



Briefing Paper 1: Traveller and Roma Cultural Identity

Introduction

Over the coming period the second National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy, an essential tool for progressing key areas of policy important for Travellers and Roma, and the National Traveller and Roma Education Strategy are being developed and seeking views and submissions. In addition, a number of other policy areas relevant for Roma and Travellers are under consideration and implementation of Traveller and Roma policy through targeted and mainstream actions continues to be slow.

This is one of a series of short briefs intended to inform thinking about and engagement with key thematic areas - in this instance Traveller and Roma Culture – which are pertinent for those policies and the progress of Traveller and Roma rights and equality which should flow from them. The briefing papers are designed as a work in progress to be reinforced and/or modified as the discussions develop.

Traveller and Roma Cultural Identity

Our Vision: Traveller and Roma Ethnicity is celebrated and promoted through arts, culture, and heritage.

Our Ask: Sustainable public funding to preserve and promote Traveller and Roma history and culture, and engagement in the Arts.

Context: Traveller and Roma Culture

Resourcing and celebrating Traveller and Roma identity, culture and heritage is a central element in any strategy to counter discrimination and the exclusion and marginalisation of Travellers and Roma. In the context of marginalisation and exclusion there is a particular need for inclusion measures, including through the arts, that empower Travellers and Roma and help to build effective participation.

Irish Travellers have a unique position in the history of arts, culture, and heritage of Ireland. Promoting Traveller arts and cultural heritage and Traveller participation and engagement with cultural work requires a dual approach whereby Travellers are included in mainstream events and institutions but, in addition, specific and targeted measures are needed to counteract the impact of systemic racism and exclusion.

Traveller projects and organisations need to be respected as centres for Traveller arts and culture in terms of traditional Traveller crafts and, also, Traveller participation in music, song, media, visual arts, poetry and drama among others.

Commitments and Progress Made During NTRIS 2017-Present

NTRIS Cultural Identity Objectives:

- Traveller culture, identity and heritage is supported and valued within Irish society.
- Travellers and Roma are supported to develop, preserve, and promote their cultural heritage.
- Facilitate intergenerational learning, cultural continuity and positive self- identity for Travellers and Roma



1. Sustainably Preserving and Promoting Traveller and Roma Culture

Pavee Point has welcomed financial support by the State towards small projects as part of the annual Traveller Pride Week, and International Roma Day, which aim to celebrate Traveller and Roma culture. Exhibitions and projects with the National Museum of Ireland have taken place and the Traveller Wellbeing Through Creativity Pilot Initiative was established. However, as noted by the Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM), such funding is ad hoc in nature and project-based. We support the FCNM Advisory Committee's call for the State to take immediate action to support Travellers in preserving and developing their identity and culture on a more permanent and ongoing basis. Active participation and engagement with Traveller organisations to identify the supports required to further develop this work will be crucial in building Traveller inclusion in the arts and culture sector. This will require building on and facilitating ongoing opportunities for participation, skills development, mentoring and leadership opportunities.

2. Inclusion of Traveller and Roma Culture within the School Curriculum

We acknowledge the positive developments taking place in relation to including Traveller culture and history in the school curriculum which holds potential to create a more inclusive school environment for Travellers. However, to ensure effective implementation upon their enactment, steps must be taken to ensure that policy and practice in schools are in line with interculturalism, antidiscrimination and anti-racism, and that they explicitly focus on Travellers, and that this approach could be built upon to include other cultures, including Roma culture.

3. Promote Mainstreaming and Inclusion of Traveller & Roma Arts and Culture

Travellers are a named group in a range of cultural organisations' equality and diversity statements in line with Arts Council EDI strategy, NTRIS and IHREC Act 2014 - this is a very welcome development, but a gap is arising between the positive intention behind this commitment and implementation of schemes, bursaries, opportunities for participation on courses, workshops and engagement with arts institutions. Additional measures are needed to bridge this gap and build Traveller and Roma engagement strategies with arts and culture institutions in conjunction with Traveller and Roma organisations.

Recommendations

- Resource Traveller organisations and organisations working with Roma and explore mechanisms to support community engagement with arts and culture work - in order to collect, and preserve the history, stories, songs and identities of Travellers, including the Cant language and to promote Traveller and Roma engagement with, and access to their own cultures, and ambitious art practices.
- Ensure that the inclusion of Traveller culture and history in school curriculum takes place in active consultation with Traveller organisations and acts as a precedent for further inclusion of all the cultures which are part of Ireland.
- Develop and implement Traveller inclusion strategies in mainstream arts and culture institutions to include targeted actions.