



Pavee Point Travellers' Centre

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Irish Travellers

Travellers are a minority ethnic group, documented as being part of Irish society for centuries. Travellers have a long shared history and value system, their own language, customs and traditions. The distinctive Traveller lifestyle and culture, based on a nomadic tradition, sets Travellers apart from the sedentary population or "settled people".

While Irish Travellers are native to Ireland, they have much in common with European Travellers and Gypsies. For example, a nomadic tradition, living in extended families and European Gypsies also have to resist attempts to absorb them into the settled population, in order to retain their identity.

Data

There is a dearth of information on Travellers lives and experiences. As a result the discrimination and exclusion that Travellers experience is often invisible to policy and decision makers. This makes it difficult to develop policies to combat discrimination. Adequate data is necessary for proper planning of services.

Pavee Point has been working with the Central Statistics Office to help develop an ethnicity question for the next census where people can self-identify in terms of ethnic group.

It is also important that any information on ethnic group is collected within an equality framework. This means that the benefits, in terms of equality, are understood not only by those collecting the data but also by those providing the data.

Population Structure

In the 2002 Census, Travellers were, for the first time, asked to self-identify in terms of their ethnicity by answering the question: Are you a member of the Traveller community? Pavee Point believes that a universal question on ethnic group would yield more accurate data.

According Census 2002:

- There are 24,000 Travellers nationally, accounting for 0.6% of the population.*
- Only 3.3% of the Traveller community are over 65 years, compared to 11.1% of the general population
- Sixty three per cent of Travellers are under 25 years compared with 37% of the general population.
- Forty two per cent of Travellers are under 15 years of age compared with 21% of the general population.
- The average age for Travellers is 18 years compared with a national figure of 32.

* Local authorities also carry out a count of Traveller families each year. This count for 2002 shows 5,541 Traveller families. The Central Statistics Office estimates an average Traveller family size of 5.5. This would give a count of 30,000 Travellers nationally.

"Being a Traveller is the feeling of belonging to a group of people. Knowing through thick or thin they are there for you, having the support of family systems. Having an identity,"

Michael McDonagh.

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