

Common Myths

■ Myth: TRAVELLER ACCOMMODATION LOWERS NEARBY HOUSE PRICES

Independent research has shown no drop in house prices due to adjacent Traveller accommodation. This myth is generated to try to keep Travellers out and results in Travellers being deprived of a place to live.



■ Myth: TRAVELLERS DO NOT WANT TO BE PART OF IRISH SOCIETY

Travellers have always been part of Irish society. Unfortunately, Traveller experience of Irish society is often one of exclusion from the mainstream. Travellers are often viewed as 'a problem'; one that would be solved if Travellers would just be 'normal' and 'fit in'.

This attitude comes from a failure to recognise Travellers as a minority ethnic group. Travellers are a distinct ethnic group with their own culture, shared history, language, traditions, perceptions and sense of belonging.

Discrimination is now, and has always been, the main barrier facing Travellers when it comes to equal participation in society. Discrimination has a deep effect on Travellers and gives Travellers the message that they are not wanted.

Up until recently there was no legal redress for Travellers, or other groups, experiencing discrimination. Now, with the Equal Status Act and the Employment Equality Act, Travellers are beginning to challenge the treatment they receive.

■ Myth: TRAVELLERS CHOOSE TO LIVE ON THE SIDE OF THE ROAD.

Travellers do not want to live without access to basic facilities such as water, electricity and sanitation. The vast majority of Travellers living on the roadside are on local authority accommodation waiting lists and are living on the roadside because there is nowhere else for them to go.



In 1995, the Government Task Force on the Traveller Community recommended that 3,100 units of accommodation be provided for Travellers by year 2000. It recommended that 900 houses and 2,200 Traveller specific units (eg., halting sites, group housing etc) be provided. Since 1995, approximately 900 housing units and approximately 600 Traveller specific units have been provided. Approximately 1500 Traveller families still require permanent accommodation in Ireland in 2005.

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Irish Travellers

Challenging the Myths



This leaflet sets out to challenge some of the most recurring myths and misinformation about Irish Travellers in Ireland.

Irish Travellers are an important part of the existing cultural and ethnic diversity in Ireland. Travellers have a long shared history, a nomadic tradition and a distinct cultural identity.



Census 2002 records 24,000 Irish Travellers in Ireland, representing 0.6% of the population. According to the Census, Travellers continue to have a much lower life expectancy compared to the general population. Those over 65 years account for 3.3% of the Traveller population compared with 11.1% of the general population.



This leaflet seeks to challenge the belief that Travellers are to blame for their own situation. It recognises that the whole of society, including Travellers, have a responsibility to

improve the living circumstances of Travellers.



Offensive Labels

- **Travellers are often thought of** as a group who are, at best, a romantic leftover from the past and at worst, cheats, criminals and people who choose to live in dirty conditions without respect for anyone else. Such labels serve to promote racism and discrimination and prevent Travellers achieving full equality in accommodation, education, health and the provision of services.
- **Travellers are often blamed** for crime and anti-social behaviour. This may occur even when it emerges subsequently that others were responsible. As in all communities there will be some Travellers who engage in crime, but, to associate all Travellers with crime, or to blame Travellers for crime without proof, is offensive and contributes to the exclusion of Travellers.
- **Travellers are often condemned** for halting sites being badly maintained. Some Traveller sites are very well looked after by Traveller families and local authorities, however, many local authority halting sites are poorly serviced in terms of sanitation and refuse collections.



- **Travellers are often labelled** as cheats who do not pay taxes and do not pay for the services they receive on halting sites. Travellers on official halting sites pay rent to local authorities, even when such sites and services are sub-standard. Any Traveller in receipt of social welfare is means tested in the same way as the general population. Travellers in the PAYE sector pay tax in the same manner as the general population and self-employed Travellers make their own tax returns, as do members of the general population. Travellers also pay tax in the form of VAT on goods and services.
- **Travellers are often associated** with violent behaviour. However, there is no evidence that violence of any type is more prevalent among any one ethnic group than another. This label is often used to paint Travellers as brutish and as a justification for racism and discrimination which excludes Travellers.
- **Travellers are often labelled** as being work shy. Discrimination is the main barrier to Travellers joining the mainstream labour market. Against the odds, there are an increasing number Travellers joining the labour force and working as commercial drivers, community workers and as workers in service industries. Other Travellers are also successfully self-employed.

Offensive terms are often used to or about Travellers. Most people are aware that the term 'knacker' is highly offensive to Travellers yet they persist in using the term. While the origins of this term may have been different, it is now commonly applied to Travellers in the same way negative words are used against black people. 'Itinerant' is also an offensive term to Travellers and continues to be used as a pseudo scientific word.