minister for Housing and Urban Renewal, (2004). Review of the Operation of the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act 1998.

⁸ Traveller Accommodation Dail Eireann Debates, 4 November, 2004, 1461 see also 3 November, 2004, 1316.

3.0 Obstacle: Traveller health status continues to resemble that of a developing country

There continues to be a very high mortality rates among Travellers. Older Travellers, i.e. those aged over 65, accounted for just 3.3% of the population. The corresponding figure is 11.1% in the general population. This is only a slight improvement since 1996 when the respective figures were 1.3% and 11.4%

The Traveller population has a very young profile, which is the result of a combination of higher mortality rates and higher birth rates. 42% of Travellers are aged 0-14 years compared with a corresponding figure of 21% for the general population⁹. This has key implications for policy areas impacting on young people, including education, training, youth and community policies.

In the only major survey of Traveller health to date, the combined stillbirth, peri-natal death and infant mortality rate in 1987 was found to be three times the national average.¹⁰ More recent research (1999) indicates that the differential for sudden infant death among Traveller children is 12 times the national average.

Traveller health status continues to resemble that of a developing country. The National Traveller Health Strategy has been a welcome development. It identified and addressed some of the problems that Travellers encounter in relation to health and established an infrastructure for dealing with them which was inclusive of Traveller organisations. We need to ensure that in the reform of the health service there continues to be a focus on Travellers' health and that there are resources available to address current and emerging health needs.

3.1 Recommendations on Traveller health:

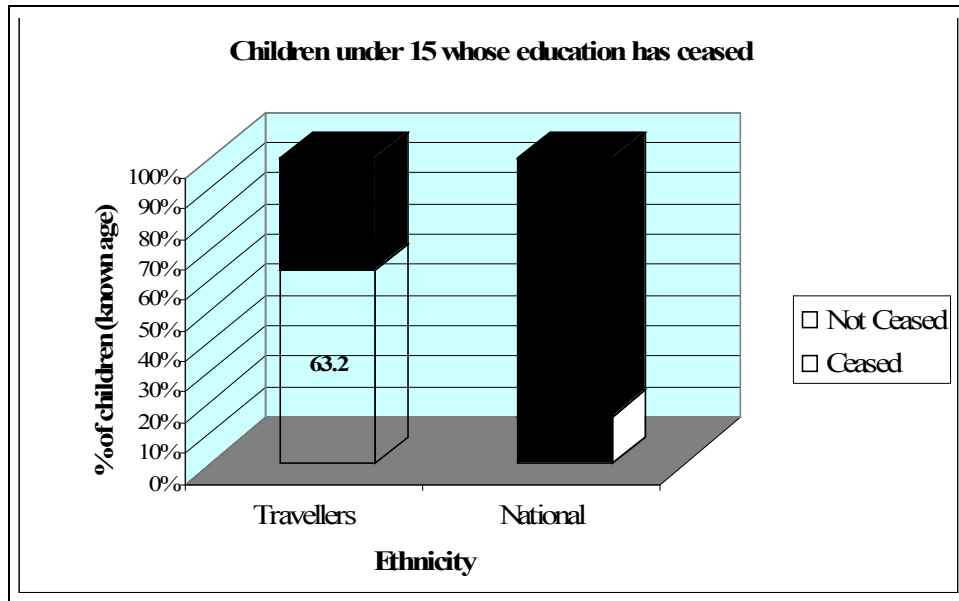
- Pavee Point welcomes the Government's Traveller Health Strategy but calls for sufficient commitment and resources to be applied to fulfil its potential impact. Pavee Point further contends that improving the poor health status of Travellers is also dependent on concomitant improvements in accommodation, environmental and economic conditions.
- In the reform of the health services recognition and continuation of the role of the National Traveller Health Advisory Committee (NTHAC) must be assured. The NTHAC role within the HSE also needs to be defined. The Traveller Health Units should continue to have a regional role in monitoring and progressing Traveller health policy and practice.
- The All Ireland Travellers Health Status and Needs Assessment Study needs to be prioritised and carried out.
- The Rural Social Scheme be examined to see if it could be extended to cover Primary Health Care Projects or that a national pilot scheme be established for Traveller PHC projects which would ensure that Travellers do not lose their secondary benefits and would act as an incentive to Travellers attempting to

⁹ While this data was not available at the time of the CERD Report publication, equivalent data was available from the 1996 Census.

¹⁰ Barry, J., Herity, B. and Solan, J. (1989). Vital Statistics of Travelling People, 1987, Dublin: The Health Research Board, pp. 14-15.

escape the poverty trap in which they currently find themselves. Given Travellers appalling health and employment statistics Pavee Point calls for affirmative action and proposes that Travellers should be able retain their medical cards for 5 years after taking up employment.

4.0 Traveller children continue to experience marginalisation in participating and benefiting from education policy and provision in Ireland.



The Department of Education and Science is considerably short of its goal under the National Anti Poverty Strategy to obtain ‘full participation of Traveller children in an intercultural education system’. The development of intercultural principles in Irish schools is still at an embryonic stage and suffers from the absence of an overall coherent policy statement. Full Traveller participation in education remains an unfulfilled hope rather than a reality.

Census 2002 shows that for 54.8% of Travellers, primary school education was the highest level of education they obtained and that 63.2% of Traveller children under the age of 15 had completed their education before the age of 15, compared with 15.4% of the national population.

In recent years, debate and actions have focused on the numbers of Traveller children participating in schools, with the result that most Traveller children now attend primary school. There has also been an increase in numbers of Traveller children transferring to secondary school. However very few Travellers remain in secondary schools after the second year of schooling.

In the first (Government) Report of the Monitoring Committee of the Task Force of the Travelling People, (2000) it was stated:

‘It is to be acknowledged that the drop out rate for Traveller children has been unacceptably high. Greater efforts will be made with the assistance of the Education

and Welfare Board in particular to encourage Traveller children to remain in school until they meet the statutory age requirement¹¹.

A scheme of visiting teachers, who liaise with families, has contributed to raising attendance levels at primary level, as has the increased awareness and mobilisation of the Traveller community itself, including work undertaken by Traveller NGO's, such as Pavee Point.

The system of segregated classes for Travellers has now been dropped and Traveller children are supposed to attend mainstream classes, with additional teachers provided to support them. However, there has been some concern expressed that the system of withdrawing Traveller children from classes in order to provide teaching in the same school can often lead to a *de facto* segregation.

Literacy rates among Travellers remain very low and most Travellers still leave school without qualifications. The education system is still failing many Travellers and structural inequality including weaknesses in institutional and policy responses are key factors in this failure.

Pavee Point has also been critical of the extent to which additional funding allocated by the Department of Education and Science is actually benefiting Travellers in some schools, with limited evaluation or publication of good practice. It is, of course, important to recognise the excellent work that is being undertaken in some schools in relation to Traveller education. Pavee Point has welcomed progress in providing pre school provision with 52 schools catering for 546 Traveller children.

Junior Education Centres and Special Schools for Travellers provide segregated schooling for Travellers. Pavee Point welcomes the Department of Education and Science commitment to consider a course of action of phasing out such education provision in favour of integrating Travellers into mainstream schooling.

4.1 Recommendations on Traveller Education

- The forthcoming Traveller Education Strategy must dismantle the remnants of segregated schooling that persists in institutions such as Junior Education Centres and Special Schools for Travellers. Savings from this policy change must be reinvested in Traveller education.
- Traveller education must be fully located within an intercultural educational framework, rather than included as an afterthought or separately, as at present.
- Resources saved through the closing down of segregated schools and training centres should be 'ring-fenced' and used for targeted education strategies for Travellers within mainstream schooling.

5.0 Obstacle: The continuing refusal of the Government to Recognise Travellers as an Ethnic Group

The United Nations CERD Committee recently concluded

‘Recalling its General Recommendation VIII on the principle of self-identification, the Committee expresses concern at the State party’s position with

¹¹ *ibid*

regard to the recognition of Travellers as an ethnic group. The Committee is of the view that the recognition of Travellers as an ethnic group has important implications under the Convention. (article 1 and 5)

Welcoming the open position of the State party in this respect, the Committee encourages the State party to work more concretely towards recognizing the Traveller community as an ethnic group’.

Pavee Point has contended that the importance of recognising Travellers as an ethnic group has important policy implications and is not a hollow conceptual debate.

In particular if Travellers are not a distinct minority ethnic community then *ipso facto* the message goes out that Travellers should be treated the same as the general population and incorporated into the general Irish population and they and their needs will become invisible. This assimilationist mindset is clearly evident in some local authorities that persist in refusing to build Traveller specific accommodation in the vain hope that Travellers and their distinct needs will be subsumed into the general population.

5.1 Recommendation: Travellers should be recognised by the Irish Government as an Ethnic Group

In line with the CERD Committee’s concluding observations, Ireland, Travellers should be recognised as an ethnic group and Ireland and concomitantly such recognition should be reflected in the planning, implementation and review of all relevant policy.

6.0 Obstacle: Despite some recent improvement, there is a paucity of data on Traveller needs.

An issue in identifying problems and solutions has been the lack of information. The Traveller question in the 2002 Census and the commitment of the CSO to gather data was a positive step forward and shed some light on the challenges faced in relation to Traveller Economic Development, Education, Health and Accommodation issues. However there is a need for a broader data strategy which encompasses data collection, collation, disaggregation, analysis and monitoring. We need to have on-going information available. Pavee Point has been to the forefront in piloting and documenting some of these data issues, in particular in relation to ethnicity. This work needs to be progressed and pursued within a broader equality framework and Traveller organisations need to be involved.

6.1 Recommendation: Effective Data Strategy on Travellers

We are all aware of the link between poverty and social exclusion. We know a key mechanism to improve your status is to have an income. Traveller unemployment is in excess of 70%. Targets set within the National Anti-Poverty Strategy to reduce long-term unemployment amongst vulnerable groups down to the national average will not be met by 2007 for Travellers. Initiatives need to be undertaken within the Mainstream Labour Market; the Civil and Public Service; the Community Sector and the Traveller Economy to address Travellers economic exclusion. The role of Traveller organisations in supporting this work must be recognised and resourced.

7.0 Obstacle: The absence of a Traveller employment and training plan is a major obstacle to improving socio economic conditions

Post the Celtic Tiger economic exclusion amongst Travellers persists and contrasts starkly with other sectors of Irish society. The 2002 census highlighted that 73% of Traveller men are unemployed in comparison to a national male figure of 9%; while 63% of Traveller women are unemployed in comparison to a national figure of 8%. The range of employment that Travellers are engaged in fits into the 'first in, first out' category so that even for Travellers who have secured employment very few are in sustainable /career building type jobs.

The only other group whose unemployment rates are comparable to the Traveller community are disabled people. Targets set within the National Anti-Poverty Strategy to reduce long-term unemployment amongst vulnerable groups down to the national average will not be met by 2007 for Travellers.

Pavee Point welcomes the Special Initiative for Travellers which is being organised through FÁS. The focus of SIT is the Traveller economy and other employment initiatives for Travellers within four pilot areas (Dublin, Galway, Clare and Cork) and up to €0.5m should be spent by the end of this year. However, a lack of understanding of cultural diversity and the impact of inequality on a community may hamper the potential of this development.

There are particular issues that face Traveller women in the labour market and that greatly restrict their progression options. For example, the income an adult dependent can earn is calculated on the basis of a daily rate worked out on the basis of a 7 day week. So any adult who is the dependent adult in social welfare terms can only work a few hours a day (or else a lot less than the minimum wage hourly rate) if they do not wish to interfere with the family's overall income. This has particular implications for women including Traveller women. It can also impact on Traveller women's ability to access a greater variety of training as the allowable income does not always keep pace with the FÁS training allowance and FÁS is the main provider / funder of Traveller women's training opportunities.

7.1 Recommendation: The development of a National Traveller Employment, Enterprise and Training Strategy

- The targeting of Travellers for mainstream training and employment developments and opportunities i.e. that current developments do not replicate the Traveller specific responses of existing agencies but generate new and sustainable openings.
- Where there is an identified skills gap between the Travellers seeking employment and the jobs available that the training options made available are within mainstream provision.
- Where it is appropriate to develop Traveller specific responses that a community development approach is used and the work builds on the work of community based organisations.
- Provision of adequate resources to Traveller organisations to develop their work on Travellers economic exclusion.

- The pro-active redress of discrimination in the labour market and the transferral of the positive models of engagement being explored by the public sector to the private sector.
- A concerted effort to put equality and social inclusion policies into practice across employment and economic developments to tackle the structural nature of Traveller economic exclusion.
- The recognition of the potential of the Traveller economy through:
 - The implementation of flexible responses within public policy and practice in areas that have a particular impact on this sector of the economy e.g. recycling.
 - The incorporation of equality and diversity approaches within enterprise supports.
 - The recognition and provision of adequate supports for the development of self-employment responses to unemployment e.g. an extension of the Back to Work Enterprise Allowance so that it decreases in 20% blocks and so would run over 5 years.
- A commitment to build on the work of the National Women's Council of Ireland's to tackle the gendered nature of the current welfare system.
- In the meantime a commitment to ensure that the allowable income for dependent adults keeps pace with the FÁS training allowance.
- A commitment to allow dependent adults to earn an income in keeping with the principles underlying the minimum wage concept.
- A commitment to allow Travellers to maintain their medical cards for the first five years of employment or until Travellers health status is comparable with that of the majority population.

Conclusion

Travellers are probably the most disadvantaged group in Irish society yet numerically they constitute a tiny minority. Why are Travellers perceived as such a huge problem? Who defines the problem? Who defines the solutions? How can we ensure that Travellers culture and ethnicity is taken into account so as to ensure that Travellers do not have to give up their identity in order to be accepted into Irish society? There is clear evidence of significant gaps between agreed government policy and what is implemented on the ground. How can we find more effective mechanisms to ensure that Government policy is implemented? This submission seeks to address these issues in a constructive and forward looking approach that seeks to ensure that Government and NGOs work together.