



**A SUBMISSION
to the
National Plan for Women**

PRESENTED BY

**National Traveller Women's Forum
&
Pavee Point Traveller's Centre**

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SUBMISSION TO THE NATIONAL PLAN FOR WOMEN

***"Women from minority groups are recognised globally as having specific needs and concerns and as being particularly vulnerable to discrimination."*¹**

"Throughout our lives as Traveller women, we have experienced both racism and sexism, both directly and indirectly and the interaction between racism and sexism".

THE CONTEXT

Traveller women's experience of gender/ethnic inequality is a unique experience within gender inequality and needs to be included in the national plan for women's issues being developed by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform. It is crucial that Traveller women and Traveller women's experiences are included in the development and recommendations of this plan.

Within the National Plan, as within all policy documents and approaches to women's issues it is important for Traveller women to have the space, as the national women's movement has not, to date, seriously examined the needs of Traveller women.

Traveller women experience all of the inequality that all women experience, in addition Traveller women have to deal with the inequality that Travellers experience. In many cases it is the latter inequality, which is forced to prominence as it fundamentally affects the ability of a Traveller woman to live her life and provide for herself and her family.

The differences between Traveller women and settled women also need to be defined and respected by both parties. Women from the majority community have a role in examining their positions, ensuring that their organisations are intercultural in policy and practice, that they support other women to create their own space for reflection and action. There is a need to build solidarity between different women, and for different women to develop different and appropriate strategies to tackle sexism.

This submission will be looking at 11 of the 12 critical areas of concerns resulting from the Platform for Action and the Beijing Declaration as well as some general areas that are critical for promoting equality for Traveller women. The issues are not in a vacuum, and cannot be placed discreetly within each of the 12 areas of critical concern, as such, our concerns interlink and impact in a variety of areas.

What is important is that Traveller women also have a role to play in society.

METHODOLOGY

In November 2001, the National Traveller Women's Forum along with Pavee Point submitted an application to the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, to carry out a joint consultation with Traveller women with an aim to ensure that their voices are included within the National Plan for Women.

Due to the extremely tight timeframe for conducting consultation only two national workshops were held, one in Dublin and one in Galway. Traveller women and Traveller women's groups nationally were invited to attend a workshop, which suited themselves, and a daylong workshop was held in each venue. In all an estimated hundred women attended.

The National Traveller Women's Forum and Pavee Point have carried out consultations and workshops on many of the areas that form the 12 Critical Areas of Concern over the last year to eighteen months, and some of the work of specific programmes within our organisations focus on these areas, such as domestic violence and health. As such, due to the timeframe, both within the day itself and the timeframe to complete the submission, it was decided to focus on four of the critical areas of concern that Traveller women do not often have a chance to voice their opinions and needs. These were, Traveller Women and the Media, Traveller Women and Power and Decision Making, the Traveller Girl Child, and Traveller Women and Human Rights. The other information provided within this submission comes from a variety of sources including; previous workshops and consultation fora with Traveller women, the work of specific projects within our organisation and the analysis developed by the National Traveller Women's Forum and Pavee Point.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

1.EQUALITY PROOFING

Traveller women's experience of inequality and discrimination are different to that of settled women or other minority ethnic groups, as is their experience of racism and discrimination different to 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 gender proofing alone will not identify the suitability/impact of policies, services or strategies. Complex proofing, assessing multi-disadvantage is required where policies, services or strategies are to be 'general,' and where specifically aimed at Traveller women.

2.DISAGGREGATION OF DATA

In order to develop a full understanding and corresponding policies and strategies to tackle the problems facing Traveller women, full and accurate information is required. This information then needs to be collated, analysed and made available for interested parties to develop analysis and responses to the situation. As part of a full and comprehensive understanding, information on the ethnic background of the clients accessing all services, registering with a statutory agency (e.g. census, information re health, education, employment) needs to be collected, specifically our perspective, on Travellers. All ethnic data needs to be disaggregated by gender.

This information needs to be obtained in sensitive manner within an equality framework. This requires training the staff who will be collecting the information and producing an information strategies re the purpose and usefulness of such an exercise.

3.TRAVELLER WOMEN AND REPRESENTATION

Traveller Women as a matter of course, should be represented at all consultation for a. Organisations such as the National Traveller women's Forum should be invited automatically to any consultation arenas where the views and needs of women and/or Travellers are being sought and discussed.

4.CODES OF PRACTICE

All service providers must adopt anti-racist and anti-sexist codes of practice. These codes of practice should underpin the work of all public servants, in particular front-line staff and those in

decision-making roles. This is an essential element of an overall strategy to ensure equality and inclusion for Traveller women.

5. TASK FORCE REPORT ON THE TRAVELLER COMMUNITY, 1995

The National Traveller Women's Forum and Pavee Point urge the immediate progression of recommendations of the *Task Force on the Travelling Community*, 1995, in particular, in this case, the section on Traveller women.

6. NATIONAL TRAVELLER HEALTH STRATEGY

Again, the National Traveller Women's Forum and Pavee Point urge the prompt implementation and adequate resourcing of the Traveller Health Strategy, due to be launched on the 26th February 2002.

TRAVELLER WOMEN AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Human rights were one of the critical areas of concern that was discussed during the consultation process. As a concept human rights can be difficult and aspirational, and far removed from people's reality, yet it is the denial of basic human rights that fundamentally affects the ability of individuals and communities to live their lives and fulfil their potential.

Across the board, and particularly when we look at the gamut of human rights, cultural, social, and economic as well as civil and political, Travellers are being denied their human rights, as Travellers. The lack of basic amenities and services required to live a healthy, safe and empowered life, contravenes national, regional and internationally agreed conventions on Human Rights. Traveller women are triply denied, being denied their rights as Travellers, as women and as Traveller women.

Traveller women are also over burdened by human rights violation. When economic, social and cultural right in particular are violated, it is Traveller women who have to raise their families in the consequences of those violations, i.e. with no water, no electricity, inadequate service provision and the constant threat of eviction. Traveller women are also the brokers with the settled community; therefore they are the ones that experience the racism and discrimination face to face.

A central concern is that the traditional, western and male approach to human rights, which has prioritised civil and political rights, has excluded those rights which most fundamentally affect women, and the more excluded in our society. Therefore we need to address two fundamental areas; social, economic and cultural rights need to be accorded the importance and focus traditionally given only to civil and political rights, and following from this, women's rights, which are more likely to be violated in private spaces, (within the home) or by individuals as well as states and agencies, are identified in all arenas as human rights.

By insisting that women's rights are human rights and by challenging the traditional approach to human rights, all perpetrators of human rights violations must be held accountable.

Human rights are important tools as they have a number of particularly characteristics that makes them useful in protecting individuals and communities.

- Human rights are universal, therefore they cannot be given to one woman and not another, or to men and not women. Therefore, human rights are Traveller women's rights.

- Human rights are also non-divisible, it is not conceivable to give one right and not another, or to promote civil and political and not cultural, economic and social rights. Being given the right to vote but not the right to an education is meaningless.
- There is a duty to protect human rights under due diligence, the government has an obligation to promote human rights. It is a contravention of human rights to not only not uphold human rights, but also not to promote and protect them from being violated by others.

The equality agenda, including equality legislation and institutions, have become under increasing pressure in recent times. Some politicians and service providers have been attempting to roll back government commitments and the equality agenda that has been developing, often at a painfully slow rate, in recent years. The government has a responsibility, under due diligence, to protect the equality infrastructures, and ensure that people's rights are protected and violations sanctioned.

Recently there has been an increased focus on social and economic rights, but cultural rights remain the poor relation, often not named or prioritised. It is important for women from minority ethnic groups that cultural rights are given equal validity and focus.

"Traveller women have played crucial roles in maintaining Traveller culture and identity."¹ It is Traveller women who are the barers of culture, transmitting that culture to their children. Traveller culture and Traveller women are under huge external pressure to conform to settled culture, through discrimination and organised attempts to assimilate Travellers. It is crucial that Traveller culture be recognised and resourced. There should be research into history, art and culture of Travellers, and recognition and acknowledgement of Traveller language.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The equality legislation and institutions must be protected and supported in conducting their work, and resources provided to ensure that equality of outcome is both aimed for and achieved.
- The Incitement to Hatred Act must be broadened and strengthened to deal with 'any act which in effect encourages discrimination against those protected by the Act or motivates others to discriminate against those protected by the Act.' Such a change is crucial if the incidences of public expression by both members of the media and political representatives

¹ *Task Force Report on the Travelling Community*, Government of Ireland, 1995:271

are to be challenged. Otherwise a context persists whereby inflammatory remarks which serve to maintain stereotypes and further exclude the Traveller community are unchallengeable.

- The establishment of the Irish Human Rights Commission will have a key role to play in vindication women's human rights and equality proofing legislation. The work of this commission needs to be supported and resourced.
- There needs to be ongoing awareness raising of the positive contribution to Irish society of cultural diversity.
- There is a need to move towards a rights based approach to service provision.
- Traveller women need to be informed of their rights as individuals and as Travellers.
- Traveller women need to be included in the Traveller debate and the human rights debate.
- All Traveller specific polices need to target the needs of Traveller women, all women's polices need to target the needs of Traveller women.
- Non-Traveller women need to address the rights of Traveller women and their specific needs must be addressed in women' debates.

TRAVELLER WOMEN AND HEALTH

Travellers, due to generations of marginalisation and direct and indirect discrimination are particularly disadvantaged in terms of health status and access to health services. Travellers die at a younger age than the population in general and suffer poor health on a level which compares unfavourably with and would be unacceptable to any of the settled community.

Health statistics include;

- High mortality rates for all causes
- Infant mortality 18.1 per 1 000 Travellers (7.4 for the national population)
- Traveller women live on average 12 years less than the national population²
- 1% of Travellers are over 65 years³

Traveller women are even more marginalised in relation to health than Traveller men. This is particularly evident in two key areas;

- Traveller women's role in providing health care for her family, and
- Traveller women's access to women's health care.

² The Traveller Health Status Study, the HRB, Joe Barry et al, 1988

³ CSO 1996

Traveller women are the primary carers of the family; therefore, one of their roles is as the provider/sourcer of health care for the family, particularly the children. This role means that Traveller women are the prime negotiator with the service providers and health professions, and as such have experienced in a direct way the ongoing failure to have the health needs of their communities and families meet. In this regard it is Traveller women who have the experience of direct discrimination from the health services, (refused from services, treated poorly etc.) as well as extensive experience of dealing with indirect discrimination, in dealing with the poor health status of themselves and their families and the lack of health provision that meets their needs.

Traveller women's access to health care services to meet their own health needs have been very poor. Traveller women's access to, and information on, preventative health care such as screening as well as sexual health care is poor, and their subsequent take up low.

Traveller women's own poor health status, coupled with the poor health of the children and often extremely poor living conditions has a negative emotional and psychological effect on Traveller women. Traveller women's difficulties with depression and mental health is often responded to with over prescribed of drugs such as anti-depressants, without medical personnel making any attempts to respond to the specific needs of the women.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE NATIONAL ACTION PLAN FOR WOMEN (2001 - 2005)

- In all areas of health policy and implementation for Women's health, Traveller women must be named as a priority group as their health status remains extremely low, as does their access to health care. Without specifically naming Traveller women and their needs, their particular needs and experiences will be over looked. This includes areas such as, the Health Promotion Strategy, Breastfeeding initiatives, pre-natal, natal and ante-natal care, research into women's health, positive mental health programmes, dental programmes and sexual health initiatives.
- 3.1 (Page 15) Traveller women must be named as a target group in *A Plan for Women's Health*, as well as their experiences included in the review of the implementation of the Plan for Women's Health.
- 3.10/3.11 (Page 16) Preventative services such as cervical smear testing and breast screening are not free on the GMS. Breast screening, to date is only available in the eastern region, where the programme is currently behind, while a smear test costs a GMS patient a minimum of €15 (depending on the doctors charges). As such Traveller women, who are dependent on the GMS are denied access to these basic preventative health services. This

lack of access, coupled with poor information in relation to preventative health care, means that many Traveller women are dying of preventable cancers. Breast screening and cervical smear testing should be made available to all of those on the GMS as soon as possible.

- 3.14, (Page 16) the routine antenatal HIV testing, introduced in 1999, causes us great concern. The women being tested; are they aware they are being tested? Is their consent sought? Can a woman refuse to undergo such a test? Do women get the results of such testing? And is there pre and post-test counselling? Our experience and anecdotal evidence tells us that Traveller women do not know they are being tested, permission is not sought, women have not received the results of testing and no counselling is offered. Women should not be tested without their consent, crucially they should be informed of all procedures being performed on them and consulted in all aspects of their own care; counselling should be offered to all women undergoing such potentially traumatising tests.

SPECIFIC ISSUES TRAVELLER WOMEN AND HEALTH CARE

- The Traveller health Strategy due for release on the 26th of February must be implemented fully and promptly, with a specific commitment to Traveller women's health.
- Traveller women and Traveller women's organisations need to be included in the planning and design, delivery and evaluation of services being provided to their community.
- There should be data collection and disaggregation looking at both the uptake of specific screening and health services for Traveller women. Therefore, all data collection systems must include information on the ethnicity of the clients/patients.
- There is a need to decentralise screening services and develop localised services.
- Health Board should carry out bi-annual environmental inspections of Traveller halting sites and make the findings publicly available.
- The Department of Health and Children and Health Boards should fund further initiatives broadly based, although tailored to local need, based on the primary health care projects currently being run by Pavee Point in conjunction with the NAHB, among others.
- The employment of Traveller women as health service providers should be explored and implemented by Health Boards. This would include funding to Health Boards for the training and employment of Traveller women as primary health care workers. This training should include a clear progression route.
- The production of health promotion material should be carried out in close consultation with Traveller women's organisations to ensure that it is culturally appropriate and meets the target communities needs.
- Literacy levels need to be taken into account in developing all material, including health promotion material and programmes.

- Health Boards should establish a Traveller Health Unit, each of which should have a designated Traveller women's brief. The management of each unit should include representation from Traveller organisations, specifically Traveller organisations representing the interests of Traveller women.
- The reproductive health needs of Traveller women, including maternal health need to be considered in conjunction with other health needs, specifically sexual health.
- The terms of the GMS should prohibit G.P.s refusing to take Travellers as patients solely because they are Travellers.
- An appropriate appointment system should be implemented which takes account of Travellers mobility and levels of literacy.
- The importance of the medical card cannot be overestimated for many Travellers. The poor health status, combined with larger families than the national average, result in a dependence on access to free health care. As such Travellers access to and the services available on the medical card are crucially important. Travellers must be facilitated in maintaining medical cards in order to compensate for generations of neglect in relation to their health care. (Discussed again in the section Traveller Women and Employment & Traveller Women and Education and Training).

TRAVELLER WOMEN AND THE ECONOMY, TRAINING AND EDUCATION

GENERAL

Traveller women face a multitude of interconnecting barriers accessing employment, education and training opportunities. The scale of these barriers range from direct discrimination, including refusing access to Travellers women, to lack of information.

EDUCATION

Travellers' experience of the education system in general has been and continues to be pretty appalling and is well documented. Resources have been increased recently to encourage greater access and participation levels. However, Travellers continue to experience barriers and difficulties within the system at all levels, from preschool to adult education. Access continues to be problematic, as exemplified in a recent Galway case⁴. The curriculum implemented is one that originates in and belongs to the dominant culture, and has little or no recognition or validation of Traveller culture within that curriculum. Ongoing discriminatory practices and low expectations of Travellers by staff at all levels, and classmates who unknowingly carry through such bias, is the reality for most Travellers.

It is only recently that Travellers are beginning to gain access to second level education structures. The number of Travellers in third level institutions can be identified by name. The result is that many Traveller women are poorly educated, with low literacy levels. While it is Traveller mothers who have to deal with the consequences of inadequacies and poor practice in relation to their children's education. One clear and regularly occurring example is the practice of withdrawing Traveller children from class for remedial education, not based on educational need, but on the fact that they are Traveller children.

EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING

Traveller women working within the Traveller economy are part of the family unit involved in income generating. They work with other members of the family, carrying out a variety of tasks to ensure that the family could generate an income, this includes selling door to door, at markets, collecting goods for selling, sorting materials and childcare. Recent years have seen the deterioration of many of the income generating opportunities for Traveller families, particularly scrap metal recycling, horse trading and market trading are dwindling. The primary reasons for this have been restrictive legislation, which was not adequately poverty proofed, (the Casual Trading Act, 1995 and the Control of Horse Act, 1996) restrictive accommodation provision and

⁴ McDonagh, Michelle (2001): Irish Times, September 11th, 2001.

economic growth. Traveller women were particularly affected by the Market Trading Act as many women ran market stalls at both private and public fairs.

Outside of the Traveller economy, within the labour market, Travellers, both men and women find it very difficult to access employment. Travellers are discriminated against both directly and indirectly. Direct discrimination, in the form of refusal to hire or provide services and indirectly because of the poor education, health and accommodation status of Travellers in general.

Consequently, Traveller women's access to income generating opportunities in the Traveller economy has declined, while opportunities within the labour market have not replaced them, leaving many Traveller women unemployed and living on social welfare.

One of the most important areas of employment and training for Traveller women is within development work, Traveller organisations and Traveller specific programmes. These type of employment and training outlets offer many Traveller women training and development opportunities, the ability to work in 'safe' (in that they are free from discrimination) working/training environment, and to work and train in areas that promote initiatives to support their own community. It is crucial that these initiatives continue to be supported and developed, and that progression from training and employed opportunities are developed and strengthened. Also crucial is that barriers and potential barriers to women accessing these training and employment opportunities are removed or prevented from being erected. Barriers such as access to childcare and tax and social welfare regulations and requirements.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE NATIONAL ACTION PLAN FOR WOMEN (2001 - 2005)

There are many challenges for Irish society at national, regional and local levels to ensure that Traveller women have equality of access, participation and outcomes in order that they have opportunities to achieve their full potential. Recognition of their ethnicity and distinct culture, as well as their diversity within their culture, such as their gender, is a prerequisite to Travellers being fully respected and included in the wider society. In order to combat the exclusion of Traveller women from the education, training and employment opportunities clear strategies and affirmative action is required.

◆ INTERCULTURAL CURRICULUM

Intercultural, anti-racist and anti-sexist education should permeate all areas of the education system, from early years, to adult and life long learning and for all learners, educators and policy makers.

All forms of educational provision need to be based on the principles of interculturalism anti-racism and anti-sexism, including the formal and non-formal sectors. This has implications for the training of teachers and other educators and the curriculum and content of all training programmes. It also has wider implications for the management, planning, recruitment, administration and evaluation of learning and learning institutions.

◆ **TRAVELLER EDUCATION SERVICE**

The main instrument envisaged by the Task Force of the Travelling Community, 1995, to drive the implementation of its recommendations (more than half of the recommendations of the Task Force report were related to education) was the Traveller Education Service. This has not yet been established. This unit should be established as a matter of urgency and ensure that as part of it remit is, specifically, the education of Traveller women and girls. It is our view that lack of progress in this regard is extremely disappointing. It should be established without delay.

◆ **DEVELOPING SUSTAINABLE SUPPORTS FOR TRAVELLER WOMEN**

MEDICAL CARDS

The potential loss of the medical card, which would result from employment and some training, is a huge disincentive to Traveller women. The fear of losing the benefits provided by a medical card prevents Traveller women from accessing employment and training opportunities, which in turn results in the loss of a means of empowerment and access to progression out of a poverty trap. This is an issue which particularly affects Traveller women as they are primarily responsible for the health and well being of their families. Therefore, it is Traveller women who are most often being denied access to employment, or being asked to choose between basic health care and employment opportunities.

Some training and employment initiatives are developed in such a way that secondary benefits such as the medical cards, can be retained. These flexible approaches to promoting access into training and employment opportunities need to be mainstreamed, to ensure the continuing development and support of Traveller women's programmes.

Pavee Point and the National Traveller Women's Forum are looking for affirmative action on the issue of Travellers and medical cards, to tackle the massive inequality in health status without endangering Traveller access to employment and training. We propose that the

Traveller community retain their medical cards for five years after taking up employment, with a review at the end of the five year period.

This action is in keeping with reform of benefits to reduce poverty traps, enhance employability and positively impact on women's access to the labour market as advocated by the European Union in the Council Decision on Guidelines for Member States' employment policies for the year 2001.

◆ **CHILDCARE**

Quality childcare provision needs to be provided for Traveller women accessing employment or training. In conjunction with the provision of this care, the specific needs of Traveller children must be recognised and included in the policies and approach of the early years setting. The development of an anti-bias childcare needs to be resourced, developed and piloted through the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform.⁵

Traveller women have traditionally cared for their children within the extended family. This practice is not as readily available to them today. They have little experience and are cautious when it comes to using formal childcare for their children. The experience of Traveller groups shows that Traveller women are more confident when members of the Traveller community are directly involved in the provision of care. Therefore, a prerequisite of quality childcare for Travellers is the training and employment of Travellers to provide the childcare.

Traveller organisations should receive funding to provide quality childcare for Traveller women attending training courses and employment in line with the funding received by the Traveller Training Centres and VTOS.

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.

Traveller women need to access culturally appropriate training in childcare in order to be employed as positive role models in childcare settings.

⁵ *Eist, Respect for Diversity in Early Childhood, Care, Education and Training*. Pavee Point 2001.

◆ **EQUALITY INFRASTRUCTURE**

Employment and access to goods and services are now within the remit and operation of the Equal Status Act, 2000 and the Employment Equality Authority Act, 1998. "Persons who are discriminated under either Act have a statutory means of redress, on application to the Independent Director of Equality Investigations."⁶

While Travellers are taking cases under the Equal Status Act, which deal with access to goods and services, the numbers of Traveller taking cases under the Employment Equality Act remains low. Recent research has highlighted that many Travellers feel that if they want to work in the mainstream labour market they have to hide their identity. Research⁷ suggests that Travellers do not have faith in the capacity of the Employment Equality legislation to combat the pervasive discrimination in the labour market. Therefore, there is a need to proactively challenge employers current attitudes and practices through education and awareness raising programmes; the placing of a requirement on them to develop and implement equal status policies; and the undertaking of targeted recruitment drives to realise Travellers access to mainstream labour market.

To support this work overall and ensure equality is an informing principle within the education, training and employment sectors; it is crucial that equality becomes an integral part of performance monitoring. Otherwise equality will be perceived as an add on to the be dealt with when other work has been done.

YOUNG TRAVELLER WOMEN AND GIRLS

"...A child belonging to such a minority or who is indigenous shall not be denied the right, in community with other members of his or her group to enjoy his or her own culture, to profess or practise his or her own religion or to use his or her own language"⁸

Traveller children are a minority within a minority, suffering all the ill effects of inadequate accommodation, poor living standards and discrimination experienced by their parents. In addition children are especially vulnerable to ill health and poor physical development and are subject to disadvantages in emotional and cognitive development.

⁶ Ireland's National Employment Action Plan 2001; Page 19

⁷ *Job Vacancies, Vacant Jobs*, Pavee Point, 2001

⁸ UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 30.

The Traveller community in Ireland is extremely young, the most recent figures available, estimate that over 50% of the Traveller population are under the age of 15, with 40% under the age of 10.⁹ Therefore, the population of Traveller girls is also extremely high, a population of young women who from a very early age experience both direct and indirect discrimination, affecting their life chances and well being.

Like the settled community, Traveller childhood has changed. However, many Traveller parents still maintain some of their traditional principles. Children are still very much active participants, confident and mature in adult company. Apprenticeship home education skills are still vital and valued; however, Traveller children are accessing school more frequently with some remaining into the early stages of the second level system. More girls are less restricted by child minding duties; yet they continue to be monitored in early adolescence.

Traveller's women and girls, like all women are not a homogenous group. Expectations, ambitions and desires change from generation to generation. Cultures are not stagnant and staid, but develop with time and circumstance. Traveller culture is constantly under threat from external oppression, as a result it can be difficult for the younger generation of Travellers to challenge some aspects of their own culture. A challenge that may be seen as a challenge to the culture itself. This is a similar interplay between sexism and racism. Young Traveller women and girls need to be supported to develop themselves personally within safe environments where they can absorb and articulate their own culture and own cultural needs.

CONSULTATION

The critical area of the girl child was one that was discussed at the consultation workshops hosted by Pavee Point and the National Traveller Women's Forum. It was an area that produced particularly lively discussion, with many of the barriers that a young Traveller girl and woman experience being discussed, as well as intergenerational differences.

One of the most shocking points raised at the consultation was the young girls experience of racism impacting on them from a very early age. Traveller women remember themselves and their daughters experiencing feelings of isolation and hostility at a young age from the majority population. A feeling of knowing they are different and despised for that difference, but not understating why or having the language to explain the feeling. Mothers described the difficulties

⁹ Economic and Social Research Institute Report, 1986.

of comforting a young daughter, distraught from her experiences at school or pre-school, and being unable to explain racism or provide comfort.

The women also discussed the barriers and poor life chances that Travellers girls experience from birth. The infant mortality rate for Travellers is three times the national average.¹⁰ In a five-year period, for every settled child that died of a cot death, ten Traveller children died.¹¹

The women also discussed how young Traveller girls are also affected by all the socio-economic disadvantage that Traveller as a whole are subjected to. However as children they are even more vulnerable and have even less power to effect change. Traveller girls are often raised in extremely poor living conditions, with no safe play space, no where safe to crawl, difficulties ensuring their health and well being, when in some areas over 50% of families live in accommodation with substandard facilities that include no toilets, electricity or showers/baths.¹²

When the young Traveller girl attends school, unfamiliar values, systems and an environment that does not reflect her culture or experiences confront her. The outcomes for Traveller girls from the education system is still very poor. The curriculum implemented is one that originates in, and belongs to, the dominant culture, and has little or no recognition or validation of Traveller culture within that curriculum

RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to improve the lives of Traveller girls all 12 of the critical areas of concern are vital. Improvements in the health and living conditions are central to many of the child specific recommendations and needs that Traveller girls have.

- The importance and necessity of developing a national approach to 'diversity education' for education and childcare provision from early years to life long learning provision grounded in anti-bias principles, should be acknowledged, resourced and implemented without delay. All children including Traveller children have the right to access an education system which delivers an intercultural/anti bias approach throughout the entire curriculum.
- There should be no discrimination against children in the education system.
- Within the formal and informal education system the central aims must be to ensure equality of access, participation and outcome for all Traveller children.

¹⁰ 1987 Health research Board.

¹¹ Irish Sudden Infant Death Association.

¹² Dublin Accommodation Conalition, 1994

- Policy makers and services should be informed of and adhere to, Articles 2, 29 and 30 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child when drawing up and implementing policy and training, or devising education programmes which relate to quality, equality, human rights and respect for diversity.
- All arenas where children are cared for and educated and where services are provided, should adhere to anti- racist and anti-sexist codes of practice.
- Traveller girls, as with Traveller women, have domestic responsibilities, including childcare. The provision of good quality childcare to mothers also reduces the burden on Traveller girls who often have responsibility for their younger siblings. Without this, girls may lose out on opportunities.
- Research on the needs and rights of the Traveller child is vital particularly in the current climate of change at national level within the early years, childcare and youthwork sectors.
- Traveller organisations need to be resourced in order for them to represent the needs of the Traveller child at local, regional and national levels.
- The voice of the Traveller child must be heard and used to inform work with Traveller children. This is good practice and in line with National Children’s Strategy.
- The specific needs of young Traveller women and girls need to be prioritise within the development of youthwork services in the proposed national youthwork development plan, taking into account both gender and cultural needs.
- The proposed legislation to create the position of Ombudsman for Children must be cognisant of the needs of Traveller children and Traveller girls.

DRAFT, NATIONAL PLAN FOR WOMEN

- 12.1 (Page 36) Traveller children and Traveller girls must be a named priority within the National Children’s Strategy, and measures developing from the Youth Work Act 2001 as a measure of affirmative action to counter the generational disadvantage and discrimination they have and continue to experience.
- 12.5 (page 36) all childcare facilities must adhere to anti- racist and anti-sexist codes of practice, and promote cultural diversity.
- 12.8 (page 37) the proposed Early Childhood Education Agency, must again name and prioritise Traveller children and Traveller girls, in forwarding their policies and actions. The anti-bias approach to early years should also be mainstreamed within this agency.

TRAVELLER WOMEN AND THE MEDIA

One of the critical areas of concern examined within the workshops was Traveller Women and the media. Traveller women explored how women and Traveller Women are portrayed in the media, what is the background behind this negative portrayal (as they felt that the images were predominately negative) and how they would like to see themselves portrayed. The women also looked at developing some actions/recommendations to promote Traveller women's positive inclusion in the media.

Traveller women felt that they, their families and their culture are almost always represented in the media in a negative light. There are only references to Travellers and Traveller women when something is wrong. Traveller women are represented surrounded by poverty and dirt, their living conditions as appalling. Alternatively they are represented as being involved in criminal or violent behaviour. The more benign representations of Travellers are often patronising, 'how does this poor women live in these circumstances?' with the underlying subtext, that if she were not a Traveller, she would not have to cope with these circumstances.

Although some instances of journalism are factually correct, (i.e. the women living in the field with little or no facilities) another issue remains central to the representation of Traveller women, it is the media, and not Traveller women, have the power in the exchange and representation of the images and words.

Traveller women's way of life is different to that of the majority population, the way of life that is more commonly represented in the media, as the 'norm.' In order to describe life styles, culture and situations that do not conform to the norm, more space, (i.e. media time) is required, but this is not forthcoming. Therefore Traveller women's lives are often represented as deviant, contrary to the norm, rather than culturally different.

Those Traveller women who have experienced the media also felt rudely treated, directly as individuals. Their stories were taken and twisted and individual journalist were often rude to them in the process.

Apart from the negative and patronising representations of themselves, Traveller women feel that they are excluded from the media. There is little or nothing about their lives as women, as workers, community leaders, mothers, nothing about the day to day aspects of their life, the

music they enjoy and the stories they tell. Traveller women are not given the space in the media to represent themselves or their lives.

As the media is a prime source of information for the majority population on Traveller women it can challenge or reinforce racist images. The experiences and feelings of the Traveller women who were involved in our consultation, is that the majority of the media coverage does the latter. A negative stereotype of Traveller women exists and the media look for stories and angles on stories that reinforce that stereotype, be they bluntly negative or patronising. The few positive representations of Traveller women are in isolated, 'Traveller only/specific' specials, with the reality and complexity of being a Traveller women never touched or presented.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to tackle some of the above issues, some recommendations were put forward.

- Traveller women are often the victims of bad practice in terms of race reporting. Newspapers refer to Travellers ethnicity when it is not relevant thereby brandishing all Travellers with a particular behaviour. This has implications for women in particular as they often find themselves at the interface between the Traveller and settled communities. The NUJ Guidelines on Race The National Union of Journalists have produced 'Guidelines on Race Reporting'. These Guidelines state: "Only mention the word gypsy or Traveller if strictly relevant or accurate'. These guidelines should be developed into legally binding codes of practice in conjunction with the Equality Authority and adopted by media institutions.
- Members of ethnic minorities should be involved in the communication process at all levels: including; the elucidation of what information is needed; the planning of how information is collected, presented, packaged and distributed; the decision making processes involved in the production and distribution of information.¹³
- There should be, established on a legal footing, a watch dog on the representation of minorities in the media. This should assist the media in acknowledging and challenging its role in the development and maintenance of negative stereotypes and discrimination, and reflect cultural diversity. This should also compel the media to have fair and balanced coverage of issues.
- The incitement to hatred legislation needs to be radically overhauled in order to successfully prosecute racist media representations.

¹³ As recommended in the European Parliament Ford Report (1991)

- Media practices should be examined to decipher how these practices can block progress for Traveller women and impact on equality.
- Journalist should be trained in cultural diversity and interculturalism as a part of their core curriculum.

Central to Traveller women taking control and ensuring a better access to and representation in the media is education and confidence building for Traveller women.

- Traveller women should be trained in media production in order to facilitate access to creating media images stories and offering their viewpoint on issues and society.
- Traveller women need to be facilitated in being involved in the communication process at all levels: including; the elucidation of what information is needed; the planning of how information is collected, presented, packaged and distributed; the decision making processes involved in the production and distribution of information.
- 10.5 (page 34) In developing the Community Advocacy Programme and the media forum, Traveller women need to be named as one of the groups whose interests need to be protected and developed.

TRAVELLER WOMEN IN POWER AND DECISION MAKING & INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISM FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN

Traveller women are for the most part excluded from positions of power outside of their own community and while they are increasingly involved in various consultative committees with statutory agencies, the power still remains with these agencies to make the final decisions which impact on Traveller women's lives, in the areas of accommodation, education, health, employment, domestic violence etc. For example, there are no Traveller women employed as teachers, as members of An Garda Síochána, as Housing Officers in Local Authorities, as Chief Executive Officers in Health Boards etc and thus the needs of Travellers in all of these services are dictated by settled people.

In order to ensure that Traveller women gain more control over their lives, their well-being and the well-being of their families, they must be involved in making decisions regarding service provision and overseeing the implementation of these decisions. An essential element of any strategy for the advancement of Traveller women, is the development of clearly defined structures to allow for the involvement of Traveller women's groups/organisations in the design, implementation and monitoring of policies which affect them.

The general experience of Traveller women is that they are patronised by decision-makers. Traveller women consulted as part of this process felt that they experience racism and discrimination when dealing with decision-makers and that this makes it impossible to work towards building a relationship based on equality. They also feel that invariably they are blamed or made to feel responsible as Traveller women for the ill-health of their children or the conditions within which they are forced to live. Traveller women feel the focus is often taken away from the responsibility of the state to provide culturally appropriate services and focuses on blaming them as Traveller women for their situation.

In identifying the power structures that make decisions affecting their lives Traveller women felt that they have very little control over their lives and decisions being made which affect them. While many Traveller women participate on Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committees, Traveller Health Units or Regional Planning Committees on Violence Against Women, they still experience a lack of control or power. Their status as a Traveller woman, the racism they experience, their low education achievements, literacy difficulties and corresponding

low self-esteem and confidence all contribute to their difficulties in maintaining their power when relating to decision-makers.

Traveller women are continually reminded of their lack of power, or exclusion from decision-making structures. Traveller women's role as mother and carer means that they are daily dealing with schools, hospitals, health board personnel and doctors, they are therefore confronted time and again by those with the power to make decisions affecting their lives.

ISSUES FOR TRAVELLER WOMEN

- The racism and sexism they experience when dealing with Government bodies.
- The assumption by decision-makers that all women are the same, without acknowledging the distinct needs of Traveller women.
- The lack of appropriate information that exists for Traveller women, many of whom are pre-literate or illiterate.
- Lack of resources made available for childcare or transport for Traveller women participating in any consultative structures.
- The lack of resources that are available for supporting the necessary capacity-building training that Traveller women need to enhance their participation on any decision-making structures.
- The lack of progress in relation to the provision of appropriate accommodation. The daily struggle to survive in some of the appalling conditions in which Traveller women are forced to live, does not allow much time for participation in activities outside of the home.
- The constant persistent exclusion of Traveller women from discussions affecting their lives.
- The lack of equality-proofing in any gender mainstreaming initiatives.
- The absence of data pertaining to Traveller women, in the areas of health, employment, education etc. This lack of data makes it difficult to set targets for the advancement of Traveller women in any sphere of life.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE NATIONAL PLAN FOR WOMEN

- It is essential that the National Traveller Women's forum be facilitated to participate in any National Policy For a in order to ensure that the needs of Traveller women will be addressed.

- The absence of representation of Traveller women and women from ethnic minorities in general at decision-making levels must also be examined.
- When promoting any gender balance it must be taken into account that women are not a homogenous group and that Traveller women have needs that are specific to them and that assurances are needed that these needs/concerns will be included.
- Any examination of gender equality needs also to be supported by equality-proofing.
- Local authorities must be compelled to achieve a gender balance on the Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committees. Funding should be provided to Traveller women to participate on these committees. This funding could provide them with resources such as childcare, transport and skills and capacity-building to enhance their participation. This is the case for any of the committees Traveller women participate on.
- *'The Task Force Report on the Traveller Community, Section H : Women'* must be fully implemented without delay. It is now seven years since the launch of this report and progress must be made without delay.
- That civil servants at all levels show a commitment to anti-racism and anti-sexism at all levels, particularly staff on the frontline and decision-makers.
- That elected representatives would have the capacity to represent the needs of Traveller women.
- That data disaggregation based on ethnicity would be a feature of any data collection. This would allow for the identification of the specific needs of Traveller women and would assist in the development of strategies to address these needs.
- That any national campaign to combat racism and discrimination would have a specific focus on Traveller women and their experience.
- **Equality Infrastructure** - Employment and access to goods and services are now within the remit and operation of the Equal Status Act, 2000 and the Employment Equality Authority Act, 1998. "Persons who are discriminated under either Act have a statutory means of redress, on application to the *Independent Director of Equality Investigations*." ¹⁴ This legislation is necessarily complex and information re the process and workings of the legislation requires ongoing and supported dissemination. Some communities and individuals require support in accessing this legislative process. In order to provide this type of service, appropriate organisations, Traveller groups, need to be funded to provide advocacy and support to the communities they represent to ensure the maximum benefit of the legislation. As part of this process Travellers should be trained to work as community advocates.

¹⁴ *Ireland's National Employment Action Plan 2001*; Page 19

VIOLENCE AGAINST TRAVELLER WOMEN

"Traveller women experience a range of different forms of violence from state or institutional violence to male domestic violence and individual violence imposed when services are denied and Traveller women are removed from public premises".¹⁵

Violence of one form or another is part of the real life experience of many Traveller women. The state and individual violence that Traveller women experience, are directly linked to the racism and sexism that Traveller women experience. There are particular concerns regarding statutory violence against Traveller women. This violence is particularly evident when evictions are taking place. Evictions have regularly been planned when Traveller women are alone, without their partners, but often caring for children. Eviction is a very frightening and aggressive act. The Gardai and local authorities must not be allowed to target women alone or forcibly evict Traveller families, without providing alternative accommodation. Today with approximately 1,207 Traveller families living on the roadside, there are many Traveller women who are daily living with the threat of eviction and the corresponding threat of violence.

Individual violence against Traveller women is also a fact of life for Traveller women. Where Traveller live without any security of tenure, i.e. on the roadside, they have been subject to intimidatory acts by members of the settled community. This threat of intimidation or violence impacts on the mental health and well-being of Traveller women and therefore further isolates them from the majority society and the State.

Violence against Traveller women must be rigorously investigated to the full extent of the law regardless of whom it is thought to have or seen to have committed the violent act. However when it is members of An Garda Siochana who commit the violent act it makes it very difficult to deal in an open and transparent manner with the issue, particularly in the absence of an Independent Complaints Bureau or Garda Ombudsman.

Traveller women living within their community must also be afforded protection from domestic violence, and be guaranteed a response if they contact the authorities for assistance. The National Traveller Women's Forum and Pavee Point recently co-hosted a Roundtable Discussion on Garda Policy on Domestic Violence Victims. The purpose of this roundtable discussion was to

¹⁵ See, *The Beijing Platform for Action and Women from /minority Ethnic Groups*, May 2000, National Traveller Women's Forum and National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism.

explore how the needs of Traveller women could be facilitated more by this policy or by those responsible for its implementation. Traditionally domestic violence was not referred to by Traveller women, but like settled women the issue is increasingly becoming a topic of discussion by both Traveller women and those working with them. The issues that arose during the course of this roundtable discussion will be dealt with in the following section.

ISSUES FOR TRAVELLER WOMEN

- The state/institutional violence which Traveller women experience, particularly regarding their accommodation situation and in event of evictions.
- The racism and sexism Traveller women face when dealing with service providers, makes the accessing of services an antagonistic experience and further deepens the mistrust Traveller women have in these services.
- The poor relationship that exists between many Traveller women and members of An Garda Siochana.
- The non-implementation (on some occasions) of the Garda Policy on Domestic Violence leaves Traveller women in vulnerable and violent situations.
- The attitude of some members of An Garda Siochana when dealing with Traveller women who report incidents of domestic violence.
- The attendance of a female member of An Garda Siochana in the case of an incident of domestic violence.
- Traveller women wishing to use the services available to victims of domestic violence are regularly confronted by racism and discrimination. This impacts on their ability to leave the home and access a safer environment.
- The difficulties of staying in refuges - Traveller women often have many children and this can prove very problematic when accessing refuges, particularly in the case of teenage boys. This compromises the ability of Traveller women to leave the home and access help.
- The lack of information that is user friendly and culturally appropriate for Traveller women regarding their rights and the services available to them.
- The lack of Traveller women working in services for victims of domestic violence.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE NATIONAL PLAN FOR WOMEN (2001 - 2005)

- When developing models of good practice in relation to responding to women experiencing domestic violence, the distinct needs of Traveller women must be incorporated into these strategies.
- That the review on the Report of the Task Force on Violence Against Women be completed and that the distinct needs of Traveller women are incorporated into this review.
- That organisations working with Traveller women be resourced to work on the issue of violence against women.
- That all Traveller women regardless of their literacy abilities be given full information concerning their rights and that any leaflets regarding the services available are user friendly, culturally appropriate and incorporate the use of graphics for Traveller women with literacy difficulties.
- That Traveller women be involved in any designing, developing or implementing or reviewing of any strategies to deal with the issue of domestic violence.
- That in relation to service provision, there is a need for data to be disaggregated based on ethnicity (membership of the Traveller community) and on a gender. Such data disaggregation allows for the identification of the needs of Traveller women in relation to any area of service provision and therefore the development of strategies and/or setting of targets to meet these needs.
- That Traveller women participating on the Regional Planning Committees on Violence Against Women be resourced to do so. That these resources would provide for childcare or transport costs and capacity building.
- That the on-going representation of Traveller women on the National Steering Committee on Violence Against Women be ensured.
- That state violence be recognised as something that Traveller women experience and that steps are taken to address this form of violence.
- That the refuge services be resourced to deal with the needs of a Traveller woman with many children and their desire to keep their teenage sons with them.
- That all refuges and other providers of services to Traveller women experiencing domestic violence incorporate codes of practice on anti-racism into their work practices.
- That Traveller women would be trained to work in refuges and childcare, to support making the refuge services more culturally appropriate. That the barriers preventing Traveller women taking up such work, need to be addressed, eg: flexible access routes to relevant qualifications.

- That an assessment of state and voluntary agencies working to support Traveller women be carried out to identify if Traveller women are discriminated against in accessing these services either wittingly or unwittingly.

TRAVELLER WOMEN AND POVERTY

It has been well documented that Traveller women are one of the most marginalised groups in Ireland, experiencing discrimination accessing services, public, private and community as well as employment and therefore income. While the era of the Celtic Tiger may be said to have improved the position of many women in society, Traveller women have not experienced the same benefits. This is inextricably linked to the racism and discrimination which daily impacts on their lives.

Poverty impacts on all aspects of Traveller women's lives. Traveller women have a very low educational attainment status, poor health status, high unemployment rates, low literacy levels, experience high levels of racism and discrimination. They fare poorly on all indicators of poverty.

In the light of this real lived experience of poverty, Traveller women find it difficult to manage crisis situations, particularly financial crisis situations. With little or no access to legitimate credit facilities, they are hindered in raising money in the short term to deal with a crisis.¹⁶ Access to services required in a socio-economic crisis are also restricted due to direct and indirect discrimination, (poor literacy, lack of information, fear of the unknown due to poor confidence levels). In such crisis situations Traveller women may deal with the problem by attempting to provide for themselves using the only means they feel are at their disposal. In this case, developing a form of begging different from traditional forms of begging within the Traveller economy, not generally approved of by Travellers, but adopted out of necessity.

Traveller women as a group suffer from extreme poverty and marginalisation within their own community. Traveller women with primary responsibility for the health and welfare of children are particularly affected. The accommodation they live in impacts on their struggle to provide for their children and affects their health and that of their family. Traveller women's low educational status, poor literacy levels also reduce their ability to progress educationally and economically.

Poor health, poor education attainment, poor accommodation, poor employment prospects, racism and sexism, lack of access to decision-making structures all impact on the self-image and self-confidence of Traveller women. Therefore to ensure that Traveller Women are removed from the poverty trap it is essential that the recommendations made under all the Critical Areas of Concern be implemented.

ISSUES FOR TRAVELLER WOMEN

- Lack of access to employment, which would lead to a degree of economic independence.
- Lack of access to legitimate credit facilities, with most Travellers finding it virtually impossible to access bank accounts and only small number accessing Credit Unions.
- Difficulty in accessing appropriate education and training.
- The low self-confidence that many Traveller women feel due to poverty in which they live.
- The pressures living in poor accommodation exerts on the financial well-being of Traveller women.
- The poverty that lone Traveller women parent's experience.
- With little or no access to decision-making structures, Traveller women are reliant on settled decision-makers to alleviate their stress.
- The social welfare system is inflexible and creates difficulties for Traveller women without a permanent address, further isolating them and compounding the poverty which affects their lives.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE NATIONAL PLAN FOR WOMEN(2001 - 2005)

- Traveller women must be targeted in any measures designed to improve the overall status of Irish women.
- That the provision of culturally appropriate childcare and the specific targeting of Traveller women in all childcare initiatives be pursued. With access to appropriate affordable childcare Traveller women would be in a position to avail employment and/or education.
- That research would be undertaken to identify the nature and extent of poverty experienced by Traveller women.

¹⁶ See *Access to Credit Facilities for the Traveller Community in the Greater Dublin Area*, 1996. Paul Quinn in Association with Thomas McCann. Published by St. Vincent de Paul.

- That organisations/groups working with Traveller women be resourced and permitted to participate in the development, implementation and monitoring of policies to overcome the poverty Traveller women experience.
- 1.1 – that the Cabinet Committee on Social Exclusion would recognise Traveller women as a specific target group when providing a strategic focus on tackling the problems of social, exclusion, alienation and disadvantage.
- That data disaggregation would be a feature of any research regarding poverty and that Traveller women would be specifically targeted in any measures being developed.
- 1.3 - That the review of the National Anti-Poverty Strategy would be completed and that new targets would be set for Traveller women under the heading of women’s poverty.
- That the NAPS Review would be equality and gender-proofed, in order to take account of the interconnected issues of sexism and racism that Traveller women experience.
- 1.6 – That the Family Mediation service would adopt a code of practice regarding anti-racism, acknowledging the specific racism and discrimination experienced by Traveller women.
- 1.10 – That the particular experience of Traveller women with disabilities would be acknowledged, i.e. they are discriminated against as women, as Travellers, as Traveller women with disabilities.
- 1.24 – That Traveller women would be identified as a target group under this commitment.
- 1.25 – That the educational disadvantage that traveller women experienced and continue to experience would be recognised under this Education Equality Initiative.
- 1.26 – That the gender disaggregated data being developed would include the disaggregation of data based on ethnicity.
- 1.30 – That it is necessary to identify and tackle the particular difficulties that Traveller women as carers experience and that these be catered for in the development of supports for carers.

TRAVELLER WOMEN AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Environmental issues are of concern to all women, however there are specific environmental issues that impact on Traveller women's lives. Traveller women are largely responsible for the rearing of their children, domestic duties and caring for the elderly, therefore the environment in which they live impacts on their lives in a particular way. The most recent available figure for Traveller families living on the roadside is 1,207. This number constitutes approximately 1 in 4 of all Traveller families living in Ireland. These figures suggest that a significant proportion of Traveller women are living without access to water, toilets, electricity, regular rubbish disposal and no security from eviction. The pressures that this imposes on Traveller women impacts on all other aspects of their lives, socially, culturally, economically.

Apart from Traveller women living on the roadside there are also a significant number of Traveller women living in substandard accommodation. Many halting sites are located on the side of extremely congested roads, near rubbish dumps and amidst sprawling industrial estates. For Traveller women from nomadic families the non-existence of a network of transient sites poses particular environmental issues. Local authorities have provided emergency accommodation in lieu of the development of culturally appropriate accommodation. The reality for many Traveller women is that they may spend many years living on emergency sites, with poor facilities, in overcrowded conditions.

More recently Traveller women have been allowed to avail of the opportunity to engage in identifying the accommodation needs of Travellers in the county in which they live. This opportunity comes in the form of participation on Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committees and representation nationally on the National Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee. While this opportunity is to be welcomed, there are issues in relation to these committees, particularly the Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committees. In many cases Traveller women are operating on these committees without support and resources. They do not have access to resources to develop their skills to operate effectively on these committees. They are not resourced to provide childcare while attending the necessary meetings. Neither are they provided with transport to and from these meetings, which is a particular issue for Traveller women not living in urban centre where these meetings take place.

In 2001 all these Local Authorities produced their five-year accommodation plans for the county, however the Traveller accommodation crisis is still intense.

ISSUES FOR TRAVELLER WOMEN

- The poor living conditions of many Traveller women – with no access to basic facilities, overcrowding and no visible progression route to culturally appropriate accommodation.
- The reluctance of those in authority to acknowledge the impact that living in poor environment has on Traveller women's health.
- The location of some sites in industrial areas, on the side of motorways or in locations that are away from services and public transport.
- The lack of green space in many sites, group housing schemes.
- The lack of access to a clean reliable water supply, which is a reality for Traveller women living on the roadside.
- The dearth of rubbish disposal facilities for many Traveller women.
- The increased child illness rates which are a result of living in an inappropriate environment.
- The lack of culturally appropriate accommodation provision by some local authorities – some Traveller women feel they have no choice but to accept local authority standard housing as they are not offered the range of accommodation types, such as group housing etc.
- The financial hardship which inevitably ensues from living in a poor environment and the subsequent lack of access to legitimate credit facilities without a permanent address.
- The impact living in a poor environment has on a Traveller woman's role as carer for the elderly or those with disabilities.
- The difficulties Traveller women experience with the Caravan Loans & Grants Scheme.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE NATIONAL PLAN FOR WOMEN (2001 - 2005)

- The inclusion of gender impact statements in the implementation of the accommodation section of the Report on the Task Force Report of the Travelling Community.
- The speedy implementation of all Local Authority five-year accommodation plans.
- The immediate review of the Caravan Loans & Grants Scheme – review the prices of caravans, repayment options, assessment criteria etc.
- That all local authority staff particularly decision-makers and frontline staff develop codes of practice regarding anti-racism to enhance their work with Traveller women. That these codes of practice would be adopted and incorporated into all their areas of work.

- In the provision of any accommodation to Traveller women that the safety and security of Traveller women be taken into account.
- That the need for crèche or childcare facilities be examined in the provision of accommodation to Traveller women.
- That Traveller women be involved in the planning, design and implementation of accommodation programmes and that they would be resourced to facilities. The resources would cover childcare, Transport and capacity building.
- That guidelines on gender mainstreaming be circulated to all local authorities who play a major environmental role in Traveller women's lives.
- That a rights based approach be adopted in ensuring all Traveller women live in a safe and clean environment.
- That all Traveller groups would be resourced to employ accommodation community workers to support the work of Traveller representatives on Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committees.
- That structured interdepartmental cooperation is a necessity if the connected issues affecting Traveller women's lives are to be dealt with effectively.
- That no evictions be allowed to take place until all accommodation targets are met.
- That initiatives to support the development of participatory planning projects for Traveller women's groups at local level be resou

CONCLUSION

The National Traveller Women's Forum and Pavee Point recognise the National Action Plan for Women presents a real opportunity to address the rights of women and more particularly, Traveller women. For this plan to be a success it must recognise that women are not a homogenous group and must be visionary and inclusive in the actions it outlines.

The development of this National Plan for Women presents an opportunity to the government to highlight the need for more inter-departmental co-operation to address the concerns of women, in a holistic way. In the case of Traveller women it will provide for their health needs to be looked at in conjunction with their accommodation, education and other needs. If this opportunity is grasped and a firm commitment made by all departments to work together, it will provide a strong basis for the achievement of equality for Traveller women.

Pavee Point and National Traveller Women's Forum and Traveller women all around the country look forward to the outcome document from this consultation process. It is important that the recommendations made as a result of the consultation process are reflected in the final National Plan for Women.

"My perspective, as women and a Traveller women, is that society will reap the rewards when Travellers in general , but specifically Traveller women, do not face racism and sexism and gain equality of opportunity and, most importantly outcome."

Submitted by the National Traveller Women's Forum and Pavee Point Travellers Centre

National Traveller Women's Forum

The National Traveller Women's Forum was established in 1988. It is an alliance of Traveller women and Traveller organisations from throughout Ireland which aims to, *'work collectively to challenge the racism and sexism experienced by Traveller women and promotes Traveller women's rights to self-determination, the attainment of human rights and equality within society'.*

The NTWF recognises 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.

Pavee Point

Pavee Point is a national non-governmental organisation which is committed to the attainment of human rights for Irish Travellers. It was established in 1983 and is based in Dublin. The organisation is a partnership of Travellers and settled people working together to address the needs of Travellers as a minority ethnic group who experience exclusion, marginalisation and racism.

Pavee Point has extensive experience in developing innovative and culturally appropriate responses to the needs of Travellers from its starting point based on a community development approach and on an intercultural model. The organisation seeks to combine local action with national resourcing, and direct work with research and policy formulation.