



Pre-Budget Submission

Pavee Point Travellers' Centre

September, 2006

Pavee Point is a non-government organisation which is committed to human rights for Travellers. The group comprises Travellers and members of the majority population working in partnership to address the needs of Travellers, who as a minority ethnic group experience exclusion and marginalisation.

Targeting exclusion

The budget has a crucial role to play in addressing issues of social and economic exclusion. As social inclusion is an important policy objective within Government's work and structures, poverty / equality proofing policies for their impact on the most marginalised should be an integral part of policy development and implementation. The Budget should not be above such an approach.

Equality / poverty proofing the budget are particularly important when the extent of Travellers economic and social exclusion is considered. As the Census 2002 highlighted:

- ›79% of Travellers have only primary level education in comparison to the national level of 22%;
- ›Only 19% of Travellers have some level of second level education in comparison to 52% of the overall population;
- ›Only 3% of the Traveller population is over 65 in comparison to a national rate of 11%;
- ›While 40% of Travellers are aged less than 15 in comparison to a national rate of 20%;
- ›Unemployment runs at 73% for Traveller men against a national rate of 9%;
- ›While for Traveller women it is 64% against a national rate of 8%.

Adequate Income

The new National Social Partnership Agreement reiterates the target set in the NAPS: *'to achieve a rate of €150 per week in 2002 terms by 2007'*. To accomplish this target and ensure that social welfare rates equate with 30% of GAIE, Pavee Point calls for an increase of €20 in this year's budget.

Travellers' marginal socio-economic status is very evident in their poor health status: in this context the importance of the medical card cannot be overestimated. This is an enormous barrier to Travellers who wish to progress on from training and employment schemes to the mainstream labour market. Pavee Point is calling for positive action on this issue by proposing that Travellers retain their medical cards for five years after taking up employment.

With regard to other secondary benefits and in line with calls from other non-government organisations, Pavee Point calls for a significant increase in the income

limit allowed before secondary benefits are affected. To this end an increase €67.57 should be made to bring the limit up to €385.

Though Child Benefit has been increased in recent years, the Child Dependent Allowance remains very low. This is a particular pertinent issue when one considers the issue of early school leaving, the cost of participation in formal education and the strong links between educational and employment status. To address this issue Pavee Point joins in the calls from other organisations to bring CDA up to €24 which is an increase of €7.20.

Developing opportunities

Many links have been made between educational status and access to the labour market. The publication of the Traveller Education Strategy is eminent and it would be important that adequate resources – both financial and human – are put in place to ensure that Travellers educational disadvantage is seriously addressed. Integration is one of the principles of the forthcoming strategy; and Pavee Point would be concerned that where integration takes place that monies currently spent on Traveller specific education are used in a transparent manner to support intercultural responses.

Progress on addressing Travellers accommodation issues has been slow. A number of Traveller organisations have explored and pursued the idea of the rental scheme being used to provide decent caravan accommodation for Traveller families. Pavee Point is calling on the Government to ensure that each Local Authority and Community Welfare office are informed of the work that had been done to date and instructed to support such a development in their area. In the past a loan and grant scheme was also operated to support Travellers to secure good caravans: Pavee Point is calling for the re-development of this scheme with a more consistent and effective roll-out across the country.

Active Labour Market Programmes have provided opportunities for Travellers to access second chance education and training and for many Travellers are the only access route to employment. It is therefore important that such schemes e.g. CE and JI are adequately resourced and Travellers employment in the community sector recognised and supported.

On a broader front much work needs to be done to support Travellers access to the other segments of the labour market – public and private. The recent

initiative by the Department of Finance exploring accessing to civil service employment for Travellers is a welcome initiative. It is important that the Government continues to support the development of such initiatives and seeks effective means of encouraging the private sector to follow its example.

Under EQUAL 1 the three enterprise projects noted that self-employment / entrepreneurship should be given a greater standing within the development of programmes to address unemployment, lack of development and employment opportunities in local economies. Given the initial small scale nature of many of the enterprises amongst marginalised communities the package of supports developed must include a realistic mixture of social welfare and tax supports. For example, one mechanism could be the re-development of the Back to Work Enterprise Allowance. To this end Pavee Point recommends:

- ›reducing to one year the minimum length of time a participant should be on a social welfare payment; and,
- ›the introduction of a longer phasing out period with the reduction in welfare payment happening more gradually: for example, dropping by 20% per annum and spread over a six year period.

Finally

Community development has played an important role in supporting Travellers active engagement in a range of initiatives from the local to the national. Such work is crucial if Travellers are to play an active role within Irish society. Adequate resources are required to develop Traveller organisations and their capacity to not only delivery badly needed services *but* to develop the Traveller community's capacity to engage in social and economic development.

Alternative supports could be developed through: for example, the introduction of a VAT exemption for organisations with charitable status. The application of a 21% VAT rate on, for example, building work and the purchase of equipment like computers can poise a considerable financial burden.

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