



# VOICES UNHEARD

## A STUDY OF IRISH TRAVELLERS IN PRISON

Conn Mac Gabhann  
The Irish Chaplaincy in Britain (ICB)

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The Irish Chaplaincy in Britain, (ICB), is a leading, innovative charity that provides high quality services and support to excluded, vulnerable and isolated Irish emigrants in Britain.

The Irish Chaplaincy in Britain, (ICB), commissioned *Voices Unheard* in response to the needs of the Travelling community as identified by two of the Chaplaincy's projects. The Travellers' Project which works with the Travelling community in Britain has consistently highlighted the profound and systemic marginalisation of the Travelling community in Britain and has noted with grave concern the increasingly high levels of imprisonment amongst this community. The Irish Council for Prisoners Overseas, (ICPO), through its work across the prison estate, has recorded high levels of discrimination, distress, self-harm and isolation experienced by Irish Traveller prisoners as a result of prejudice and the community's cultural distinctiveness.

ICB was determined to address the issues faced by Irish Travellers in prison by establishing an accurate portrayal of their current situation through a methodologically robust research project. ICB sought, and gained financial support from The Allen Lane Foundation, Travellers Aid Trust and a donor who wished to remain anonymous, in order to implement the planned Travellers in Prison Research Project, (TPRP). On 29th July 2010, following an application to the National Research Committee of the National Offender Management Service, (NOMS), TPRP gained permission to conduct its proposed research nationally. The project began with quantitative research, based upon a survey of Irish Travellers across the prisons in England and Wales that was completed in October 2010. The next stage involved extended qualitative field research, including a series of interviews and focus groups with Irish Traveller prisoners across England and Wales. *Voices Unheard* is a presentation of the findings of the Travellers in Prison Research Project.

**Staff kept saying he needed a shower when he was very clean, like they thought of him as someone who doesn't understand cleanliness because he used to live in a caravan because they don't know the truth about Traveller morals and life.**  
(Diversity Manager)



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Finally, thanks to the Irish Traveller prisoners who by speaking so sincerely have made this report their own. In so doing, Irish Travellers have begun to make their voices heard.

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

The Irish Council for Prisoners Overseas, (ICPO), has provided advice and practical support to Irish prisoners for over 25 years in prisons across England and Wales. Throughout this period ICPO has highlighted the significant number of Irish Travellers in prison and the unequal hardships faced by this group. The Commission for Racial Equality, (CRE), in *Race Equality in Prisons*, (2003), echoed ICPO's concern:

Failure area: Access to goods, facilities or services...  
Prisoners with low literacy skills had difficulty adapting to prison life and accessing prison services. In the case of Irish Travellers, this is compounded by prejudice and discrimination, leading to high levels of self-harm.  
(Commission for Racial Equality, 2003, p.83)

The review of this CRE report, *Race Review 2008*, (2008), by the National Offender Management Service, (NOMS), found that serious problems remained regarding the treatment of Irish Travellers in prison:

Overall, the Review Team [conducting the inquiry] was concerned that, five years on from the CRE report, there was still a lack of recognition in the establishments visited of the issues facing White minority groups and therefore no strategy in place to tackle these. Particular concerns relating to Gypsy Traveller Roma prisoners included: difficulties accessing services, including offender behaviour programmes, as the literacy level required was too high, derogatory and racist name calling primarily by prisoners, and by some staff, in two of the prisons visited, lack of confidence in the complaints system and the lack of cultural awareness and understanding of staff. (NOMS, 2008, p.59)

*Race Review 2008* expressed a hope that improved monitoring of Irish Travellers (and Gypsies) would improve access to the services and facilities which make possible a prisoner's rehabilitation:

...the majority of establishments do not record how many Gypsy Traveller Roma prisoners they have in their population. The Review Team found no monitoring of these groups being undertaken in the establishments visited, and Gypsy Traveller Roma prisoners complained that they did not feel their needs were considered. (NOMS, 2008, p.59)

Given the lack of ethnic monitoring of Gypsy Traveller Roma prisoners in most establishments, further work is needed to ensure equality of access to goods, facilities and services for

this group. A priority area both nationally and locally is to ensure that the needs of Gypsy Traveller Roma prisoners are addressed. (NOMS, 2008, p.61)

In contrast with 15 other ethnic categories, despite the high visibility of Travellers in many prisons, and NOMS' expressed concern over Travellers in prison there are, at the date of publication of this report, no official figures for the population of Irish Travellers or the combined population of Gypsies and Irish Travellers.<sup>1 2</sup> As a result, important issues affecting Irish Travellers in prison have been inadequately dealt with, to the economic and social detriment of society.<sup>3</sup> Without accurate statistics regarding the prison population, relevant government bodies are ill-equipped to challenge offending behaviour, encourage rehabilitation and implement successful resettlement strategies.

The Travellers in Prison Research Project, (TPRP), the first national study of Irish Travellers in prison, begins to address this lack of monitoring and the consequent oversight of issues affecting this group.

## 1.1 Aims

The life of an Irish Traveller is often short, framed by exclusion and discrimination. In Britain and Ireland, opinion polls frequently identify Travellers as the most disliked group in society.<sup>4</sup> The negative social factors which face Irish Travellers in everyday life present serious challenges to prisons and prison staff in relation to the custody, rehabilitation and resettlement of Traveller prisoners.<sup>5</sup>

A number of prisons and members of staff have made laudable efforts to develop effective strategies to work with Irish Travellers and deal with their distinctive needs. Indeed, TPRP identified prisons in which particularly dedicated staff in their own time and on a voluntary basis facilitate group meetings for Travellers. Unfortunately, however, many prisons have been unable or unwilling to address the particular needs of their Traveller population.

Significantly, TPRP identified no overall strategy within prisons to deal with the specific custody, rehabilitation and resettlement needs of Irish Travellers. This seems to be a significant lacuna given, frequent replication of offender background, offending patterns and stated causes of offending behaviour. It is realistic to believe that given the relatively homogenous nature of this prisoner group that a consistent national strategy could improve rehabilitation and resettlement services. The human argument for such a change is obvious.

The financial argument is no less compelling. Excluding expenditure met by other government departments such as health and education, NOMS spends between £23,040,000 and £38,385,000 per year on Irish Travellers in prison.<sup>6</sup> Holding in custody a prisoner group with recurring offending patterns and consequently identifiable rehabilitation interventions such as literacy training, employment skills and accommodation needs and yet not addressing these needs means that prisons continue to place an unnecessary burden on the tax payer by failing to challenge re-offending. This report, therefore, should serve as a catalyst for a formal re-evaluation of approaches to the rehabilitation of Travellers in prison.

In terms of the Travelling community itself and its supporters, this report may serve as an opportunity to reflect on the too frequent instances of imprisonment of Irish Travellers. It was not the purpose of TPRP to explore in depth the high levels, nor the impact, of imprisonment amongst the Travelling community as a whole. However, while this report takes account of the pervasive and sadly, often permitted discrimination affecting Travellers across all aspects of life, it also serves as a challenge to the community to tackle, in so far as it can, the factors which lead too many Travellers to prison.

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1 The 2011 Census used a combined 'Gypsy or Irish Traveller' ethnic category, (Office for National Statistics, 2011).

2 TPRP submitted two Freedom of Information Requests to the Ministry of Justice to ascertain the figures of Irish Traveller and/or Gypsy Roma Traveller prisoners. *Population of Irish Travellers in prison in England and Wales*, Ministry of Justice, reference: 64867 (May 2010) and *Population of Gypsy Roma Traveller prisoners in England and Wales*, Ministry of Justice, reference: 65399 (June 2010). TPRP was informed 'this information is not recorded centrally on whether a prisoner is from an Irish Traveller background or not' and 'information is not recorded centrally on whether a prisoner is from a GTR background or not.'

3 In terms of the wider prison population the cost of reoffending is high, for example, 'The National Audit Office has estimated that the social and economic costs of reoffending by those released from short sentences alone are between £7–10 billion a year,' (MoJ, 2010).

4 For attitudes to Travellers in the UK see, MORI, 2001.

5 'Gypsies and Irish Travellers have the poorest life chances of any ethnic group today,' (Commission for Racial Equality, Summary, 2006, p.2).

6 Based on the average cost per prison place (Prison Reform Trust, 2010, p.6) and an Irish Traveller population in prison ranging between 0.6% and 1% of the entire prison population.

TPRP, working with limited resources and limited access to prisons, has in this report managed to take a 'snapshot' of Irish Travellers in prison. The research is not a complete picture of Irish Travellers in prison in England and Wales. It is, however, a first step in establishing the size of the Irish Traveller population in prison, their profile and the main issues which affect their progress on the journey of rehabilitation and resettlement. TPRP believes that this report and in particular its recommendations offer prisons, prison staff and Irish Travellers in prison, an opportunity to significantly improve the rehabilitation of a group, routinely (and inaccurately) characterised as 'hard to reach.'

TPRP is confident that the modest proposals included in this report would benefit Irish Travellers in prison by enabling them to take control of their lives through suitable training and support. Crucially, society would, to an extent, be unburdened of the social and economic weight attendant on the widespread imprisonment of a marginalised group. Travellers with whom TPRP met almost unanimously spoke of the wastefulness of imprisonment, coupled with a sense of the inevitability of incarceration given their skill set which often excluded literacy. Irish Travellers in prison want, like society as a whole, to provide for their families and themselves and to live happy and constructive lives. It is, therefore, in the interests of both wider society and Irish Travellers to facilitate more effective strategies for the custody, rehabilitation and resettlement of this hitherto isolated section of the prison population.

One final observation – TPRP found that providing different approaches to the needs of Irish Travellers in prison is sometimes seen by prison governors and staff as showing preferential treatment for this group. Prisons and prison staff need to be reminded that providing equal opportunities may mean offering the same services in a flexible manner. The status quo means that a sizeable number of Irish Travellers pass through prison with little or no engagement with prison services – a costly mistake and a missed opportunity. The basic principle regarding the provision of services should not be one size fits all but rather what approach will succeed in achieving the successful rehabilitation of prisoners for their good and the good of society.

MY SON WAS 13 WHEN HE DIED...  
THE GOVERNOR TOLD ME I COULDN'T GO  
TO THE FUNERAL BECAUSE I CAME FROM  
'THE TRAVELLING COMMUNITY' AND WOULD  
ABSCOND. THE C OF E CHAPLAIN HEARD IT  
AND COULDN'T BELIEVE IT. SHE WAS MORE  
SHOCKED THAN ME.  
I WAS MOVED [FROM THE PRISON] THE NEXT  
DAY.

I HAD THOUGHT OF PUTTING NOTICES ABOUT THE SURVEY ON THE WINGS, BUT ON REFLECTION DECIDED AGAINST, AS A NUMBER OF THOSE I SPOKE TO PREFER NOT TO ADVERTISE TOO WIDELY THAT THEY ARE TRAVELLERS.

(Prison chaplain)

I'VE BEEN TOLD THAT I'M AGGRESSIVE BECAUSE I USE MY HANDS WHEN I SPEAK. I'VE BEEN TOLD I'M THREATENING BECAUSE I'VE GOT A LOUD VOICE. BUT IF YOU CAME FROM A FAMILY OF THIRTEEN YOU'D BE LOUD. IT'S NOT AGGRESSION. IT'S NORMAL. IT'S JUST HOW WE TALK.

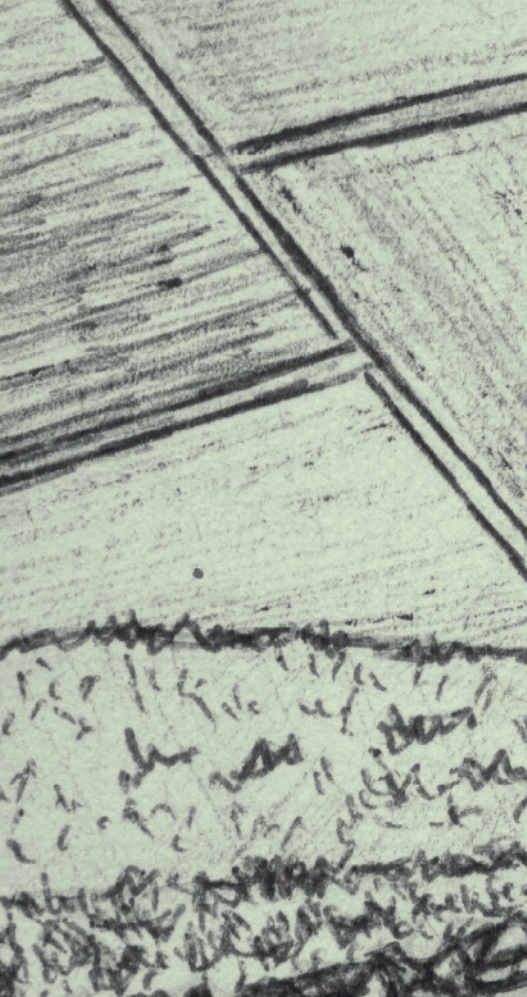
THIS YOUNG PERSON FINDS HIS 'CONFINEMENT' PARTICULARLY DIFFICULT ESPECIALLY AS HE IS USED TO MOVING ABOUT FROM PLACE TO PLACE.

(Prison officer)

THEY DO NOT INFORM ANYONE THEY ARE GYPSIES OR TRAVELLERS AS THEY ARE AFRAID THEY WILL BE PICKED ON BY BOTH STAFF AND OFFENDERS.

(Prison officer)

IF YOU'RE A TRAVELLER YOU'RE AN OUTCAST...IF WE PUT THREE STICKS IN THE GROUND AND A BIT OF CANVAS IN A FIELD THEY WOULDN'T LET US STAY PUT FOR A WEEK.



## 2. IRISH TRAVELLERS

Irish Travellers are traditionally a nomadic people who originated in Ireland.<sup>7</sup> While the majority of Irish Travellers live in Ireland there are Irish Traveller communities in a number of other countries including the United States and Germany. The largest Irish Traveller community outside of Ireland is based in the United Kingdom. There are no accurate figures for the population of Irish Travellers in the United Kingdom, however.<sup>8</sup> While Irish Traveller communities, particularly in Britain, maintain strong links with Ireland, the classification 'Irish Traveller' is most accurately seen as an ethnic identifier rather than an identifier of nationality.

Irish Travellers possess a distinctive way of life, value system, culture and traditions. Their language is known as Shelta, of which there are two dialects, Gamin and Cant. Irish Travellers refer to themselves as 'Pavees' or 'Minceir.' The historical origins of Irish Travellers as a group remain unclear. Some historians argue that Irish Travellers are descended from the native Irish population, dispossessed as a result of social and political upheavals such as Oliver Cromwell's military campaign in Ireland (1649–53) or the Great Famine in Ireland (1840s). Other analysts propose much earlier origins (McVeigh, 1997; Ó Riain, 2000). Ó Riain claims there is evidence indicating the existence of nomadic groups in Ireland as early as the 5th Century AD (Ó Riain, 2000, p. 8).

In the 21st Century, many members of Irish Traveller communities continue to prefer a nomadic, self-employed way of life within a cohesive extended family structure, in spite of the hostility exhibited towards them in the media and in government policies.<sup>9 10</sup> Historically, Irish Travellers lived and travelled in horse drawn wagons, moving in pursuit of economic and social opportunities. In the 20th Century, Travellers updated their traditional forms of transport by moving from horse-drawn wagons to motor homes, caravans and trailers. They did not abandon their preference for nomadism, however. Although many Irish Travellers live in trailers, there are also a significant number who live in flats and houses, either as a result of housing policies, limiting personal circumstances (such as illness or for accessing education) or by preference. Irish Travellers who live in permanent accommodation remain Irish Travellers.

### 2.1 Irish Travellers in Britain

[The] nomadic rights [of Irish Travellers] have been severely curtailed by criminal justice legislation, commodification of marginal land, and settled people's resistance to their nomadic way of life. Conflict has arisen between urban settled denizens, municipal authorities, police forces, and Irish Travellers over modes of living and access to scarce resources... (Power, 2004, p.5)

<sup>7</sup> In contrast, it is widely believed that both English Gypsies (also known as Romanies or Romany Gypsies) and the Roma communities living across Europe originated in Northern India.

<sup>8</sup> The Commission for Racial Equality estimated the combined number of Gypsies and Travellers in Britain to be 300,000 (CRE, 2006, p.4)

<sup>9</sup> '...media commonly suggest to their readers, in their representations of Travellers, that this category of people routinely display certain negative characteristics not only typical of but essential to the group: that is, they represent Travellers in a stereotypical and prejudicial fashion.' (Morris, 2000, p.213)

<sup>10</sup> The Criminal Justice and Public Order Act, 1994, withdrew the duty on local authorities to provide new sites and required Travellers to secure their own sites at a time when planning regulations had been considerably toughened.

I WISH  
THEY'D SEE  
THAT  
WE HAVE  
A CULTURE  
AS WELL

Irish Travellers have been present in Britain from at least 1850 (Kenrick and Bakewell, 1990, p.10). They contributed significantly to British life in terms of providing the rural economy with craft skills and seasonal labour; and also, significantly, in their service in the British Army.<sup>11</sup> Post-1945 Britain saw a further wave of Irish Traveller migration as men came over from Ireland to build motorways and work as labourers (Kenrick and Clark, 1995, p.20). Many settled in large urban centres like London, Manchester, Liverpool, Leeds and Birmingham but later they moved to other parts of the UK, to both urban and rural locations.

Irish Travellers were welcomed throughout rural Britain until the 1950s when they were seen as flexible migratory workers who also filled important niches in the economy by bartering, selling and recycling scarce commodities. Since the 1960s, however, urbanisation, mass production of cheap disposable plastics and other domestic items, and the mechanisation of agriculture changed the lives of Irish Travellers profoundly and undermined the basis of their rural economy in Britain and Ireland. As a result, Travellers became marginalised economically and have over time become increasingly marginalised socially, (Power, 2004, p.5).

## 2.2 Law and Obligations

Irish Travellers were established as a legally recognised ethnic group in 2000.<sup>12</sup> This year, for the first time they have been categorised as a distinct ethnic group on the national census.<sup>13</sup>

As a legally recognised minority, the Equality Act 2010 places a positive legal obligation on the National Offender Management Service, (NOMS), to see their individual needs receive due regard. In terms of prison policies, services and staff this must be done in a way which:

- Eliminates discrimination, harassment and victimisation towards Irish Travellers;<sup>14</sup>
- Fosters relations between Irish Traveller prisoners, staff and other prisoners by recognising the need to tackle prejudice and promote an understanding of Irish Traveller culture;<sup>15</sup> and
- Improves equality of opportunity for Irish Travellers in respect to prison services.<sup>16</sup>

In meeting these obligations the Act necessarily allows scope for treating some prisoners more favourably than others.<sup>17</sup> Specific measures may therefore exist for one ethnic group to ensure that they have the same level of access and opportunity in respect to a particular service.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>11</sup> See newspaper article, 'Galway brothers who paid ultimate sacrifice,' (News Letter, Belfast, 31st August 2009).

<sup>12</sup> O'Leary v Allied Domecq, 29/8/2000, CL 950275

<sup>13</sup> The 2011 Census used a combined 'Gypsy or Irish Traveller' category

<sup>14</sup> Equality Act 2010, s.149(1)(a)

<sup>15</sup> Equality Act 2010, ss.149(1)(c) and 149(5)

<sup>16</sup> Equality Act 2010, s.149(1)(b)

<sup>17</sup> Equality Act 2010, s.149(6)

<sup>18</sup> '...specialist services may be needed to address the problems of groups of offenders with specific needs – such as...offenders from Traveller/Roma/Gypsy backgrounds – or to help some BAME [Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic] offenders to engage with services which they would otherwise mistrust.' (Clinks and Prison Reform Trust, 2010, p.3)

NOMS also has obligations under the Human Rights Act 1998. These are to uphold the individual rights of prisoners enumerated in the European Convention of Human Rights.<sup>19</sup> Notably, these include respect for an individual's private and family life<sup>20</sup> and protection from discrimination in the enjoyment of the protected rights.<sup>21</sup>

NOMS recognises its equality obligations and their legal nature in its published guidance, 'Promoting Equality in Prisons and Probation: the NOMS Single Equality Scheme 2009-2012'. In addition to listing the specific duties contained in the Equality Act it states:

The governing principles to be adopted in meeting the general duty include the fact that promoting race equality is obligatory, and must be central to all functions, including planning, policy making, service delivery, regulation, inspection, enforcement and employment; that public authorities must meet the duty to promote equality of opportunity in all relevant functions; and that the weight given to race equality must be proportionate to its relevance to a particular function (e.g. those that affect the public most or different groups in different ways). (NOMS, 2009, p.32)

Despite this acknowledgment and the fact that the Glossary includes a 'Gypsy Roma Traveller' acronym, the substantive text of the document makes no reference to Irish Travellers or indeed Gypsy Roma Travellers generally. While race appears as a prominent issue, the focus is entirely on meeting requirements as to other Black and Minority Ethnic, (BME), prisoners. As such, the specific needs of Irish Travellers, independent and different to those of the general BME community, have remained outside the scope of official attention. This is the case, notwithstanding the fact that NOMS is under a legal obligation to ensure their equality of opportunities and treatment.

SOMETHING SERIOUSLY HAS TO BE DONE ABOUT IT. ACTION IN MY MIND SPEAKS LOUDER THAN WORDS AND IF THERE'S NOTHING DONE ABOUT IT...IT WILL CONTINUE AND CONTINUE TO GET WORSE. THEY THINK THE TRAVELLING COMMUNITY AND THE TRAVELLING PRISONERS ARE REJECTS FROM SOCIETY AND THAT PEOPLE DON'T REALLY GIVE A DAMN ABOUT THEM, WHAT HAPPENS TO THEM RIGHT OR WRONG. IT'S VERY EASY FOR ANYONE TO WRITE STUFF BUT UNLESS THERE'S ACTION TO BACK THIS UP IT'S JUST WASTING TIME AND WASTING MONEY...

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19 Human Rights Act 1998, s.6

20 European Convention on Human Rights, Art.8

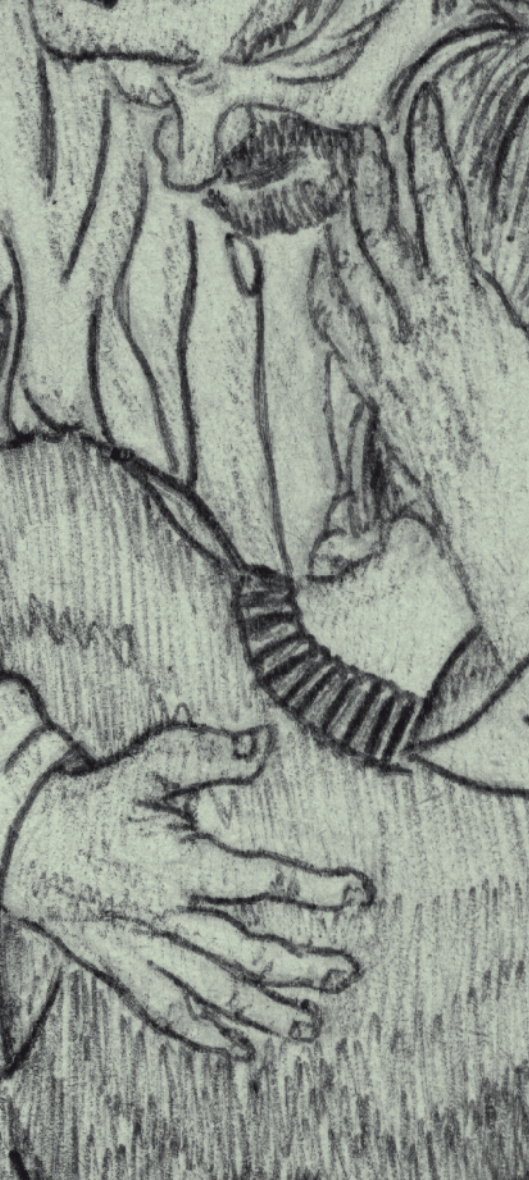
21 European Convention on Human Rights, Art.14

A LOT OF MEN ARE CUTTING THEMSELVES FOR BEING ALONE...AND COMMITTING SUICIDE. YOUNG [NAME OF AN IRISH TRAVELLER] KILLED HIMSELF HERE LAST WEEK. THEY WOULDN'T LET HIM BE WITH OTHER TRAVELLERS AND HE ASKED AGAIN AND AGAIN. HE HAD NO ONE TO TALK TO BUT THEY JUST LEFT HIM....

WE AREN'T TREATED AS THOUGH WE ARE FOREIGN NATIONAL PRISONERS, BUT WE FACE THE SAME DIFFICULTIES AS OTHER GROUPS. THESE AREN'T RECOGNISED.

HE CANNOT READ OR WRITE AND NEVER ACCESSED SCHOOL WHEN GROWING UP AS HIS FAMILY WERE MOVING AROUND. ALSO WHEN MIXING WITH SETTLED PEOPLE AS A TRAVELLER CHILD IN SCHOOL HE FOUND IT HARD. HE FELT ABLE TO FINALLY ACCESS EDUCATION IN PRISON.

(Prison Officer)



### 3. METHODOLOGY

TPRP's fieldwork began in August 2010 following approval of the research proposal from the National Research Committee at NOMS. TPRP had two data collection phases: 1) Quantitative Data - a survey of Irish Travellers across the prison estate and a response form for prison staff; 2) Qualitative Data – a series of focus groups and interviews with Irish Travellers in seven prisons.

#### 3.1 Quantitative Data

In mid-September 2010, TPRP sent survey packs to the diversity and chaplaincy teams in all prisons in England and Wales. We asked that a suitable prison official (i.e. the person who works most closely with Irish Travellers) take charge of completing the survey form for each Irish Traveller prisoner in the particular institution during the week 20th September to 27th September 2010.

TPRP requested that a prison official complete the survey form for each Irish Traveller in custody based on their knowledge of the prisoner and obtainable information. This approach meant that the information provided through the survey had been mediated by an official with a vested interest in the depiction of his or her workplace and work practices. Given the reluctance of Irish Travellers in prison to identify themselves as Irish Travellers, the large size of some prisons and the heavy workload of prison staff, the information provided by prison officials on Irish Travellers must be seen as a minimum in terms of representing issues affecting Travellers.

This approach to collecting data was taken for a number of reasons, including:

- 1) Many Traveller prisoners would find it difficult to complete a survey form due to poor levels of literacy;
- 2) Prison officials have access to information concerning prisoners not available to the prisoners themselves;
- 3) Some prison officials before the survey was distributed indicated that they would be unable to embark on a lengthy process of distribution and collection of survey forms with their Traveller population;
- 4) NOMS, the Prison Service and other government agencies are likely to trust the efforts and insights of prison officials over and above the views of prisoners or sympathetic organisations. However, this approach has the weakness that difficulties faced by Irish Travellers might be unknown to, or possibly, ignored by, prison staff conducting the survey.

In practice, prisons carried out the survey with varying degrees of effort, success and consultation with their Traveller population. In some cases, prisons simply provided a headcount of their Traveller population. In other cases, staff arranged meetings to consult with Travellers and made great effort to complete the survey as fully as was possible.

117 prisons provided information on their Traveller population for TPRP. 15 prisons provided no response to TPRP's requests for information on Irish Travellers. 6 prisons stated that they did not have the resources to carry out the survey; or that they did not record figures for Irish Travellers; while one prison stated that 'currently 38 prisoners identify as either Gypsy or Traveller' but could not provide a further breakdown.<sup>22</sup> 32 prisons stated that they identified no Irish Travellers in their institutions. 85 prisons across England and Wales stated they had an Irish Traveller population.

TPRP is aware of substantial numbers of Irish Travellers in prison (through its contacts with ICPO) who were not counted or included in the survey in late September 2010. In prisons which provided no response, those that identified no Irish Travellers and those prisons that provided detailed data, TPRP found evidence of a significant undercount of Travellers overall within the prison estate. In one example of undercounting, a prison official in the north-west identified 13 Irish Travellers in prison while an ICPO contact who had visited the same prison in late September maintained the figure was in the high 40s. Likewise in three of the focus groups with Travellers (each group comprising 12 to 15 prisoners), participants indicated that there were at least double the number of Travellers in their respective institutions as were present in the meeting.

Crucially, however, the statistics presented in this report are based on data provided by staff of HM Prisons. The data does not wholly enumerate the size of the Irish Traveller population in prison in England and Wales, nor does it fully define the complex needs of this group. The figures herein represent a methodologically robust baseline upon which improved monitoring and service delivery can be based.

Prison officials identified 453 individuals, 0.6% of the prison population as coming from an Irish Traveller background.<sup>23</sup> For the purposes of an authentic depiction of the scale and therefore the relative importance of the issues affecting Irish Travellers in prison, TPRP has identified through the use of ICPO's network of prison visitors and its database of Irish prisoners that the population of Travellers in late September 2010 may have been as high as 850, representing approximately 1% of the prison population in this period. Based upon these two sources, TPRP has employed these minimum and maximum levels for the purposes of this report. Therefore, the Irish Traveller population in prison lies within the range of 0.6% to 1% of the total population of prisoners in England and Wales.

The survey data was captured in a one-page survey form which asked 16 questions on five areas: prisoner profile; the nature of offence(s) and sentence; health; education and training; and contact with family. All but three of the questions were to be answered by a tick box response, with additional space provided for more detailed responses.

The survey forms were anonymized by a process of coding in which the official completing the forms allocated each Traveller prisoner a number. This unique number was only used to refer to a specific prisoner both on the survey form itself and in any further communication with TPRP. This rigorous approach to maintaining anonymity was designed to promote confidence amongst prison officials and Irish Travellers in TPRP's procedures. Furthermore, these measures should have enabled respondents to contribute data to TPRP without any fear of consequences from either prison staff or prisoners.

An additional element to the TPRP survey process as described above was the prison officials' comment form. This form was for use by the official completing the prisoners' survey forms. The prison officials'

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<sup>22</sup> TPRP did not include, in its final headcount, these 38 prisoners or other instances of Irish Travellers that could not be verified as solely Irish Travellers as opposed to prisoners within the combined category of Gypsy/Traveller.

<sup>23</sup> This percentage is based on 453 Irish Travellers out of 71,708 prisoners in the prisons which submitted a response to TPRP. Scaled up for the entire prison population of 85,368 (24th September 2010) the minimum number of Irish Travellers in prison during this week was approximately 512.

FOR A  
TRAVELLER,  
HIS  
MOUTH  
IS HIS  
PEN.

comment form enabled prison staff to anonymously contribute their views, experiences and expertise on issues affecting Irish Travellers in prison. The prison officials' comment form included four substantive questions/comment areas: 1) What (if any) particular difficulties face Irish Travellers in prison?; 2) How can these difficulties be addressed?; 3) What initiatives are there for Irish Traveller prisoners?; and a General Comments section. Out of 138 prisons contacted, 69 returned a comment form.

Out of 453 identified Irish Traveller prisoners, 296 TPRP survey forms were submitted. Not all survey forms returned provided answers to all survey questions. For each calculation made in this report, the corresponding size of the particular data set is provided beneath each table of figures.

### **3.2 Qualitative Data**

Following the completion of the TPRP survey, the project embarked on a series of focus groups and interviews with Traveller prisoners in order to explore in depth the issues raised by the survey data. This phase of the research, beginning in November 2010 and finishing in February 2011, engaged the participation of 57 Irish Traveller prisoners, in seven prisons. The prisons involved were located in Wales, the North West, the North East, the Midlands, the South East and London. Participants included category A, B, C and D offenders. One female prison was visited. One private prison was visited. A Young Offenders Institution (YOI) was not included as the distinctive and complex issues involved in matters of youth offending were beyond the scope of the project.

The TPRP focus groups and interviews were semi-structured in format. TPRP had identified a range of subject areas through the quantitative data provided by the survey and used this to identify discussion points. Initially, discussion focussed on education, health, family contact and cultural awareness. TPRP's inquiry developed by responding to the issues identified as important by the Traveller participants. TPRP focus groups and interviews achieved significant depth of insight by facilitating Irish Traveller prisoners' discussions on the matters that they identified as affecting them most seriously. As a result of this process, in which the Traveller participants led, the breadth and depth of the discussions expanded to include: accommodation, mental health, parole, Home Detention Curfew, (HDC), recall, reasons for offending and discrimination.

### **3.3 Literature**

When compiling a report on a subject which is under-reported, one of the challenges is using what little material has been published on the subject in a judicious manner. This is the case when dealing with issues affecting Irish Travellers in Britain. TPRP have had to deal with two different forms of this problem, namely: 1) literature which

conflates Irish Travellers with Gypsies and Roma; and 2) literature from another jurisdiction, namely, the Republic of Ireland.

Much of the literature from the UK combines Irish Travellers and Gypsies; sometimes including European Roma in this catch-all category. Although, of course, there are similarities in the issues affecting Irish Travellers, Gypsies and Roma, there are also great distinctions. This report references UK research on the combined Irish Traveller and Gypsy communities whenever it is deemed that to do so reflects the situation of the Irish Travelling community in Britain. As UK reports regarding the socio-economic, educational and health status of Irish Travellers and Gypsies largely agree that separately, the Irish Traveller and Gypsy communities are marginalised, TPRP's use of these reports may be seen as legitimate and uncontroversial.

However, TPRP does reference a number of research reports emanating from research carried out in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland on Irish Travellers. Most prominently, this report utilises the *All Ireland Traveller Health Study*, (UCD, 2010). TPRP considers the use of this report and others to be valid, both in terms of explaining the context of the Irish Travelling community and in terms of methodological practice. The *All Ireland Traveller Health Study* was a major government (both UK and Irish) sponsored research project on the health of Irish Travellers. The study includes the Irish Traveller population within Northern Ireland, currently a constituent part of the United Kingdom. It is therefore likely to reflect to some degree the situation of Irish Travellers in the parts of the United Kingdom at issue here, namely, England and Wales.

Principally, the choice of what third party material TPRP has used in this report is based on its particular relevance to the themes involved rather than whether the research was carried out in Ireland or Britain. In support of this approach, TPRP has identified that almost 45% of Irish Travellers in prison were born on the island of Ireland. It is therefore reasonable and necessary to use evidence as to the social, economic, cultural and health context of this nomadic group, from both their country of residence and (in the case of many Irish Travellers) from their country of origin.

TRAVELLERS ARE STEREOTYPED. WE ARE  
TREATED LIKE A GANG. OFFICERS HAVE HAD  
BAD EXPERIENCES WITH TRAVELLERS IN THE  
PAST, AND THEY THINK ALL TRAVELLERS ARE  
TROUBLE.

AT RECEPTION [INTO PRISON], I SAID I'M A TRAVELLER. THE MAN SAID 'SO YOU'RE IRISH? THEN YOU ARE W2 [WHITE IRISH]'.

I LIVE ON A CAMP [UNOFFICIAL SITE]. I'M DOWN AS NFA [NO FIXED ABODE] AND I DON'T WANT TO GO TO A HOSTEL SO STRAIGHT AWAY I'M RECALLED.

AN OFFICER TOLD ME, 'I MUST HAVE WASHED YOUR APP [APPLICATION FOR A COURSE] IN THE WASHING MACHINE; IT WAS IN MY TROUSERS.'

IF YOU PUT A TRAILER AS AN ADDRESS YOU'LL NEVER GET A TAG [HOME DETENTION CURFEW].



## 4. DEMOGRAPHICS

### 4.1 Findings

#### 4.1.1 Minority Ethnic Group

Irish Travellers represent between 2.5% and 4% of the minority ethnic population in prison. <sup>24</sup>

#### 4.1.2 Foreign Nationals

Irish Travellers represent 2%-3% of the foreign national population in prison in England and Wales when nationality is based on being born in another jurisdiction (i.e. the Republic of Ireland). <sup>25</sup>

Irish Travellers may represent 5%-8% of the foreign national population in prison when the Irish government's definition of Irish nationality is used as the defining criteria. <sup>26</sup>

#### 4.1.3 Gender

The research identified that 93.6% of Irish Travellers in prison were male and that 6.4% were female. This can be compared to official statistics representing all prisoners nationwide of 95% male and 5% female, recorded by the Ministry of Justice on 10th September 2010. <sup>27</sup>

#### 4.1.4 Place of Birth

	#	%
Great Britain	159	54.3
Republic of Ireland	111	37.9
Northern Ireland	20	6.8
Other	3	1

Table 1. 293 Respondents

54.3% of Irish Travellers in prison in England and Wales were born in Great Britain. 37.9% of Irish Travellers in prison were born in the Republic of Ireland. 6.8% of Irish Travellers in prison were born in Northern Ireland.

#### 4.1.5 Ages: All Irish Traveller Prisoners

	#	%
20-30	111	39.5
30-40	83	29.5
40-50	48	17.1
15-20	24	8.5
50-60	12	4.3
60-70	3	1.1

Table 2: 281 Respondents

<sup>24</sup> Based upon a figure of 22,292 minority ethnic prisoners in the overall prison population, (Prison Reform Trust, 2010, p.28).

<sup>25</sup> Based upon a figure of 11,367 foreign national prisoners in the overall prison population, (Prison Reform Trust, 2010, p.28).

<sup>26</sup> Entitlement to Irish Citizenship: 'Every person born on the island of Ireland before 1 January, 2005 is entitled to be an Irish citizen. The citizenship of a person born on the island of Ireland on or after 1 January, 2005 depends on the citizenship of the person's parents at the time of the person's birth or the residency history of one of the parents prior to the birth... Under the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Acts, 1956 to 2004, a person who was born outside Ireland is automatically an Irish citizen by descent if one of that person's parents was an Irish citizen who was born in Ireland.'

<sup>27</sup> Table 1.2, Offender Management Statistics Quarterly Bulletin July to September 2010, England and Wales

#### 4.1.6 Ages: Irish Traveller Prisoners in Comparison with the Overall Prisoner Population

	Ministry of Justice (85,429)		Irish Travellers (281)	
	#	%	#	%
<b>Adults</b>	73,678	86.3	146	51.9
<b>Young adults</b>	10,114	11.8	130	46.3
<b>15-17 year olds</b>	1,637	1.9	5	1.8

Table 3: 281 Respondents

#### 4.1.7 Accommodation Prior to Imprisonment

	#	%
House	126	44.8
Authorised Site	84	29.9
Flat	30	10.7
Unauthorised Site	20	7.1
Other	13	4.6
No Fixed Abode	8	2.9

Table 4: 281 Respondents

TPRP found that most Irish Travellers in prison normally (i.e. prior to imprisonment) live in a house or a flat, 55.5%. This finding mirrors the situation nationally with most Travellers now believed to live in housing. In many cases, settlement in housing is due to an inadequate supply of Traveller sites rather than preference and indeed, often results in isolation, loss of family support and psychological distress, (Greenfields, 2009, p.1-p.2).

TPRP's findings on the percentage of housed Irish Travellers emphasises that Irish Traveller ethnicity is not dependent on the type of accommodation in which a Traveller normally resides. Prison staff in a number of prisons suggested that certain prisoners should not be included in the research because 'They've never travelled,' or because they were 'settled.' Some prison staff were unaware that Irish Travellers were an ethnic grouping regardless of the type of housing in which they normally resided. <sup>28</sup>

TPRP found that 29.9% of Irish Travellers in prison normally live on authorised sites. Authorised sites include Traveller sites which are publicly owned and rented and self-provided private sites which have the required planning permission. In most cases, authorised sites possess a postcode.

TPRP found that 7.1 % of Irish Travellers normally reside on unauthorised sites. Unauthorised sites include Traveller sites owned by Travellers which do not have the required planning permission; and sites on public and private land not belonging to Travellers and with no planning permission. In most cases, unauthorised sites do not possess a postcode.

## THEY KEEP THEMSELVES TO THEMSELVES.

(Prison Officer)

<sup>28</sup> Indeed, the 'inadequate supply' of Traveller sites and 'explicitly sedentarist state policies' often impose housed accommodation on Travellers contrary to their preference and traditional way of life, (Greenfields, 2009, p.1- p.2). It is also likely that TPRP's findings drawn largely from official prison data, may not account for the fact that, 'many Irish Travellers are now seasonally nomadic,' (Power, 2004, p.6).

ALTHOUGH NOT MANY TRAVELLERS HAVE BEEN IDENTIFIED,  
WE CAN RUN A PRISONER GROUP IF DEMAND WARRANTS IT.

(Equalities Officer)

IT'S LIKE THIS. WHEN I FIRST CAME IN AND I ASKED FOR  
SOMETHING I WAS GIVEN AN APP [APPLICATION] TO FILL IN.  
NOBODY ELSE WAS, THEY DIDN'T HAVE TO... THEY COULD  
ALL WRITE BUT I WAS GIVEN ONE [AN APPLICATION]  
BECAUSE THEY KNEW I COULDN'T FILL IT IN. THAT'S WHY I  
LEARNED TO READ AND WRITE.

I HAVE CHECKED WITH THE HEAD OF DIVERSITY AND WE  
ARE NOT CURRENTLY IN A POSITION TO IDENTIFY THIS  
GROUP WITHIN THE PRISONER POPULATION ALTHOUGH WE  
ARE HOPING TO ADDRESS THIS IN THE NEAR FUTURE.

(Prison Officer)



## 5. DISCRIMINATION

### 5.1 Findings

- Irish Travellers and some prison staff reported discriminatory treatment of Irish Travellers on the basis of their ethnicity
- Irish Travellers and some prison staff reported that racist and derogatory terms such as 'pikey' and 'gypo' were frequently used in reference to Irish Traveller prisoners
- Most prisons have failed to formulate or implement measures to ensure equality of opportunity for this prisoner group despite the stated 'priority' given to addressing 'the needs of Gypsy Traveller Roma prisoners' (NOMS, 2008 p.61)

### 5.2 Context

Overall, the Review Team was concerned that, five years on from the CRE report, there was still a lack of recognition in the establishments visited of the issues facing White minority groups and therefore no strategy in place to tackle these. Particular concerns relating to Gypsy Traveller Roma prisoners included: difficulties accessing services, including offender behaviour programmes, as the literacy level required was too high, derogatory and racist name calling primarily by prisoners, and by some staff, in two of the prisons visited, lack of confidence in the complaints system and the lack of cultural awareness and understanding of staff. (NOMS, 2008, p.59)

Given the lack of ethnic monitoring of Gypsy Traveller Roma prisoners in most establishments, further work is needed to ensure equality of access to goods, facilities and services for this group. A priority area both nationally and locally is to ensure that the needs of Gypsy Traveller Roma prisoners are addressed. (NOMS, 2008, p.61)

There is a need for better training that raises awareness of GTR issues for all staff. Negative perceptions of GTR prisoners in the mind of some staff are largely the result of ignorance... Accountable GTR staff members require specific training to meet individual GTR prisoner needs. All staff need to be made aware of the GTR culture and the disparate and diverse nature of communities in order to be able to respond appropriately on a daily basis... (Nacro, 2009, p.24)

### 5.3 Commentary

The Prison Service has a positive duty, and is committed, to: eliminate unlawful discrimination; promote equality of opportunity; and promote good relations between people of different racial groups. Unlawful discrimination on the basis of colour, race, nationality, ethnic or national origin, or religion is prohibited, as is any racially abusive or insulting language or behaviour on the part of any member of staff, prisoner or visitor. Action will be taken against anyone who contravenes this policy statement.

In order to make good this intent, prison establishments must work to ensure that:

Direct discrimination, harassment, victimisation and incitement to racial hatred are prevented and tackled and good relations between people of different racial groups promoted;

Indirect discrimination is prevented and tackled and equality of opportunity promoted.

**(Prison Service Order 2800)**

#### **Maintenance of order and discipline...**

...At all times the treatment of prisoners shall be such as to encourage their self-respect and a sense of personal responsibility...

#### **Offences against discipline**

A prisoner is guilty of an offence against discipline if he – ...

...is disrespectful to any officer, or any person (other than a prisoner) who is at the prison for the purpose of working there, or any person visiting a prison;

...uses threatening, abusive or insulting words or behaviour;

...uses threatening, abusive or insulting racist words or behaviour...

#### **Interpretation of rule 51**

... For the purposes of rule 51 words, behaviour or material are racist if they demonstrate, or are motivated (wholly or partly) by, hostility to members of a racial group (whether identifiable or not) based on their membership (or presumed membership) of a racial group, and “membership”, “presumed”, “racial group” and “racially aggravated” shall have the meanings assigned to them by section 28 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998(a).

**(Prison Rules 1999 consolidated January 2010)**

Most participants in TPRP focus groups stated that derogatory terms such as ‘pikey’ and ‘gypo’ were commonly used by some staff and prisoners. On a number of occasions, prison staff informed TPRP of

ONE OFFICER  
WOULDN'T LET  
ME HAVE THE  
WEIGHTS IN  
THE GYM. HE  
SAID I'D STEAL  
THEM TO SELL  
FOR SCRAP,  
WHEN I'M  
LOCKED AWAY  
IN HERE!

instances of racist name-calling. On one of TPRP's visits for a focus group, a prison officer informed TPRP that fellow officers had used the term 'pikies' while assembling participants. Traveller prisoners often felt that such name-calling was unremarkable because of its frequency. They did however feel that if they were to use racist language about an officer or another prisoner then they would be punished. Traveller prisoners also stated that because they rarely complained about racist treatment by other prisoners and instead sought redress themselves with perpetrators, they were often doubly victimised.

Some Traveller prisoners felt that the acceptability of terms such as 'paddy' and persistent allusions to stereotypes of Irish people as intellectually inferior, unpredictable and drunken were offensive. One prisoner made the point that constant talk by prison officers which depicted Irish people as alcoholics might be acceptable in certain circumstances but that in prison, when one could not respond for fear of incurring punishment, such stereotypes had a demoralising effect on prisoners from an Irish background.

Most worryingly, some prisons appeared not to treat racism directed towards Irish Traveller prisoners seriously. TPRP found evidence that the use of derogatory terms, practices which tended to make access to services more difficult for Travellers than others, and the handling of complaints, indicated an acceptance of prejudice directed towards this prisoner group.

### 5.3.1 Prison Atmosphere

They keep themselves to themselves. (Prison chaplain, Midlands)

The inability to participate in services caused by poor literacy has created an atmosphere in which Irish Travellers are deemed by some prison staff to be, at best, disinterested in education and rehabilitation and at worst, uncooperative. This scenario appears to have contributed, in some instances, to a negative perception of Irish Travellers amongst prison staff, in turn leading, on occasion, to a breakdown in communication between staff and prisoners. A breakdown in communication between prison staff and a prisoner will only ever produce a detrimental effect on the prisoner involved. In many cases, we found that Traveller prisoners feeling belittled by individual officers attempted to avoid all but minimal contact with staff.

When I asked him [a prison officer] what had happened my app [application] he said it must have been in his trousers when he put them in the washing machine. So I haven't bothered going back to him. (Irish Traveller prisoner, North West)

As a result of limited participation in prison services due mainly to poor literacy TPRP found that there was a widespread impression that Travellers were simply insular and had no interest in engaging with services. This perception appeared to reinforce disengagement by Travellers with services in prison. Indeed, this characterisation of

Irish Travellers has contributed to a vicious circle in which they are considered 'a hard to reach group' and therefore culturally appropriate services are deemed unnecessary, by virtue of the current low levels of Travellers accessing services.

Although not many Travellers have been identified, we can run a prisoner group if demand warrants it. (Equalities Officer, London)

An example of this mutual mistrust (and a strategy to overcome it) was observed during one prison visit to a recently initiated Travellers' group meeting in the Midlands. A number of Traveller prisoners stated that they 'wouldn't ask for anything from them [staff],' perceiving unfair treatment from some officers. The group named officers who they trusted and all did accept that some officers would try to help if asked. However, the group generally made it clear that a sense of mistrust of some staff meant that in general, they were unlikely to ask for assistance from staff.

In the course of the meeting, the Traveller prisoners raised a series of issues regarding phone calls, prison visits, diversity representatives, employment and a listener scheme amongst others. One member of staff present managed to resolve the vast majority of issues, firstly by clarifying prison policy and then by acting on the outstanding requests for assistance. Remarkably, many of the Irish Travellers requesting information had been in this particular prison for a significant length of time and so, one would have assumed, would know how to access prison services. Yet the Travellers at the meeting had limited or no knowledge of issues they regarded as important, such as the possibility of exchanging prison visits for phone calls. Up to this point, the Irish Travellers in this prison, it appeared, were unaware of how to access services and facilities in the prison.

As a result of not knowing how to access services and facilities, the Travellers in this prison by and large did not try to access them. Crucially, Travellers at this meeting expressed satisfaction that procedures had been explained to them and that they could thereby better access prison services. Likewise, the prison officer expressed satisfaction and surprise that the resolution of many issues for Travellers was simply a matter of explaining policy and processing applications.

WE ARE GOING THROUGH A SPATE OF BULLYING AT THE MOMENT AND ONE OF THE GROUPS TARGETED HAVE BEEN A GROUP OF THREE TRAVELLER LADS. THERE HAVE BEEN THREATS AND ABUSIVE NAMES SHOUTED BUT THEY WON'T SAY WHO IS THE RING LEADER AS THEY DON'T WANT TO BE SEEN AS 'GRASSES'. THE LADS THEMSELVES HAVE REQUESTED TO STAY IN THEIR CELLS AND TO MOVE PRISONS. WHAT REALLY DISTURBS US IS THAT THEY SAY SOME STAFF TREAT THEM LIKE THIS.

(Prison Officer)

I'VE HEARD A LOT OF OFFICERS SAY 'PIKEY'... BUT THERE ARE A LOT OF GOOD OFFICERS TOO.

LET'S BE HONEST, WE [IRISH TRAVELLERS] HAVEN'T ALWAYS HELPED OURSELVES BUT WHEN YOU GROW UP AND ALWAYS HEAR YOU'RE NOTHING... WELL IT HAS AN EFFECT.

PEOPLE ARE RACIST TO TRAVELLERS BUT ALL ETHNICITIES GET RACISM.

WE'RE THE VERY LAST RUNG ON THE LADDER, THE LOWEST. YOU CAN SEE IT IN THEIR EYES. THE WAY THEY TREAT YOU – WE NEVER GET THE BENEFIT OF DOUBT.

A NUMBER OF RIRFS [RACIST INCIDENT REPORTING FORMS] HAVE BEEN ISSUED BUT IT'S JUST THE SAME OLD FACES.

(Diversity Manager)

## 6. OFFENCES AND SENTENCING

### 6.1 Findings

	All Prisoners		Irish Travellers	
	#	%	#	%
Violence against the person	23,612	28	67	22.6
Drug offences	12,692	15	5	1.7
Sexual offences	10,594	12.6	13	4.4
Robbery	10,359	12.3	43	14.5
Other offences	9,719	11.5	30	10.1
Burglary	8,318	9.9	78	26.4
Theft and Handling	5,124	6.1	23	7.8
Fraud and Forgery	1,888	2.2	9	3
Not recorded / Unknown	1,027	1.2	13	4.4
Motoring offences	989	1.2	15	5.1

Table 5: 296 Respondents

	All Prisoners		Irish Travellers	
	#	%	#	%
<b>Sentenced</b>	71,744	85	245	84.5
<b>Remand</b>	12,706	15	45	15.5

Table 6: 290 Respondents

	Official statistics (78,663)		Irish Travellers	
	#	%	#	%
<b>Remand</b>	12,706	16.1	45	15.5
<b>Less or equal to 6 months</b>	5,532	7	20	6.9
<b>&gt;6 months to &lt;12 months</b>	2,564	3.3	6	2.1
<b>12 months to &lt; 4 years</b>	20,674	26.3	85	29.3
<b>&gt; 4 years</b>	37,187	47.3	124	42.4

Table 7: 290 Respondents, 11 (3.8%) prisoners responded as sentenced but did not specify length

The research identified that 26.4% of Irish Travellers in prison were serving immediate custodial sentences or on remand for burglary offences. This was closely followed by offences relating to violence against a person at 22.6%, which can be broken down to 4.7% murder, 1.7% manslaughter and 16.2% non-fatal harm. Robbery was the next most common at 14.5%. For theft and handling stolen

goods, 7.8% were detained, of which 5.1% were for theft and 2.7% for handling. Motoring offences were the cause of 5.1% being detained, which can be broken down to 2.4% for dangerous driving, 0.3% of reckless driving, 1% for taking without consent and 1.4% for other driving offences. Of the remaining prisoners, 4.4% were detained for sexual offences, 1.7% for drug offences and 10.1% for other offences. The remaining 4.4% of the responses failed to indicate an offence.

These results can be compared with statistics for all prisoners recorded during the same week. Table 5 displays the TPRP's figures alongside statistics recorded through a survey of the overall prison population carried out by the Ministry of Justice as to the type of offences.<sup>29</sup>

TPRP also found that 84.5% of Irish Travellers in prison were serving sentences. Those on remand accounted for 15.5% of the population. These results are compared to figures recorded by the Ministry of Justice for the entire prison population in Table 6.<sup>30</sup>

## 6.2 Context

In more recent decades the traditional skills of barter and trade between Travellers and the general community have changed. A thing of the past is the nomadic tinsmith in rural life who performed a service in exchange for goods or food and who moved relatively freely in a society where most people were not particularly affluent anyway, but were largely self sufficient (Gmelch and Gmelch, 1976). The whole basis of ...society has shifted, it has become more polarised and sharply divided on class lines (Kelleher, 2007; Balanda and Wilde, 2001 and 2003), and traditional skills have been replaced by mass production of goods and services on which everyone now relies and must find monetary means to purchase. Some Travellers have adapted well with antique dealing, horse trading, sports and music participation but the mass of the community has not. The lack of a skill or trade and lack of earnings have created a dependence on state welfare and contributed to a sense of frustration and futility, according to our findings. (UCD, 2010, p.165)

## 6.3 Commentary

While there is a similar correlation between the statistics for Irish Travellers and the general prison population in respect of nature of sentences, there appears striking differences in the data spread for committed and alleged offences. The research has identified that 51.7% of the offences committed by Irish Travellers involve the unlawful obtaining of property.<sup>31</sup> This can be compared to a corresponding figure of 30.5% for all prisoners nationwide. Furthermore, burglary accounts for 26.4 % of the offences committed by Irish Travellers, which can be compared to a figure of 9.9% for the entire prison population.

This high proportion of offences involving misappropriated property is typical of a minority group who are socially and economically marginalised in society.

Recent research indicates that income inequality is the most consistent structural correlate of rates for theft and other forms of property crime. All forms of theft tend to occur disproportionately in poor, isolated, socially disadvantaged neighbourhoods. (Miller, 2009)

In criminology, the rationale for this occurrence lies in 'strain theory' which, put simply, suggests that a lack of legitimate opportunities to achieve material success will lead to criminal activity as an alternative method to achieving it. Therefore, in Traveller communities, where employment is scarce and the prospect of moving out of poverty seems remote, one would expect to find higher rates of offences involving misappropriated property. This results from the fact Travellers have one of the lowest levels of legitimate opportunities, and therefore unlawfully obtaining the property of another becomes a conceivable means to success. In this way, the proportional spread of Irish Traveller offences is indicative and the consequence of a lifestyle with everyday survival as its primary aim.

<sup>29</sup> Table 1.3a, Offender Management Statistics Quarterly Bulletin July to September 2010, England and Wales.

<sup>30</sup> Table 1.1a, Offender Management Statistics Quarterly Bulletin July to September 2010, England and Wales.

<sup>31</sup> Percentages for Robbery, Burglary, Theft and Handling stolen goods, and Fraud and Forgery combined.

THEY DON'T TEND TO SIGN UP FOR EDUCATION CLASSES BECAUSE THEY FEEL AT A DISADVANTAGE.

(Prison chaplain)

NOW YOU NEED CARDS AND QUALIFICATIONS TO DO TRAVELLER JOBS. WE'RE BEING SHUT OUT. [ANOTHER RESPONDS:] THAT'S WHY YOU NEED TO GET THEM THINGS WHILE YOU'RE INSIDE. SKILLS AND ALL THAT.

YOU SEE A GENERATOR THERE, IT'S WORTH 400 POUND. THAT'LL LOOK AFTER YOUR FAMILY FOR A WEEK SO YOU TAKE IT.

NO TRAVELLER WANTS TO WORK FOR ANOTHER MAN, [MASS AGREEMENT] SO THERE'S NO POINT BOTHERING WITH COURSES HE'S NOT GOING TO USE.

YOU NEED TO BE ABLE TO READ AND WRITE FOR THE MODERN WORLD.

YOU'VE GOT TO MAKE THE EFFORT YOURSELF TO LEARN...IT'S NEVER GOING TO BE EASY BUT THEY COULD DO THINGS THAT WOULD HELP.

IF SOMEONE WRITES TO HIM HE WILL GET SOMEONE TO READ THE LETTER.



## 7. LITERACY & EDUCATION

### 7.1 Findings

#### Literacy Problems

	#	%
Yes	152	53.5
No	132	46.5

Table 8: 284 Respondents

#### Learning Difficulties

	#	%
Yes	71	25.5
No	207	74.5

Table 9: 278 Respondents

#### Requiring Basic Educational Intervention

	#	%
Yes	169	59.3
No	116	40.7

Table 10: 285 Respondents

#### Prison Jobs

	#	%
Yes	173	62.2
No	105	37.8

Table 11: 278 Respondents

The research identified that 53.5% of the population of Irish Travellers in prison were defined as having serious problems with literacy.<sup>32</sup> This can be compared with illiteracy rates in prison of 36% (National Audit Office, 2008a, p.11) to 42% (National Audit Office, 2008b, p.9).<sup>33</sup>

25.5% of Travellers were identified as having learning difficulties. 5.6% of responses specified that they had learning difficulties but did not indicate literacy problems. Therefore 59.3% of the total survey replies suggest a need for basic educational intervention.<sup>34</sup>

Establishing accurate figures regarding such a complex and possibly subjective matter as 'learning difficulties,' across the general prison

<sup>32</sup> It cannot be ruled out that TPRP's findings on levels of literacy may represent a significant under-reporting, given widespread reluctance to admit difficulties with literacy.

<sup>33</sup> Illiteracy in this instance is defined as below Reading Level 1.

<sup>34</sup> Literacy problems and learning difficulties are, of course, two distinct issues. However, both indicate a need for ameliorative educational intervention.

population is difficult. However, 59.3% does compare negatively with similar broad interpretations of 'learning difficulties':

20–30% of offenders have learning disabilities or difficulties that interfere with their ability to cope with the criminal justice system... The term learning disabilities or difficulties includes people who: experience difficulties in communicating and expressing themselves and understanding ordinary social cues; have unseen or hidden disabilities such as dyslexia; experience difficulties with learning and/or **have had disrupted learning experiences that have led them to function at a significantly lower level than the majority of their peers**; are on the autistic spectrum, including people with Asperger syndrome. (Prison Reform Trust, 2010, p.37. Emphasis added)

## 7.2 Context

### 7.2.1 Traveller Education Nationally

TPRP's findings represent a detailed picture of Traveller literacy of which HM Prison Service is already broadly aware:

... Irish Travellers...as they often had very low literacy levels, found it difficult to make applications or complaints. Overall, the Prison Service did not do enough to change its practices so that those with low reading skills could cope with prison life. (NOMS, 2008, p.48)

The CRE [Commission for Racial Equality, 2003] made specific reference to Irish Travellers and the fact that very low literacy levels made it difficult for them to make applications or complaints. (NOMS, 2008, p.54)

Low levels of literacy skills amongst Travellers often leads directly to reduced access to important services in prison:

It is a reality that prison life is a series of paper based processes. Prisoners' concerns are routinely addressed through the Requests and Complaints system which is a written system. Traditionally a substantial part of the maintenance of family ties is achieved through letter writing. Sentence progression may often require prisoner completion of offending behaviour – some of which depend upon literacy and numeracy skills. Adequate responses to reports which impact on parole decisions have to be in writing. It is also a reality borne out of the oral culture of GTR communities that low level literacy skills are endemic. It follows therefore that in a paper based environment, GTR prisoners are likely to face difficulties. This has potentially very wide ranging negative impacts. For instance; Are GTR prisoners adequately, accessing and able to use the Racist Incident Reporting Forms (RIRFs)? (Nacro, 2009, p.16)

Prisoners from Traveller backgrounds are another sub-group of BAME offenders who potentially face practical barriers to accessing services. Low literacy levels among Travellers....mean that they can miss out on information about provision; and, more broadly, their marginalised status within broader society can limit their capacity and willingness to request help. <sup>35</sup> (Clinks and Prison Reform Trust, 2010, p.33)

Prisoners with learning disabilities and difficulties are discriminated against personally, systemically and routinely as they enter and travel through the criminal justice system. (Prison Reform Trust, 2010, p.38)

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<sup>35</sup> For example, the terms and conditions form to be used by a prisoner applying to use the prison pinphone system is a three page, 638 word document (PSO 4400, Prisoner Communication). Likewise, prisoners must complete a full induction including a Physical Activity Readiness Questionnaire (PAR-Q form) in order to gain access to the prison gym, (PSO 4250 Physical Education). Indeed, access to almost all services in prison is dependent to some degree on written applications.

### 7.2.2 Traveller Education Nationally

Many Irish Travellers in prison are entering prison from a context of very low educational attainment:

The vast majority of Traveller pupils linger on the periphery of the education system. The situation has persisted for too long and the alarm bells rung in earlier reports have yet to be heeded. (Ofsted, 2003, p.6)

In all the authorities, Traveller pupils generally performed worse than their peers in any other minority ethnic group. (Ofsted, 2003, p.13)

In 2001 the data from one LEA [Local Education Authority] showed that only 33% of Traveller pupils gained Level 2 and above in reading and writing and that only 44% did so in mathematics at the end of Key Stage 1 compared with the national average of 84%, 86% and 91% respectively. (Ofsted, 2003, p.14)

Overall [school] participation rates ... are unacceptably low, at around 84% at Key Stage 2 and 47% at Key Stage 4. A very significant number of Traveller children, mainly at Key Stages 3 and 4, lack education. (Ofsted, 2003, p.10)

### 7.3 Commentary

...The purpose of education within prison is to address the offending behaviour of inmates, by improving employability and thus reduce the likelihood of re-offending upon release...

...Every prisoner able to profit from the education facilities provided at a prison shall be encouraged to do so.

...Educational classes shall be arranged at every prison and, subject to any directions of the Secretary of State, reasonable facilities shall be afforded to prisoners who wish to do so to improve their education by training by distance learning, private study and recreational classes, in their spare time.

...Special attention shall be paid to the education and training of prisoners with special educational needs, and if necessary they shall be taught within the hours normally allotted to work...

...Prison personnel within the establishment must have overall responsibility for managing the education contract, by ensuring that: ...Education will make a clear contribution to throughcare by forming links with the probation service, training and employment organisations to support prisoners' education, training or employment on release...

#### **Prison Service Order 4205**

TPRP found that low levels of literacy amongst Irish Traveller prisoners resulted in limited access to services in prison. Irish Traveller prisoners and prison staff attributed many of the most serious difficulties facing this prisoner group to the widespread inability to read and write.

In the five years following the CRE report, *Race Equality in Prisons* (2003), little progress was recorded on 'the very low levels' of literacy amongst Irish Travellers (NOMS, 2008). Our research indicates little or no progress on literacy levels amongst Irish Travellers from the publication of *Race Review 2008*, (NOMS, 2008) to date.

Many Irish Travellers entering prison are coming from a background where opportunities to gain literacy skills as children have been restricted. Irish Traveller males are expected to contribute to the family financially from a young age. As a result, extended schooling is often seen as a luxury a family cannot afford. Moreover, research shows that attempts by Traveller families to access education are often thwarted by prejudice and discrimination. Prisons are therefore dealing with a group who have very practical reasons for their limited schooling:

[Traveller families] report fears of racist bullying and the potential erosion of their community's moral code and values. In addition, they perceive the secondary curriculum as irrelevant: there is a very strong tradition of starting work in the family business at a young age. Whatever the reasons, many Traveller children miss opportunities to acquire the skills and knowledge necessary for full and equal participation in society. (Ofsted, 2003, p.11)

Consequently, it is important for staff working with Travellers in prison to recognise the cultural basis for poor levels of literacy. It is also important to recognise that formal education at school often entails experiences of prejudice and humiliation for Travellers, obstacles which must be overcome in order to improve literacy levels in prison:

In many respects the situation in which the Travellers' children find themselves also illustrates to an extreme degree the experience of prejudice and alienation which faces many other ethnic minority children. (The Swann Report, quoted in Dept. for Children, Schools and Families, 2009, p.3)

In this context an alternative approach for engaging Irish Travellers in education and specifically literacy programmes within prisons is necessary. Education providers in prison need to accept that there are specific reasons for aversion to traditional education programmes amongst Travellers. Unfortunately, providers in some prisons visited not only failed to recognise the unique fears of Travellers with regard to education but in some cases appeared to reinforce the pre-conceptions of Travellers. For example, literacy classes frequently start at Reading Level 1 when many of the Irish Travellers have not attained Level 1 because of disruption to their schooling. This contributes to a sense of embarrassment and reinforces the belief that formal education is not for Travellers:

You don't want to be the stupidest in the class. When you go to the literacy classes the others can all read, they're more advanced. (Irish Traveller prisoner, Midlands)

There was a fundamental objection to current literacy programmes expressed by Travellers and that was, that the current models failed to establish the trust of Travellers. Travellers expressed a frustration at the education services for implicitly undermining their extensive skills which were valued by their community, such as building, landscaping or craft skills, by approaching Travellers as if they were deficient. As Irish Travellers don't necessarily always see a lack of literacy amongst themselves as a deficiency (especially outside of prison) they felt that some classroom approaches damaged the necessary trust upon which adult education is based:

All these men are used to hard work, labouring and landscaping and they expect us to go into a classroom like children. The men want to learn...they know they need it [education] but it's got to be right for them...not treating them as children, they won't take that. (Irish Traveller prisoner, London)

YOU NEED  
LITERACY TO  
DO BUILDING,  
DECORATING.  
THAT'S NOT  
RIGHT IS IT?

Traveller participants in TPRP's focus groups indicated that the low levels of participation in education services and in particular on literacy courses had three distinct causes: 1) the unsuitability of current educational models, including teacher-student hierarchies; 2) the lack of suitable courses; and 3) a rejection of education per se as incompatible with Travellers' image of themselves.

### 7.3.1 Occupational Courses

The purpose of the training and treatment of convicted prisoners shall be to encourage and assist them to lead a good and useful life.

**Prison Rules 1999 consolidated January 2010**

Using focus groups of Gypsy, Traveller and Romany prisoners, NACRO (2009) similarly found that these prisoners perceived unequal access to work [outside of prison] as a result of racial prejudice. **High value was placed, therefore, on learning a trade, self-employment and business start-up advice to assist future nomadic resettlement.** (Clinks and Prison Reform Trust, 2010, p.14. Emphasis added)

TPRP found that most Travellers in prison were eager to access skills training and business start-up advice appropriate for their particular resettlement needs as Irish Travellers. The participants expressed interest in training which would improve their ability to be successfully employed.

However, in prison, the poor levels of literacy amongst Traveller prisoners have a significant impact on their engagement with occupational training opportunities. One of the more striking findings in terms of Traveller access to education in prison is that without literacy skills they are prevented (in most cases) by the education department from pursuing skills training that would significantly improve their resettlement opportunities. Occupational skills training is often available but inaccessible for many Travellers because they do not possess the requisite literacy standards to embark on courses such as bricklaying, painting and plumbing. As Irish Travellers, predominantly prefer self-employment in manual trades this barrier to developing skills which they would very likely use upon release is frustrating, counter-intuitive and counter-productive. Indeed, in the Traveller focus groups, the reluctance of prison education services to allow Travellers onto occupational courses was interpreted by many Travellers as a

deliberate attempt to hinder them and to highlight their difficulties with literacy.

### 7.3.2 Sentence Plan

HM Prison Service uses the Offender Assessment System, (OASys) to identify the reasons for an individual prisoner's offending behaviour and how to change this offending behaviour. Every prisoner who is going to be in prison for 12 months or more has a sentence made through OASys. OASys is then used to draw up a prisoner's Sentence Plan. As part of this plan the prisoner will have to attend courses to help change offending behaviour. These courses include Enhanced Thinking Skills, Cognitive Skills, Controlling Anger and Learning to Manage It, (CALM), Sex Offender Treatment Programmes, (SOTPs), Healthy Relationships Programme and the Chromis Programme for people who exhibit violent behaviour. These courses assume a certain level of literacy demanding reading of course materials and the completion of questionnaires and forms.

Overall, the Review Team [expressed] particular concerns relating to Gypsy Traveller Roma prisoners included: difficulties accessing services, including offender behaviour programmes, as the literacy level required was too high... (NOMS, 2008, p.59)

THE LOW  
LEVELS OF  
LITERACY  
AMONG  
TRAVELLERS  
MAKES THEM  
FEEL  
SOMETIMES  
LIKE SECOND  
CLASS  
CITIZENS.

(Prison Chaplain)

With a minimum of 53.5% of Travellers having serious literacy problems, a rehabilitation strategy which demands literacy skills without firstly delivering a successful literacy skills programme, is defective and financially wasteful in terms of Irish Travellers. From the point of view of the prison education providers, the current sentence plan system is beginning from a starting point which excludes over half of the Traveller prison population. As a result of this disoriented approach, over half of Irish Traveller prisoners freed from prison have their offending behaviour go unchallenged during detention. The current situation means that neither society into which prisoners return, nor the majority of Irish Traveller prisoners benefit from rehabilitative interventions. Instead society is left with the consequent social and economic costs of recidivism.<sup>36</sup>

### 7.3.3 Literacy: Perception and Progress within Prison

As participation in behaviour management courses, identified in a prisoner's sentence plan, is considered to demonstrate a willingness to change and perhaps an actual change in behaviour then the opposite is also considered to be true. A prisoner not engaging with behaviour management courses is deemed not to be addressing behaviour which led to his or her offending. However, the inability to participate in courses which require a level of literacy means that automatically over half of all Irish Traveller prisoners serving 12 months or more are by virtue of their poor literacy skills deemed not to be dealing with their offending behaviour.

<sup>36</sup> TPRP's findings mirror research by the Prison Reform Trust which 'found that there are a significant number of prisoners who, because they have a learning disability or difficulty, are excluded from aspects of the prison regime including offending behaviour programmes,' (Prison Reform Trust, 2010, p.16).

YOU HAVE TO  
FILL IN  
PAPERWORK  
BEFORE YOU  
CAN DO A  
LITERACY  
COURSE!  
THAT'S WHY I  
AVOID  
EDUCATION.  
I JUST GO TO  
THE  
WORKSHOPS.

The unintended consequences of this situation are subtle but immense in the lives of Irish Traveller prisoners in England and Wales. Non- participation (or the inability to participate) in rehabilitative courses means that discretionary privileges such as re-categorisation to a less stringent regime or prison, enhanced status, successful applications for Home Detention Curfew, (HDC), and Release on Temporary Licence, (ROTL), are much more difficult to obtain.

Specific concern was expressed in TPRP's focus groups that Travellers were proportionately over-represented in terms of prisoners serving Indeterminate Public Protection Sentences, (IPPs). The IPP sentence means that until a prisoner can demonstrate a reduction in risk, in part achieved by progressing through the behavioural and educational development courses included in their sentence plan, it is unlikely that the prisoner would get parole. Therefore, Irish Travellers serving IPP sentences are very likely to remain in prison longer than other prisoners as poor literacy bars full engagement with the requirements of their individual sentence plans.

A report by HM Chief Inspectors of Prison and Probation described this predicament - prisoners being unable to access the interventions they needed to secure their release as 'Kafka-esque'. (Quoted in Prison Reform Trust, 2010, p.16)

More broadly, the inability to participate in behavioural programmes inhibits a prisoner's progress through his sentence plan and thereby causes a commensurate reduction in the accessing of, or opportunity for accessing, prison privileges. This uneven situation creates a sense of frustration amongst Travellers in prison, who, frequently convinced of their own willingness to change, resent both being denied the opportunity to demonstrate this change and access to resulting privileges.

The inability to participate in behaviour management courses also prevents Travellers from engaging in well-established rehabilitation courses. Rehabilitation courses such as CALM, Chromis and Enhanced Thinking Skills are successful, effective courses. During the research, prison staff told how successful these courses were for those who wanted to make a change to their offending behaviour. However, because of poor literacy levels these rehabilitation courses are frequently inaccessible to Irish Travellers. Irish Travellers as a result are often excluded from courses whose rehabilitative content could assist in their successful resettlement and reintegration with family, community and wider society.

#### **7.3.4 Literacy: Prison Jobs**

62.2% of Travellers were identified as having prison jobs. This was a positive finding which indicated the dependability of Travellers and their eagerness to participate in prison life generally. However, some Travellers did voice concern about their inability to get prison jobs.

Most of those refused prison jobs were told that it was because of their poor literacy skills which presented health and safety concerns. Some prisoners felt that their inability to read was a pretext for discrimination, mentioning perceptions of them as untrustworthy or unclean:

I don't need to be able to read to push a brush on the wing,' (Irish Traveller prisoner, London).

Prison jobs are very important in the lives of prisoners, giving them the chance to establish self-confidence, self-respect and develop reliability. Additionally, prison jobs can provide a prisoner with much needed money required for phone calls and small purchases. For these reasons, it is important that Travellers have an equal opportunity to access prison employment and that their inability to read and write is not automatically used to prevent them taking up jobs. Indeed, encouraging reliable role models from within diverse ethnic groups through employment signals to other prisoners of that group that there are opportunities for personal development within the establishment.

### **7.3.5 Literacy: Visiting Orders, Applications, Complaints**

The CRE made specific reference to the fact that low literacy levels amongst Travellers made it difficult for them to make applications or complaints. (NOMS, 2008, p.54)

Arranging a prison visit generally necessitates the prisoner filling in a paper request for a visiting order to be sent to the would-be visitor(s). One participant in a Traveller focus group stated that he had had his request for a visiting order for his mother refused three times in the first weeks of his imprisonment, being told that 'It wasn't filled out properly.' The prisoner felt that instead of advising on proper procedure the officer was trying to make it difficult for him to maintain family contact by capitalising on his poor literacy.

Prisons need systems to record and organise requests which in turn, mean the use of applications and forms. For a group with poor literacy levels and infrequent experience of form-filling, this can have the result of limiting access to services and facilities even within a non-discriminatory context. However, many Irish Travellers felt that their poor levels of literacy were routinely used as an excuse to prevent access to services and facilities within prisons. One Traveller prisoner commented:

It's like this. When I first came in and I asked for something I was given an app [application] to fill in. Nobody else was, they didn't have to... they could all write but I was given one [an application] because they knew I couldn't fill it in. That's why I learned to read and write. (Irish Traveller prisoner, location undisclosed)

It is common for Traveller prisoners to have an application refused on the grounds that the form has not been properly filled out. This situation increases a prisoner's frustration with the system, his or her sense of isolation and inhibits access to support within prison: rehab, probation and resettlement; and outside prison: family contact.

### **7.3.6 Literacy: Conclusion**

The widespread inability to read or write amongst Travellers in prison places an unequal hardship upon this group. As a group that zealously asserts its independence and self-reliance in all aspects of life, the reality of living life in a system that depends on form filling and written applications for the most trivial request creates a tension between the system and Travellers. One Traveller who was unable to make a successful request for aspirin due to poor literacy stated: 'I'll never ask for anything again. If they don't want to help us they just throw paperwork at us.' (Irish Traveller prisoner, North West). The vulnerability created by illiteracy has led to an already marginalised group being forced further into the margins of prison life. The system appears, to many Irish Travellers, to be impossibly slanted against them and so many retreat psychologically from engaging with their offending behaviour, confident that they are not being treated

fairly. This situation was acutely described during one focus group when Travellers laughed ironically at the process for submitting complaints which invariably requires a good standard of literacy.

Overall, the low levels of literacy amongst Irish Travellers in prison have far reaching consequences for the individuals involved, their families, their communities and wider society. Traveller prisoners without literacy skills languish with the same skill set with which they entered prison, only more frustrated at what appears to be deliberate attempts to refuse services to Travellers. Traveller families, upon release of a loved one receive an ex-offender home with a similar set of skills as he or she had upon imprisonment with all the risks of recidivism that comes with wholly unproductive incarceration. More broadly, society suffers as a consequence of prisons' inability to successfully tackle offending behaviour and reduce the economic and social cost of criminality.

THERE'S NO USE HAVING THE WRONG  
TYPE OF EDUCATION FOR A MAN WHO HAS  
WORKED 20 YEARS ON THE ROADS.

I'M GIVEN A LONG HOUSING FORM TO FILL  
OUT. WHAT IF I CAN'T READ OR WRITE?  
THERE'S NO HELP!

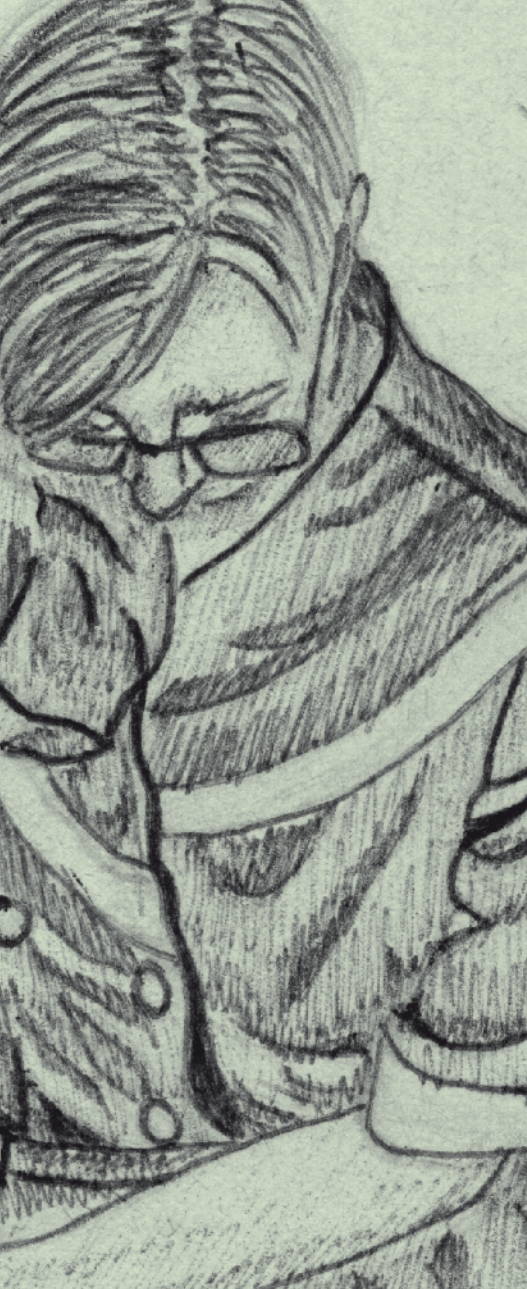
TOE BY TOE IS GOOD. IN FOUR MONTHS OF  
DOING IT I COULD WRITE A LETTER HOME.

WE GET CALLED PIKEY AND GYPO BY OTHER PRISONERS,  
BUT WE'D NEVER GO TO THE OFFICERS ABOUT IT.

ACCESS TO EDUCATION IS AVAILABLE BUT SOME FEEL  
UNCONFIDENT DUE TO THEIR EDUCATIONAL  
BACKGROUNDS.

(Diversity Officer)

I DIDN'T GO TO SCHOOL BECAUSE I WAS TRAVELLING.



## 8. PHYSICAL HEALTH

### 8.1 Findings

#### Physical Health Problems

	#	%
Yes	69	24.6
No	212	75.4

Table 12: 281 Respondents

Nature of Problem	#
Musculoskeletal	20
Respiratory	17
Cardiovascular	9
Neurological	9
Endocrinological	4
Other	4
Gastrointestinal	2

Table 13: 65 Specified Responses

Common Physical Health Problems	#
Asthma	12
Back	10
Epilepsy	9
Arthritis	7

Table 14

### 8.2 The Context

- **50% of Irish Travellers die before their 39th birthday** <sup>37</sup>
- **70% of Irish Travellers die before the age of 59 years** <sup>38</sup>
- **The life expectancy of a Traveller male born in 2008 is 16 years less than the UK average** <sup>39</sup>
- **The life expectancy of a Traveller female born in 2008 is 11.8 years less than the UK average** <sup>40</sup>
- **Travellers experience worse health, yet are less likely to receive effective, continuous healthcare** <sup>41</sup>

37 Brack and Monaghan, 2007, p.32

38 Brack and Monaghan, 2007, p.32

39 Based on data from the Office for National Statistics, at: <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/cc/nugget.asp?id=168> and the All Ireland Traveller Health Study, (2010, p. 94).

40 Based on data from the Office for National Statistics, at: <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/cc/nugget.asp?id=168> and the All Ireland Traveller Health Study, (2010, p. 94).

41 Cemlyn et al, 2009, p. v

### 8.3 Commentary

The study found that 24.6% of Irish Travellers were identified as having a physical illness.<sup>42</sup> Given that the survey was conducted by prison officials not generally working within prison health facilities, these figures may represent a significant undercount.

Healthcare in prison is stretched due to the concentrated demand on limited services by a population with high levels of serious medical conditions such as drug and alcohol dependency. However, it is important for prison staff to note that Irish Travellers experience worse health and in general die earlier than other sections of the population. As a recent study of Irish Travellers found:

With regard to health status of Travellers ... this population subgroup subjectively rates their health in a positive manner, but in fact have substantially higher rates of ill-health affecting them on a day-to-day basis than is demonstrated in the comparator populations. They have a higher burden of chronic diseases, and higher measures of risk factors such as smoking, high blood pressure, cholesterol, and dietary consumption of fried foods. (UCD, 2010, p.80)

Therefore, Irish Travellers generally, enter prison at a higher risk of ill-health than other prisoner groups. This should alert prison staff to the greater risk and perhaps also the urgency of responding to expressions of ill-health by this prisoner group. When a Traveller prisoner voices concern about his or her health it may indicate an urgent need because Travellers access healthcare only infrequently outside prison and consequently experience negative health outcomes.

Irish Travellers are accepting of ill-health. This attitude that poor health is virtually unavoidable is understandable with levels of mortality in the under 39 age group reaching 50%. Experiencing close relatives dying at a young age has contributed to Travellers often assuming that ill-health and one's own early death is almost inevitable. A 2007 report on the health of Gypsies and Travellers commented:

Many described their state of health, irrespective of its severity or extent, in terms of restrictions on their ability to perform daily tasks, and appeared to accept chronic ill health as long as day-to-day management of symptoms could be readily achieved. (Van Cleemput et al, 2007, p.207)

Prison staff are faced with the dual challenge of enabling Travellers to access healthcare in spite of the norm of avoidance of these services and secondly, managing the markedly poor health profile of this ethnic group. *Race Review 2008* stated that, 'Challenges ... remain in ensuring that establishments are making their services accessible to Gypsy Traveller and Roma prisoners' (NOMS, 2008, p.15). During the research a number of Traveller prisoners expressed their frustration with the prison health service, feeling that their ethnicity, illiteracy and speaking style meant that they were less likely to get help than other prisoner groups. NOMS highlighted the need for improved access to services in prison for this group in 2008:

[Regarding] Gypsy Traveller Roma prisoners in most establishments, further work is needed to ensure equality of access to goods, facilities and services for this group. A priority area both nationally and locally is to ensure that the needs of Gypsy Traveller Roma prisoners are addressed. (NOMS, 2008, p.61)

Unfortunately, to date, TPRP found little evidence of strategies at a local or national level to encourage Travellers to access services, in particular healthcare where their needs are pressing. This finding was disappointing given the concerns expressed by NOMS on this matter in *Race Review 2008*, (2008, p.59).

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<sup>42</sup> Even individuals 'with non-psychiatric disorders such as epilepsy can find themselves over-represented in the criminal justice system if their illness is sufficiently stigmatising,' (Linehan et al, 2002, vol. 19, p.76). This is significant given the apparently high levels of incarceration amongst this group and the comparatively high levels of poor physical health amongst Travellers.

Some health providers in prisons remain unaware that Irish Travellers are often unfamiliar with bureaucratic norms taken for granted by most people in the UK. This creates misunderstanding which when combined with a demonstrative speaking style can prevent access to services. The Traveller prisoners who discussed access to healthcare stated that they tried to avoid the healthcare unit principally because they found it humiliating to ask for assistance and then have the request hindered in some way (e.g. through illiteracy, misunderstanding or mistrust).

The peripheral status of Irish Travellers in terms of service provision is an obstacle to rehabilitation, to relationships with staff and to Travellers' well-being. While TPRP received a number of responses from prison staff that maintained that healthcare provision was equally poor for all prisoners, it remains the case that Travellers generally suffer poorer health and as a result will need commensurate service access. The current state of affairs was identified by NOMS:

...Irish Travellers ... as they often had very low literacy levels, found it difficult to make applications or complaints. Overall, the Prison Service did not do enough to change its practices so that those with low reading skills could cope with prison life. (NOMS, 2008, p.48)

Clearly, a credible and effective strategy to deal with healthcare provision for this significant minority within the prison population is needed in order to enable this group to better 'cope with prison life.' TPRP found that a strategy to allow greater access by Irish Travellers to healthcare services in prison should acknowledge the following:

- The evidence of health studies establishing that:

...the health status of Gypsies and Travellers is much poorer than the general population. Parry et al (2004) found that, even after controlling for socio-economic status and comparing to other marginalised groups, Gypsies and Travellers have worse health than others... (Cemlyn et al, 2009, p.48-49)

- Travellers are less likely to access healthcare than other sections of the population because of fatalism, fear of illness, their nomadic lifestyle outside prison and experiences of discrimination from providers.

Travellers show...a low utilisation of other hospital services including aftercare, preventive services and specialised services such as psychiatric care. Low levels of literacy and a nomadic lifestyle have been identified as barriers to Travellers gaining access to the health services. (Linehan et al, 2002, p.79)

- Travellers in prison find it difficult to understand the need for bureaucracy involved in accessing services such as healthcare because their experiences in their home and working life, often, do not necessitate reading, writing and record-keeping. As a result Travellers often perceive applications to access these services as unnecessary obstacles which result in a low uptake and the grim fatalism expressed by one prisoner regarding health services after feeling humiliated about his inability to write:

I'll never go back to them. They done nothing for me. (Irish Traveller prisoner, Midlands, commenting on a visit to the healthcare unit)

THERE IS A LACK OF UNDERSTANDING AMONG STAFF AND OTHER PRISONERS OF TRAVELLER CULTURE AND SOMETIMES RACISM FROM STAFF.

(Prison chaplain)

THIS PRISONER FEELS OFFICERS STEREOTYPE HIM AS HE'S A TRAVELLER BUT HE HAS NEVER SUBMITTED A COMPLAINT REGARDING THIS.

(Prison Officer)

A YOUNG TRAVELLER HUNG HIMSELF LAST WEEK. IF HE'D HAD OTHER TRAVELLERS TO TALK TO HE'D HAVE BEEN OK.



## 9. MENTAL HEALTH

### 9.1 Findings

#### Mental Health Problems

	#	%
Yes	71	26.1
No	201	73.9

Table 15: 272 Respondents

Nature of Problem	#
Depression	31
Psychotic Disorders	16
Other	9
ADHD	4
Personality Disorder	4
Suicidal / Self-harm	3
Bipolar Disorder	2

Table 16: 69 Specified Responses

26.1% of Irish Travellers in prison were identified as having mental health problems. In comparison, it is estimated that 10% of the prison population has 'serious mental health problems.'<sup>43</sup>

### 9.2 The Context

- 9% of all Irish Traveller deaths generally in a 10-year sample were suicides.<sup>44</sup>
- There is a gross over-representation of Irish Travellers in forensic psychiatric admissions to the national secure psychiatric facility in Ireland.<sup>45</sup>
- 'We have been concerned with the high levels of Traveller admissions into our mental health unit...' (Diversity Manager, London)
- [A] compounding issue is the traditional problem of finding employment, which is tied in with identity and personal self-esteem in the accounts of Travellers themselves. The tight-knit community has positive effects, but also negative, in that there is literally little personal space for individuals and strong incentive to take part in group activities that can be damaging...Add to this a chronic problem with bridging to

<sup>43</sup> Michael Spurr, Chief Operating Officer of the National Offender Management Service, speaking in September 2008, (Prison Reform Trust, 2010, p.39).

<sup>44</sup> Brack & Monaghan, 2007, p.35

<sup>45</sup> Psychiatric admissions of Irish Travellers transferred from Irish prisons to the national secure psychiatric facility, the Central Mental Hospital, (Linehan et al, 2002, vol. 19, p.76)

the general world around them and the corrosive daily relations with the general population Travellers themselves describe, and the mix is complete of poor self-esteem and self-efficacy in an unsupportive environment. There are a number of examples of fatalistic thinking in the narratives, particularly in trying to break the cycle of education and employability. There is ample evidence in these data of risk factors for mental ill-health, depression and suicide, whether from the quantitative census, the qualitative consultation or the mortality study. (UCD, 2010, p.161)

- Travellers at all points of interface report higher levels of discrimination than expected and lower levels of trust in others and in health service providers. Even if this was a collective misperception and had no basis in objective fact, such a perception is likely to lower a sense of efficacy and self esteem and this is damaging to mental health and wellbeing... Regrettably, it is all too likely that there is a very real basis to this perceived discrimination. The general population often, with honourable exceptions, has little time for Travellers. (UCD, 2010, p.165)

### 9.3 Commentary

All incoming prisoners must be medically examined by a qualified member of the Healthcare team, or a competent and trained HCA... to determine whether they have any short or long term physical or mental health needs, including disability, drugs or alcohol issues, and ensure that any follow up action is taken, that anyone who needs to know about individual prisoners' ongoing healthcare requirements is informed, and that actions taken are recorded in the appropriate record. If a prisoner is identified as being at risk of suicide or self-harm an ACCT must be opened. Disability data should be entered on Prison-NOMIS [National Offender Management Information System], if the prisoner consents.

#### **Prison Service Instruction 52/2010**

As all incoming prisoners receive a medical examination during their first days in custody, healthcare teams should be mindful that Irish Travellers experience high levels of mental illness and suicide. The profile of Irish Traveller prisoners in England and Wales is marked by high levels of self-harm and depression.<sup>46</sup> The poor state of mental health found amongst Irish Travellers in prison, mirrors in many respects the poor mental health of Travellers in the population generally. However, our research has identified key factors which exacerbate the poor mental health of Travellers in prison.

#### **9.3.1 Access to Services**

Prisoners' inability to participate fully in the prison regime leaves them at greater psychological risk as they spend more time alone with little to occupy themselves. (Prison Reform Trust, 2010, p.38)

The Commission for Racial Equality, (CRE, 2003), reported that the difficulties in accessing prison services in general, experienced by Irish Travellers is a major contributory factor in the high levels of detected mental illness amongst this group:

Failure area: Access to goods, facilities or services... In the case of Irish Travellers, this is compounded by prejudice and discrimination, leading to high levels of self-harm. (Commission for Racial Equality, 2003, p.83)

<sup>46</sup> TPRP found frequent expressions of concern made by prison staff in regards to Travellers' mental health and in particular self-harming amongst this group. A Diversity Manager in a London prison stated, 'We have been concerned with the high levels of Traveller admissions into our mental health unit.' A London based chaplain explained that, 'Many of the young Traveller men don't seem able to cope in prison...Many of them cut themselves.' Fr. Ged Barry, a prison chaplain in HMP Full Sutton also commented on the issue in 2007, 'I was fed up with burying young Traveller men,' (Travellers' Times, Autumn, 2007, p.12).

A 2008 report on Gypsy and Traveller health identifies a dual feature of Traveller engagement with health services. Prior to accessing services, many Travellers are reluctant to engage because they may experience prejudice or embarrassment as a result of poor literacy. When Travellers do access these services, they are sometimes mistrustful of staff which can, in turn, impair a constructive dialogue:

Gypsies' and Travellers' general experiences of discrimination and racism contribute to a sense of devalued identity, characterised by feelings of shame and humiliation, which contribute to the specific ways in which they experience social exclusion. Shame and attempts to ward off shame are central features of relationships and encounters with health staff, as personal reactions to these experiences can produce mutual mistrust and poor relations between staff and the Gypsy and Traveller patients. (Patrice Van Cleemput quoted in Cemlyn et al, 2009, p.53)

As a basis of mental health treatment is a trusting relationship, the frequently unsympathetic relationships between some staff and Travellers was found to conceal the need for interventions. An example of this was a distressed prisoner speaking in a segregation unit, who had experienced four deaths of close family members in the past 10 months and yet he had not told any staff and therefore had not received help with contacting his family. The prisoner made it clear to the TPRP interviewer that much of his frustration was due to the limitations placed on his phone contact. The prisoner felt that even if he did explain that family members had died, 'these people [prison staff] don't understand what death and funerals mean to a Travelling man,' (Irish Traveller prisoner, Wales).

TPRP was alarmed that a substantial number of submissions to the project came from prison staff concerned by the high rates of self-harm inflicted by Travellers in custody. A prison Diversity Manager, explained that he and the healthcare unit 'want to understand the issues.' HM Inspectorate of Prisons found that ethnicity is not recorded in clinical records and that staff had concluded that ethnicity was not relevant as all patients were treated in the same way. Unfortunately, this approach by healthcare teams in prison contravenes the 'Nursing and Midwifery Council Code of Professional Conduct' on recognizing the diverse needs of patients. It also means that the distinct mental health issues faced by Travellers are less likely to be effectively addressed.<sup>47</sup>

### **9.3.2 Disruption of Family and Community Support**

Family contact is important for the well-being of most prisoners. The Travelling community considers family to be of the highest importance. Travellers generally live and work amongst other Travellers, sharing experiences and a culture which reinforces strong family and community ties. As an ethnic group which has had frequent negative experiences of mainstream society, including local government, schools and more generally from the media, the consequent reliance by Travellers on other Travellers is understandably high. These strong family ties which equip the community to deal with social, economic and health issues, are severely affected by imprisonment:

Travellers have traditionally relied on their family networks for social and economic support...A loss of social support structures combined with distrust, a sense of anomie, discrimination and low self-esteem is a potent combination likely to have implications for mental health and physical wellbeing. The loss or reduction of ties and support structures and emotional support, and the potential impact in terms of health status is well documented... (UCD, 2010, p.132)

Outside of prison if a Traveller has a problem, he or she will most likely talk about it with another Traveller who will understand and empathize. Inside prison, this support mechanism is rarely available. This is not just a case of wanting to speak to 'one of your own,' this is more than simply wanting the companionship of a person from within one's own ethnic or cultural group. There is the added factor that having experienced severe discrimination many Travellers are reluctant to seek help and support from someone who is not from within their community. Given prevalent discriminatory attitudes towards Travellers in

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<sup>47</sup> See Prison Reform Trust, 2010, p.53

mainstream society, Travellers in prison rarely feel there are opportunities to articulate problems to staff or other prisoners. The consequences of this can be dire as the research team witnessed on one prison visit:

[Prisoner G, an Irish Traveller] killed himself last week. He had asked again and again to get moved to another wing to be with other Travellers... All he wanted was to talk to another Traveller but they wouldn't move him. He was in bad shape and they done nothing for him... He got into trouble so they'd move him to another wing ...Then he killed himself... We would've taken care of him... (Irish Traveller prisoner, London)

### **9.3.3 Prejudice and Loss of Self Respect**

The processes of stigmatisation and institutional disadvantage are of particular importance in psychiatry. Stigma can arise from and also contribute to mental disorders, leading to disadvantages in housing, employment and direct or indirect criminalisation... (Linehan et al, 2002, p.76)

These rates [within the Irish prison system] suggest that a very high proportion of all Travellers will be imprisoned at some time during their life. This 'normalisation' of the experience of imprisonment exposes a high proportion of all Travellers to the adverse health and lifestyle behaviours prevalent in prison.... In a more general way, the normalisation of imprisonment is likely to have adverse effects on the expectations and aspirations of children and adults. It adds also a stigma attached to Travellers as a group. (Linehan et al, 2002, p.78-79)

The systematic induction into prison of a significant proportion of any identifiable group within society is a cause for concern. From a mental health perspective, prisoners have an increased risk of suicide. (Linehan et al, 2002, p.79)

In any ethnic group or sub-population where imprisonment is so common, it is reasonable to hypothesise for future research that the lower life expectancy, the impaired physical and mental health, may to some extent be caused by imprisonment itself. (Linehan et al, 2002, p.79)

TPRP found that there was a deeply pessimistic attitude amongst Travellers in prison. Travellers expressed a casual acceptance regarding imprisonment, self-harm, suicide, death at a young age and discrimination. One young Traveller in the North East of England summed up how he thought the situation of Travellers could be improved, 'Look, Travellers will never be equal in the whole wide world.' Such pessimistic perceptions were found to be common amongst Traveller prisoners during the research.

This characteristic acceptance of poor social, economic and health status and the overall picture of poor self-esteem amongst Irish Travellers frequently leads to serious mental health issues such as depression and self-harming. As prisons (necessarily) remove prisoners from their communities and families where one's value as a person is generally reinforced, it is important that prison does not (even unintentionally) withdraw a sense of value for that person's heritage, be it as an Asian, Afro-Caribbean or Traveller prisoner. As Irish Traveller men often gain their self-esteem from loyally providing for their family by working in demanding physical occupations, the perception evident in some prisons of Travellers as illiterate (therefore too lazy to learn or simply stupid), unclean, untrustworthy and/or aggressive creates a demoralizing effect on this group.

Many Travellers in prison expressed the belief that some members of staff considered them to be lesser than other prisoners. One focus group participant said, 'We are at the bottom of the pile, the lowest rung on the ladder, what they do to us they wouldn't dare do to the others or there'd be riots. If we were Muslims, it would be on the front page of the newspaper,' (Irish Traveller prisoner, North West).

Many Traveller prisoners recalled instances in which they felt that they had been subject to discrimination by staff and prisoners. One reported example was that of a Traveller prisoner who was going to the gym and was told by an officer not to steal the weights for scrap metal because that was what the officer assumed Travellers did. The use of terms such as 'pikey' and 'gyppo' by prison staff was described in all focus groups as being commonplace.<sup>48</sup>

In terms of mental health, the use of derogatory names and stereotypes are significant because they provide a context in which a prisoner assesses how he or she is valued within a particular establishment. As equality strategies improve standards and conduct throughout the prison estate, it is noticeable to groups whose background can still be subjected to prejudicial comment to what extent the system values their equal treatment. Without a concerted approach to deal with the distinct issues affecting Traveller prisoners it is likely that the current context which apparently exacerbates poor mental health amongst this prisoner group will continue.<sup>49</sup>

...I WAS FOUND HANGING IN MY CELL BY ANOTHER PRISONER WHO WAS ALSO SHARING THE CELL WITH ME...HANGING FROM THE BARS OF THE WINDOW AT ABOUT THREE O'CLOCK IN THE MORNING, THIS MAN SAVED MY LIFE. I WAS COMPLETELY IN MY OWN BLACK ZONE, I DIDN'T KNOW WHERE I WAS AFTER I WAS FOUND GUILTY AND THE DEATH OF MY SON AND SPENDING THREE LONG YEARS ON REMAND AT... PRISON. I WAS CUT DOWN BY THE NIGHT STAFF AND I WAS RUSHED TO THE HOSPITAL WING AND I WAS PUT ON DRIPS.

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<sup>48</sup> See Section 5 Discrimination

<sup>49</sup> '...the CRE reported that the full diversity of groups was often ignored in any discussion about race equality in the Prison Service. This was particularly the case for Irish Travellers....' (NOMS, 2008, p.48).

OFFICERS DISMISS US. IRISHMEN ARE THE BUTT OF A JOKE. WHEN YOU ASK FOR SOMETHING, IT'S 'YEAH, WE'LL CATCH YOU LATER PADDY.'

THESE PEOPLE ARE REFUSING TO SEND HIM TO A PSYCHIATRIC UNIT WHERE HE COULD GET THE TREATMENT THAT HE NEEDS FOR HIS MENTAL ISSUES. HE HAS BURIED TWO OF HIS FAMILY SINCE HE'S BEEN IN THIS PRISON HE'S CONSTANTLY CUTTING HIS WRISTS, HE'S ON HIGH DOSAGE OF PAINKILLERS AND IS ADDICTED TO MEDICATION HERE AT THE PRISON.



## 10. FAMILY

### 10.1 Findings

#### Marital Status

	#	%
Single	110	38.6
Married	89	31.2
Partner	43	15.1
Separated	22	7.7
Divorced	18	6.3
Widowed	3	1.1

Table 17: 285 Respondents

#### Children under 18

	#	%
Yes	165	58.9
No	115	41.1

Table 18: 280 Respondents

46.3% of Irish Travellers in prison are in a relationship, 15.1% have a partner and 31.2% are married. 58.9% of Irish Travellers in prison have at least one child under the age of 18.

Irish Travellers are highly family oriented. In prison, this is evident in the comparatively high levels of marriage and partnerships, and the percentage of prisoners with children under 18. As Travellers often marry at a young age and have large families, the role that family plays in the life of a Traveller in prison is central in terms of rehabilitation and resettlement.

### 10.2 Context

[There is a] legal obligation for establishments to consult local communities about their policies and functions and their impact on people of different racial groups... There is a related need to communicate widely in promoting our work in order to encourage good relations between people of all racial groups.

THIS PRISONER  
FEELS STAFF  
DON'T  
UNDERSTAND  
HOW MUCH  
TRAVELLER  
CULTURE  
IS BASED  
AROUND  
FAMILY.

(Prison officer)

This is particularly important with regard to groups that have historically been disproportionately represented in the criminal justice system, such as black and minority ethnic people and Gypsies and Travellers...

The strategy must set out how the establishment will work towards the following high-level objectives: Building the trust and confidence of local BME and other minority communities; Consulting meaningfully on policies and functions and their impact on people of different racial groups; Increasing mutual understanding between the establishment and local BME and other minority communities...

#### **Prison Service Order 2800**

Prisoners' families, including their children, often experience increased financial, housing, emotional and health problems during a sentence. Children of prisoners have about three times the risk of mental health problems and the risk of anti-social/delinquent behaviour compared to their peers. (Prison Reform Trust, 2010, p.22)

65% of boys with a convicted parent go on to offend. (Prison Reform Trust, 2010, p.22)

Research evidence that demonstrates a clear link between conviction of a parent and delinquent and/or offending behaviour in their children is well established. Many studies have shown that when one person in a family offends, there is an increased risk of other members offending also. (Browne, 2005, p.29)

### **10.3 Commentary**

TPRP found high levels of concern by Traveller prisoners for the welfare of their family members on the outside. This concern for family, in the case of male prisoners, was predominantly couched in terms of a prisoner's responsibility to support his family. During one prisoner focus group there was consensus that their offending behaviour, (while it was, for the most part intended to 'feed a young family' and was therefore intelligible to one another), had 'let down' their wives, partners and children.

The Traveller prisoners in this group agreed that while their offences were largely motivated by supporting a family or 'doing what you have to, to survive,' their imprisonment was an enormous burden for their families. Noticeably, the prisoners described themselves as having an easier time than their families as they felt that their families would remain loyal regardless of circumstances. The prisoners in the group in their late 20s and 30s expressed serious concerns that their imprisonment would impact the lives of their children:

I feel like a fool. I'm sitting in here. I get all my meals and all the rest, and my wife has it all to do. I've let her down...I've made sure that the girls go to school every day... They're doing well at school...but I should be out there with them. They're growing up without a father. (Irish Traveller, South East)

A Traveller participant in another group expressed his fears about the large numbers of young Traveller men in prison:

Young boys are running 'round wild. There's nobody telling them what's right and wrong because there's no [Traveller] sites...families are living apart and then the boys end up in here [prison]. It's going on and on. (Irish Traveller, Midlands)

Traveller focus group participants felt that the disruption of traditional Traveller social structures caused by limited or no site provision caused a breakdown in 'morals and respect,' an increased likelihood of 'falling in with the wrong crowd' and also interfered with stable family employment. There was a view that as the community became more marginalised in terms of accommodation, education and employment that the cycle of imprisonment in some Traveller families would become more difficult to break.

Interestingly, one young Traveller who stated that he had spent many years in institutions pointed out to the rest of the group that the cultural obligation to provide for one's family was landing a lot of Travellers in prison and that something would have to change:

Look the world's a different place. Travellers need to find other ways of making a living from what they used to do. You need to be able to read and write or Travellers will be extinct... (Irish Traveller, South East)

Remarkably, one prisoner who indicated he had gained considerable financial rewards from his crimes reflected that the separation from his family was the worst aspect of imprisonment and his offending behaviour:

It's just a waste. It's not worth it. What use is money? And they're [his family] out there. (Irish Traveller, South East)

This attitude typified that of many Irish Traveller prisoners. All the prisoners with whom TPRP spoke emphasised the importance of their family to them. In many cases, a main causal factor of incarceration was the determination to provide financially for a family. Correspondingly, it was the separation from family that Traveller prisoners found to be the most difficult aspect of imprisonment.

ONE YOUNG TRAVELLER WANTED A TRANSFER TO NEARER HIS HOME IN THE COVENTRY AREA, HE ACTUALLY RIPPED HIS BODY WITH A RAZOR BLADE, WAS TAKEN TO THE HOSPITAL, RECEIVED TREATMENT AND IS NOW REFUSING TO GO BACK ON THE WING. HE IS IN THE SEGREGATION UNIT AND HAS BEEN THERE FOR LAST 3 MONTHS...

TRAVELLERS FIND IT PARTICULARLY DIFFICULT TO BE LOCKED UP BECAUSE THEY ARE USED TO BEING ABLE TO MOVE. THEY FIND IT DIFFICULT TO SETTLE IN A PRISON ENVIRONMENT.

(Prison chaplain)

I HEARD A GOVERNOR ASK A MAN [A TRAVELLER] WHY HE BOTHERED APPLYING FOR TAGGING. HE MUST HAVE THOUGHT WE ARE STUPID ALTOGETHER. HE WOULDN'T HAVE APPLIED IF HE DIDN'T HAVE AN ADDRESS. BUT THEY JUST THINK YOU'RE A TRAVELLER, SO NO CHANCE.



## 11. FAMILY CONTACT

### 11.1 Findings

#### Postal Contact

	#	%
Yes	207	77.2
No	61	22.8

Table 19: 268 Respondents

#### Phone Contact

	#	%
Yes	235	89.4
No	28	10.6

Table 20: 263 Respondents

#### Prison Visits

	#	%
Yes	200	73.8
No	71	26.2

Table 21: 271 Respondents

### 11.2 Context

Family ties are important to all prisoners. For GTR prisoners we found that literacy problems could impact negatively on maintaining links with families. Visiting Orders were the source of much frustration; there was a requirement to write out the same information each time a new form was submitted and this caused unnecessary irritation and distress when literacy skills were poor. Access to telephones is important to all prisoners, but this importance is heightened by the difficulties in maintaining family ties via letters, particularly if families are travelling. (Nacro, 2009, p.16)

### 11.3 Commentary

Special attention shall be paid to the maintenance of such relationships between a prisoner and his family as are desirable in the best interests of both.

A prisoner shall be encouraged and assisted to establish and maintain such relations with persons and agencies outside prison as may, in the opinion of the governor, best promote the interests of his family and his own social rehabilitation.

**Prison Rules 1999 consolidated January 2010**

... the Prison Service of England and Wales has an obligation to actively encourage prisoners to maintain outside contacts and meaningful family ties as which is integral to their rehabilitation. Visits are seen as a crucial to sustaining relationships with close relatives, partners and friends. They help prisoners maintain links with the community, and are associated with a reduced likelihood of reoffending...

**Prison Service Order 4410**

Charles Clarke, when Home Secretary, stressed the importance of family for successful resettlement:

An offender is much less likely to reoffend if he feels part of a family and community, from which he receives support as well as owes obligations.' (Prison Reform Trust, 2010, p.22)

Maintaining family ties can reduce the likelihood of reoffending by 39%. (Prison Reform Trust, 2010, p.22)

Approximately 30% of prisoners who take their own lives had no family contact prior to their deaths. (Prison Reform Trust, 2010, p.42)

**11.3.1 Postal**

Regular letter writing is seen as an important way of enabling prisoners to maintain close relationships with family and friends, as well as to sustain links with life beyond the establishment – which is required under Prison Rules.

Convicted prisoners may send:

- (a) one statutory letter per week, the first letter to be issued immediately on reception;<sup>50</sup>
- (b) as many privilege letters as they wish, except at establishments where routine reading is in force...<sup>51</sup>
- (c) special letters...<sup>52</sup>

**Prison Service Order 4411**

<sup>50</sup> A statutory letter is one that a prisoner is entitled to and must not be withdrawn or withheld as part of a punishment. Statutory letters are sent at public expense.

<sup>51</sup> A privilege letter is one that a prisoner is regularly allowed to send over and above their statutory entitlement of letters. The postage costs of privilege letters are paid from prison earnings or private cash.

<sup>52</sup> A special letter is one that a prisoner is allowed in special circumstance detailed in PSO 4411.

THIS PRISONER  
CAN'T TRANSFER  
MONIES FROM  
SENDS ACCOUNT  
TO PIN CREDIT  
TO PHONE  
IRELAND  
BECAUSE HE  
GETS A ONCE  
MONTHLY VISIT.  
HE IS HAVING  
DIFFICULTY IN  
HAVING  
REGULAR  
CONTACT WITH  
FAMILY DUE TO  
HOW THE  
DIFFERENT  
ACCOUNTS ARE  
ALLOWED TO  
WORK,

(Prison Officer)

77.2% of Irish Travellers in prison use the postal service as a method of maintaining contact with their family. This is a high level of postal communication, especially given the poor literacy levels amongst this group. This statistic indicates that a substantial number of Traveller prisoners rely on other prisoners (and staff) to help them maintain postal contact by reading and writing letters. It demonstrates that many Travellers are in a position in which they have to rely on others to maintain contact with their family. This dependence on others for reading and writing letters is often coupled with a sense of shame or inadequacy and can compound a prisoner's feeling of isolation. Given these added difficulties facing Irish Traveller prisoners in maintaining postal contact the statistic illustrates their high level of commitment to family life on the part of Traveller prisoners.

### 11.3.2 Phone

Prisoners must have no more than £50 in telephone credits in their telephone account at any time, except for foreign national prisoners where no limit will apply. Foreign Nationals will fund the cost of any additional balance (above £50) in their Pinphone account from their Private Cash only.

Foreign national prisoners or those with close family abroad must be permitted a free five minute call once a month where the prisoner has had no domestic visits during the preceding month.

#### International Calling Cards

The Prison Service have secured an approved international Calling Card that will enable prisoners to make international calls at rates significantly cheaper than those charged by British Telecom ...

This service is available to all prisoners in the knowledge that UK based prisoners can have family and friends located legitimately outside the UK.

#### Prison Service Order 4400

Some establishments have recognised the problem caused by dependence on mobile telephones in GTR communities and have afforded GTR prisoners additional telephone privileges to compensate them for the additional expense. This is done on the same basis as for Foreign National

Prisoners. It is particularly important that these concessions are afforded to GTR prisoners who are not resident in mainland UK. Irish GTR prisoners for instance will rely totally on the telephone to maintain family contact in many instances when actual family visits are made impossible by reason of distance. This good practice should be consistently applied with concessions being made universally. (Nacro, 2009, p.21)

89.4% of Irish Travellers were identified as maintaining contact with family by phone. This high level of phone contact is to be expected given the strong family bonds evident in the Travelling community and their preference for oral communication. Significantly, given the relatively high cost of phone calls for prisoners, the reliance on phone calls for maintaining family ties is a heavy burden on Traveller prisoners and their families. As 37.9% of Irish Traveller prisoners were identified as being born in the Republic of Ireland, it is therefore likely that a sizeable proportion of their phone calls will be charged at an international call rate. Indeed, as almost all Irish Travellers not born in the Republic of Ireland have close family in that jurisdiction, the higher international call rate will negatively affect the majority of this prisoner group.

Furthermore, as 39.9% of Irish Travellers included in the survey do not normally live in permanent accommodation prior to imprisonment, it is unlikely that family contacts will have ready access to a landline to receive calls. As a result of Travellers' cultural preference for a nomadic lifestyle and the consequent absence of landlines this prisoner group is dependent primarily on more expensive phone calls to mobile phones. This combination of factors can in many cases mean that a Traveller prisoner is calling a mobile phone on prison international call rates. As a result the Traveller prisoner has only limited ability to maintaining the family contact and support which criminological research deems is so critical to a prisoner's rehabilitation and successful resettlement.

My son died in April...one brother died in September another in November and my sister's husband died last week in Cork... You can't talk long when you're phoning a mobile in the Republic... (Irish Traveller prisoner, Wales)

### 11.3.3 Prison Visits

Visits assist in maintaining good order. Good quality visits in a relaxed environment make a significant contribution to the well being and attitude of prisoners and generally help to build better relationships between families and staff to the point where families are encouraged to share sensitive information which may have an impact on the welfare of the prisoner.

#### **Frequency of social visits**

Governors may organise visiting arrangements to accommodate the particular needs of the establishment and the wishes expressed by prisoners and visitors, subject to the following provisions:

- a) each unconvicted prisoner must be allowed visits on at least three days a week, including the opportunity for a visit on Saturday or Sunday, normally every weekend and at least once a fortnight
- b) convicted prisoners, both adult and young offenders, should be allowed a visit on reception after conviction and at least every two weeks thereafter, including at least one weekend visit every four weeks.

#### **Prison Service Order 4410**

IN OTHER  
PRISONS  
I COULD  
LEAVE V.O.S  
ON THE GATE  
FOR MY WIFE,  
OR SEND THEM  
TO A FRIEND.  
THAT'S  
USEFUL FOR  
TRAVELLERS  
BUT YOU  
CAN'T DO  
THAT HERE.

#### **Issue and validity of visiting orders**

Visiting orders may be sent to an address at which the visitor is not a resident to ensure that visitors who do not have a permanent address are able to see the prisoner. In this instance, after the prisoner has sent a written application to the Governor the visiting order should be sent to a pre-determined address or, failing this, the visitors' centre or the prison gate. *The collection point must be agreed between the prisoner and the Governor.* The visitor is required to produce approved identification in order to collect the visiting order, and should be informed of the acceptable forms of identification in advance...

#### **Prison Service Order 4410**

73.8% of Irish Traveller prisoners were identified as receiving visits from family. This high level of contact through prison visits again indicates the strong family support network available to many Traveller prisoners. 26.2% of Irish Travellers were identified as not receiving any visits from family members. The percentage of prisoners without prison visits is significant in the context of the Traveller community. The Travelling community places a high value on family bonds. Therefore the lack of family visits in the case of over a quarter of Irish Traveller prisoners is significant. One explanation for this may be the expense of a prison visit by a family member either from a different part of the UK or the Republic of Ireland. It may also indicate a difficulty on the part of the prisoner or his or her family in coping with the bureaucracy of applying for, and receiving a visiting order either as a result of illiteracy or simply not having the necessary identity documents to access the prison. It may also suggest an inability on the part of the family to receive a visiting order as they may possess no officially recognised address. Of course, other non-culturally specific factors such as a breakdown in relations may be the cause of a prisoner not receiving a visit but it is important to note that the absence of family visits for whatever reason is likely to impact more acutely on Travellers because of their customs of familial reliance.

I DO FEEL THAT THEY [TRAVELLERS] ARE SOMETIMES RELUCTANT TO ACCESS SERVICES BECAUSE THEY FEEL THAT TRAVELLERS ARE NOT UNDERSTOOD BY STAFF.

(Prison chaplain)

A TRAVELLER MAN HANGED HIMSELF HERE LAST YEAR. HE WAS A GOOD FRIEND OF MINE. HE WAS 8 YEARS OVER HIS TARIFF FOR A LIFE SENTENCE. HE HAD DONE LOTS OF RE-OFFENDING COURSEWORK. HE WAS DOING WHAT THE PRISON TOLD HIM TO DO. THEY TOLD HIM IF HE COMPLETED IT HE'D BE RELEASED SOMETIME AFTER HIS TARIFF. HOWEVER, HE CONTINUED TO DO THE SAME COURSEWORK OVER AND OVER. HE'D DONE EVERYTHING THESE PEOPLE HAD ASKED HIM TO DO. HE'D DONE MORE THAN HIS FAIR SHARE OF IT, HE'D DONE IT THREE OR FOUR TIMES OVER AND OVER AND OVER AGAIN. THERE WASN'T ANYTHING ELSE FOR HIM TO DO... ALL HE WANTED WAS TO BE IN THE COMPANY OF IRISH PRISONERS. THEY REFUSED HIM THAT.

THIS PRISONER HAS DIFFICULTIES UNDERSTANDING HOW TO APPLY FOR ACCESS TO PRISON PHONES.

(Prison officer)



## 12. RESETTLEMENT / RELEASE ON LICENCE

### 12.1 Findings

- TPRP encountered instances in which prison resettlement professionals stated that Traveller prisoners due for release on licence were unlikely to be permitted to live on authorized Traveller sites.

...MAPPA would reject his [an Irish Traveller prisoner's] application to live on the [local authority] site. <sup>53</sup> (Probation Officer, London)

- Staff in a number of prisons indicated that Traveller sites were presumed to be prima facie unsuitable accommodation for Travellers released on licence.

Travellers don't get released [on licence] back to sites. (Prison Chaplain, North West)

- TPRP encountered instances in which prison resettlement professionals stated that Traveller prisoners due for release would not be eligible or suitable for support services.

We really can't do much for him. We can't get him accommodation anywhere because he's a Traveller. (CARAT <sup>54</sup> Worker, London)

- TPRP found that many Traveller prisoners did not know that resettlement services were available to Travellers.

### 12.2 Context

There is the possibility that the inflexibility of OASys is adversely affecting a GTR prisoner application for ROTLs and Home Leave. <sup>55</sup> The perception amongst GTR prisoners is that it does, and that in consequence GTR prisoners are being denied D Cat status and thus parole as a result. They point to an apparent reluctance of agencies and contracted out private sector service providers to monitor tags within the GTR communities. If this is so, then other ways must be found to ensure that GTR prisoners' ability to access parole (and indeed, outside work opportunities as part of sentence progression) is not being unfairly restricted. (Nacro, 2009, p.19)

<sup>53</sup> Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangement, MAPPA, is a mechanism through which Police, Probation and Prison Services share information across agencies on MAPPA offenders in order to enhance public protection, PSO 4745, *Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangement, (MAPPA)*.

<sup>54</sup> CARAT, stands for Counselling, Assessment, Referral, Advice and Throughcare services, PSO 3630, *CARATs*

<sup>55</sup> Offender Assessment System, (OASys), is used to identify the reasons for an individual prisoner's offending behaviour, how to change this offending behaviour and to create a sentence plan for every prisoner due to spend more than twelve months in prison.

Travellers receive much less help with resettlement than others because it is assumed that 'you're going to go out and live in a caravan' (Clinks and Prison Reform Trust, 2010, p.26)

Where specific resettlement needs among BAME offenders are identified, some separate resettlement provision may be appropriate. This might include, for example, specialist services for the most socially and economically marginalised groups, such as foreign national prisoners with disputed immigration status, and those from Traveller/Roma/Gypsy backgrounds. There may also be a need for specialist work to tackle cultural resistance to engaging with services within some minority ethnic communities. (Clinks and Prison Reform Trust, 2010, p.40)

Unless something is done to tackle the causes of offending behaviour, and the social and economic exclusion from which it commonly springs, and to which it contributes, prisons will continue to have revolving doors, and the public will not in the long term be protected. ... insufficient priority is given by the prison service to resettlement work and outcomes. It is not enough to draw up sentence plans: they will remain only paper exercises unless prison staff are able to engage with and motivate prisoners, and to provide the appropriate interventions. ... assessing the risks and needs of each individual and ensuring, through regular contact with a dedicated prison officer, that they are provided for, progressed and regularly reviewed. It requires standards and targets to be set for prisons, as well as prisoners, so that the provision of adequate time and resources is not an optional extra, but a baseline requirement. (HM Inspectorates of Prisons and Probation, 2001)

People serving short prison sentences are two to three times more likely to reoffend if they do not have suitable housing. (Prison Reform Trust, 2010, p.48)

Prisoners who have problems with both employment and accommodation on release from prison had a reoffending rate of 74% during the year after custody, compared to 43% for those with no problems. (Prison Reform Trust, 2010, p.49)

## 12.3 Commentary

From the beginning of a prisoner's sentence, consideration shall be given, in consultation with the appropriate after-care organisation, to the prisoner's future and the assistance to be given him on and after his release.

**Prison Rules 1999 consolidated January 2010**

All prisoners have the opportunity to maintain and develop appropriate community ties and to prepare for their release. Provision by the Prison Service in collaboration with probation areas is targeted on the basis of an assessment of risks and needs and directed towards reducing the risk of re-offending and risk of harm.

**Prison Service Order 0200 Performance Standard 52**

### **Licence Conditions...**

#### **Standard Conditions**

- (i) To be well behaved, not to commit any offence and not to do anything which could undermine the purposes of your supervision, which are to protect the public, prevent you from re-offending and help you to re-settle successfully into the community.
- (ii) To keep in touch with your supervising officer in accordance with any instructions that you may be given;
- (iii) If required, to receive visits from your supervising officer at your home/place of residence (e.g. approved premises);
- (iv) Permanently to reside at **an address approved** by your supervising officer and notify him or her in advance of any proposed change of address or any proposed stay (even for one night) away from that approved address;...

#### **Prison Service Order 6000**

### **Being released 'on licence'**

If a prisoner is sentenced to a determinate sentence of 12 months or more, the second half of their sentence is spent in the community. This is 'on licence'. Being on licence means they have to meet certain conditions - like having to stay away from the victim of their crime. If they break any conditions or commit another crime, they could go back to prison to serve their sentence. The prisoner is supervised (managed) by the Probation Service.

(Crime and Justice, Direct Gov. website)

### **12.3.1 Accessing Pre-release Services**

Interestingly, black prisoners were most likely, and white Irish/other prisoners least likely, to say that they had done something in prison that would make them less likely to offend.<sup>56</sup> (HM Chief Inspector of Prisons for England and Wales, 2010, p.38)

TPRP's focus groups and interviews revealed a failure on the part of the prisons visited to provide suitable pre-release services and unwillingness, in cases, to provide Traveller prisoners with pre-release services. TPRP found a lack of knowledge amongst Traveller prisoners of pre-release services such as benefits and accommodation advice, addiction service signposting and skills training. Strikingly, in two prisons visited, it was apparent that this lack of knowledge was a result of a failure on the part of the prisons in delivering services to Travellers rather than a failure on the part of Traveller prisoners in making applications to access services.

In contrast to TPRP's other visits across the prison estate, Travellers in a focus group held in a London prison indicated a lack of interest in pre-release services generally. The participants stated a preference for relying upon their family and community network to assist them upon release and they were sceptical of the relevance or even the existence of pre-release services.

Participants in the London focus group overwhelmingly identified site provision and accommodation on sites as central to their ability to lead positive and law-abiding lives upon release. The participants felt government policies on Traveller accommodation hindered them and their families from maintaining stable lives in which they could access employment opportunities, education for children and health services. Moreover, the London, South East and Midlands TPRP focus groups emphasised the moral guidance

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<sup>56</sup> This report acknowledges that Irish Travellers in prison are frequently defined solely as 'white Irish.'

provided by living within a stable Traveller community. Participants in all of the focus groups stated that the opposition to Traveller sites (and continued reduction in sites) meant that traditional Traveller family and community structures were breaking up and as result, young Traveller men were no longer heeding the advice of the community.

Look, if you're on a site and you're doing something stupid, somebody will have a word with you... They won't let you get involved in stuff you shouldn't be at...If you're on an estate, you'll get mixed up with the wrong crowd...drugs, all sorts. That's what happened me. When I get out I'm sticking to my own... (Irish Traveller prisoner, South East)

### **12.3.2 Traveller Sites and Release on Licence**

TPRP recorded a number of instances related by prison staff and prisoners in which the conditions imposed on Irish Travellers due for release on licence prevented an offender returning to family life on a Traveller site during the licence period.

Prisoners in all TPRP focus groups highlighted cases (not involving either child protection or domestic violence issues) in which Travellers were being prevented from returning to live on Traveller sites because the accommodation was deemed unsuitable (see above PSO 6000 Chapter 14, licence condition (iv)). Traveller prisoners felt that preventing their release on licence to sites was based on a prejudicial belief that the parolee would become ensnared in criminality by returning to their community:

We can't go back to a site [due to licence conditions]...They [the Probation Service] think we're all criminals but they wouldn't say the same about a whole estate. They wouldn't stop a man going home because there used to be a criminal who lived in the same estate...but we're all thieving pikies... (Irish Traveller prisoner, South East)

In contrast, a Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) report makes it clear that:

While there may be individual elements in the Gypsy and Traveller community that may be involved in such [anti-social] behaviour, there is absolutely no substantive evidence that the level of such behaviour is any more significant than in other groups, or in the population as a whole. (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2009, p.15)

Significantly, the report goes on to suggest that the negative perception of Traveller sites is reinforced through prejudicial media attention:

...the reporting of cases where such activity does take place can sometimes lead to a misconception that all Gypsies and Travellers are involved in criminal or antisocial behaviour. That is not the case at all. Indeed, Gypsies and Travellers are often the victims of such behaviour, or at the receiving end of racist behaviour or language. (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2009, p.15)

Traveller prisoners felt that it was established Probation Service practice to prevent release on licence to Traveller sites (including authorised sites). On a TPRP prison visit, a governor acknowledged that staff may have applied a blanket ban on the release of Travellers to accommodation on sites. He indicated that staff, when considering resettlement issues, did not always understand the nature of a Traveller site and therefore misunderstood the prisoner's desire to return to a site. He suggested that staff did not always know that sites were in most cases, officially authorised, permanent (with postcodes) and had electricity and running water.

TPRP's research suggests that decisions on the release on licence of Traveller prisoners are sometimes made based on an institutional presumption that Traveller sites are unsuitable environments for the re-integration to society of ex-offenders. In light of TPRP's findings on the release on licence of Traveller prisoners, agencies and personnel involved in setting licence conditions should consider each request for release to accommodation on a site on its own individual merits.

I got a flat so that I could get released [on licence]... I wanted to be with the family but I was told that I wouldn't get released on to a site... (Irish Traveller Prisoner, South East)

Where hostel accommodation is imposed as a condition of a parole licence so that probation can monitor post release conduct, a GTR prisoner is at another (dual) disadvantage. Such accommodation is culturally alien and at odds with GTR cultural identity: Hostel accommodation puts a GTR ex prisoner adjacent to drugs and to drug taking by others in such accommodation. GTR ex prisoners find this abhorrent and will often refuse such accommodation and find themselves therefore, unable to access parole for that reason. (Nacro, 2009, p.16)

I APPLIED TO  
NACRO FIVE  
MONTHS AGO  
AND HAVE  
NOT MET  
ANYONE YET.  
I'M RELEASED  
IN 18 DAYS.

Preventing Travellers from settling on release from prison on Traveller sites has negative consequences. Usually, a released individual is allowed his or her liberty to pursue (within the limits of the particular licence conditions) his or her own objectives and lifestyle. However, as an Irish Traveller's identity, livelihood and support network is often intrinsically linked to the Irish Travelling community, licence conditions which reduce or prevent family or community contact simply delay an offender's reintegration into society. In many cases, the alternative to a prisoner's preference to be released to a site is the offer of a hostel. This alternative to residency on a site was unanimously derided in TPRP's focus groups as being 'worse than prison' for Travellers. Traveller prisoners found the idea of release without access to one's family as perverse and anathema to Traveller identity. Indeed, TPRP recorded a high number of prisoners in focus groups who had been recalled to prison as a result of breaking the residency conditions of their licence.

### **12.3.3 Home Detention Curfew (HDC, also known as 'tagging')**

Most prisoners serving sentences of three months or over but less than four years will be eligible for consideration for Home Detention Curfew.

The purpose of HDC is to manage more effectively the transition of offenders from custody back into the community. Prisoners will be granted HDC only if they have passed a risk assessment and are able to provide a suitable home address which is approved by the Probation Service...

YOU NEED  
A HOME  
OUTSIDE.  
THAT'S THE  
MOST  
IMPORTANT  
THING.  
IF YOU  
DON'T HAVE A  
HOME  
TO RETURN TO  
THERE'S  
NOTHING  
MOTIVATING  
YOU  
TO DO WELL  
INSIDE.

However, for most eligible prisoners HDC must be viewed as a normal part of his or her progression through the sentence. Prisoners will normally be released on HDC unless there are grounds to indicate the prisoner is unlikely to complete successfully the period on HDC.

**Prison Service Order 6700**

Home Detention Curfew...Irish prisoners who otherwise meet the Home Detention Curfew (HDC) eligibility criteria set out in PSO 6700 (as amended), may be considered for release on HDC unless there is a court recommendation for deportation or there are exceptional circumstances...

**Prison Service Instruction 21/2007**

Prison Service Order 6700, 5.13.3, (v), states that a substantive reason for retaining a prisoner, eligible for Home Detention Curfew, in custody is a 'lack of suitable accommodation for HDC.' TPRP found that in a number of cases accommodation on a Traveller site was not deemed 'suitable' per se. However, the presumption that Traveller sites are unsuitable generally for HDC (or indeed, as regards any licence conditions) appears contrary to the findings of the European Court of Human Rights which affirmed that the UK Government has a positive obligation by virtue of Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights to facilitate the Traveller way of life.<sup>57</sup> As 'HDC must be viewed as a normal part of [a prisoner's] progression through the sentence,' (PSO 6700), Travellers must not be excluded from HDC solely on the basis of the type of their habitation.

A Traveller never gets 'tagging. (Irish Traveller prisoner, South East)

More generally, preventing prisoners from partaking in HDC on Traveller sites based on negative stereotypes of Travellers and Traveller sites is contrary to obligations placed on public bodies by the Equality Act 2010 and reiterated by NOMS itself:

The governing principles to be adopted in meeting the general duty include the fact that promoting race equality is obligatory, and must be central to all functions, including planning, policy making, service delivery, regulation, inspection, enforcement and employment; that public authorities must meet the duty to promote equality of opportunity in all relevant functions; and that the weight given to race equality must be proportionate to its relevance to a particular function (e.g. those that affect the public most or different groups in different ways). (NOMS, 2009, p.32)

<sup>57</sup> In *Connors v The United Kingdom* Application No. 66746/01, 27th May 2004, the European Court of Human Rights held that the United Kingdom has a positive obligation by virtue of Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights to facilitate the Traveller way of life.

Technical objections to applications for HDC on Traveller sites, based on access to utilities on sites, are misplaced as the majority of Traveller sites have full access to utilities. Prison Service Order 6700, 5.17 states that 'The address to which the prisoner is curfewed must have an electricity supply. As long as this condition is met the address should be technically suitable for the installation of the curfew equipment. A property without a fixed or metered electricity supply would therefore not be a suitable address. If a telephone line is not available this will be installed.' As most Traveller sites meet the technical requirements for HDC suitability and given that 'for most eligible prisoners HDC must be viewed as a normal part of [a prisoner's] progression through the sentence' (PSO 6700), TPRP is concerned at evidence which indicated routine refusal of applications for HDC on sites. Licence conditions which as of routine impose residence in a flat or house when there is suitable Traveller site accommodation appear contrary to government obligations to protect the Traveller way of life.<sup>58</sup>

I was told [by probation] I'd have to move into a flat. (Irish Traveller prisoner, South East)

It is noteworthy that in all TPRP focus groups, Travellers expressed deep concern over practices in relation to Home Detention Curfew and generally, terms of release on licence, which they deemed both contrary to Traveller family life and discriminatory. It was felt in the focus groups that forbidding a Traveller prisoner to return to his or her home on licence insinuated that the wider Travelling community was criminal in nature. Travellers felt such criminalisation of a community as a whole was prejudicial and would be unacceptable in relation to other ethnic minority communities:

They wouldn't stop a Black man returning to Brixton because they [probation] think all Black people are criminals. (Irish Traveller prisoner, South East)

Moreover, Traveller prisoners found inequitable, official obligations on Traveller ex-offenders to reside in culturally inappropriate places such as hostels or council flats while avoiding family contact, as is often stipulated by the Probation Service. As the family network is the source of social and economic support for Irish Travellers generally and often the only support a Traveller trusts, probation restrictions on accessing this support can mean that release on licence is worse than imprisonment:

I'd prefer to spend 9 months more here [prison] on recall than in a hostel with junkies and rapists... I'm not allowed to see my family living on a camp so I'd prefer to be in here. (Irish Traveller prisoner, Midlands)

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<sup>58</sup> In *Connors v The United Kingdom* Application No. 66746/01, 27th May 2004, the European Court of Human Rights held that the United Kingdom has a positive obligation by virtue of Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights to facilitate the Traveller way of life.

TRAVELLERS NEVER GET D-CAT.

ON THE WHOLE THE OFFICERS ARE ALRIGHT, ALTHOUGH TRAVELLERS DON'T EVER SEEM TO GET GIVEN D CAT AND IT WOULD BE NICE TO HAVE A ST PATRICK'S DAY CELEBRATION. WE NEED DECENT SITES. WE'RE ALL OVER THE PLACE, THE COMMUNITY IS BROKEN UP. THERE'S NO SITES. WE'RE HERE, THERE AND EVERYWHERE. IF YOU WERE LIVING BESIDE A MAN [A TRAVELLER] WHO WAS GETTING HIMSELF INTO TROUBLE YOU'D STOP HIM. BUT WE'RE ALL OVER THE PLACE.

IF WE HAD SITES, IF WE HAD SETTLED PLACES TO BE AS A COMMUNITY THE CRIME RATE WOULD DROP OVERNIGHT. BUT WHEN YOU'VE GOT FAMILIES SPLIT UP, KIDS RUNNING WILD... YOU CAN'T SUPERVISE THEM.

HOSTELS ARE LIKE PRISONS. WORSE THAN PRISON. WHEN WE GET OUT WE JUST WANT TO BE WITH OTHER TRAVELLERS.



## 13. FEMALE TRAVELLER PRISONERS

### 13.1 Findings

#### Ages: Women

	#
15-20	1
20-30	6
30-40	5
40-50	5
50-60	1

Table 22: 18 Respondents

#### Offences

	#
Burglary	5
Violence against the person	4
Other offences	4
Robbery	2
Not recorded / Unknown	2
Theft and Handling	1
Drug offences	1

Table 23: 19 Respondents

#### Literacy Problems

	#	%
Yes	11	57.9
No	8	42.1

Table 25: 19 Respondents

#### Learning Difficulties

	#	%
Yes	6	31.6
No	13	68.4

Table 26: 19 Respondents

### **Mental Health Problems**

	#	%
Yes	11	64.7
No	6	35.3

Table 27: 17 Respondents

### **Female prisoners with children under 18**

	#	%
Yes	10	52.6
No	9	47.4

Table 27: 19 Respondents

## **13.2 The Context**

In England, class distinctions were very important; Irish prisoners were often treated worst. (Nacro, 2000, p.47)

## **13.3 Commentary**

TPRP found that 57.9% of female Travellers in prison had literacy problems. 31.6% of female Travellers were identified as having learning difficulties. 63.2% of the total survey replies on female Traveller prisoners indicated a need for basic educational intervention. 52.6% of female Travellers in prison were identified as having children under 18 years of age.

64.7% of female Irish Travellers in prison had mental health problems which is markedly worse than the figure for mental health problems amongst both male and female Travellers in prison of 26.1%. Of the specified mental health problems, psychotic disorders and depression were the most common illness types recorded for female Traveller prisoners. Although the study group was small, involving 19 female prisoners, there are identifiable trends in both TPRP's survey data and the qualitative research on female Travellers in prison which suggest high levels of psychological disturbance, substance abuse and histories of suffering domestic violence.

The bleak situation of female Traveller prisoners mirrors the extreme social exclusion within the female prison population in general (Prison Reform Trust, 2010, p.25-26). TPRP's findings indicate that prison is an inappropriate place for a high percentage of female Traveller prisoners who have acute mental illnesses and whose conditions are more likely to be exacerbated by prison than treated.

THERE ARE OTHERS IN THE PRISON. THEY DO NOT INFORM ANYONE THEY ARE GYPSY TRAVELLERS AS THEY ARE AFRAID THEY WILL BE PICKED ON BY BOTH STAFF AND OFFENDERS.

(Diversity and Equality Officer)

LAST WEEK, HE ATTEMPTED SUICIDE AS A RESULT OF BEING CUT OFF FROM HIS FAMILY.

(Prison chaplain)

IF I HAD A PROBLEM, SAY, A BAD PHONE CALL, TROUBLE AT HOME OR WHATEVER I'D NEVER TALK TO SOMEBODY WHO WASN'T A TRAVELLER. WHATEVER IT WAS YOU WERE TELLING HIM WOULD BE ALL OVER THE WING. THAT'S WHY YOU NEED OTHER TRAVELLERS...IF I KNEW ANOTHER TRAVELLER WAS IN TROUBLE, I'D GIVE HIM WHATEVER I HAD TOBACCO, ANYTHING IN MY CELL TO HELP HIM OUT.



## 14. TRAVELLER YOUNG OFFENDERS

### 14.1 Findings

#### Offences by Young Offenders <sup>59</sup>

	#	%
Burglary	40	29.2
Robbery	26	18.9
Non-Fatal Violence	20	14.6
Other Offences	14	10.2
Theft	10	7.2
Sexual Offences	5	3.7
Unknown	5	3.7
Dangerous Driving	3	2.2
Handling Stolen Goods	3	2.2
Manslaughter	3	2.2
Murder	2	1.5
Other Driving Offences	2	1.5
Taking Without Consent	2	1.5
Drug Offences	1	0.7
Fraud and Forgery	1	0.7

Table 28: 137 Respondents

#### Sentence length being served by Young Offenders

	Official statistics (11034)		Irish Travellers (132)	
	#	%	#	%
Remand	2347	21.3	26	19.7
Less or equal to 6 mths	1079	9.8	10	7.6
>6 months to <12 mths	522	4.7	3	2.3
12 months to < 4 years	4150	37.6	45	34.1
> 4 years	2936	26.6	48	36.3

Table 29: 132 Respondents

<sup>59</sup> Young Offenders are defined as having a birthday after 21st September 1980, i.e. under 21 years of age on the day the survey week started.

WHEN I WAS  
12 I WAS TOLD  
GO OUT AND  
EARN A LIVING.  
THERE WAS  
NO DADDY OR  
MAMMY  
GIVING ME  
HANDOUTS....

### Young Offenders with children under 18

	#	%
Yes	68	50.4
No	67	49.6

Table 30: 135 Respondents

### Young Offender males with children under 18

	#	%
Yes	66	51.6
No	62	48.4

Table 31: 128 Respondents

Irish Traveller Young Offenders represent 46.3% of the overall Irish Traveller prisoner population. Generally, Young Offenders represent 13.8% of the overall prison population.

94.9% of Traveller Young Offenders are male. 5.1 % of Traveller Young Offenders are female.

58.4% of offences committed by Traveller Young Offenders were offences related to unlawfully obtained property.<sup>60</sup>

22.2% of Traveller Young Offenders were identified as having mental health problems.

48.9% of Traveller Young Offenders were identified as having serious problems with literacy. 20.5% of Traveller Young Offenders were identified as having learning difficulties. 52.2% of Traveller Young Offenders were identified as requiring basic educational intervention.

## 14.2 Context

HM Chief Inspector of Prisons has commented that 'the high reoffending rate among young adult men is unlikely to reduce without significant changes in approach, funding and focus' (Prison Reform Trust, 2010, p.33)

23% of young offenders have learning difficulties (IQ below 70) and 36% borderline learning difficulties (IQ 70–80%). At least 60% have difficulties with speech, language and communication that adversely affect their ability to participate in certain elements of the custodial regime. (Prison Reform Trust, 2010, p.33)

<sup>60</sup> Offences relating to unlawfully obtained property include: burglary, robbery, theft, fraud and forgery, and handling stolen goods.

Young people who are not in education or employment are twenty times more likely to commit a crime. (Prison Reform Trust, 2010, p.34)

74.8% of young men released from prison in 2004, were reconvicted within two years of release. (Prison Reform Trust, 2010, p.33)

### 14.3 Commentary

Irish Traveller Young Offenders make up almost half the overall Irish Traveller prisoner population. This very high rate of younger offenders indicates a need for intervention in the lives of young (predominantly) male Travellers before incarceration. As 52.2% of Traveller Young Offenders were identified as requiring basic educational intervention and 22.2% were defined as having mental health problems, clearly these areas in particular should be addressed during imprisonment to reduce re-offending.

51.6% of male Traveller Young Offenders have a child or children. In comparison, 25% of the overall male population in Young Offender Institutions are, or are shortly to become, fathers (Prison Reform Trust, 2010, p.34). The fact that so many Traveller Young Offenders are fathers has serious negative implications for the future life chances of their children and the wider Travelling community.<sup>61 62</sup>

HOW WOULD YOU STOP A YOUNG  
TRAVELLER GETTING INTO TROUBLE WITH  
THE LAW? - STAY AWAY FROM BAD  
INFLUENCES ... AND DRUGS. BUT THAT'S  
ABOUT HAVING SITES TOO. YOU KEEP AN EYE  
ON YOUR OWN, THAT'S HOW YOU GET BOYS  
TO HAVE RESPECT AND MANNERS...

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61 65% of boys with a convicted parent go on to offend, (Prison Reform Trust, 2010 p.22)

62 'The systematic induction into prison of a significant proportion of any identifiable group within society is a cause for concern,' (Linehan et al, 2002, p.79).

YOU HEAR 'PIKEY' AND 'GYPO' EVERY DAY.

TRAVELLERS DON'T GET TAG [HOME DETENTION CURFEW];  
THEY JUST ASSUME YOU DON'T HAVE AN ADDRESS.



## 15. FAITH

### 15.1 Findings

- Irish Traveller prisoners are overwhelmingly Roman Catholic
- Irish Traveller prisoners, in most cases, identified the prison chaplain as the person they most trusted
- Irish Traveller prisoners use religious images, statues and Rosary beads to reference their community's faith practices and thereby, to support their religious and cultural lives

### 15.2 Context

- The overwhelming majority of Irish Travellers are Roman Catholics: 98.0% in ROI and 96.7% in NI. (UCD, 2010, p.47)
- Religion is very important in the lives of Irish Travellers. Religion is 'important' or 'very important' to 89.4% of ROI Travellers and 85.3% of NI Travellers... (UCD, 2010, p.48)

### 15.3 Commentary

TPRP found that most Irish Travellers in prison considered their religious faith to be important. Traveller prisoners often identified their Catholic faith as an intrinsic part of their cultural and ethnic identity. Traveller prisoners often indicated an instant respect for and trust in members of the Catholic chaplaincy. Prison chaplains were frequently recognized by Travellers as sympathetic towards them as they were more likely to understand their cultural and religious background. During prison visits, TPRP observed that the chaplain often acted as a respected mediator between groups of Travellers; between Traveller and non-Traveller prisoners; and between Travellers and other members of staff.

In many cases, because of the importance of faith in the lives of Irish Travellers, TPRP observed that the chaplain led on the wider provision of services for this prisoner group. Traveller participants appeared to greatly benefit from having a trusted facilitator in group meetings which were organised by the chaplaincy teams. Traveller prisoners mentioned that they felt groups organised by the chaplaincy maintained confidentiality and that the context, even if not explicitly religious or Catholic, was reassuring and familiar.

The Co-ordinating Chaplain told me, 'It's not your job to organise Traveller groups.... Then whose job is it?' (Prison Chaplain, London)

On a number of occasions TPRP was informed by prison chaplains that facilitating Traveller initiatives was: not permitted; described as outside a chaplain's remit; or to be done on one's own time. However, TPRP found that Catholic chaplains were often in a good position to work with Travellers in prison because of a shared religious background and the perception of chaplains as impartial.<sup>63</sup>

They love religious pictures and statues. (Prison Chaplain, North West)

TPRP found that chaplains and prison officers were sometimes bemused by the religious practices of Traveller prisoners, in particular, the importance placed on religious images and statues. As Irish Travellers are traditionally nomadic, their religious practice often incorporated religious images and objects that could be transported with them. For this reason, religious images and objects remain important in the lives of Traveller prisoners.

The priest looks at Travellers a bit funny... how they're always down on their knees before the statues. He found it a bit strange how they seemed to venerate the statue of Our Lady. (Prison Chaplain, Midlands)

Significantly, Chaplaincy teams should be reminded that the use of images and statues in Catholic religious practice, although a distinctive form of devotional worship, is both traditional and orthodox.<sup>64</sup>

A BIBLE WAS THROWN OUT THE WINDOW. I SAID TO THE S.O. SOMEBODY SHOULD PICK IT UP. NOBODY DID. IF IT WAS A QUR'AN IT WOULD'VE BEEN PICKED UP. THE PLACE WOULD'VE EXPLODED. THERE'S NOT THE SAME RESPECT FOR OUR RELIGION.

(Prison chaplain)

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<sup>63</sup> The suitability of a Catholic chaplain contributing to the delivery of an effective race equality strategy as regards Travellers should not be seen as removing the responsibility for delivery away from other relevant post-holders such as the Race Equality Officer, the Diversity Officer and / or the Foreign Nationals Co-ordinator.

<sup>64</sup> The Catechism of the Roman Catholic Church, 2132, states: The Christian veneration of images is not contrary to the first commandment which proscribes idols. Indeed, "the honour rendered to an image passes to its prototype," and "whoever venerates an image venerates the person portrayed in it." The honour paid to sacred images is a "respectful veneration," not the adoration due to God alone: Religious worship is not directed to images in themselves, considered as mere things, but under their distinctive aspect as images leading us on to God incarnate. The movement toward the image does not terminate in it as image, but tends toward that whose image it is, (St. Thomas Aquinas, STh II-II,81,3 ad 3).

MY MAIN CONCERN FOR IRISH TRAVELLERS IS THAT THEY ARE NOT BEING GIVEN THE SPIRITUAL AND PASTORAL CARE THEY DESERVE.

(Prison chaplain)

ANYTHING WE WANT IN PRISON WE HAVE TO GO TO A CHAPLAIN. NO ONE ELSE HELPS.

WHEN CONDUCTING THE SURVEY, THE RECORDS SHOWED THAT ON ONE WING ALONE THERE WERE ONLY 5 TRAVELLERS, WHEN IN FACT I FOUND 10! THERE ARE FAR MORE TRAVELLERS IN PRISON THAN RECORDS SHOW.

(Prison chaplain)

IT IS MY EXPERIENCE THAT IRISH TRAVELLERS ARE VERY FAMILY ORIENTATED AND DEEPLY SPIRITUAL. THEY OFTEN ATTEND BOTH ROMAN CATHOLIC AND ANGLICAN SERVICES AND ARE QUITE SOCIABLE AND WILLING TO ENGAGE.

(Prison chaplain)



## 16. MONITORING, RECEPTION AND INDUCTION

### 16.1 Findings

TPRP found that there was no systematic monitoring across prisons in England and Wales of Irish Traveller prisoners.

On 11th October 2010, Lord Avebury asked when does the Government plan to identify Gypsies and Irish Travellers as a separate ethnic minority group within the P-NOMIS system [National Offender Management Information System]?

Replying, The Minister of State, Ministry of Justice (Lord McNally), stated: 'The ONS [Office for National Statistics] is responsible for allocating ethnicity groups with a code for recording purposes. Once the ONS has allocated Gypsies and Irish Travellers with a code, the MoJ will circulate a change request. This request will ensure that the change is implemented across the justice agencies in an appropriate and timely manner, including within Prison-NOMIS. A timescale for this change has not been agreed yet.' (Hansard, 2010)

### 16.2 The Context

To have an equality policy without ethnic monitoring is like aiming for good financial management without keeping financial records... Ethnic monitoring can tell you whether you are offering equality of opportunity and treatment to all ethnic groups. It can also tell you how and why you are falling short of this ideal. (Commission for Racial Equality, 2002, p.3)

6% of respondents said they were a Gypsy, Romany or Traveller, but the equalities manager was not aware of any prisoners from these groups, and there was no specific support for them. (HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, 2010, p.37)

...the majority of establishments do not record how many Gypsy Traveller Roma prisoners they have in their population. The Review Team found no monitoring of these groups being undertaken in the establishments visited, and Gypsy Traveller Roma prisoners complained that they did not feel their needs were considered. (NOMS, 2008, p.59)

### 16.2.1 Identification of Prisoners' Ethnicity, Nationality and Religion

ESTABLISHING NATIONALITY: ...It is important for the effective management of foreign national prisoners that the correct nationality of a prisoner is established as early as possible. This is not an easy task but it is an increasingly important one. Accurate information on nationality is... increasingly important for sentence planning purposes. Accurate statistics are also needed for Ministers, Parliament and the public.

**Prison Service Instruction 21/2007**

Foreign national prisoners, or prisoners who hold British passports but have lived for a substantial period in another country, must be identified.

Details of all newly arriving prisoners must be recorded in their personal record F2050 and on Prison-NOMIS...The information recorded must include the name and contact details of the prisoner's next of kin or nominated contact, the prisoner's ethnic group, and their religion...

**Prison Service Instruction 52/2010**

### 16.2.2 Identification of Mental Health Needs

[Processing at] Reception...[should] identify any immediate needs and risks already recorded. The prisoner must also be interviewed, in private if possible, to discover and record any further immediate needs and risks, and any other information about the prisoner that may be relevant, particularly during their first night in custody.

First Night in Custody, when family and community links are broken and the future is uncertain, is one of the most stressful times for prisoners. Many self-inflicted deaths and self-harm incidents occur within the first 24 hours, the first week, and the first month, particularly among younger prisoners. Extra emphasis placed on tackling safer custody issues during the first 24 hours and beyond is likely to produce most benefit in this early period.

**Prison Service Instruction 52/2010**

### 16.2.3 Identification of Educational Needs

Any special needs of particular categories of prisoners, such as foreign national prisoners (e.g., lack of knowledge of English or local customs, family contact issues), and those with disabilities or learning difficulties, must be addressed.

All new prisoners must be provided with a pack or booklet giving essential information...As far as possible, this information should be available in a variety of formats (e.g. written, video, audio)... Prisoners new to custody are likely to find the reception and first night periods confusing and even overwhelming, and while staff should try to help them settle in and overcome their anxieties, it is good practice not to overload prisoners with information when they first arrive.

Induction to Custody...Key outcome: Prisoners know and understand their entitlements and responsibilities, and how to access support and facilities available to them...Prisoners must be placed on an appropriate induction programme...The induction package must be adapted as far as possible to take account of individual prisoners' learning abilities and language competencies, and make use of a variety of formats (e.g. visual, oral, written, etc) as appropriate...

**Prison Service Instruction 52/2010**

### 16.3 Commentary

TPRP found that in most cases, Irish Travellers in prison in England and Wales are not routinely identified by prisons as Irish Travellers nor are they identified as constituent of the wider Irish Traveller / Gypsy ethnic category employed in the 2011 Census. The consequence of failing to effectively monitor the population of Irish Travellers in prison is that the distinctive rehabilitation and broader custody issues of this ethnic minority are left unaddressed during the sentence period. TPRP concluded that because prison monitoring processes failed to count Irish Traveller prisoners, this prisoner group was often ignored in terms of suitable service provision.

In the prisons which actively promote awareness of Traveller life and culture there was an increased willingness by Irish Travellers to identify themselves as Irish Travellers. Traveller prisoners indicated that it was only in establishments in which Travellers were treated equitably that they felt they could identify as Irish Travellers. In the prisons which promoted an awareness of Traveller culture through regular Traveller groups, Traveller Prisoner Representatives and Traveller Diversity Representatives the atmosphere between prisoners and staff was more positive than those prisons which did not include Travellers in their Race Equality Action Plan (REAP), (PSO 2800, 3.3).

#### **TPRP found that the reasons for a lack of effective monitoring included:**

- A failure by some prisons to include Travellers in monitoring processes

When your initial enquiry came, I raised it with our Deputy Governor. Sadly, she felt that we did not have the resources at the moment to complete the survey. (Prison Officer, North West)

I have checked with the Head of Diversity and we are not currently in a position to identify this group within the prisoner population although we are hoping to address this in the near future. (Prison Officer, London)

Would you please note that we do not record Irish Travellers as a designated group. (Prison Officer, South West)

- A failure by some prison staff to identify Travellers by asking questions as to a prisoners ethnic background

[The] issue I'm facing is that on the official system we do not have any Irish Travellers. We do have people from Northern Ireland and Southern Ireland and quite a few of them will identify themselves face to face as coming from the travelling community background but will not commit that information to paper as they feel it will hamper there [sic] progress in some way. (Diversity Officer, South East)

- A reluctance on the part of some Traveller prisoners to identify as Travellers due to fear of discrimination

In response to your request for research to be conducted on your behalf for Irish Travellers I wish to inform you that we did attempt to conduct this research for you. However at the time of asking, our records showed that we had no Irish Traveller offenders currently resident at HMP...We did look further, as we are aware that for their own reasons, some traveller offenders do not disclose their traveller status. (Diversity Officer, South East)

I have no Irish Travellers listed on the nomis system for the establishment at present. This is not unusual, a lot of lads use the White British code instead. (Diversity Officer, South East)

...at the moment we are showing that we do not have any travellers at HMP...however we are currently reviewing our data collection process and that will include a clear avenue for women who are travellers to disclose if they choose to. (Diversity Officer, Midlands)

We have travellers from different backgrounds ... They will attend the Catholic mass and use that as a meeting venue, but the problem is that they are often reluctant to identify themselves. (Diversity Officer, North East)

- The inability of some Traveller prisoners to read and complete monitoring paperwork

Nobody asked me, they just went through some pages filling out things. I didn't know what the sheet said. (Irish Traveller prisoner, Midlands, speaking about ethnic monitoring on reception into prison)

**Therefore, an effective national monitoring strategy would:**

- Impose a duty on all prisons to collect accurate data about their Traveller population (at the very least as part of the wider Traveller / Gypsy ethnic category);
- Require staff to effectively identify Travellers upon reception into prison;
- Reassure Travellers of equal treatment within a particular institution;
- Ensure that the identification of a Traveller's ethnicity does not depend on the prisoner's level of literacy.

Regrettably, although NOMS have been aware of the distinctive problems evident amongst Travellers, a substantial minority in prison, no such strategy has been or is in place to identify this prisoner group. TPRP is deeply troubled that following concerns expressed in the CRE report published in 2003, regarding

'access to goods, facilities or services' for Irish Travellers and the subsequent NOMS report published in 2008, there has been a failure to effectively address the monitoring of this prisoner group.<sup>65</sup>

Given the lack of ethnic monitoring of Gypsy Traveller Roma prisoners in most establishments, further work is needed to ensure equality of access to goods, facilities and services for this group. A priority area both nationally and locally is to ensure that the needs of Gypsy Traveller Roma prisoners are addressed. (NOMS, 2008, p.61)

Three years later, TPRP found no indication that prisons believed that the monitoring of Gypsy Traveller Roma prisoners was a priority. TPRP, to date, has found only ad hoc attempts to effectively monitor Travellers and in turn, address the needs of this prisoner group.

TWO MEMBERS OF THE PRISONER DIVERSITY  
REP GROUP ARE IRISH TRAVELLERS. THEY  
GREET ALL PRISONERS ON INDUCTION AND  
IDENTIFY TRAVELLERS/GYPSIES AND OTHER  
MEMBERS OF THIS COMMUNITY FOR ME.

(Diversity Manager)

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<sup>65</sup> *Race Equality in Prisons: A formal investigation by the Commission for Racial Equality into HM Prison Service of England and Wales*, (Commission for Racial Equality, 2003, Part Two, p.83) and *Race Review 2008, Implementing Race Equality in Prisons – Five Years On*, (NOMS, 2008, p.61).

THE ONLY GROUP OF PRISONERS WHO DO NOT HAVE A ONE TO ONE MEETING WITH SOME SUPERVISOR ARE THE ENGLISH AND IRISH TRAVELLING PRISONERS. THERE SHOULD BE A GROUP OF PEOPLE PUT TOGETHER TO DEAL WITH THE TRAVELLERS AND KNOWS TRAVELLING HISTORY AND LOOKS AFTER WELFARE. SOMEBODY WHO COMES TO PRISON TWO OR THREE TIMES A YEAR AND IS IN CONTACT THROUGH PHONES AND LETTERS...

WE RUN THE TOE BY TOE MENTORING SCHEME AND EMPLOYED A TRAVELLER AS A PRISONER MENTOR. OTHER GYPSIES AND TRAVELLERS FELT MORE COMFORTABLE DOING THE SCHEME HAVING A FELLOW TRAVELLER TEACHING THEM TO READ.

(Gypsy and Traveller Liaison Officer)

WE NEED A TRAVELLER REP TO LOOK AFTER TRAVELLERS.

BLOCK LAYING, BRICKLAYING AND PAINTING ARE ALL GOOD COURSES. THEY'RE JOBS A MAN CAN DO BY HIMSELF.

A TRAVELLER GROUP WOULD BE GREAT FOR THE SUPPORT, WHERE YOU TALK TO YOUR OWN PEOPLE.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: VOICES UNHEARD, A STUDY OF IRISH TRAVELLERS IN PRISON

The Travellers in Prison Research Project, (TPRP), an initiative of the Irish Chaplaincy in Britain, (ICB), conducted research across prisons in England and Wales during the period August 2010 to March 2011 in order to establish an accurate picture of prisoners from an Irish Traveller background. The culmination of this research, *Voices Unheard*, is the first study of Irish Travellers in prison in England and Wales. It is first and foremost a presentation of data regarding Irish Travellers in prison. By accurately describing the situation of Irish Travellers in prison, it is hoped that the report proves to be a catalyst for effective monitoring of this prisoner group and consequently, the efficient re-deployment of available resources for Irish Travellers in prison. Effective service delivery to Irish Travellers in prison can result in a reduction in re-offending amongst this group and a corresponding reduction in the harm done to society in general. *Voices Unheard*, thereby, can represent a positive way forward for both the Irish Travelling community and wider society.

Since 2003, HM Prison Service has been aware of the failure to adequately address the needs of Irish Travellers in prison in England and Wales. Irish Travellers suffer unequal hardship in prison.<sup>1</sup> Poor levels of literacy, mental illness, limited access to services, discrimination and prejudicial licence conditions for release, disproportionately affect Traveller prisoners. Despite official recognition of these issues and the size of the Traveller population perhaps being as high as 1% of the overall prison population, little intervention has taken place to encourage rehabilitation amongst this group. Without appropriate strategies for Travellers in prison, society will continue to bear the social and economic burden of warehousing an ethnic group who cannot access education courses because they cannot read; a group that cannot complete rehabilitation programmes because they cannot write; and a group that cannot file their grievances because they cannot complete forms.

Irish Travellers are members of a legally recognised ethnic group which has been a part of British society for centuries. Irish Travellers were, until the 1950s, an integral part of the rural economy in Britain, providing a wide range of skills and labour. Urbanisation, mass production of plastics, the mechanisation of agriculture and the bureaucratisation of society have undermined the traditional basis of the Traveller economy. Irish Travellers, as a result, have become marginalised economically and in turn, have become increasingly marginalised socially. A hostile media and definitively anti-nomadic legislation such as the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, have exacerbated the precarious condition of this group.

Irish Travellers have not always adapted to the dynamics of contemporary life in Britain. Committed to retaining their strong family bonds and nomadic way of life, many Travellers have refused to assimilate into British society. On occasion, maintaining the Traveller way of life, has, for some Travellers, meant living apart from mainstream society. Experiences of pervasive prejudice from within mainstream society, for example, in terms of accommodation or educational opportunities, have conditioned some in this community to become less concerned with society's rules and more interested in their own survival and prosperity. TPRP found that this narrative frequently results in the imprisonment of Irish Travellers.

Overall, TPRP found that prisons are ill-prepared to deal with this distinctive prisoner group, failing to address the needs of Irish Traveller prisoners and consequently, failing in broader ambitions to reduce recidivism. *Voices Unheard* enumerates the challenges facing Irish Travellers in prison and makes initial recommendations for the improved delivery of services to this prisoner group, for the benefit of the Irish Traveller community and wider society.

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<sup>1</sup> See *Race Equality in Prisons: A formal investigation by the Commission for Racial Equality into HM Prison Service of England and Wales*, (Commission for Racial Equality, 2003, Part Two, p.83) and *Race Review 2008, Implementing Race Equality in Prisons – Five Years On*, (NOMS, 2008, p.59, p.61).

## Findings

- There is no effective, overall strategy for monitoring Irish Travellers in prison as a separate group or as part of a broader Gypsy Traveller Roma category.
- Prisons have failed to formulate or implement measures to ensure equality of opportunity for this prisoner group despite the stated 'priority' given to addressing 'the needs of Gypsy Traveller Roma prisoners.'<sup>2</sup>
- Irish Travellers in prison are commonly subjected to racist treatment.
- Irish Travellers represent between 0.6% and 1% of the entire prison population.
- Irish Travellers represent between 2.5% and 4% of the minority ethnic population in prison.
- Irish Travellers may represent between 5% and 8% of the foreign national population in prison.
- 51.7% of offences involving Irish Travellers were in relation to unlawfully obtaining property.
- 59.3 % of Irish Traveller prisoners were identified as requiring basic educational intervention.
- 26.1% of Irish Traveller prisoners were identified as having one or more mental illnesses.
- 58.9% of Irish Traveller prisoners have a child (or children) under the age of 18.
- 37% of Irish Traveller prisoners normally live (i.e. prior to incarceration) on Traveller sites.
- 46.3% of all Irish Traveller prisoners are young adults (between 18 and 21 years of age).
- 51.6% of Traveller Young Offender males have a child (or children).
- 64.7% of female Traveller prisoners have a mental illness.
- 52.6% of female Traveller prisoners have a child (or children) under the age of 18.

WE'LL NEVER BE EQUAL IN THIS WORLD

(Young Offender)

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<sup>2</sup> *Race Review 2008*, (NOMS, 2008, p.61)

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- The entire prison estate should introduce an effective process for monitoring the population of Irish Travellers in prison.
- Prisons which have five or more Travellers in custody should facilitate regular meetings of this prisoner group with access to appropriate resources.
- Prisons should appoint a suitable Traveller as a Traveller Representative who should be involved in reception, induction, monitoring and delivery of services for Traveller prisoners.
- Cultural awareness, equality and diversity training for prison staff should include information on Irish Traveller culture.
- Celebrations of importance to Irish Travellers such as St Patrick's Day and Gypsy Roma Traveller Month should be recognised and used to create wider cultural awareness in prison.
- Prisons should implement and encourage education programmes which are culturally suitable for Irish Travellers such as the peer mentoring reading programme, Toe by Toe.<sup>3</sup>
- Prisons should develop strategies for Traveller prisoners with literacy problems who wish to access rehabilitation programmes.
- Prisons should consider options for facilitating access to occupational courses such as bricklaying and painting without stringent literacy requirements.
- Prisons should permit the transfer of appropriate sums from a Traveller prisoner's canteen account to his or her PIN phone account in recognition of the more expensive phone calls to mobile phones in the UK and internationally.
- Prisons should afford all Irish Traveller prisoners the opportunity to purchase the approved international phone card.
- Prisons should permit visiting orders to be left at the prison entrance or at an appropriate designated address in the case of Traveller prisoners without an officially recognised address.
- Resettlement services in prisons should have identifiable strategies for dealing with Traveller prisoners.
- Conditions for release on licence should take account of a Traveller's right to reside on a Traveller site.

THERE HAS TO BE SOMETHING POSITIVE DONE ABOUT IT BY PUTTING TOGETHER A GROUP OF PEOPLE WHO ARE WELL-EDUCATED IN THE TRAVELLING WAY OF LIFE AND THE HISTORY OF THE TRAVELLERS, WHO WE CAN TRUST AND CAN BE A SPOKESMAN OR A GO-BETWEEN, BETWEEN OURSELVES AND THE AUTHORITIES...

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<sup>3</sup> Toe by Toe is organised in prisons in the UK by The Shannon Trust.



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