

TRAVELLERS IN THE IRISH PRISON SYSTEM

A QUALITATIVE STUDY



IPRT
Irish Penal Reform Trust

The Irish Penal Reform Trust is an independent non-governmental organisation campaigning for the rights of everyone in the penal system, with prison as a last resort.

This report was written by Liza Costello, and was supported by the St Stephen's Green Trust.

Cover image: James Collins conducting a tinsmithing workshop at Cloverhill Prison © Derek Speirs (image provided by Pavee Point)

Irish Penal Reform Trust
MACRO Building
1 Green Street
Dublin 7, Ireland
T: +353 (0) 1 874 1400
E: info@iprt.ie
W: www.iprt.ie

Copyright © Irish Penal Reform Trust, 2014

ISBN: 978-0-9573037-5-1

Design: www.hexhibit.com

Contents

Acknowledgements	3
Summary of Recommendations	4
1. Introduction	6
2. Findings from the research literature	8
3. Issues facing Travellers in the Irish prison system	14
4. Issues facing Travellers leaving prison	31
5. Supports and coping strategies in prison	35
6. The bigger picture	39
7. Ways forward	47
8. Examples of good practice	51
9. Conclusion and recommendations	57
References	63
Appendix A: Travellers in prison: a rights-based perspective	67
Appendix B: Research methodology	69

The implementation of human rights standards in prisons, which includes the equitable treatment of all prisoners, is vital to establish a positive prison environment and thereby to improve prison management. Equitable treatment encompasses eliminating all forms of discrimination, as well as taking affirmative action to ensure that the special needs of ethnic and racial minority and indigenous prisoners are met. For such a strategy to be successful the first step is for prison services to make clear their commitment to racial and ethnic equality and to transform commitment into practice, by taking specific measures and putting in place appropriate mechanisms, ideally in consultation with community representatives of ethnic and racial minorities and indigenous peoples.

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2009,
Handbook on Prisoners with Special Needs p. 57

Acknowledgements

IPRT would like to express sincere gratitude to the interviewees for this study, for their time and for sharing their experiences. This report could not have been completed without their generous contribution.

We would also like to thank all the voluntary organisations that kindly supported the interview process. In order to protect the confidentiality of participants, they cannot be named, but their support was crucial. Pavee Point played a very helpful role in facilitating contact with them. Finally, thanks are due to the members of the research group for supporting the study: Seamus Taylor of NUI Maynooth, Katayoun Bahramian and John Paul Casey of Pavee Point, Susan Fay of the Irish Traveller Movement and Maria Joyce of the National Traveller Women's Forum.

IPRT would also like to acknowledge the support of St Stephen's Green Trust in this research project and publication.

Liza Costello

Summary of Recommendations

RECOMMENDATION 1

Develop a strategy for Travellers in the criminal justice system

A dedicated strategy should be developed for Travellers in the criminal justice system. It should aim to:

- address how discrimination can impact Travellers' experience of the criminal justice system, be it through disproportionate arrest and conviction rates, or unfair treatment within the prison system.
- identify proactive steps to ensure that Travellers have equal and culturally appropriate access to education while in prison, including literacy education.
- set out steps to ensure equitable access to relevant supports for Travellers on leaving prison, including support in accessing employment and accommodation, as well as rehabilitation and other therapies, and in returning to their community.
- establish means by which Traveller organisations can play a role.

RECOMMENDATION 2

Develop an equality policy for the Irish Prison Service

In the UK, the Equality Act 2010 placed a legal obligation on the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) to address discrimination against prisoners and to advance equality of opportunity among them. In Ireland, similar legislation is expected to be introduced, within the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Bill.

In order to meet this forthcoming requirement, the Irish prison service should develop an equality policy for all minority groups in prison, including Travellers.¹ This should set out how the Irish Prison Service (IPS) ensures that all prisoners receive equal treatment and enjoy equal rights. It should identify barriers to rights for particular groups of prisoners, and how the IPS addresses those barriers. Regarding Travellers, it should address the following issues:

- Discrimination from prison officers
- Discrimination from other prisoners
- Literacy problems and how they can prevent Travellers from accessing information
- Inclusion of Travellers and avoiding segregation
- Physical safety of Travellers in prison
- Access to appropriate mental health supports.

¹ Other groups could include other minority ethnic groups, older prisoners, prisoners with disability and prisoners from the LBGT community.

RECOMMENDATION 3

Conduct effective ethnic monitoring

Irish Penal Reform Trust (IPRT) welcomes the recent introduction of ethnic monitoring in the Irish Prison Service, and sees this as a very important first step. However, successful ethnic monitoring must involve:

1. introducing ethnic monitoring in prisons, using the ethnic categories developed by the Central Statistics Office (CSO) to enable comparative data and taking a proactive approach with Travellers;
2. analysing and publishing the results on a regular basis; and
3. addressing any unjustifiable disproportional outcomes between Travellers and other prisoners.

RECOMMENDATION 4

Establish Traveller groups in prisons

Feedback from those involved in setting up and facilitating Traveller groups in the UK prison system suggests these groups are instrumental in ensuring that Travellers' needs are identified and brought to the attention of prison staff. They can also be a useful social opportunity. However, in order to work effectively, good facilitation is required. This involves the participation of community-based Traveller organisations.

RECOMMENDATION 5

Provide targeted reintegration support

Barriers to reintegration need to be targeted through specific measures.

Involve voluntary organisations: Relevant voluntary organisations, alongside the Probation Service, should be funded to support Travellers on leaving prison and to work with Traveller communities to address factors such as stigma surrounding drug use and offending behaviour.

Targeted support: For those who cannot return to their family, targeted support measures should exist to enable them to access secure accommodation and employment.

Raise awareness: Awareness needs to be raised among young people in the Traveller community regarding dependent drug use and its consequences.

RECOMMENDATION 6

Further research

Evidence from the All-Ireland Traveller Health Study (AITHS) (2010) suggests that Travellers are disproportionately represented in the Irish prison system. Emerging findings from this study suggest that, as is the case for a large proportion of people committed by sentence generally², much offending behaviour among Travellers is largely rooted in a context of marginalisation and social exclusion, compounded by discrimination. This relates to what Mac Gréil refers to as a 'culture of poverty' (2010), whereby structural barriers to inclusion ensure that Travellers remain at a very peripheral level of Irish society. Further research is required to fully explore the relationship between social disadvantage, marginalisation and offending behaviour among Travellers.

² See IPRT (2012a) *The vicious circle of social exclusion and crime: Ireland's disproportionate punishment of the poor*, IPRT, Dublin.

1. Introduction

Over recent years, the Irish Penal Reform Trust (IPRT) has become increasingly aware that very little has been documented about the experiences of Travellers in the Irish prison system, while evidence that has emerged from the UK gives cause for concern. Reports by the Irish Chaplaincy in Britain, the Scotland Equality and Human Rights Commission, the (then) Commission for Racial Equality and others have all revealed a wide range of issues that disproportionately affect Travellers in prison. These include racist abuse from other prisoners and prison officers, discrimination, lack of literacy, high rates of suicide, substance misuse, and often the strength of Traveller family ties not being recognised, leading to isolation, self-harm and even suicide.

In 2011, the UN Committee Against Torture's Concluding Observations to Ireland suggested that such issues were not unique to the UK context. In this document, it expressed concern 'at reports of allegations by prisoners from the Traveller community in Cork prison that they are consistently subjected to acts of intimidation by other prisoners' and recommended that the State address 'the issue of intimidation of the Traveller community and investigat[e] all allegations of such intimidation'.

In response to these concerns, in February 2013, IPRT applied for funding from the St Stephen's Green Trust to commence a project addressing the experiences and needs of Travellers in the Irish prison service. Funding was provided and this research study was conducted between August–November 2013.

Aim and objectives

The aim of this research is to illuminate the experiences and needs of Travellers in prison. Its objectives are to:

- present what is already known regarding Travellers in prison;
- analyse the rights of Travellers in prison from an equality and human rights perspective;
- conduct primary research into the needs and experiences of Travellers in the Irish prison system;
- highlight models of good practice in meeting the needs of minority ethnic groups in prison; and
- to make relevant evidence-based recommendations to the Irish Prison Service and other relevant bodies.

A qualitative approach

Due to the paucity of research literature in the Irish context, this study took an exploratory approach in order to achieve these aims. Desk-based research was conducted to review and present relevant international research literature on the experiences of ethnic minorities in prison, focusing on studies that directly consider the experience of Travellers. This included a review of good practice measures, which involved telephone interviews with two key stakeholders in the UK. The desk-based stage also involved analysing international human rights and equality legislation instruments, both regarding minority ethnic groups and prisons, in order to identify the rights of Travellers in prison as protected by international standards.

The second stage of the research involved collecting primary qualitative data on the experiences of Travellers in the Irish prison system. In-depth interviews were carried out with 10 Traveller ex-prisoners over September–November 2013. Interviewees were accessed via voluntary organisations working with Travellers. In the early stages of this research, a roundtable meeting was also held with national Traveller organisations. The methodology of the research is included at Appendix B.

Report outline

Chapter 2 presents a summary of relevant findings from the research literature. This is followed by the qualitative findings, presented in chapters 3–7 of the report. Chapter 3 focuses on the issues faced by Travellers in the Irish prison system. Chapter 4 goes on to explore issues faced by Travellers on returning to the community. Chapter 5 discusses supports and coping strategies of Travellers while in prison. Chapter 6, 'The bigger picture', explores how issues faced by interviewees in the prison context are also experienced in the wider community, while Chapter 7 considers 'ways forward' for the prison service and the criminal justice system more generally. Chapter 8 of this report looks at models of good practice in other jurisdictions, focusing particularly on the UK, where initiatives have been implemented specifically for Irish Travellers in prison. The last chapter, Chapter 9, discusses the findings of this study, and considers them alongside some of the existing research literature, before going on to make a series of recommendations.

Appendix A provides a review of international human rights instruments as they pertain to the rights of Travellers in the Irish prison system. A research proposal submitted to an internal IPRT ethics committee (comprised of IPRT board members) is included in Appendix C, which also provides greater detail into the research methodology. Appendix D contains the study's research tools: the consent form and information sheet.

2. Findings from the research literature

Disproportionate representation of Travellers in prison

The limited available evidence suggests that Travellers are strongly over-represented in the Irish prison system. The All-Ireland Traveller Health Study (AITHS, 2010) census identified 150–299 Traveller men and 18–21 Traveller women who were in prison. As Travellers comprise only 0.6% of the population in the Republic of Ireland, these figures suggest Traveller men are between five and 11 times more likely than other men to be imprisoned, while Traveller women face a risk of imprisonment as much as 18 to 22 times higher than that of the general population. In addition, both analyses indicated that the relative risk of imprisonment was higher for Traveller women than it was for Traveller men.³ These findings reflect those of other studies; in 2005, for example, Kennedy et al's study of mental illness among prisoners in Ireland found that Travellers were over-represented both among sentenced and remand prisoners, accounting for 5.4% of their entire sample. Prior to that, Linehan et al (2002) found that male Travellers had a higher relative risk of imprisonment when compared to the rest of the population.

The disproportionate representation of Travellers in the penal system is not a situation that is unique to Ireland: the same trend can be found in other countries with an indigenous minority ethnic population. In 2005, the rate of imprisonment for people from the Aboriginal community in Australia was 12 times higher than for the rest of the population (United Nations Office on Crime and Drugs, 2009). In New Zealand, the Māori people form 12.5% of the general population aged 15 years and older yet comprise 42% of all criminal apprehensions (Department of Corrections, 2007). Similar findings have been found regarding Native Americans in various states in the US: in Alaska, for example, the category 'Alaska Native' accounted for 36% of all offenders in institutions in 2009 (Alaska Department of Corrections, 2010). In the UK, according to the Prison Reform Trust, about 27% of the prison population was from a minority ethnic group on 30 June 2009, compared to one in 11 of the general population. In the US, those who are African or Latino account for one-third of the general population and 58% of those in prison (Jealous, Brock and Huffman, 2011).

³ The lower figure came from data from the census of Traveller families while the higher one came from prison officials, based on Travellers who had self-identified in prison. The disparity between the two figures was partly attributed to sensitivity around families volunteering information about a family member being in prison and to the possibility that some Travellers in prison may have become disassociated from their family. The absence of an ethnic identifier makes the actual number of Travellers in prison unknown.

Causes of disproportionate representation of Travellers in prison

Socio-economic factors have been cited as one key contributing factor in the over-imprisonment of minority ethnic people, specifically the increased risk of poverty, unemployment and educational disadvantage (National Indigenous Drug and Alcohol Committee, 2009). This reflects MacGabhann's finding that the determination to provide financially for a family was 'a main causal factor of incarceration' among Irish Travellers in Britain (2011, p. 52). MacGabhann reported that over half (51.7%) of offences involving Irish Travellers related to unlawfully obtaining property, compared with 30.5% of all prisoners. Such offences included robbery (14.5%), burglary (26.4%) and theft and handling (7.8%).

Two contributing factors were cited from the literature regarding the higher proportion of Travellers serving sentences for unlawfully obtaining property:

- The societal move away from traditional services and bartering to the mass production of goods and services, leading to increasing dependence on the welfare state among Travellers and a sense of frustration (AITHS Team, 2010); and
- 'Strain theory', whereby the lack of legitimate opportunities for securing income can lead to criminal activity as an alternative means of accessing it; 'income inequality', states Miller, 'is the most consistent structural correlate of rates for theft and other forms of property crime' (MacGabhann, 2011).

Research in Australia has suggested that **alcohol and drug** misuse rates among minority groups, which have been associated with high rates of social exclusion, may also contribute to their over-representation in prison (NIDAC, 2009). While the prevalence of drug use among Travellers in Ireland is unknown, due to the fact that ethnicity is not recorded in relevant surveys and datasets, recent qualitative research has suggested that drug and alcohol misuse among Travellers may be increasing (Van Hout, 2010, 2011). Moreover, Power (2004) found that substance abuse can increasingly lead to entry into the criminal justice system for young Irish Travellers in the UK. A high rate of substance abuse within minority groups has been associated with lower socio-economic status (Bellis et al, 2005).

This does not necessarily translate into Travellers being imprisoned for drugs-related offences; in fact, MacGabhann (2011) found that the proportion of drugs-related offences was much lower among Irish Travellers than the general population.⁴

Finally, the over-representation of Travellers in prison may reflect **discrimination**, both in relation to general society and the criminal justice system. According

to the CERD (Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination) Committee's General Recommendation XXXI on the prevention of racial discrimination in the administration and functioning of the criminal justice system (2005), a possible indicator of racial discrimination is, 'The number and percentage of persons belonging to those groups who are held in prison'. This ties in with findings of a review by the Royal College of Psychiatrists (2007) in England, which highlighted:

- victims were more likely to report an offence if the perpetrator was from a minority ethnic background;
- higher rates of arrest for minority ethnic people; and
- a higher likelihood of being detained on remand for minority ethnic people (Royal College of Psychiatrists, 2007).

Evidence from the US also indicates race disproportionality and inequality at each stage of the criminal justice system, including police stops and searches, police and prosecution charging decisions, courts sentencing, and imprisonment (Taylor, 2013).

The case for ethnic monitoring

The All-Ireland Traveller Health Study identified the absence of an ethnic identifier in prisoner records as 'a major barrier' to collecting data on Travellers in prisons (AITHS Team, 2010). Without such an identifier, it is not possible to monitor the issues and needs faced by Travellers in prison. It also makes it more likely that Travellers will be overlooked: in the UK, a report by the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) reported that because Irish Travellers were not apparent in any ethnic monitoring system, they were often ignored in discussions about race equality (National Offender Management Service, 2008). In this light, the recent introduction of ethnic monitoring by the Irish Prison Service, which includes Traveller as an ethnic category, is a very welcome development.

Literacy and education among Travellers in prison

No data are available on literacy levels among Travellers in prison in Ireland. In the UK, one study found that 53.5% of Irish Travellers in prison in the UK had self-reported literacy problems (MacGabhann, 2011). In addition, 25.5% were identified as having learning difficulties, with 5.6% suggesting they had learning problems but not literacy problems. This could lead to Traveller prisoners being excluded from education and rehabilitation activities, which in turn can be negatively perceived by prison authorities as disinterest and even refusal to cooperate (ibid., p. 24).

These findings were reflected in other UK studies. For example, a review of resettlement outcomes for black, Asian and minority ethnic prisoners found that low literacy levels among Irish Travellers mean that they can miss out on information about provision. The National Offender

⁴ The link between substance use and offending behaviour is a complex issue. An Australian study found that 40% of police detainees attributed current charges to being intoxicated, 4% to 'hanging out' for drugs, and 5% to the cost of buying drugs (Payne and Gaffney, 2012).

Management Service (NOMS) found that low literacy levels among Travellers in the prison system made it difficult for them to access services, and to lodge applications or complaints (NOMS, 2008). It seems little had changed since the CRE stated in 2003:

Prisoners with low literacy levels 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

Low literacy levels are found among the Traveller population generally. Comparing data from the AITHS and a survey of medical card holders, 71.2% of Travellers said they could usually read and fill out forms, compared to 92.4% of medical card holders, and 13.9% of Travellers said they could do this but with great difficulty, compared with only 7% of the other sample (AITHS Team, 2010). According to Census 2011, 17.7% of Travellers have no formal education, compared with 1.4% in the general population, Travellers cease their full-time education an average 4.7 years earlier than the general population and by 17 years, 90% of Travellers have ceased their full-time education, compared with 24% for the general population (CSO, 2012).

Discrimination against Travellers in prison

'We get called pikey and gypo by other prisoners. But we'd never go to the officers about it.'

MACGABHANN, 2011

A survey of prison life in 49 prisons in England and Wales (n. 4,860 prisoners) found that minority ethnic prisoners tended to rate the quality of race relations in prison more poorly than other prisoners, with large proportions of minority ethnic prisoners feeling that they were subject to unfair treatment (Cheliotis & Liebling, 2006). While this study did not look specifically at the experiences of Travellers in prison, further research suggests they are no exception to this finding. Evidence from the UK points to Irish Travellers experiencing a high level of discrimination in prison. For example, the National Offender Management Service in the UK expressed concern over a lack of confidence among Gypsy Traveller Roma prisoners regarding the prison system's complaints process, cultural awareness, and its concern over 'derogatory and racist name calling primarily by prisoners'. It went on to note that 'Irish Travellers complained of being accused of intimidating or bullying prisoners and staff' which they felt this was 'the result of officers misinterpreting their distinct accent and non-verbal communication style' (NOMS, 2008, p. 59).

Most of the participants in MacGabhann's study stated that 'derogatory terms such as "pikey" and "gypo" were commonly used by some staff and prisoners' (2011, p. 23), which many felt was 'unremarkable, due to its frequency' (ibid., p.24). Jacobson et al (2010) provided further qualitative evidence on this issue.

In the Irish context, the UN Committee Against Torture, in its Concluding Observations to Ireland in 2011,

expressed concern 'at reports of allegations by prisoners from the Traveller community in Cork prison that they are consistently subjected to acts of intimidation by other prisoners'. It recommended that the State address 'the issue of intimidation of the Traveller community and investigat[e] all allegations of such intimidation'. More recently, a 2011 report of the Inspector of Prisons for Limerick prison referred to 'low level abuse and intimidation of prisoners' by prison officers, including reference to prisoners' ethnic backgrounds, 'which if outlined in graphic detail would only feed a frenzy of public comment' (p. 42). It included 'shouting at prisoners, threats of transfer to other prisons, not respecting confidentiality issues, intimidation of prisoners to withdraw complaints or not make complaints, goading prisoners, over-use of P19 procedures and the general attitude of some staff' (ibid.). The Inspector noted that this was not confined to Limerick prison, and was perpetrated by 'a small number of prison officers' (p. 43). The report recommended that 'the Irish Prison Service and local management ... ensure that appropriately trained officers are allocated to those parts of the prison, or to those situations, where such undisciplined conduct is most likely to occur' (p. 43).

Significantly, Cheliotis & Liebling (2006) found that the perceived quality of race relations was associated with prisoners' views on more general aspects of their treatment in prison, such as respect, humanity, fairness, relationships with staff and safety.

'Cultural resistance' to engaging with services

Some studies note a 'cultural resistance' among Travellers, which can act as a barrier to accessing supports and services. This has been attributed to both perceived and experienced discrimination. Literacy problems comprise a further barrier, limiting Travellers' capacity to navigate the bureaucracy of the prison system and organise prison visiting orders for relatives. As a result, Travellers can face difficulty in dealing with 'bureaucratic norms taken for granted' (MacGabhann, 2011, p. 42) by others. Similarly, a 2009 study found that Travellers can be reluctant to engage with health service providers, due to prejudice, embarrassment or poor literacy (Cemlyn et al, 2009).

These findings were echoed by Fountain et al (2007), who found that black and minority ethnic prisoners are reluctant to approach drug services 'due to fears of experiencing a lack of cultural understanding, overt and institutional racism, and because of the lack of black and minority ethnic staff (both in the Prison Service in general and in prison drug services specifically)'. A further, related barrier was the stigma attached to drug use for some young men:

In the macho environment of male prisons, drug users and help-seekers can be bullied and blackmailed. The cultural and religious stigma attached to drug use by some Black and minority ethnic communities means that fear of family and community discovering their drug use prevents some prisoners from these communities accessing drug services. (Fountain et al, 2007, p. 30)

These barriers can continue post-release, partly due to 'a lack of co-operation between some prisons and community drug services, and ... funding issues, or because a prisoner's home is in a different part of the country from the prison' (Fountain et al, 2007, p. 30).

Health status and needs of Travellers in prison

Data from the AITHS suggest, albeit within a small sample (n. 26), high rates of health problems among Travellers in prison.⁵ For example, 27% had been treated for chronic disease in the previous 12 months, 39% were being treated for mental health problems at time of interview, 62% had interacted with psychiatric services over the previous 12 months, and 81% were taking prescription medication.

These findings are mirrored by data on the health of Irish Travellers in the UK. In MacGabhann's study in 2011, just under one-quarter were reported to have had physical health problems, a figure presented as a possibly significant under-count, due to the fact that the survey was conducted by prison officials generally unconnected to health services within prisons.

Mental health needs of Travellers in prison

Research literature on the Traveller population in general has shown that Travellers face a higher than average risk of depression, self-harm and suicide. In the context of prison, MacGabhann (2011) found that 26.1% of Irish Traveller prisoners were identified as having one or more mental illnesses; the figure was much higher for female Traveller prisoners, at 64.7%. Prison staff cited two challenges in meeting the health needs of Travellers: a norm of avoidance of health services and a poor health profile among Travellers on admittance. Of particular concern, MacGabhann's study found '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' (2011, p. 46). Staff also expressed a strong belief that the rate of suicide was also higher among Travellers than the rest of the prison population. Concern over this was raised again in submissions by Father Gerard Barry, a chaplain at HM Prison Full Sutton, to the Equality and Human Rights Commission regarding a high rate of suicide among Irish Travellers in prison. In the general population in Ireland, the AITHS found that the suicide rate in male Travellers was 6.6 times higher than in the general population (AITHS Team, 2010).

Cited contributory factors to poor mental health among Travellers in prison are: a sense of hopelessness; depression; unemployment; repeated criminalisation; enforced separation from family; prejudice and discrimination; a loss of self-respect resulting from imprisonment; and a deeply pessimistic attitude perceived among Traveller prisoners (Cemlyn et al, 2009; MacGabhann, 2011). A pessimistic attitude was

reflected in 'a casual acceptance regarding imprisonment, self-harm, suicide, death at a young age and discrimination' (MacGabhann, 2011, p. 47).

Perinatal health needs of minority ethnic women in prison

A synthesis of published research concerning the perinatal health needs of black and minority ethnic (BME) women in prison found that pregnant women in prison present a vulnerable obstetric risk, and that in addition to universal obstacles, BME women face additional ethno-cultural barriers when trying to access appropriate perinatal mental health care while in prison (Foley and Papadopoulos, 2013). The study identified BME imprisoned pregnant women as a high-risk obstetric group. It recommends that policymakers and service providers firstly need to become aware and sensitive to these needs.

Drug and alcohol use

Limited data suggest high rates of drug and alcohol use among Travellers in prison. The AITHS found that 58% of a sample of 26 Travellers in prison in Ireland had addiction problems (AITHS Team, 2010). In Scotland, according to the Equality and Human Rights Commission Scotland, some Gypsies and Travellers known to service providers became regular users or substance-dependent while in prison, which was associated with a number of deaths among Gypsies and Travellers shortly after their sentence ended (Cemlyn et al, 2009).

Research also indicates that ethnic minority prisoners can face major problems in accessing positive intervention for substance dependency. In the UK, Fountain et al (2007) found that black and minority ethnic prisoners are less likely to access drugs services than other prisoners, and can be more likely than other prisoners to rely on peers as sources of information about drugs and drugs services. This is partly due to stigma and cultural differences (see above). They also found that those with literacy problems are further disadvantaged.

The World Health Organization (WHO), in its 2001 report *Prisons, Drugs and Society*, also identified barriers to drugs services, including 'racial prejudice and discrimination, which can undermine effective resettlement, self-esteem and well-being' (WHO, 2001, p. 19). The WHO acknowledges that the attitudes and understanding of issues around the use of drugs and alcohol among ethnic minorities may be different to those of the majority ethnic group. In this regard, they recommend:

- that prison officials find ways of challenging and tackling any racism in their establishments;
- that providers of community-based services ensure that all aspects of their practice are free from discriminatory attitudes and practice;
- that additional support is provided to ethnic minority prisoners on leaving prison in terms of accessing housing, employment and training, areas where considerable discrimination can often be experienced;

5 The AITHS conducted a census of Travellers in prisons, and an additional, more detailed survey of 26 Travellers in prison.

- that appropriate education support is provided;
- that all staff and prisoners undergo diversity awareness training (WHO, 2001).

Contact with family and community

Family contact and support plays an essential role in prisoner rehabilitation. Prisoners without family support are between two and six times as likely to be reconvicted as those with support from a family (Cavadino and Thompson, 2006). This can be particularly important for minority ethnic prisoners; in Mexico, the rehabilitation of indigenous women prisoners was impeded by the fact that prohibitive costs meant they were unlikely to receive calls or visits from their family (Taylor, 2004).

Contact with family is particularly important for Travellers, partly because of their minority status and partly because of the importance of the family in the Traveller community. Traveller prisoners are more likely to be married and have children, as Travellers tend to marry at a younger age than the rest of the population and to have children.⁶ Indeed, MacGabhann (2011) found that family contact was extremely important for Irish Traveller prisoners and that Traveller prisoners experience a high degree of concern for the welfare of their families. Despite high levels of literacy problems, 77% of Travellers used the prison postal service to keep in touch with their family, suggesting that many Travellers have to rely on other prisoners (and staff) to maintain contact with families (MacGabhann, 2011). An even higher proportion (89.4%) maintained contact by phone, leading to higher costs, especially as many had relatives living in Ireland, while almost three-quarters (73.8%) received visits (*ibid.*). Cemlyn et al (2009) found that the trauma of separation from children can be compounded for Travellers whose children are being cared for by someone outside the Traveller community.

Rehabilitation and resettlement

Power (2004) explored the difficulties faced by Travellers when they leave prison, and concluded that after-care systems are designed for a sedentary population, not to meet the needs of Gypsies and Irish Travellers. If Traveller ex-prisoners have no local connection, local services will often not support them. This may result in people not receiving the assistance they need regarding accommodation, training or employment, and not being supported to avoid recidivism. This lack of secure accommodation, as well as judicial assumptions about perceived risk of absconding, also results in a high number of Travellers being remanded in custody.

A study in the UK of black, Asian and minority ethnic offenders' experiences of resettlement (Jacobson et al, 2010) found that accommodation and employment were the most commonly cited needs among this group. This echoes the findings of Fountain et al (2007), who concluded that on being released from prisoner, minority ethnic people are particularly vulnerable to problems relating to accommodation and employment.

Jacobson et al (2010) found that a large majority of service providers and three-fifths of ex-prisoners interviewed for their study felt that the ethnicity of ex-prisoners affected their resettlement experiences. Cited factors included racism and discrimination and 'the implications of resettling for differing cultural needs and expectations' (p. 1). Interestingly, while most (ex-)prisoners thought that it was desirable for staff providing resettlement services to be ethnically diverse, their main concern was that staff should display cultural sensitivity and understanding'. It concluded that specialist services may be required to address the needs of offenders with specific needs, such as those from Traveller/Roma/Gypsy backgrounds. The author also recommended the provision of 'cultural sensitivity training' for all staff, as well as the careful consideration of recruiting ethnically diverse staff, including those from the Traveller community.

Finally, Fountain et al (2007) found that, on release from prison, minority ethnic prisoners can face problems reintegrating with their family, due to the stigma of having been in prison, and, for some, of using drugs.

⁶ In 2011, among those Travellers aged 15–29 years, 33.4% were married. In the same year, Traveller women reported giving birth to 4.9 children, compared to 2.9 for the general female population (CSO, 2012).

Key points

- Travellers appear to be highly over-represented among the prison population. Causes are complex; factors include social and educational disadvantage, racial discrimination, literacy problems, mental health problems and drug and alcohol dependency.
- A high proportion of offences for which Travellers are imprisoned relate to unlawfully obtaining property. Possible explanatory factors for this include the societal move away from traditional services, leading to increased dependence on the welfare state, and a lack of legitimate opportunities for securing income.
- Literacy and education levels among Travellers are significantly lower than for the rest of the population; UK-based research suggests this can lead to Travellers in prison being excluded from education and rehabilitation services.
- Qualitative research in the UK has highlighted that Travellers in prison can face discrimination and prejudice from both other prisoners and prison officials.
- 'Cultural resistance' can represent a barrier to accessing relevant supports and services for Travellers in prison. This has been related to discrimination and literacy problems, as well as reluctance to engage with service providers and embarrassment.
- Existing data suggest high rates of health problems among Travellers in prison, including chronic disease and mental health problems. There is some evidence of a higher rate of suicide among Traveller prisoners. Perceived contributory factors include hopelessness, depression, recidivism, discrimination, loss of respect and a deep pessimism among Traveller prisoners.
- Limited data also suggest high rates of drug and alcohol use among Travellers in prison, and there is some evidence that Travellers can become substance-dependent while in prison.
- Family contact and support plays an essential role in prisoner rehabilitation and in Traveller culture. Traveller prisoners have been shown to experience a high degree of concern for the welfare of their families. Separation from children can be particularly traumatic for Travellers whose child(ren) are being cared for by someone outside the Traveller community.

3. Issues facing Travellers in the Irish prison system

This is the first chapter presenting findings from the qualitative stage of this research. It explores the issues faced by Travellers in the Irish prison system. Some themes, such as discrimination, relate specifically to the experience of being in a minority ethnic group. Others, such as separation from family and conflict in prison, are universal to all prisoners, but here the analysis seeks to highlight factors that are particular to Travellers.

We start with the subject of discrimination, because this was such a strong theme which impacted on so many aspects of life in prison.

Discrimination in prison

Participants shared experiences of discrimination while in prison, both from other prisoners and from prison officers.

Discrimination from other prisoners

Offensive name-calling from other prisoners was commonly experienced, especially among male prisoners:

They'd call names – 'knackers' and 'pykies' and all that. ... Just mostly lads, they know you're a Traveller, they probably call you names through different landings and all that kind of crack.

INT009

There was a tendency among interviewees to understate the extent and nature of discrimination in prison. For example, the same person quoted above who was called 'knacker and pykie' later commented that 'in prison, you don't really face it [discrimination] at all because everyone is doing their own thing'. There was a strong sense of offensive language having been normalised, because it is so common outside the prison context. There was also a strong sense of fatalism; one person concluded 'But that's prison, isn't it? You just get on with it'. Another noted, 'You wouldn't like it but you'd kind of just laugh it off. ... Don't retaliate' (INT007). Another emphasised a stoical approach to dealing with this:

Ah, they'd call you names the whole time. But like, you'd put up with that. ... like 'knackers' and all things like that. ... It's only names. They don't hurt me like. It's not any loss if people call me names.

INT004

Another, female, interviewee insisted that good relations could exist between Travellers and settled prisoners even in the face of offensive name-calling:

With the other prisoners there's a lot of discrimination against Travellers in the prison do you know what I mean? But generally we get on alright in prison, we get on with the other girls.

INT001

Others emphasised serious negative consequences of discrimination. Among some male prisoners, discrimination from other prisoners was associated with physical assaults (see section below on segregation for further exploration of this). Others reflected on the damage caused, to relationships and to perceptions of self-worth, even when offensive terms were not targeted at Travellers. For example, one woman described her reaction to hearing a prisoner casually use the term 'knacker' while chatting to another prisoner who was not a Traveller:

Now I know settled people has a habit of saying 'knacker'. They don't mean literally to say that you're a knacker, but it's the word itself. ... It's an insulting word to a Traveller. Like, 'go away, you dirty, smelly knacker'. By saying that inside in jail, you're saying they're dirty and smelly, so you must

be a lot better and cleaner than me. Like, that's what you're trying to say. ... They're this, that and the other. And they're not the same as us really when it comes to it.

INT002

Others argued that the extent to which a Traveller experienced this could vary. For example, one woman who described how she 'always mixed it' with both Travellers and settled people, noted that other prisoners were supportive and didn't hold against her the fact that she was a Traveller: 'They say you're painted with the one brush, but you're not' (INT005). Another, male, interviewee reflected that some Travellers would be more vulnerable to discrimination than others, because they would be more readily identified as being a Traveller, due to ways of speaking or dress. Of himself this interviewee noted, 'I wasn't going around shouting to people I was a Traveller but I never denied that I was a Traveller' (INT010).

This raises another theme: fear of discrimination, which emerged in many interviewees with both men and women. Fear of discrimination could cause a Traveller to hide their ethnic status from other prisoners:

I'd be afraid to say I'm a Traveller, in case he's against Travellers. He might say, I don't want you in my cell or something. And all his mates on the landing probably all talk together and whatever. And God knows what happens after that. And he could have had a run in with a Traveller before, and take it out on me.

INT008

Others spoke of how fear of discrimination could prevent someone from attending education and training courses, or even from socialising with other, settled prisoners:

The Traveller girls, they'd rather keep to themselves. If they go outside their groups, they're slagged. ... Not to their faces, but at least if you're with your own you know where you stand. ... You know what you're getting.

INT001

The Traveller women didn't really get mixed up in, involved in the school and things going on over there, the arts and crafts, whatever might be going on over there. ... They might have felt a bit more comfortable going over, where their own was in one room. But for them to walk into a room with all settled people, even if they know how to read and write. Because I know how that feels. Maybe it was a little bit intimidating.

INT002

There was a perception that the IPS did not perceive discrimination against Travellers to be as serious as discrimination against other minority groups:

I know if anyone's in any way racist inside in the jail, if people call names or anything in the jail, you get a p19. ... But that only swings one way. That ... doesn't count for Travellers. So maybe if they brought out a different thing inside of jail that

doesn't stand to no one.

INT002

Discrimination from staff

Interviewees also experienced offensive name-calling from prison officers. There was a shared view that this did not come from all prison officers; rather, people spoke of the 'odd, bad' prison officer who exhibited such behaviour:

The prison officer, like you will get one or two that will call you names and all, like, 'go in there you little smelly knacker you'. And they'll push you back into your cell and all. You will get prison officers, not them all, but you will get one or two like that.

INT004

Again, it was felt that some Travellers were more vulnerable to this than others:

Some Travellers had very distinctive accents and some prison officers might be trying to copy them speaking, you know? ... Sometimes your cell might get referred to as your caravan.

INT007

In general, people felt that, as with prisoners, the best response was to ignore it:

You get some bad and good [prison officers], know what I mean? It depends. ... You might get an odd cheeky one or two ... throwing a smart comment. But you just pass no heed on them.

However, this was much more difficult to do than it was in response to prejudiced behaviour from other prisoners. In seeking to understand this difference, one participant's observation is illuminating; he noted that someone who is 'there beside you ... wouldn't be as brave'.

This is an important point, because after all, the prison officer is not 'there beside you'; he/she is in a position of authority – they can make life significantly better or worse and a prisoner will never be in a position to challenge such behaviour:

It's just very hard to take in because it's a prison officer.

So it's worse if a prison officer does it?

Yeah, because he shouldn't be doing it, do you know? It's his job to basically just look after you ... not to be calling you names or anything like that. ... Basically he's in authority. Trying to treat you like a little child or whatever.

INT004

It is important to add that some felt being a Traveller had no impact on their relations with prison officers, with one noting that he did not even think staff were aware he was a Traveller. This interviewee only served one nine month sentence, however, and he did add that 'I never had a conversation with a prison officer or anything in there' (INT008). During the interview, he also explained that he was a shy person, and preferred to keep to himself as much as possible in prison.

Nonetheless, another, female, interviewee put this case more strongly, suggesting that prison officers treated with respect those who showed respect to them, and that this often led to particularly positive relations between Travellers and prison officers:

I haven't seen the Travellers getting treated differently. They get respected a little bit more to be honest with you. That's the truth. And I know that because there's a lot of Traveller women in one house. ... We knew what buttons not to press with them and they knew what buttons not to press with us. That's the way it was with the Travelling women. ... They'll treat you the way you treat them. ... And they got familiar with the Traveller women so they knew what to expect.

INT002

This view was shared by another, male interviewee, who described how prison officers tended to help him with practical matters such as changing a telephone number on his card of permitted numbers, or even showing preferential treatment, such as letting him and his cousin into the recreation room before other prisoners. He also felt that this was because he treated prison officers with respect, unlike some other prisoners:

Other prisoners, they'd probably be cheeky the whole time, do you know, keep pressing the buzzers the whole time. The officer would probably tell them to fuck off. 'I'll do it in a minute, I'll do it in a minute'. And they wouldn't.

INT004

Nonetheless, as the examples above show, Travellers did experience racial discrimination against them by prison staff. Some even spoke of more systematic examples of discrimination in the prison system.

Systematic discrimination

Three interviewees described incidences of what can be described as wider, even systematic, examples of discriminatory treatment of Travellers. One described a conflict that developed in Wheatfield prison years previously, between Travellers and settled prisoners. At that time, a high proportion of prisoners in the prison were Travellers. According to the interviewee, the prison service responded by dispersing most of the Traveller prisoners to other prisons throughout the country, a response which he felt was unfair and which comprised unequal treatment of Traveller prisoners:

They kicked the Travellers out because there was too many Travellers together. ... Like you're settled in a prison, you're getting on well with everyone, like you're not affiliated with any gang or anything. You're sitting back doing your own thing. The prison officers – they should leave you alone. The people that are causing trouble, yeah, they're entitled to shift them out of the prison.

INT004

He also described being punished more harshly than others for fighting with another prisoner:

This was me first fight now. They took me job off me, put me in me cell, put me off the landing. They put me down in the block. And that was me first fight like. There was fellas fighting every day. ... Like when any of them other fellas got into trouble, or whatever, they were just put back into their cells and doors banged out until the next morning, until they went into see the governor or whatever. But I was put straight down to the base from Friday till Monday, for the whole weekend.

INT004

Interviewees described how offensive language could be used as a way of deliberately antagonising a Traveller in prison, of goading a reaction from them, so that the prisoner would then face punishment. For example, one woman spoke of how this happened to her repeatedly:

‘You knacker’. That’s what they’d say, blatantly, to your face. They’d wind you up. And when you react then, you’re down to the block. ... They draw you out. I was often in tears down there, trying to walk away from a situation. It was very unfair.

INT001

This interviewee felt strongly that a negative culture prevailed in one prison, so much so that such treatment was a regular occurrence.

Another interviewee felt that, in some prisons, Travellers could be offered less appealing jobs than other prisoners:

In Mountjoy, a lot of them would be given jobs on the outside. Like given the dirty jobs. The lads who didn’t have toilets in the cell, they’d be throwing the stuff out the window. The Travellers were known to be given that kind of job. And very rarely would you get a Traveller in a trusted position. ... I think just that they were the dirty jobs to give them and that they were used to doing dirty jobs.

INT007

Discrimination in prison: Key points

- Offensive name-calling from other prisoners can be a common experience for Travellers in prison. The extent to which this is experienced can vary. However, even the use of offensive language not directed at the individual in question can be deeply hurtful and damaging.
- Despite the consequences of offensive language, many interviewees took a stoical, even fatalistic, approach to its use, arguing the best response was to ignore it.
- Fear of discrimination was an issue in itself, leading to some not acknowledging their ethnicity, and to others not engaging in education and training opportunities.
- Some prison officers also use offensive language towards Travellers. This was much more difficult to bear than discriminatory behaviour of other prisoners. This was because of the unequal power relations between prison officers and prisoners.
- Some interviewees recounted incidences that could be described as examples of more systematic discrimination; these include the widespread dispersal of Travellers throughout the prison system following a conflict between Travellers and settled prisoners in one prison.

Travellers in prison: A segregated group?

Many interviewees described a tendency of the Irish Prison Service to place all Travellers in the same part of a prison. Rather than this emerging as a fixed policy, however, its use seemed to vary, both across and within prisons. So for example, one woman noted of the Dóchas Centre that, 'That's just how it was the Travellers all got put over to the small yard' (INT002), while another woman said that in her experience, this was not the case. One man, who had served multiple sentences over a 20 year period, felt that the tendency of prison staff to operate on this basis had decreased over the years, which he attributed to a wider effort to break up gang culture and thus reduce violence in prisons. But again, this observation did not chime with that of others who had served recent sentences.

Despite these variations, being placed with other Travellers was a fairly common experience among interviewees. Generally, they were not asked if this was their preference, or even if they were a member of the Traveller community. Rather, it seemed to interviewees that the prison officers had guessed their ethnicity on the basis of their surname:

They'd recognise the common surnames.... It's just the surnames. Two people with the same surname – maybe they thought they were related. But they'd never ask you. You just got back to your cell and you might find two or three in your cell.

INT007

Two differing views presented among interviewees regarding the desirability of this tendency to place Travellers together. Some valued it, while others drew attention to the problems it created.

Advantages of being placed with other Travellers

One acknowledged benefit of being placed with other Travellers was the opportunity it gave to engage with others from a shared cultural background. As one interviewee put it, 'you feel more yourself if you're with a Traveller in a cell' (INT008). This interviewee also pointed out that settled prisoners would be likely to feel the same. This was not just about feeling more at home with other Travellers – it was equally to do with fear of causing offence or being inappropriate when talking to someone from a different culture: 'I'd probably be afraid to say some things' (INT008).

Some male interviewees felt that being placed with other Travellers was necessary for their personal safety. For example, one man described how he was placed on a landing in Mountjoy prison where 'first thing – I couldn't see no Travellers'. He felt strongly that this should not have happened, and that it placed him at risk of physical danger:

So I was four or five days up there, and I was out in the yard. The whole yard went and tried to attack me. To cut me. I ran out of the yard and I had to go on 23 hour lock-up. That's from being a Traveller. If the prison officers had any sense, they would have known that not to put me, a Traveller, where there was no Travellers.

INT004

As a result, this interviewee subsequently spent months on 23-hour lock up, at his own request. When asked if he felt the attack was motivated by his being a Traveller, he explained the rather complex relationship between his being a Traveller, and his being perceived as isolated, and therefore vulnerable:

If they see you on your own, one Traveller, by yourself, they will try to bully you. ... It's because of being on your own and being a Traveller. If you're up on a landing with a whole set of fellas and you're the only Traveller ... then you're expecting to get attacked any minute.

INT004

On leaving 23-hour lock-up he requested and was granted a move to another part of the prison where other Travellers had been placed, two of whom he knew. After that, 'I was grand, I settled in there on the spot. I felt much safer'. No further incident occurred.

Some similarities emerged between his experience and those of another interviewee, who described being physically attacked by a (settled) prisoner. He attributed this attack to his being alone:

The first lads probably thought ... probably because I was on me own, happy days, some of them thought they could attack someone, know what I mean?

INT009

Again, he was sent to a 'protected landing', where he met three other Travellers, after which he felt safer, and 'never got any hassle the five weeks I was there then' (INT009).

Disadvantages of being placed together

Other participants drew attention to difficulties they associated with being placed in a part of a prison dominated by Travellers. A key concern was that this approach could increase the likelihood of friction arising among Travellers in prison:

I tell you, if you have a lot of Travellers with different names in one place, an awful lot of strong women, some of them's going to want to be top dog. So that's going to cause problems alone. And you can get caught up in the middle of that very easily.

INT002

This approach also ignores the fact that relations between Traveller families can vary hugely. One interviewee described how he found himself sharing a cell with someone from a family with whom his own family were in conflict. This gave rise to tension:

Sometimes they'd try to put all the Travellers together. ... I personally didn't like it because on one occasion they brought in someone my family was feuding with. ... There was just a bit of tension in the cell like and I didn't want to argue in the circumstances.

INT007

Another interviewee explained that conflict did not have to exist in order for it to feel inappropriate to be placed with other Travellers; unfamiliarity alone could give rise to difficulty. She described how for this reason, in prison, she and another Traveller woman chose to be placed with settled prisoners, rather than Travellers:

When I first went in there, I knew a girl from Galway, so I went straight to who I knew. ... Now [she] was a Traveller. But we mixed with settled people. Because at that time there were a load of Travellers over in the yard and they were all one people. So you'd feel a bit funny walking into a load of Cash's and we're from Galway, and sitting down and trying to make our own with these [laughs]. 'Cause that'd have its challenges anyway. So [we said] 'we're safer here for the moment and we'll suss it out'.

INT002

As evident in the above quote, interviewees found that requests to be moved were generally granted.

Another perceived disadvantage with placing Travellers together was that it could lead to the formation of close groups or cliques, which could be a source of strength, but which could also be difficult to leave. As already noted, fear of discrimination could lead to Travellers choosing to only socialise with other Travellers in prison, and to avoiding any education or training courses. Conversely, it also emerged that pressure might also arise *within* such a group not to engage in mainstream supports. Some felt that doing so risked being mocked by other Travellers:

When lads go in [and say], 'oh, I'm a Traveller, put

me over with Travellers', it's kind of a bad thing. Because they're all stuck in one corner, they're all doing the same thing. They're afraid to leave the group then. Do you know? Because you'd be mocked or laughed at.

INT010

When I took up the reading and writing inside of jail, and I went over to the other people, I hid it from the table (*i.e. didn't tell other Traveller women*). Because ... it was like being a child again, pronouncing words. ... Like if I sat at that table pronouncing words, obviously there was going to be a laugh made of me. That's how I felt.

INT002

A tendency among some Travellers to stay together was also associated with a sense of pride:

It's hard to break away from the group. It's a pride thing as well, breaking away. A lot of them seem to hang together. You know what I mean?

INT010

This sense of pride was seen to grow stronger the more it became threatened. Reinforced by a history of marginalisation, in the context of prison it emerged as being particularly important. This can have both a positive impact and a negative one:

If you're in prison you have this proud thing as well, that you're a Traveller, that you hold your own, that you're not like everyone else, do you know what I mean? ... Independent. You hold onto every bit of dignity you have, what's left of it anyway when you're in prison.

INT001

That pride is a big thing for Traveller women. I mean, pride is a killer. You don't want to do nothing. It stops you from learning how to read, it stops you from getting help, it stops you from getting information you need. It's like a big block there and sometimes you don't even know it's there.

INT002

Two groups of Travellers?

One clear theme that emerged was that some Travellers in prison tend to socialise only with Travellers, while others are more likely to socialise with both Travellers and settled people:

A lot of the Travelling people would keep to themselves you know. Stick with your own is what they say, especially in prison.

INT001

Some would rather stick with [each other].

INT003

As one participant put it, 'It depends what way Travellers get on, know what I mean? Some Travellers will mix easy and some won't mix' (INT009). Unsurprisingly, it seems that those who tended to 'mix' with settled people outside of prison were more likely to do so in

prison. For example, one interviewee described how he was 'on and off the road in short lengths' as a child, but that when he was young his parents moved to a housing estate, and as a result he began socialising with people outside the Traveller community at a young age. 'I suppose it was easier then' he concluded, 'when I went to prison, to mix' (INT010). Another, female interviewee, had a similar experience:

I'm the kind of person who does their own thing. The [Traveller] girls would be saying, 'what are you doing around with them?' But they're my people as well, the country people. I get on with everyone.

INT001

A segregated group? Key points

- Many interviewees described a tendency in the Irish prison system to place all Travellers in the same part of a prison. Rather than a fixed policy, this approach seemed to vary across and within prisons.
- Overall being placed with other Travellers was a common experience among interviewees. Interviewees felt that prison officers did this on the basis of people's surnames, rather than personal preference.
- Some identified advantages of Travellers being placed together: it allowed them to engage with people from a shared culture, and avoided risks to personal safety that could arise when a prisoner is isolated.
- Others identified disadvantages to this approach: it could increase the likelihood of friction developing between Travellers and overlooked the fact that relationships between different Traveller families could vary significantly. It could also give rise to Travellers feeling pressure to stay within a group.
- For some, a tendency to stay together was associated with a sense of pride. This was perceived as both a source of strength and a source of difficulty.
- Some Travellers in prison tend to socialise only with Travellers, while others are more likely to socialise with both Travellers and settled people. Those who tended to 'mix' with settled people outside of prison were more likely to do so in prison.

Literacy problems in prison

Many participants shared problems they experienced in prison due to low literacy, which was seen as an issue affecting many Travellers:

Not being able to read and write and all this kind of stuff, it's a big thing with the Travelling community, do you know what I mean?

INT001

Literacy as a barrier to information

Some described how this was a barrier to information. For example, one woman shared how she had not heard about treatment options in prison because she could not read:

People do be printing leaflets and expecting people who can't read to understand them. ... Like picking up leaflets in jail and reading them. Like I was in jail for 13 months. I never heard about treatment once when I was in jail. It was literally a stone's throw from where I was to where the place was over there. And obviously because I can't understand what I see.

INT002

This interviewee also explained a more subtle barrier to information caused by literacy issues among Travellers in prison. She described how Travellers who could read might choose not to do so, in the company of other Traveller women, in order to save those women from embarrassment or from feeling excluded. This cultural sensitivity meant that any printed information in prison might not be engaged with by Travellers who could read, as well as by those who could not:

They won't even pull them [leaflets] out on a table, because they feel, especially around a Traveller's table, they're not going to pull out a leaflet and say, 'here would you ever look at that, that's what's going on next week'. Because the shame of it on the women around that [don't read]. The shame of it. So they won't even go there. So there was a lot going on in there that the Traveller women didn't know about.

INT002

Literacy as a barrier to entitlements

Not being able to write meant being reliant on other prisoners when writing letters home, or filling in forms, such as an application for temporary release or making a complaint:

There was a good few Travellers in there like that couldn't read or write. If they wanted to write a letter like, they came over to me a good few times, for me to write it for them. Because I can read and write. That's the way they'd do it like. ... Fellas would ask me to write their letter.

INT004

See I can read and write so I've an advantage. I could write cards and stuff.

INT001

One participant (INT006) explained that in completing such forms, it would be inappropriate to approach staff, in case a successful outcome raised suspicion among other prisoners, or suggested favouritism. On the other hand, asking another prisoner for help could cause particular problems for applications requiring personal information, such as an application for temporary release. One interviewee noted that some Travellers might even choose not to apply for temporary release, in order to avoid the embarrassment caused by having to share personal information with another prisoner:

Even now say filling out your TR forms. ... You've to go into a room and ask a settled person to help you do a TR form. And you know you want to put personal things on it, because you're asking for TR, you want some kind of personal stuff, whatever's going on. Some of them won't even bother because ... [you've to] tell them what's going on in your life.

INT002

This theme was echoed by another interviewee who could read and write and who therefore found himself completing forms on behalf of other prisoners from the Travelling community.

You had to fill in forms called a half sheet in there. Even if it was a simple request to make a phone call, for a visit, you had to go through filling in this form. ... You'd find prisoners, particularly Travelling prisoners, they're very shy about approaching people. They'll say, 'oh will you come into my cell and write it?'

INT007

Literacy problems and low self-confidence

Some interviewees described how literacy problems can lead to low self-confidence. This could lead to reluctance to attend education courses, even basic literacy courses. Combined with the fear of discrimination described earlier, this could lead to Travellers deciding to not avail of such courses on offer in prison:

I'd know a lot of girls wouldn't go to education. They say there's basic classes to help you read or write but they wouldn't go.

INT001

You throw a woman who doesn't know how to read or write into a class of six people and they're a lot further on than her. ... She's not going to go back.

INT002

Accessing literacy education in prison

A positive finding was that interviewees who overcame such barriers benefited from literacy education in prison:

I hadn't a clue when I went in and that's the truth. I couldn't read or write a letter and then I started writing letters home. ... I learned. I know how to read. ... I can write simple words and this and that. I can't write a big lot now. But I learned a lot. But you take it home with you. What you learn in prison you take home with you.

INT005

I learned how to read ... and I learned how to use a computer. ... Everybody's using computers, laptops, mobile phones.

INT006

Years ago in St Pat's, I done a bit of reading and writing. ... That was grand.

INT009

One interviewee went on to explain how her experience of literacy education in prison helped her to encourage her son to continue with his education:

My child ... was saying, 'Mammy I'm ashamed to go back to school on Monday, I don't know how to read and write.' He's 12 like. And I said, 'look at me. I was 36 going to prison. And I didn't know how to read and write. And I stood up in there and said I didn't know how to read and write. I learned, at 36. It's not too late for you at 12'. ... So he put it up in front of all the kids in his class. ... He says, 'I'm X. I don't know how to read and write. At the moment. But I do want to learn to read and write.' ... He really listened to what I told him.

INT005

Literacy problems in prison: Key points

- Low literacy was seen as an issue affecting many Travellers.
- Some described how this was a barrier to information. This barrier could affect not only those with literacy problems, but others as well, as those who can read might choose not to do so, in the company of other Traveller women, in order to save those women from embarrassment or from feeling excluded.
- Not being able to write meant being reliant on other prisoners when writing letters home, or filling in forms, such as an application for temporary release or making a complaint. This could cause particular problems for applications requiring personal information, such as an application for temporary release. In some such cases, the importance of privacy could outweigh the desire to avail of entitlements; some Travellers may choose not to apply for temporary release, rather than share personal information with another prisoner.
- Some interviewees described how literacy problems can lead to low self-confidence. This could lead to a reluctance to attend education courses, even basic literacy courses. Combined with the fear of discrimination described earlier, this can lead to some Travellers deciding to not avail of such courses on offer in prison.
- However, interviewees who overcame such barriers benefited from literacy education in prison.

Contact with family

Emotional toll of separation from family

One of the strongest themes to emerge was the negative impact of being separated from family; many interviewees, male and female, cited this as the most difficult aspect of imprisonment:

But it's hell. Really and truly. It's the worst place in the world to be when you have kids. Locked up at seven in the night, half seven, away from your kids. ... When I look at them, the kids are never going to get over it, what I put them through.

INT005

I felt alright, know what I mean? I was mostly just worried about my kids and my family, that my kids would be alright.

INT009

The hardest part was being away from family. If you've kids and that. I have a daughter and it was hard on her, on visits, seeing you on one side of the table.

INT010

Separation from family had a huge emotional toll, particularly on female interviewees. Of the four mothers interviewed, two described losing a significant amount of weight, as a result of worrying about their children:

I was 12 and a half stone going in and I came out and I was – size eight was hanging off me. Like I'm starting to come back to myself slowly but I won't ever forgive myself for leaving the kids for so long.

INT005

I was 11 stone when I went into prison. I came out 7 and a half stone. That was some weight loss, from 11 to 7 ½. And you get two meals a day. Like, the food just seemed to be going through me. I think it was all worrying. The weight just seemed to be falling off.

INT006

One described deep distress on having to place her children into the care of her mother-in-law, which she felt marked her own failure as a mother:

I tell you, I had to sign the children over to [mother in law] before I went to jail. And it nearly killed me. ... That's what killed me. Having to sign over the one thing in this world that meant anything to me to someone else ... saying, 'here, I'm not able to look after these children'.

INT002

Another interviewee was granted one day temporary release, which was both a valued and difficult experience. The accompanying prison officer's tact and support enhanced the day, but returning to prison that evening was extremely painful:

She gave us our space. But that was me first day out. And it broke me heart. I couldn't believe it like, when I was going out to the Square, at ten in

the morning, to meet them. And I ran out and put my arms around them, and ... the kids thought I was coming home. Mammy is coming home. And I said, Mammy's allowed out for the day. I'd to leave at five o'clock. I cried the whole way back in now.

INT005

This interviewee also described how, despite this distress, her children gave her the emotional strength she needed to survive prison:

I did want to kill myself. And I was saying, I couldn't because I had kids. But if I hadn't kids I would have done it. The kids kept me going. I knew they'd have no life if I was dead. Because I lost my mother 16 years ago. And my life was hell without her. So I thought, if I died, how would their lives be?

INT005

As one interviewee acknowledged, this issue affects all mothers in prison, not just those from the Travelling community:

It's a big bond. You're letting them miss out on too much. ... I wouldn't just talk to Travellers either. Because settled girls suffer so bad from being away from their kids. Bawling their eyes out crying. So like, it wouldn't be only Travelling girls who are suffering.

INT006

The experiences shared here by these women shed light on the damaging consequences of imprisonment for all mothers and their children. However, it is also worth noting that Traveller women are more likely than the general female population to be mothers, to have a greater number of children, and to have children at a younger age. Moreover, aspects of Traveller culture can make it more difficult to address these issues. For example, one interviewee described how it was not possible to postpone her son's wedding, because he and his wife had planned a holiday abroad after their wedding; cultural norms dictated they marry before going away together:

I went back there the day after my son's wedding. And I was heart-broken. They were going away two days later [and] I couldn't see that. ... [The governor] said, 'X, because you're a Traveller, I can expect it one way', she said. 'You get married young. But why is your son rushing up the wedding?' I said, 'my son is leaving the country, and he can't bring away his wife until they're married. They're not allowed live together until they're married'.

INT005

This finding strongly resonates with previous research conducted by IPRT, on the impact of imprisonment on all parents and their children (IPRT, 2012b).

Varying visiting rights

Interviewees described how maintaining contact with family and friends was hugely important. Some wrote cards and letters home, but all particularly valued phone calls in maintaining contact with family and

friends; as noted earlier, they were often a significant part of the daily routine of prison life. Visits from family were particularly cherished. However, the extent to which people benefited from visits depended on the prison and the individual's visiting rights. The latter could be compromised by the behaviour of a visitor. For example, one woman described the outcome of being taken off table visits and placed on screened visits, which happened because her husband had 'something in his pocket' which was picked up by the security dogs:

My baby came up, he was crying the eyes out of him on the other side of the table. ... Because on a proper visit, they can play with the toys, read them a story book at the table.

INT005

Another interviewee noted that, because he had served multiple short term sentences, mostly served in Cloverhill Prison on remand, he had never been entitled to anything other than screened visits, which he felt were inappropriate for his children:

I didn't want the kids' seeing me. Because it's not nice seeing your kids through glass. ... But you have to wait three months to get visits like that, where you can sit round with the kids and all that. ... In Wheatfield and Cloverhill you've to be three months in prison before you get the proper visits with the kids.

INT009

Visiting entitlements also seemed to be vulnerable to the behaviour and attitudes of particular prison officers. In one case, an interviewee described how members of his family visited him on the occasion of his brother's death, who on arriving at the prison, were told that not all visitors could be admitted, due to staff shortages:

If you got the awkward prison officer, they might only let two in at a time, two or three. ... It was purely down to them. ... My brother had died, and the family came up to visit me – my mother and two sisters and brother – the day after the funeral, and they were told that only my mother was allowed in. They said that there wasn't enough staff available to supervise. ... But there was other people going in.

INT007

Finally, visits could be restricted by the system whereby prisoners provided a list of people who could visit, which could only be changed every month. One prisoner noted how this could mean missing out on a visit from a relative visiting Ireland for a short period from the UK:

You know when you first come into prison? You have to give 12 names for the allowed visits. I wrote down – but I didn't write down my other cousins name. So he came around for visits, but he wasn't allowed visit me. ... Once every month, you're allowed change it. So you could be waiting a

whole month like. And he could be just back from England.

INT004

Impact of imprisonment on young children

Mothers described the major, harmful consequences of their imprisonment regarding children's wellbeing. Strong emotional bonds were broken, especially with younger children:

But he took it the worst out of all my kids. He took it very bad. Imagine, the day before his confirmation he came to the vent and he called me ... And, 'Mommy, are you coming home tomorrow?' Everyone could hear. 'Are you coming home for my confirmation?' ... Mammy, you better come home because you got home for X's wedding and you got home for Y's communion. So if you miss my confirmation, it won't be the same.'

INT005

Oh, it was very hard. My daughter, wherever I used to go before I got separated from her, she'd be glued to me. ... She wouldn't even look at me on a visit. It's like she just drifted apart. And any time I made a phone call, she'd say, 'no, don't ring me now'. It broke me heart. I lost me bond there and then. ... I don't blame her either. I missed her first day of school. I wasn't around for anything like that for her.

INT006

This mother went on to described how this outcome was seriously exacerbated when she was returned to prison while on a community return scheme. While in prison she identified her father's address as her own, having been advised that if she did not do so, she would not be able to avail of the early release to community return. However, her father refused to speak to her, and finding her living arrangement intolerable she moved address. She did this unaware of the consequences. When it was discovered and she was sent back to prison for 19 weeks, the fragile relationship with her daughter suffered a further blow:

Just bonding back with my daughter and losing that bond [was hard]. And getting out now and trying to bond with her – it ain't happening. She's not taking it this time. ... She was really kind of getting used to seeing me every day, the last time. And now she's saying, 'Go away Mam.'

INT006

Schoolwork of young children also suffered:

My son was after doing very bad in school while I was in there. ... He just went down the road. He came home yesterday sick, it was his first week inside school. He's only in school the last four days – that school won't take him on.

INT005

Some expressed concern over their husband's capacity to care for their young children in their absence. This was seen as a particular issue in Traveller culture,

where more traditional gender roles leave some men possibly less well equipped to suddenly take on the childrearing role single-handedly:

They should look at the kids. What is it going to do to the kids? Especially Traveller women. The husband ... they're not used to it.

INT005

The view that imprisonment of mothers was wrong, on account of the negative impact on their children, was echoed by others:

I think they should realise that by sending a mother with kids into prison, they should look at the kids. ... Like when you see what some women are in for.

INT001

Impact on relationship with teenage children

Travellers marry younger than the general population, and have, on average, a higher number of children at a younger age. As a result, many Travellers in prison can have teenage children, which in itself raises a whole host of additional concerns and worries:

I seen Traveller girls pulling their hair out over their kids. Especially when they are teenagers. They're coming to the age of thinking of them driving, and then with the girls, they're thinking of them running off with fellas. My little one, at least at that age you know she'll be at school. But when they're teenagers, I wouldn't blame them the way they carry on.

INT006

These mothers could also miss out on important 'turning of age' events in some of their children's lives, such as graduation balls, engagement parties:

I missed important days in me kids' life. Even their debs, her engagement party, her hen night. I missed everything. When I was sitting in there.

INT005

Contact with family: Key points

- Interviewees described how maintaining contact with family and friends while in prison was hugely important.
- Being separated from family had a hugely negative toll on interviewees; many cited this as the most difficult aspect of imprisonment, and experienced significant distress as a result. This was a particular cause for concern among Traveller women.
- Visits from family were particularly cherished. However, visiting entitlements could be compromised by the behaviour of a visitor, or by virtue of the nature of the sentence being served; those on shorter sentences could have more restricted visiting rights.
- Visiting entitlements also seemed to be vulnerable to the behaviour of particular prison officers, with one interviewee describing at one family visit, following the death of his brother, not all visitors were admitted.
- Mothers described the major, harmful consequences of their imprisonment regarding children's wellbeing. They spoke of how strong emotional bonds were broken, especially with younger children.
- Schoolwork of young children suffered.
- Some expressed concern over their husband's capacity to care for their young children in their absence. This was seen as a particular issue in Traveller culture, where more traditional gender roles leave some men possibly less well equipped to suddenly take on the childrearing role single-handedly.
- Travellers in prison are more likely to have teenage children, which in itself raises a whole host of additional concerns and worries, as well as missing out on important 'turning of age' events

Internal conflict in prison

Conflict is a feature of prison life generally, and is not confined to any group. This section focuses specifically on Travellers' experience of fighting in prison, a theme which arose within some interviews with men. It is important to stress that this was not necessarily seen as the norm; a general consensus was captured in the remark of one interviewee: 'if you get on with the other prisoners well, you will get on' (INT004). Nonetheless, some male interviewees shared how, while in prison, they felt at risk of physical attack. One risk factor is already explored above – that of being isolated, which could be associated with prejudiced attitudes of other prisoners towards Travellers. Another was association: if a relative was involved in a conflict in prison, this could increase the likelihood of being attacked:

Something could have happened there before with different lads, and you being a cousin you can get a slice or you can get a box, you know what I mean? Some lad could wait for you out in the yard.

INT009

One interviewee described how he was left with facial scars after an attack that was prompted by the fact his brothers, also in prison at the time, had fallen out with another group of prisoners:

My first day in, my two brothers had been fighting up in Wheatfield, with some gangster fellas there. So it was my first day into my sentence, and a young fella says, 'what's your name?' ... They tried calling me over, they called me into a cell, a good few of them followed me into the cell. So I was, I took off down the landing. But one of them, see that mark there? [points to scar on side of face] They gave me that. With a blade.

INT004

It was felt that such attacks could be dangerous, due to the use of blades and other sharp weapons. Some prisons, such as Mountjoy and St Patrick's were seen as particularly hazardous in this regard. Sometimes this meant it was best to withhold your name during the first few days of a sentence:

On the landing, the fellas go over and ask you who you are, where you're from and all that. But sometimes you can't say who you are, you know what I mean? Some fellas might have it out for you, you know what I mean?

INT009

Conflict between Travellers in prison

Some interviewees discussed 'feuding' – the term used to describe conflict that can develop between different Traveller families, sometimes culminating in a physical fight between two Traveller men. In the context of prison, Travellers from different families are placed in close proximity to each other, which some interviewees felt could increase the likelihood of this taking place.

Interviewees made a distinction between general fighting that took place in prison, and that which was

feud-related. The latter was seen as 'more private' and possibly 'cleaner'; while it was acknowledged that blades could be used by Travellers, this was seen as less common than it was among other prisoners:

Travellers have an argument with each other, two of them will go out into the yard, have a couple of bangs, and that's it. Leave it at that. Instead of like the way settled fellas do it, they have an argument, they're pulling out blades, they're trying to cut up each other. But the way with Travellers, they have a couple of bangs, that's it, that's the end of it.

INT004

It's between the two of them. ... If one fella has something to say to that person, let them go out and say it, know what I mean? ... If they want to go out and fight, they've to check if they've any weapons on them. One fella might get beat, or they might just shake hands.

INT009

Some spoke of the pressure on Traveller men to engage in this way, which they associated with a sense of pride, which was exacerbated in the prison context:

One of the people might not want to fight but they're under pressure to do so. ... A lot of it is to do with pride. The name, he doesn't want to be seen as the weaker one out of the two. [It can happen outside prison] but in prison, they don't want to be seen as a fool, see if anyone looks at you the wrong way, don't let them away with it.

INT007

Other contributing factors that were identified include a perceived increase in the number of Travellers in prison (INT010) and a perceived tendency among prison officers not to intervene:

Usually there's a fight and I've seen it as well, the prison officers would let it go on a lot of the time. They would yeah. They'd know it might not have anything to do with prison politics, it's an outside kind of thing. ... They'd let it get started a good bit before they'd ring for back-up. ... I don't like that at all, I think it should be changed.

INT007

Despite these contributing factors, Travellers involved in a feud may decide, in the context of prison, to postpone any fighting until they had both finished their sentences. This, according to male interviewees, is not an uncommon outcome. The aim is to reduce the strain of an already stressful situation, and to finish their prison sentences as soon as possible:

Travellers could be fighting with one another. But it could be easy talk to them. It could be easy like to just say, leave it till the outside. Do you know? Just leave it at that till the outside and we'll see each other in the outside. ... I seen that happening in there. ... It's just to stop it. All Travellers really want to do in jail basically is just go and do their jail, get home as quick as possible back to their families.

INT004

They might shake hands and say, 'well I'm here to do my time, you're here to do yours. We'll sort that out when we get out'. ... It's very stressful [in prison]. ... Or if I was arguing with someone in their family, they'd say, 'oh well, it's nothing to do with me'. ... But on the outsides, it'd probably be different. You'd find they probably would take sides.

INT007

When asked to consider why some people would take this approach and not others, one noted that while some might decide 'to do my time and get home', others 'might have gone too far, they don't care' (INT007). Similarly, another interviewee felt that prisoners – settled and Travellers – who fought each other in prison were more likely to come from chaotic circumstances: 'most of them are out of their heads, they don't care about their family, they don't care about getting a mark across their face or anything like that, they're off their heads' (INT004). Those who refrained from fighting were more likely to have family to return to, and greater motivation to finish their sentence as quickly as possible and in safety.

Despite acknowledging certain differences in 'feud' related fighting among Travellers in prison and fighting in general, a strong view was shared that fighting in prison is in no one's interest:

There should be no such thing as Travellers fighting in prison. It shouldn't be happening between Travellers or settled people like. You're in there, do your own thing like. Why do you want to get an enemy? When you're outside then, you have to listen to the music, know what I mean? You have to listen to their family.

INT009

Limitations of protection in prison

Many male interviewees described serious limitations regarding the level of protection available in prison. In one account, an interviewee witnessed how those responsible for a serious attack on another prisoner were taken off the landing where the attack occurred, but were returned to it days later, 'laughing it off' (INT009). Another described how following an attack, he requested 23-hour lock up. On 23-hour lock-up, however, he still felt under threat:

They come around to your door every second, even though your door is banged out ... calling you names, when they shouldn't be allowed on your landing, because they can still get at you. ... They have to have the gate locked at all times. But it doesn't be locked the whole time.

INT004

And another interviewee shared the view that on protection, he was not always safe from attack from other people on protection:

When somebody gets up on the [protection] landing, they mix with other fellas there. They could get them back then. Do you get me? ... Ah no, it's not really safe. Well it's safe in a way, but it depends

who's getting on the landing, know what I mean? He might know that he's coming on, because some other fella gives him the word.

INT009⁷

Conflict in prison: Key points

- Fighting is a feature of prison life generally, and is not confined to any group. This section focuses specifically on Travellers' experience of fighting in prison, a theme which arose within some interviews with men.
- While fighting in prison was not necessarily seen as the norm, some male interviewees shared a strong awareness that its risk was real. If a relative was involved in a conflict in prison, that could increase the likelihood of being attacked.
- In the context of prison, Travellers from different families being placed in close proximity to each other increased the likelihood of 'feud' related fighting taking place.
- Interviewees made a distinction between general fighting that took place in prison, and that which was feud-related. The latter was seen as 'more private' and possibly 'cleaner'.
- Some spoke of the pressure on Traveller men to fight, which was associated with a sense of pride, exacerbated by the prison context. Other contributing factors can include a perceived tendency among prison officers not to intervene.
- Despite these factors, Travellers involved in a feud may decide, in the context of prison, to postpone any fighting until they had both finished their sentences. This, according to interviewees, is not an uncommon outcome. The aim is to reduce the strain in an already stressful situation, and to finish their prison sentences as soon as possible.
- Many male interviewees described serious limitations regarding the level of protection available in prison.

⁷ According to another interviewee, this was not possible as people on protection were allowed out of their cell at different hours throughout the day. It seems that different approaches may be in operation in different prisons, or even over time within one prison.

Mental health problems in prison

Some interviewees described how they were depressed in prison; often this included suicidal feelings. Some had been suffering from depression for a long time, while others associated it with being in prison:

I was obviously suffering from depression and addiction at the time. ... I've suffered from depression since I was 14. Suicidal and all that.

INT001

I felt down and out obviously, because I was in prison. ... It was very hard to get asleep. ... Thinking about being in prison and your friends all being on the outside. You'd be thinking all sorts to be honest with you. ... One day you feel alright and then the next you feel weird in yourself to be honest.

INT008

My friend died before I went to prison. And I did want to kill myself.

INT005

People attributed their depression in prison to a number of factors. One was the lack of emotional support in prison; when dealing with low mood and low self-esteem caused by being imprisoned, this woman described how she felt there was no help available:

There's nothing in jail when you're feeling that way or you have that, or your self-esteem is on the floor and you're broke inside you, there's no one that can pull you to one side and give you a bit of reassurance. Or to say 'Jesus, it's not the end of the world' or 'you've a load of good things going for you'.

INT002

Another identified factor was having a lot of time in prison without anything to fill it. This led people to worrying about life outside prison, and dwelling on their present situation:

I've seen people go off their head inside in prison, they've so much time to think. What they've done, what's happening outside. ... I've seen women that have put ropes around their necks, Travelling women, for the same reasons. Dead. All that time, so much time to think.

INT002

You get out at 11 o'clock in the morning, you're in your cell by eight o'clock at night. So you're 13 hours basically locked up on your own. You're sitting there for 13 hours thinking about the kids, thinking about what's going on.

INT005

Another contributing factor was the 'macho' context of male prisons, where any sign of distress could be interpreted as weakness:

It is [a] very macho world. If you're seen weak or crying, you're made a laugh of. Sometimes you could be having a bad day, or get bad news on a visit, or something like that. Or you'd get a bad phone call, and you have to say – a lot of people put

on a fake smile, but deeply ... you'd see them walking with other people, they'd have a big smile, but then in a cell with them, they'd be close to breaking point.

INT007

It was felt that Travellers in general tend to become depressed in prison. One interviewee shared a fatalistic attitude regarding this, suggesting little could be done to address this:

Most Travellers [in prison] I think all feel the same. They all feel down and out and depressed. Things like that. Nothing you can help them with.

INT008

Mental healthcare and prescription drug use in prison

Some interviewees described how they had been prescribed medication to treat depression and other mental health problems. For some this was effective:

The doctor had me on Valium I think they were. ... They relaxed me more. ... It took your mind off things, that kind of way.

INT008

Others, however, felt they had been over-medicated or in some cases, wrongly medicated:

I was going around like a dummy because of these medications. ... I used to get severely paranoid on them. ... And the anti-depressants, like I do suffer from depression but there's other anti-depressants I can go on without sedatives in them. That's not going to make me drowsy, do you know what I mean? ... It all started in prison.

INT001

Because there's more Traveller women on Valium now than I ever seen in all my life. ... Of course if the doctor tells you to take something, you're going to take it.

INT002

Beyond the prescription of medication, interviewees generally felt that healthcare in prison for mental health problems was scarce. While some said they were offered counselling, others were not. This does not necessarily show that mental healthcare services in the prison service are inadequate; it is at least partly related to barriers to information Travellers face in prison, and possibly to the absence of culturally appropriate support.

Among male interviewees particularly, there was a sense that seeking mental health support would only create further problems, by drawing attention to an issue that was felt to be surrounded by stigma. Or as one interviewee explained, it could even lead to staff taking sometimes drastic steps to prevent self-harm. Such a response was seen as not only unnecessary, it was also detrimental:

If you were having bad days, if you told a member of staff, a lot of the time, maybe out of panic, they'd move you to the seg – the pad. I found myself there

before for no reason. I think I said I was having a bad day to someone, and he went in and told the staff. ... 'Just dump them in the cell.'

INT007

Mental health problems in prison: key points

- Interviewees described how they suffered from depression in prison, and for some this involved suicidal feelings. Some suffered from depression prior to being imprisoned, while for others it was entirely associated with being in prison.
- Interviewees attributed their depression in prison to a number of factors, including a perceived lack of emotional support in prison; having a lot of time in prison, which can lead to worrying and ruminating; and the 'macho' context of male prisons, where distress can be interpreted as weakness.
- It was felt that Travellers in general become depressed in prison.
- Some interviewees described how they had been prescribed medication to treat depression and other mental health problems. While for some this was effective, others felt they had been over-medicated or, in some cases, wrongly medicated.

Illicit drug use in prison

Two groups emerged in the profile of interviewees: those with a long history of drug use (n. 5) and those who largely abstained from drug use, excluding alcohol (n. 5). The former group tended to have multiple convictions, a past addiction to heroin, and a history of homelessness. They described a difficult and chaotic life prior to being imprisoned – as one interviewee put it, 'the whole, horrible lifestyle':

The streets I was going back to, into hostels, all the people I grew up with and the same kind of scene. ... Going back drug dealing, going back committing crime all the time, just that lifestyle. Being strung out to bits, feeling hopeless, nowhere to go, no one to turn to. Do you know what I mean? To survive like.

INT001

I smoked a bit of hash and took a few E before all that. Petrol. ... I started smoking around 11, 12 years of age. ... I was 21 when I started using heroin. I was homeless at the time.

INT003

When I started off as a young lad I would have been sniffing petrol, glue and thinners, and anything like that. ... And as time moved on I started taking Es – ecstasy – and after a couple of years it was everything, anything. I was a heroin addict then at the end. ... After 20 years, I was just a good for nothing heroin addict in X. I was in and out

of prison, I had half my life gone. Do you know? I wasn't nothing to no one.

INT010

All of these interviewees shared difficulties they had experienced within their family as children. One had been placed in foster care as a young child, with a settled family. Another had lost both her parents at a young age. One described how his parents were both strongly dependent on alcohol and that his father was violent. Another described how he grew up on a housing estate among settled families, and felt shame associated with being a Traveller, as well as a difficult relationship with his father. All had been introduced to and become dependent on drugs at a young age.

All of these interviewees used drugs in prison, including heroin. Some had been introduced to heroin in prison:

That's when my drug habit started, in prison. I was drinking and using tablets so I had an addiction anyway but with the heroin, it started in prison. ... In Limerick Prison. I was strung out to bits.

INT001

The first time I was ever introduced to heroin was in Wheatfield prison. ... A couple of lads were on the landing, and I just ended up trying it. And then I ended up getting quite fond of it.

INT007

Others had a history of heroin addiction before prison:

I started drugs when I was young. I started smoking joints or two so. I was always going to be an addict, do you know what I mean? ... It wasn't until about seven years ago that I took heroin. ... Jail had nothing got to do with it. And I said, where was this all me life? ...

INT002

Taking heroin in prison was seen as an attempt to escape from the difficulties of the situation. As one interviewee put it, 'I escaped – you're in a different world when you take it' (INT007). Another described it as being 'like a blanket wrapped around you' (INT001).

It was pointed out that, for the same reason outlined in the section above on barriers to information, many Travellers in prison could not access information about addressing drug use, either in prison or on leaving prison:

I see a lot of settled people, they know a lot about day programmes, a lot of things I never heard of in my life. Or meetings. I didn't know anything about an NA meeting until I came here [rehabilitation centre].

INT002

Abstaining from drugs in prison

Other interviewees (n.5) had either occasionally used drugs recreationally in the past, or had never used drugs. They described how drug use was not typical to Traveller culture. For them, observing people take drugs in prison could be both alienating and distressing:

I'd be over on the top bunk bed like sitting there reading a book, while everyone underneath me doing all different kinds of drugs. It was horrible.

INT008

The only problem was drugs-wise. Like I'm a Traveller myself, I never touch drugs or anything like that. And I always think, seeing girls taking drugs and things like that, that wasn't a good thing to see. ... Just smoking and taking pills and stuff like that. And that wasn't a good thing.

INT006

With the exception of one woman who once accepted to smoke cannabis with another prisoner, all offers of drugs were always turned down:

Just pass it on. Not for you. Not interested. If someone does drugs, that's his own thing.

INT004

I was offered it in there. No way would I put my hands near it, no way. ... [T]hey were smoking heroin like.

INT008

Not only did these interviewees not want to take drugs, they also feared the consequences of doing so:

If they offered them and you took them, imagine what would happen to you then. And what would the prison then think of you.

INT006

You get offered yokes but you wouldn't really take it, know what I mean? Because you just want to go there and get your head down and do your own time. Because taking things off fellas in prison, the next day or two they might want money off you. You don't get money, they might get a chance to argue with you.

INT009

These interviewees tended to associate drug use in prison with people in a more chaotic situation and with more difficult life circumstances than their own:

You'd see the odd two, three girls that would be doing it. Because they're all homeless and they're coming from the streets anyway so they end up that way. They're coming from the streets. A different background.

INT006

All of the interviewees who did not take drugs did drink alcohol, and some acknowledged a strong dependence on alcohol in the past:

I was fond of the drink before I went in. I had a few gargles nearly every night after me mother died. That was my way of coping. I couldn't talk to anybody.

INT006

Alcohol use, however, was seen by interviewees as being much more acceptable in the Traveller community. One interviewee described how this created problems for her when she first attempted to abstain from using

drugs and alcohol:

I was nearly drinking every weekend. I think what it was, was when I was going home to Galway, to my family, they'd say 'well done, you don't take drugs no more. But here, have one of the bottles there'.

INT002

Illicit drug use in prison: Key points

- Half of the interviewees for this study had a long history of drug use (n. 5), while the other half largely abstained from drug use (n. 5) (not including alcohol). The former group tended to have multiple convictions, a past addiction to heroin, and a history of homelessness.
- All of the interviewees who had a history of drug use had experienced a difficult childhood, and all had been introduced to and become dependent on drugs at a young age. All of these interviewees used drugs in prison, including heroin. Some had been introduced to heroin in prison, while others had a history of heroin addiction before prison.
- Taking heroin in prison was seen as an attempt to escape from the stresses of prison life.
- Other interviewees (n.5) had either occasionally used drugs recreationally in the past, or had never used drugs. They described how drug use was not typical to Traveller culture, and how observing it in prison could be both alienating and distressing.
- Not only did these interviewees not want to take drugs, they also feared the consequences of doing so, both regarding their relationship with other prisoners and the response of the IPS.

4. Issues facing Travellers leaving prison

Estrangement and isolation

'Coming out was the greatest feeling ever, and then all of a sudden, I was thinking: I'm lost.'

INT006

Many interviewees found themselves estranged from their family when they left prison. This was due to their involvement in crime, the stigma associated with being imprisoned (particularly for women), and, if applicable, their drug use. Interviewees described the stigma associated with all of these issues in the Traveller community, and how this negatively impacted on their relationships with their families on their return to the community. This felt like rejection and was difficult to accept:

All my family is after washing their hands of me, and I'm only seen as a junkie. It's a horrible thing but I'm learning to accept it. My life is my life. I did what I done. I'm trying to make it better for myself and my child. But that's all I'll ever be seen as. And as much as they love me, deep down, when it comes down to it, that's all I'll ever be seen as.

INT001

But me family, I don't really hear much from me family. ... I don't know what it is. ... That [being imprisoned] would have took a lot off me family. I'd say that took a lot off me mother as well. When I used to go see her she used to be heart-broken. ... Now I go down home every couple of months. I still have that good support. Me family support me, me father and mother said, 'X, we don't care what you do, as long as you're happy and you're clean'. But that's about the best it's going to get.

INT002

One woman suffered from the stigma of drug use even without using drugs, because of its perceived association with prison:

I was 11 stone when I went into prison. I came out seven and a half stone. ... I think it was all worrying. The weight just seemed to be falling off. ... My family thought I was strung out to bits on drugs. ... I hadn't touched a drug. ... They wouldn't look at me. 'Go get yourself a bag of heroin', they'd tell me.

INT006

For some, drug dependency had also alienated their families because of a loss of trust that their drug use had entailed:

I was always promising everything, that I'd stay off this and I'd stay off that, and I just kept going back to everything. Everything that was no good to me I kept going back to. Everything I told was a lie and they wouldn't listen. You know? Same with the group of friends you hand around with. You only hang around with the same stuff you have in common with other people – drugs.

INT010

The stigma of being in prison

Being imprisoned was particularly stigmatising for women. One interviewee explained how this could be compounded by the close-knit nature of the Traveller community. Her daily appointments in her local Garda station while on community return left her, she felt, vulnerable to scrutiny from other Travellers. And while she felt very isolated during this period, this experience gave rise to a desire to further isolate herself from others, in order to avoid the shame associated with sentence:

Going over and getting stamped every day at the Garda station, you see Travellers wherever you go. And they're probably saying, 'Lord, she's going out there, she's probably out of prison. You know? Constantly talking about you all the time. ... You feel very isolated. You feel like you want to isolate yourself from them. Hide. Duck and dive. Like if it's dark, I'd just run over and get it signed. It's not nice like, you know?'

INT006

A changed family

One man, who had served multiple sentences, one lasting six years, described how bereavements in his family, and other changes, such as relations growing up and moving away while he was in prison, all served to estrange him from his own family while in prison. He found his informal support network reduced and changed, and since then has found himself reliant on homeless accommodation:

I found I drifted apart because I hadn't seen a lot of the family while I was in prison. Some had gotten married, some hadn't, some their kids had grown up. So we kind of drifted apart. Then, my mother died four years ago and that just blew things. She died and another brother had died in 2010, he's dead three years. And my dad died in May of this year. That's just – we don't keep in contact now.

INT007

All of these factors served to lead to a sense of isolation, sometimes profound, among Travellers on leaving prison:

Now since I moved up to Dublin, I have no one up here. The few friends I have, they're only small and few between. ... But sometimes you feel a bit lonely because you're on your own. Because you're not with your own.

INT002

Estrangement and isolation: Key points

- Many interviewees found themselves estranged from their family when they left prison. This was due to their involvement in crime, the stigma associated with being imprisoned and, if applicable, their drug use, all of which held stigma in the Traveller community for interviewees.
- Drug dependency was seen as particularly taboo, while being imprisoned held greater stigma for women.
- For those serving longer or multiple sentences, significant changes in the family, such as bereavements, relatives growing up or moving away, could also mean a reduced informal support network on leaving prison.
- All of these factors served to lead to a sense of isolation, sometimes profound, among interviewees on leaving prison.

Returning to a violent relationship

One female interviewee was in a relationship with a history of domestic violence; a second interviewee had been in a violent relationship, which she left following her return to the community. These women described the pain and fear of being in a violent relationship:

Now that's one of the biggest things, I think, that a Traveller woman has to deal with as well, in jail or out of jail, is the husbands. ... You'll never feel safe. I used to feel like I was walking on eggshells every time I went home. ... You can't have someone that you love, that you're expecting to love you, keep you safe and be there for you, to be controlling and manipulating and violence and all them things. How can you rely on anyone who's like that?

INT002

They also spoke of the distress caused by the prospect of returning to a violent relationship on leaving prison:

I was sitting in prison crying my eyes out. For every one day I was doing there, I'm doing two. I was thinking about what's going to happen me when I went home. ... Life wasn't going to change when I went home, life was going to get worse. And it did. [...] Yeah. It's got worse. ... I don't think I'll ever get it out of my heart. It's in me for the rest of me life. People tell you in there, 'it goes away'. It never goes away. You're in there at night and you're crying. And you want to kill yourself.

INT005

This interviewee was supported by prison staff to secure a protection order against her husband while in prison, which she had since used. The other interviewee affected by this issue managed to escape the relationship when she was given a place in a residential drug rehabilitation programme; though difficult, this has given her huge relief and a new sense of freedom:

And do you know the freedom I have now since I got away from it? Now that took an awful lot to get away from.

INT002

Returning to a violent relationship: Key points

- Two female victims/survivors of domestic violence described the pain and fear of being in a violent relationship.
- They also spoke of the distress caused by the prospect of returning to a violent relationship on leaving prison.

Finding somewhere to live

For those who could not return home to a partner or a parent, major barriers presented in terms of finding a new home. One woman, who had a protective order on her husband and at time of interview was living in a rehabilitation centre, was in the process of seeking accommodation for herself and her children. She described her difficult experiences in trying to access accommodation in the private rented sector, where she repeatedly encountered direct discrimination because of being a Traveller:

I've been looking for private rented for the past seven months. And every time I went to look for the house, and went to the house, I had references, I had a deposit, I had the money in advance. ... I viewed 14 houses in three months and I got offered not one of them. ... One fella said to me on the phone, 'X if you don't mind me asking, are you a Traveller?' I said, 'would it make a difference if I was or not?' He said 'if you are, don't bother coming to view this house'.

INT002

Another interviewee reluctantly moved in with her father, with whom she had a difficult relationship. Weeks afterwards, she attempted to move address, but was returned to prison for another 19 weeks, as changing address breached the terms of her community return scheme. On her second release from prison, she had no choice but to return to her father's address. This placed her in a very difficult situation:

Oh, I was lost. When I was getting out first I said no. Because where am I going to go? ... [I went] back to my family at home, in with my father, but he's still not speaking to me. ... I didn't want to go back.

INT006

This interviewee explained that while in prison she had been advised to give her father's address as her own, as otherwise she may have been kept in prison for a longer period. This may relate to the relatively recent policy of the Dóchas Centre not to release a woman if she is homeless and has nowhere to go.⁸

Some interviewees had found themselves relying on emergency homeless accommodation on leaving prison, or in one case, sleeping rough. These interviewees described themselves as having been dependent on drugs, which they saw as instrumental both in their involvement in offending behaviour and being homeless:

I've been in and out of addiction, you know? ... It caused a breakdown in my relationship with my partner. As a result of that I had to leave. I'm sharing with three other people. It's not ideal. But I've been sleeping out for the past number of weeks.

INT007

Another interviewee, now in stable employment and

accommodation, described how for years, he was dependent on heroin and served multiple prison sentences. During this time, he often found himself homeless, due to his chaotic circumstances:

I did a lot of times I suppose [have problems trying to find accommodation]. You wouldn't find you'd get accommodation, so. ... I'd a bad name in my home town anyway, I wouldn't get nothing.

INT010

Some interviewees who were in an insecure housing situation at the time of interview were on social housing waiting lists, but due to long waiting lists expressed doubt that this would present a solution to their housing crisis.

Finding somewhere to live: Key points

- For those who could not return home to a partner or a parent, major barriers presented in terms of finding a new home. For example, in trying to access private rented accommodation one woman repeatedly encountered direct discrimination because of being a Traveller.
- Restrictions around identifying an address as a home on leaving prison can cause serious difficulties; one interviewee found herself unwillingly living with her father when she left prison.
- Some interviewees had found themselves relying on emergency homeless accommodation on leaving prison or, in one case, sleeping rough. These interviewees felt their past drug dependency was instrumental both in their involvement in offending behaviour and in being homeless.
- Some interviewees who were in an insecure housing situation at the time of interview were on social housing waiting lists, but due to long waiting lists expressed doubt that this would present a solution to their housing crisis.

8 For further detail, see IPRT (2013) *Women in the criminal justice system: Towards a non-custodial approach*. IPRT, Dublin.



Photo © Derek Speirs

5. Supports and coping strategies in prison

Support from other prisoners

For both male and female interviewees, other prisoners were an important source of strength and support.

For many, friends in prison included both settled and Traveller prisoners; as one person put it:

Sometimes it was nice to sit down with your own, with other Traveller women. Sometimes it was nice to sit down with other settled women too.

INT002

Another interviewee pointed out that being a Traveller may not even be relevant; many settled prisoners knew Travellers outside of prison:

You want to ... just get along with people and start mixing with people. ... Most of them there might know Travellers. They might know Travellers all their life.

INT009

Another man explained that he made friends with other prisoners who were also serving their first sentence: as far as he was concerned, in the intimidating environment of prison, this was important shared ground:

I got in with a couple of lads I knew. They were alright like. It was their first time in prison as well, so I got on alright with them. ... In a way it helped. And it was their first time in as well. I kind of knew what they were feeling like.

INT008

One woman felt the friends she made in prison helped her develop personally. Years prior to her sentence, the death of her mother had led to her family 'drifting apart' as they struggled individually with grief – 'we all needed to talk but we didn't. ... That was our way of dealing with things'. She felt that 'Travellers, that's their way of dealing with it'. But in prison, talking to other prisoners, she learned how to share her feelings, to open up:

I couldn't talk to anybody. I always kept my feelings inside. And when I got in there, I could start talking out more. ... I think people started to listen to me. They realised I am somebody.

INT006

Friendships with other Travellers could be a very important source of strength. For example, one interviewee, who tended in the main to socialise with other Travellers in prison, described hours spent sitting around a table, chatting. While sometimes she found this 'depressing', she felt this support was essential to her surviving prison:

There'd be a group of Traveller women sitting at the one table and maybe a few settled people. Maybe. ... We'd be more times sitting at that table talking to one another than anything else, through the day. [It was] ... depressing at times, but it was the only thing that got us through.

INT002

Interviewees described the value of keeping company with other Travellers who understood your values, culture and norms:

I suppose with the Travellers, ... it's like you know one another. You know one another's ways. You know what a Traveller will take and what a Traveller won't when you're speaking with them. Most Travellers are very straight with you. And because you know their names, ... you've kind of an understanding of their people ... of their background, where they're coming from. And what kind of a character, most importantly.

INT002

This was also related to the close-knit nature of the Traveller community; having a shared acquaintance could be a way of breaking the ice or finding common ground:

Say, me and you never met before? But you'd know a fella I'd know. My brother in law could be your cousin. There'd be some sort of a – they could easy get on with each other anyway.

INT004

When you did bump into a Traveller, you'd have so much to share with them like. You'd know each other's families. There was a lot of that kind of thing. ... They'd be talking about the old times, or deceased family [members], or you might have lived with them in caravan sites.

INT007

Coming from a shared culture also made it easier to understand any particular problem or issue, and to know when an extra level of kindness or sensitivity was required:

Because when you're sitting down chatting to Traveller women, especially in jail, there's so much stress, obviously with missing their families, loneliness, you've to be very careful. And sometimes you don't know where some of these Travelling women is coming from. So you have to be a little bit gentle.

INT002

Friendships with other Travellers could also provide a means of overcoming barriers to attending education and training courses, such as poor self-confidence and fear of discrimination:

Once you get a good friend you're away to go. If they're doing a course with you, you're away to go, the time flies through, you're helping each other like. Meself and X, we were always close together, we done a hairdressing course together, everything together like. [If you've a friend with you doing courses] it's a help, you know you're getting some education.

INT006

Finally, knowing other Travellers could also make you feel safer in prison:

[Traveller women] seem to get each other through a lot when we're in there. ... And there's nothing like another Traveller having your back. You know it's there. Say there's five or six women on one Traveller woman over there? Well, as soon as Traveller women over this side of the jail [hear about it] the Traveller women will come over and say 'hold on a minute. What the hell went on there a while ago?' What if five or six Traveller women fell on one settled woman? The settled women won't have that. So it's kind of, everyone knew their place.

INT002

I met other Travellers that I never met before in me life. I met some of the nicest fellas I ever seen in me life, do you know? So you make very good friends. I was in no fights whatsoever when I was in Wheatfield like. I was in no arguments, no fights, nothing. Because there was a good few Travellers ... so if I got stuck with two or three fellas, I'd get my cousins.

INT004

Friendships with settled prisoners could also be important, as exemplified by one interviewee's description of how she felt she benefited from getting to know women outside the Traveller community. After her initial shock on hearing stories from settled prisoners about their less traditional lives outside of prison, she ultimately found this helpful:

The talk even, that you would never have heard in your life. Like for a Traveller woman. ... The way they used to talk about fellas, stuff like that. Where we wouldn't even be used to that. Like, they had this fella such a night, and they were with another fella another night. And we were constantly sitting around the table, listening to this the whole time.

INT006

She went on to explain how this gave her courage to step outside traditional gender boundaries, when she left prison:

It learned me as well because when I got out, I met a lad like. I didn't think I was ever going to meet someone again. [I thought] that's the only fella I'm ever going to be with. Then when I heard all these chat, and like about holidays and everything, I thought, I never got a chance to do that. I've never been to a nightclub or ... Things started looking a bit different.

INT006

Support from other prisoners: Key points

- For both male and female interviewees, other prisoners were an important source of strength and support. For many, friends in prison included both settled and Traveller prisoners. Friends helped you adjust to a new and intimidating world, and could even promote personal growth.
- Friendships with other Travellers could be a very important source of strength, enhanced by shared values, culture and norms. This was also related to the close-knit nature of the Traveller community; having a shared acquaintance could be a way of breaking the ice or finding common ground. Coming from a shared culture also made it easier to know when an extra level of kindness or sensitivity was required.
- Friendships with other Travellers could provide a means of overcoming barriers to attending education and training courses, such as poor self-confidence and fear of discrimination.
- Friendships with settled prisoners could also be important; one interviewee described how friendships formed in prison helped her to step outside traditional gender boundaries, when she left prison.

Ritual and filling time

Interviewees emphasised the importance of establishing a routine in prison. They did this by engaging in various activities, which provided a degree of structure to the day and lessened the amount of time spent worrying about family and life outside prison. This approach made time seem to pass more quickly. Typical activities included going to the gym, chatting to other prisoners, and for some, work and/or education. As one man described how he passed the time in prison:

You're going for nearly an hour in the gym, and you're coming back down and your dinner is ready. ... Then you come back for two hours and then you lay down again. You're back in before half seven, until the next morning at eight o'clock. If you're doing something, the time will fly by, know what I mean?

INT009

This routine was not established immediately, but once it did, prison life became easier to bear:

The first couple of days drag because you're just waiting to get used to it. Your sleep and all does be messed up. After a while, you're sleeping like a baby then. ... And you're waking up then at the time before they wake you. You get a routine.

INT009

For this reason, the opportunity to work was particularly valued; it provided this structure and was a way of filling time:

I was working in laundry when it first opened. ... I loved it, because I'd a certain routine. ... Instead of going up to the rec in the day time, I'd only go to the yard in the evenings and make my phone call and during the day I'd work. So it kept me away from all the bad crowd and kept me focused. INT001
I moved over to that yard and I got the cleaning job. ... I liked doing it [work] because it cleared my head and all that. It was most nearly every day. Then I got involved in doing a bit of gardening and all that.

INT003

Oh the work was great. It was a way of coping. You knew you had a routine. It was a way of getting up, you had something to do.

INT006

I was cleaning every day. I was cleaning the school. ... It wasn't for the money. It kept me going. ... because it kept me from thinking, about the kids.

INT005

As explored in Chapter 3, Travellers in prison could be excluded from rights and entitlements for a range of reasons, such as fear of discrimination and literacy problems. One interviewee described how these factors could lead to Travellers in prison being less aware of the opportunity to work. She herself only became aware of the option of working in prison on her last sentence:

Now I tell you, I did three or four sentences in that

jail and only once I got a job inside it. All the other times I didn't. ... I never knew I could. ... Information is key. The last time I was in I had a job two days a week.... [It was] brilliant. It kept my mind busy and plus I was getting paid for it, so that was even better.

INT002

She went on to reflect that Traveller women would like to avail of the opportunity to work in prison:

I think when it comes to the Traveller women, if they know, they won't say no. Like if three Traveller women knew they could get three cleaning jobs on different landings, they won't say no to it. Because they like them kind of things. They like keeping the place clean.

INT002

One interviewee described how he was given a cleaning job while on 23-hour lock-up for a five month period. His duties involved cleaning the landing and emptying bins; they gave a structure to his life and also gave him the opportunity to talk to other prisoners 'through the door', depending on the leniency of the prison officer on duty. It is of concern that this interviewee does not seem to have been paid for this work. Nonetheless, he felt it enabled him to avoid the extreme isolation that 23-hour lock-up usually entails, and was therefore extremely valuable:

I never even asked if I was getting paid. I was just glad to be getting out of the cell.

INT004.

For those who were religious, prayer also became an important part of their daily routine. These interviewees framed each day by praying for their family in the morning, and again at night. In this way, they could feel that they were doing something to help protect those they loved outside prison. This act became a daily, ritualised part of life in prison:

Religion helped the whole way through. Because every night I did my rosary, I did my prayers. I'd say to my mother and anyone else I know who is dead, I'd say, 'please just let my kids be alright'. I said, 'God I'll do this sentence, just once my kids are alive and well when I get out'. That helped, every night, you know what I mean?

INT005

I used to pray every night for my family and my daughter. ... It makes you feel better, especially when you're saying it before you go to sleep, it makes you feel better then. You're feeling better in yourself after saying your prayers, and then you just drift off to sleep. The first thing then in the morning, you're blessing your face and going to the phone to make sure everything is okay.

INT006

Attending mass in prison was important for a contrasting reason: it provided a break from the monotony of daily life in prison:

You probably would go to church. But I think probably what that is, is, to be honest, get out of the cell or see other people. Or it's just something different every week.

INT007

No one faced any barriers to praying while in prison; as one noted, 'you just go up to your own bed and sit back and pray as much as you can in a cell. Everyone does their own thing, know what I mean?' (INT009). One interviewee, however, described how in one particular prison she was prevented from attending mass as punishment:

They can stop you going to mass as punishment. I don't think that's right at all 'cause that's your religion. ... Using it as punishment isn't right. If you say that to the prison service, they'll probably say that doesn't happen or if it does happen we're not going to leave that happening. But the prison officers in the prison still will enforce this. That's the way it goes.

INT001

Ritual and filling time: Key points

- Interviewees emphasised the importance of establishing a routine in prison: this provided a degree of structure to daily life and helped people to spend less time worrying. This approach also made time seem to pass more quickly.
- Typical activities included going to the gym, chatting to other prisoners, and for some, work and/or education.
- For this reason, the opportunity to work in prison was particularly valued by interviewees. However, barriers to information may make it more difficult for Travellers to find out about work opportunities in prison.
- One interviewee described how he was given a cleaning job while on 23 hour lock-up for a five month period. This not only gave a structure to his life; it also provided the opportunity to talk to other prisoners.
- For those who were religious, prayer also became an important part of their daily routine. These interviewees framed each day by praying for their family in the morning, and again at night. This helped them feel they were doing something to protect those they loved outside prison. This act became a daily, ritualised part of life in prison.
- By contrast, attending mass could provide a valued break from the monotony of daily life in prison. One interviewee reported that in one prison, she was prevented from attending mass as punishment.

Support from staff

Interviewees who had served their sentences in the Dóchas Centre spoke positively of prison officers there. All felt that prisoners were treated fairly there. One interviewee spoke particularly positively regarding the sensitivity and support of a prison officer who accompanied her on a one day temporary release to see her children. Others described how they felt they could raise concerns with prison officers in that prison:

The officers in the Dóchas ... have a lot of patience for prisoners. They actually care about prisoners. I could sit down with an officer and talk about how I feel to them.

INT001

Across prisons, male and female interviewees spoke positively about the support they received from prison chaplains. This support could be practical or emotional:

You know who was very good inside in the jail? The nun. Where now you would hardly ever see people going to church, but you nearly always see them talking to Sr. X. Or she'd always give rosary beads or come and bless your cell. I called her over to bless my cell once or twice, things like that. And she's always there, do you know what I mean. She was more the religion in there than the priest or the mass.

INT002

I met a nun. ... She used to come every day to see me. She'd talk to you like. ... She was very nice. She gave me a holy thing for my neck. And I was telling her I'd prefer to go to Shelton Abbey ... she goes, 'yeah, I'll see what I can do'. I think it was two or three days after I was brought to Shelton Abbey. So I think she had a big part to play in it.

INT008

Staff support: Key points

- Interviewees who had served their sentences in the Dóchas Centre found prison officers approachable and sometimes a source of support.
- Across prisons, male and female interviewees spoke positively about the support they received from prison chaplains. This support could be practical or emotional

6. The bigger picture

That prison is not a social vacuum was a clear theme to emerge in this research. While the wider context – life outside prison – was not the focus of this study (which sought to explore Travellers' experience of the prison system in Ireland), all interviewees discussed how discrimination and marginalisation impacted their lives in general, and six identified pressures within the Traveller community that had caused difficulty for them. In many cases, these broader themes were related to offending behaviour.

This chapter explores the perspectives and insights of interviewees regarding being a Traveller in the wider context of Irish society. Not all the themes explored here were anticipated, and as they were not the main focus of this study, less saturation was achieved in this analysis than in that presented in other chapters.

Discrimination in daily life

Discrimination emerged as a kind of constant backdrop to life, something that has always been there. As one person put it, 'Discrimination seems to go through a lot of what you go through when you're a Traveller'. It was encountered in all aspects of daily life, from going to the local shops, to attempting to get served in a pub, to doing the school run.

Sometimes it came in the form of name-calling. For example, one interviewee commented, '[Some settled people would] intimidate you. They'd call you every name they can to get you'. Sometimes it came in the form of being excluded from public venues, such as bars and restaurants:

Nightclubs. Normal pubs. ... The odd pub will know you and know you're a Traveller and they're grand. They let you have a pint or whatever. But most pubs, they know who you are and that's it [you can't go in].

INT008

There are places there in town you could go in and you mightn't get served. I find that a lot in the city. The likes here of X here now, you go down they won't let you in. Often you go into the city and they let you into an odd place, they mightn't let you into another place. ... You walk into a pub ... and they say no, it's for regulars.

INT009

Sometimes it did not only manifest itself in verbal attacks and discriminatory exclusions; it was also experienced through nonverbal communication. Being stared at, for instance:

When I walk into certain places, I do feel very funny. ... When I walk into a place, I feel like I've ten heads on me. ... It's the look on their faces: it's like they're saying – I don't know what to call it. They look at you as though they're looking down their noses at you, because you're a Traveller.

INT002

The pervasive nature of such less tangible examples of discrimination is perhaps best illustrated by this interviewee's description of her attempt to engage with mothers of children in the school her own children were attending. This included attending the school's Breakfast Club, which in itself required a lot of courage on her part, given that none of the other women involved in the Breakfast Club was from the Travelling community. Yet these efforts were not reciprocated.

I walked up to the Breakfast Club one morning. There was a load of settled people there. I don't know was it because they never seen a Traveller woman in their life in that area, or in the Breakfast Club having a cup of coffee, or was it because I – because I just felt, the moment I went in there, everything went real quiet. ... Now and again I see them on the road and I would just kind of nod my head at them. But I've been going to that school months now and even before that, and not one

person has come up like or anything. ... They might be talking, all laughing, but the moment you walk in, that quickly stops. And they look at one another, and it's like they can tell what one another's thinking.

INT002

Interviewees described efforts to ignore discrimination. Male interviewees in particular emphasised the importance of minimising the impact of discrimination, for example by simply disregarding offensive language. One man reflected that the impact of offensive language partly depended on the intention behind its use:

You might get people ... and the way they'd say 'tinker' or 'knacker', as if it was something dirty – that's what you'd kind of get off it, as if it was something no good or dirty. ... Then other people would say it's only a word or it's only a word they're using. But some people would say it as if you're dirt. As if you're nothing.

INT010

Yet it emerged that discrimination was not so easy to dismiss. Although you might 'keep taking it because it feels normal' (INT002), as one woman put it, it still led to feelings of shame, low self-worth and marginalisation. And for some, experiences of marginalisation and discrimination were a contributing factor to offending behaviour.

Discrimination, shame and offending behaviour

Discrimination led to feelings of embarrassment and shame. Interviewees spoke of its corrosive effect on self-confidence and feelings of self-worth. For example, one man described how hearing Travellers being referred to in a negative way had a strong and harmful impact on his personal development as a young man, giving rise to deep feelings of shame and embarrassment. For him, this was a strong contributing factor in his becoming involved in offending behaviour: he sought to counter feelings of shame by creating a strong image for himself:

When I started I was just in for robbing or fighting and stuff like that. I was just out there looking for an image. ... I grew up with a lot of shame on my life as well, I suppose from being a Traveller. I would have been ashamed of being a Traveller. I would have been ashamed of it but pretended I wasn't. You know that kind of way? I would have put on that 'I'm not'. But ... if people did talk about Travellers or whatever, in a different way, I'd kind of go red inside. Do you know? ... If I heard the knacker word, it done something inside. ... I'd just put down my head or whatever. If you heard it shouted – 'knacker' or 'tinker' or whatever – whatever it done, it done something.

INT010

He went on to reflect that many Travellers go through this experience. For him, low self-confidence and feelings of inadequacy are carried through from generation to generation of Travellers, making it difficult to seek support, to change things for the better:

It's brought on from your family before you. You just think you're not good enough. You just think you're lower class. You don't talk about it, you don't talk to anyone, because you're not good enough. Being a Traveller is hard. You don't know how to talk about it. I didn't know how to talk to anyone how I didn't think I was good enough. ... I didn't think I was worth it ... to go into different groups and take part in these things, I didn't think I was good enough to do it anyway, I didn't think I was valued. By anyone. ... It's carried on, it's carried on, it's carried on.

INT010

Key points: Discrimination in daily life

- Discrimination emerged as a kind of constant backdrop to life, something that has always been there. It was encountered in all aspects of daily life, from going to the local shops, to attempting to get served in a pub, to doing the school run.
- Discrimination manifested itself in exclusion, verbal attacks, and nonverbal communication.
- Interviewees described efforts to ignore discrimination, but it emerged that discrimination was not so easy to dismiss and could lead to feelings of shame, low self-worth and marginalisation. This can be carried through from generation to generation of Travellers, making it difficult to seek support or to change things for the better.
- For some, experiences of discrimination were a contributing factor to offending behaviour.

Marginalisation and offending behaviour

In interviewees' accounts of how they became involved in offending behaviour, common themes include: a difficult childhood, poverty and social exclusion, and dependent drug use. For many, robbery during their childhood was a normal way of surviving – this was particularly the case among interviewees who had served multiple sentences:

A lot of my crime, I grew up in that environment. ... My mother and father died young, and I was taught at a young age to do be doing these things. ... I know for my mother and father, one or two of my aunties and their young fellas, we would have been brought up around crime. Do you know what I mean?

INT001

I was robbing since I was six years of age. ... I used to rob for meself. I robbed at Christmas time and made a few pound. Or I used to rob to keep my brothers and sisters going when I was a kid.

INT002

Well, I think it's something you're growing up with as well. ... You're growing up as a thief or a robber.

Different things like that. It's an attitude of your thinking as well, I suppose as well that you're carrying on.

INT010

No viable alternative ways of living presented themselves. Dropping out of school at an early age was considered normal, with the result that education may not be seen as a means of accessing employment:

Back then it never dawned on me that education was the way out. To me it was 'rob kids, because if you don't rob you're going to die of hunger'.

INT002

Other factors compounded this issue: literacy problems, which can be a barrier to information, and low self-confidence:

The lack of confidence when it comes to picking up a piece of paper and reading it, when you can't do that. And I know there's a lot of settled people that can't read but I think with Traveller women, it's not having that piece. ... It's like you fear what you don't know. It's like you're stuck in limbo, you can't step over it.

INT002

Like, it's confidence. It's a big thing. A lot of Travellers don't feel confident, they don't feel accepted. They don't want to do these courses, they think they're not good enough. ... I always thought I was lower than other people, that I wasn't good enough.

INT010

The association between marginalisation, poverty and offending behaviour is not only experienced by the Travelling community; a strong body of research literature highlights the interconnection between exclusion, offending behaviour and rates of conviction.⁹

Key points: Marginalisation and offending behaviour

- The following factors were associated with offending behaviour: a difficult childhood, poverty and social exclusion, and dependent drug use.
- For many, theft was a normal way of surviving during childhood, particularly among interviewees who had served multiple sentences.
- No viable alternative ways of living presented themselves. Dropping out of school at an early age was considered normal, with the result that education may not be seen as a means of accessing employment.
- Other factors compounded this issue: literacy problems, which can be a barrier to information, and low self-confidence.

⁹ For further detail, see IPRT (2012a) *The vicious circle of social exclusion and crime: Ireland's disproportionate punishment of the poor*, IPRT, Dublin.

Drug dependence and offending behaviour

It was noted earlier that interviewees fell into two groups: five had a history of drug use and homelessness and these interviewees had all served multiple sentences, while the other five had served fewer sentences, and had no history of drug dependence or homelessness. Most interviewees with a history of drug dependence described being introduced to drugs at an early age, culminating in heroin use. For some, robbing came first, and drug dependence followed, with robbing then used to fund their drug use; as one interviewee described it, her heroin addiction and history of robbing 'bounced off each other' (INT001). Another noted:

Then as my addiction went on and on, when I hit heroin, then I was robbing to feed that habit. I had the means to do it. And the two things mixed together.

INT002

Others became involved in offending behaviour only when they needed to fund their drug use: 'It was purely to do with the addiction, to feed my habit' (INT007).

Whether offending behaviour came before or after drug dependence, both were strongly related. And once this cycle began, it became very difficult to address:

I knew I was going back to that, but I didn't want to use drugs. So I lasted three weeks without using drugs. ... And then after that I went completely up in a heap and I broke my TR (Temporary Release) and I was back in and out then for a while. ... I often cried because I knew what I was going to go back out to. You're in a horrible place and you're only going back out. Like people say you can't wait to be free. Free from prison but you're not free from the old lifestyle do you know what I mean? There's no hope for the future like.

INT001

I was a heroin addict then at the end. That's where you end up anyway. ... So by the time I got to the last stage, after 20 years, I was just a good for nothing heroin addict. I was in and out of prison, I had half my life gone. ... I wasn't nothing to no one.

INT010

Drug dependence and offending behaviour: Key points

- Most interviewees with a history of drug dependence were introduced to drugs at an early age, culminating in heroin use.
- For some, robbing came first, and drug dependence followed, with robbing then used to fund their drug use.
- Others became involved in offending behaviour only when they needed to fund their drug use.
- Offending behaviour and drug dependence were strongly related, a cycle that interviewees found very difficult to break.

Discrimination in the criminal justice system

Some preliminary evidence emerged of Travellers encountering discrimination in the criminal justice system. For example, two interviewees felt that discrimination had impacted on their treatment by the judiciary. One, who had pleaded guilty, was given an 11 month sentence for trespassing with intent to burgle (his first conviction). He was also warned that if he intended to appeal the sentence, the sentence would be increased. When asked why he felt he was given what he felt was such a harsh sentence, the interviewee said,

It's just, standing in front of the judge, I think, he looks down [and thinks], 'yeah these are real like stubborn people', you know? That do nothing and cause trouble.

INT004

Another, female, interviewee was given the maximum sentence of three years for social welfare fraud, even though she paid back the amount she owed prior to her court case. This interviewee had six children, some of whom were still in primary school when she went to prison. While acknowledging that she had committed an offence, this interviewee felt strongly that her sentence did not reflect the complexities of her case. She also felt that her harsh sentence was based on the judge's prejudiced view of the Traveller community and his misunderstanding of the nature of the offence; in sentencing her, he described her as a 'ringleader of the family', meaning her husband's family. This was despite the fact that she had references from Women's Aid during her court case confirming she was a victim/survivor of domestic violence and had lived in their refuge accommodation for significant periods of time:

I know I was in for doing wrong, I'll put me hand up and say that, I paid my money for it, I shouldn't have been collecting social welfare. But I was living in and out of women's refuges my whole life. What did they expect? ... That was his money. ... I lived on me social welfare. So in my eyes, I would never touch his money, never was allowed.

INT005

Some interviewees' experiences with the courts system suggested that marginalisation also negatively impacted on the outcome of their case. For example, one male interviewee who had served multiple sentences for minor offences, described how his solicitor often failed to present in court, which sometimes led to the maximum sentence being imposed on him. This seemed to have been caused by his case not being prioritised by his solicitor, and perhaps the interviewee's limited capacity to do anything about this:

I often got sentences by the solicitor not talking up. The solicitor I had when I was in five weeks, I shouldn't have been in that length of time. Because he was sending other people in to do his talk, know what I mean? And the judge in Cloverhill, she was complaining what was happening to me at the time because she didn't want to keep me back every week. ... Every time I was in Cloverhill Prison, he

was never turning up. He sent other lads. They knew nothing about me. They couldn't really talk up. And the judge was giving out to those lads that was talking for me. They knew nothing about me.

INT009

Two male interviewees encountered discrimination from members of the Gardaí. One recounted overhearing two guards use offensive language when referring to female Travellers:

A couple of weeks ago, in X station, a guard referred to two Travelling girls as two pykies. He was saying it to someone else, a colleague, referring to two Traveller girls as two pykies. He [colleague] didn't seem surprised. He knew what he was talking about.

INT007

Another interviewee described how he served a five week custodial sentence for pushing a Garda. His issue was not so much with the sentence as with the physical treatment he received from the Gardaí afterwards:

I got pepper sprayed, I was dragged down like a dog by the guards then. I got a box in the back of the head, in the back of the Garda car, and put into a cell then. ... [T]hey'd no business hitting me a box in the back of the head.

INT009

Key points: Discrimination in the criminal justice system

- Some preliminary evidence emerged of Travellers encountering discrimination in the criminal justice system, among those who were serving their first sentence.
- Two interviewees felt that prejudice among the judiciary had negatively impacted on their sentencing.
- One interviewee had received poor support from his solicitor, yet did not have the means to address this. This had made him more vulnerable to being given a prison sentence, on more than one occasion.
- Two male interviewees reported encountering discrimination from members of the Gardaí.

A changing culture?

Some interviewees spoke about issues within the Travelling community. In particular, they discussed how the Traveller community has been, in recent years, undergoing a period of significant change. It was perceived to have grown less traditional; gender roles in particular were seen to be changing. Such changes were perceived to bring benefits and to sometimes impose tension.

Traveller men in a changing culture

Communication difficulties were discussed. One interviewee spoke of how difficulties communicating with her family after her mother died, noting,

Me brother went one way. Me sisters – we all just separated. We all didn't get together, a family, and hug one another, things like that. Travellers, that's their way of dealing with it.

INT006

This was seen to be a particular issue for Traveller men:

He was a great father but he didn't know how to sit down and talk to me and communicate in them kind of ways with me. ... from his own background, growing up in his own big family ... he grew up with seven brothers and they had it tough with money and different things. ... I didn't really talk to my da about anything, or my ma. And there was eleven in my family anyway, so it was hard.

INT010

For this interviewee, communication difficulties led to serious problems as he grew older; he directly attributed this to his drug dependency and to some of his offending behaviour. For example, he described easily losing his temper with guards:

I couldn't communicate, so it all built up inside and I'd snap. ... If a guard called around my house or my flat, I'd just go berserk. Stone wall mad. ... I could never talk. ... So when I came to it then, I just snapped. I didn't care. Because you didn't know how to talk about it anyway, so you didn't really care. For years I went on, I went mad in the court-house and everywhere else.

INT010

He felt that this was not unique to his own experience, but something many Travellers faced. This was associated with it being a traditional culture, where gender roles are distinct, but also to the way in which the Traveller community is cut off from the rest of society:

It'll drive you stone mad (not being able to communicate). And it's a lot of what's going on for Travellers as well. You're inside, you're part of the clique. That's all you know is that circle. You won't go outside of that circle because ... you don't know anything outside of it.

INT010

Other interviewees also spoke of a pressure on men to act in traditional roles. A male interviewee who had

spent time in care shared a similar story. In the Traveller community, he explained, 'the guys were brought up to do all the outside work and the girls were brought up to do the cooking and cleaning'. When he came back to his family, he felt tension:

I spent time in care and when I came back to my family I did a lot of cooking. And my brothers were going, 'That's a girl's job'. ... Or even making a cup of tea, Travellers would be talking about you on the side.

INT007

However, it was felt that this situation has improved in recent years:

This generation, it's different. ... With your children and that, it's different. With my kids, now and my little son and my daughter ... I really took part in her life when I was out. Even today, I've a better relationship with my daughter today. We can talk about anything. ... It's just different. And with my son as well.

INT010

In the 80s and 90s, if you saw a man carrying a shopping bag, people'd be laughing at him. I think it's changing.

INT007

One male interviewee came out to his family about being gay while in prison. While he encountered some difficulty among his brothers, he described how years ago, that would have not been an option:

I came out to my family about being gay while in prison. ... I'd got a friend to tell them. ... I'd been pressurised prior to going into prison to get married and it was something I didn't want to do. The brothers weren't so happy about it ... [but] years ago, that would have been unheard of. ... You wouldn't even think about it.

INT007

Traveller men in a changing culture: Key points

- Communication difficulties were discussed, particularly in relation to Traveller men.
- Interviewees also spoke of a pressure on men to act in traditional roles.
- It was felt that, in recent years, gender expectations had relaxed.

Traveller women in a changing culture

Female interviewees described how becoming involved in offending behaviour and/or drug use was particularly stigmatising for women in Traveller culture. Three of the women interviewed had been estranged from their families because of these reasons, as well as other aspects of their lives deemed untraditional:

I'm 24 and I'm not married so I bring shame on them, do you know what I mean? ... It's grand to live a very sheltered life but I never did. I was in homes all through my teens. ... If you're coming from a broken home you're going to have a lot of different needs.

INT001

It may be that Traveller women who transgress traditional gender roles may be at greater risk of social isolation within the Traveller community. This increased isolation may push some women into more unstable circumstances, perhaps relying on temporary accommodation, perhaps even becoming involved in heavy drug use:

The sorts of Travellers that end up in prison come from broken homes. ... They don't have that connection with their family anymore. The support isn't there. Like all my family is after washing their hands of me, and I'm only seen as a junkie.

INT001

This interviewee felt that offending behaviour was much more acceptable for Traveller men, and that she became involved only because her parents died when she was still young:

None of the rest of the girls in my family are in crime ... because they had it easy, they had their daddies or their husbands to look after them. So they didn't have to do the crime because their mothers and fathers looked after them. ... Whereas my mother and father died young, and I was taught at a young age to do be doing these things, do you know what I mean?

INT001

It was also suggested that, due to education barriers, Traveller women may have less awareness of the negative consequences of problematic drug use:

Traveller women is not aware exactly where drugs is going to lead them. It's like when I was sitting at home, and I got handed me first bag of speed, no one told me what that was going to do to me. Like I wasn't aware of what heroin will do. When I took heroin seven years ago, I didn't know, I just seen it in a friend's and said Jesus Christ. I wasn't aware of exactly what it meant, where it'll take you and what you would lose because of it. ... Travelling women, because of the education, their awareness is not up. ... They're inside in a trailer and they're not mixing with people out in the streets.

INT002

However, it was acknowledged that this situation has

changed in recent years, with Traveller women enjoying greater freedom and educational opportunities:

Some of the things have changed for the better with education and things like that. The girls getting more education and more rights.

INT007

For Traveller girls, it's not fair for them to get married there and then. They should get out and enjoy a bit of life first and see, get out and date a few guys and ... But it's breaking up an awful lot now. Even there for meself, sure I met up with another lad after that, after me husband.

INT006

It was felt that this process of change was still ongoing. Some Travellers, usually of the older generation, were seen as being more traditional and still imposed older, more traditional expectations. This could create tension between the older and younger generations. For example, the interviewee quoted above went on to explain the negative consequences of beginning a new relationship after separating from her husband:

But me family weren't happy with that, and still aren't talking to me. ... No, me family aren't still talking to me for my mistakes. But my sisters now, they talk to me. And sure that's what they say – 'It's your mistake, you learn from it'. It's just harder for me father to come around to terms with it. ... It's just the shame on the family, that's it basically.

INT006

Traveller women in a changing culture: Key points

- Female interviewees described how becoming involved in offending behaviour and/or drug use was particularly stigmatising for women in Traveller culture.
- It may be that Traveller women who transgress more traditional gender roles may be at greater risk of social isolation within the Traveller community.
- It was also suggested that, due to education barriers, Traveller women may have less awareness of the negative consequences of problematic drug use.
- It was acknowledged that this situation has changed in recent years, with Traveller women enjoying greater freedom and educational opportunities.
- However, it was felt that this process of change was still ongoing. Some Travellers, usually the older generation, were more traditional and still imposed older, more traditional expectations. This could create tension between the older and younger generations.

External pressures on Traveller culture

Negative changes were also perceived to have taken place in Traveller culture, largely due to external pressures. Two men spoke of how it had become increasingly difficult to live a nomadic life, or even in a halting site, in the face of regulations:

Given the choice, I would go back travelling. ... I know a lot of Travellers, when the modern sites came in, they didn't like them, because they found they were close and they were on top of each other. It was okay to have the advantage of the water and the sanitation but they didn't like the way they were very close together. ... I always said, if I did go back, I don't think I'd be able to live on a site. I'd find it very closed in and right on top of each other. ... I'd like to go travelling again.

INT007

Another male interviewee described how he had enjoyed travelling and would like to do it again. This, he felt, was not a realistic option:

When I was younger, I travelled. It was grand, getting out in the fresh air and getting to know other people, mixing with other people, know what I mean? ... Ah I would [like to do it again], but there's not many people going out now, you know, because you can't leave your trailer by the road. You can do it if you rent out a caravan or something and rent out a hotel say, that you can go back to sleep for a couple of hours. But you can't let a trailer lie at the side of the road because you come back, the guards will take it. All the culture's gone. ... All the culture's gone now.

INT009

This interviewee directly associated this perceived loss of the nomadic way of life, a huge part of Traveller culture, with younger Travellers becoming involved in drug use and offending behaviour:

In that time, there was more freedom for Travellers. Now they're all in houses and they're getting into all heavy drugs and all that. Before that, Travellers were out in the air, know what I mean, they were out looking for a bit of work. Now they're stuck with terraces around, they're settling in with people and they're mixing in with people, and bad company. They're in heavy drugs and they're getting in prison.

INT009

External pressures on Traveller culture: Key points

- Negative changes were also perceived to have taken place in Traveller culture, largely due to external pressures.
- Male interviewees spoke of how it had become increasingly difficult to live a nomadic life, or even in a halting site, in the face of regulations.



James Collins conducting a tinsmithing workshop at Cloverhill Prison © Derek Speirs

7. Ways forward

Show that there is a way forward

There was a strong perception that many Travellers in prison need more targeted support to escape the cycle of exclusion and offending behaviour. As things stood, factors such as social exclusion, poverty, discrimination, drug dependence and low self-worth, all acted as barriers. This was particularly related to those in more chaotic life circumstances, with a history of drug dependence, homelessness and multiple sentences. It emerged that there is no real freedom from drugs unless you can envision a life without drugs; as one interviewee noted, 'I always thought of getting off drugs, but I never thought of how to be free from drugs' (INT001).

Some interviewees felt that the best way to do this was to provide a 'role model' to Travellers in prison: someone from the Travelling community who could provide support, be it practical or emotional:

If there was someone working in the prisons, that would be brilliant, to represent Travellers, someone from the outside do you know what I mean? To go and talk to the girls, get to know the girls, help them.

INT001

This could involve providing information on education and training courses, for example:

I know Pavee Point picked up a few people, I was going to do the CE (Community Employment) scheme for people in addiction. Even if you got [someone from a Traveller organisation] to speak what way they're doing it. That there is another way, lads. You just have not been taught.

INT002

There's no middle person to say this is a, b and c, this is what you have to do. Or go to this, that and the other.

INT002

It could also involve providing more emotional support. For example, one interviewee suggested that, for some, this role might usefully take a mentoring approach, with a relationship cultivated between the representative and recipients:

You need good encouragement, not just one session every now and again. It's a relationship. You've got to know someone. It's a relationship. ... It's over time, you know? And just, understanding it's your own choice. ... You can choose to go in and out of prison all your life – you're going nowhere. But you can choose the path to walk right. You won't get it all right [but] you're going one way. Or else you're playing around with drugs forever, and you're going nowhere. You're just going straight back all the time, know what I mean?

INT010

It could also be inspirational, improving self-confidence

and showing other avenues exist:

I don't think there's anyone there giving them initiative to get to education, or forward their lives do you know what I mean? There's no one to look up to do you know what I mean? ... I think there needs to be a lot of direction in prison. People seeing there is a better way. Because a lot of us don't want this life any more. A lot of girls in there are crying to be shown a different way.

INT001

Show them that they're as good as anyone, and just that confidence. And look man, you know, you can let being a Traveller ruin the rest of your life or you can hold on, I'm a Traveller, so what? And move on with the rest of your life. You're another human being. You're another person. We don't think that. We think we're second class.

INT010

It was seen important for this role to be filled by a Traveller, 'one of your own' as one person put it. This would avoid cultural barriers impeding any intended support or information provided. Perhaps more importantly, it would allow people to see for themselves that other options are available:

With it being one of your own, a Travelling young one coming down and saying all this to me, I'm thinking, 'she's doing this, things are working out alright for her'. It's opening a door, do you know what I mean?

INT001

Some interviewees had past experience of role models and spoke of its positive influence on them; for example, the interviewee quoted above spoke of her experience in prison in the UK, where prisoners acted as representatives of different subgroups within the prison population:

When I got locked up in England and did my sentence, I looked at other women that were role models, were strong confident women ... they weren't on the drugs scene, they weren't entertaining it at all. They used to be reps and heads of different departments in the prison. They were good role models.... I used to look up to these women, it's what started to get me a bit of cop on about myself thinking that's a fool's game now, carrying on like that. And getting me over to education, starting to better myself, to see these women are strong enough to do it why can't I do it?

INT001

One interviewee, who now works in a rehabilitation centre, acts as a role model to young Travellers attending the centre, and spoke of the value of this:

It's hard to relate to someone unless you've been there, or you've been in that kind of situation. ... I

work in X now. ... And a big part of it [for them] was being a Traveller. So it was good to talk to them, and they got a lot out of me being there. They'd wait for me to come in all the time, because I could relate to them. So that was the good thing of me being at X. When lads do come in, I can kind of – I know where they are, because I was there.

INT010

Key points: Show that there is a way forward

- There was a strong perception that many Travellers in prison, particularly those with a history of multiple convictions, need more targeted support to escape the cycle of exclusion and offending behaviour.
- Some interviewees felt that the best way to do this was to provide a 'role model' to Travellers in prison: someone from the Travelling community who could provide support, be it practical or emotional.
- This could involve providing information on education and training courses. It could also involve providing more emotional, even inspirational, support, addressing self-confidence issues and showing that other avenues exist.
- It was seen important that this role was filled by a Traveller, to avoid cultural barriers impeding any intended support or information provided and to allow people to see for themselves that other options are available.
- Some interviewees had past experience of role models from the Travelling community and spoke of its positive influence.

Proactively engage with Travellers in prison

Interviewees made a number of suggestions regarding ways of improving Travellers' access to supports in prison. One common theme was that a proactive approach needed to be taken, in order to overcome barriers. For example, one interviewee suggested a workshop that focused on Traveller culture, which he felt would provide a social outlet for Travellers, while also making it easier for people to engage in training:

Maybe one thing – setting up a workshop for Traveller people. Inside in the education service. For your learning, or talking about your culture or finding out about your culture. Or just even working on stuff, do you know what I mean, making horse wagons or that kind of thing. Or tinsmith work.

INT007

Similarly, a woman felt that by simply providing a meeting point for Travellers, at which information and support is available, would be a valuable step forward:

Sometimes I think if you get one or two women to join, the rest will follow. ... But link into them as if they were Travellers ... there's no point going in and saying, hey, this is for everybody. ... Have a certain little thing where you focus on the Travellers. Draw them in.

INT002

Another woman had benefitted from the magazine *Traveller Times*, distributed in prisons in the UK for Travellers by the Irish Chaplaincy Abroad. She described how it helped raise self-esteem and was a point of contact between Travellers:

We used to have this thing called the Traveller Times in prison (in the UK). It was about Travellers in the community taking roles to help Travellers. ... It was handed out to all the Traveller prisoners. You could say, look she's doing very well. It'd kind of make you a bit proud, do you know what I mean? ... Travellers used to write in their poems, or little things or old stories. Little interesting things about Travellers. It kind of brought is all together as well, to think that, well you're not on your own.

INT001

One interviewee, while identifying a need for targeted support for Travellers, felt that care ought to be taken in too much emphasis being placed on Traveller culture. He raised the point that celebrating Traveller culture might put pressure on individuals 'to be something that you're not' (INT010).

A targeted approach to literacy education

Interviewees discussed barriers to education, such as literacy problems and fear of discrimination. Nonetheless, some interviewees had successfully completed literacy courses, both inside and out of prison. It seems one important success factor is that people are treated as equals. For example, one interviewee who had a positive experience of literacy education, through a FÁS¹⁰ course in the community, emphasised how important it was to him that everyone in that class was treated equally:

Say you're in a room with a couple of people. And they give you a book and you just write down what they ask you. In a while then, they ask you all the questions and you answer it. No one's going to sit down and have a laugh at you, know what I mean?

INT009

Others discussed how a one-to-one approach might address fears and concerns associated with attending a literacy course:

You throw a woman who doesn't know how to read or write into a class of six people and they're a lot further on than her. ... She's not going to go back. But if you sit down with her and say, 'do you need one-to-one to start off with?' She'll be considering it.

INT002

One interviewee had served a sentence in the UK, during which she had worked as a Toe by Toe mentor. She described how this approach made it easier for some Traveller women in prison to engage in literacy education; the shared ethnicity made it less daunting:

When I was in England I was a Toe By Toe mentor. And I used to do a lot of the Traveller work because I was a Traveller rep over there. We used to sit down with a lot of Traveller girls. Because it's easier to sit, the girls used to be saying to me, with a Traveller, one of your own, and go through the basics of reading and writing.

INT001

The interviewee herself benefited from the training she received to act in this role:

I used to have a meeting every week with these Toe by Toe mentors, head ones that taught us how to teach us. And they told us how to react to things, how to praise them, how to teach properly. ... [It] helped me grow an awful lot, it helped me feel good in myself.

INT001

Ethnic identifying is welcomed

Interviewees all responded positively to the idea of including a category for Travellers on the Irish Prison Service (IPS) ethnic identifier tool.¹¹ It was seen by some as an opportunity to ask people if they would prefer to be placed in a cell near other Travellers. Others felt that in doing this, Traveller culture was being recognised and, in a sense, presented as being equal to any other ethnicity:

By doing that in the jails, you're saying look, this is a culture, along with the other people. Why shouldn't we? ... I'd say ask them. Because how would they ever know?

INT002

It might come a bit more normal I suppose. Like, what are you? Are you Asian or...? No, I'm a Traveller. So it's normal. ... It won't be looked on as a bad thing, you know?

INT010

Others recognised the benefits to any future research on Travellers in the Irish prison system:

I think it would be a good idea, particularly if you were looking to do statistics.

INT007

Key points: Proactively engage with Travellers

- Interviewees made a number of suggestions regarding ways of improving Travellers' access to supports in prison. One common theme was that a proactive approach needed to be taken, in order to overcome barriers.
- Another consensus seems to be that targeted support for Travellers, involving proactive engagement, should be done with a view to addressing structural barriers to education and training and supports.
- Interviewees discussed barriers to education, such as literacy problems and fear of discrimination.
- Some discussed how a one-to-one approach to literacy might address fears and concerns associated with attending a literacy course.
- Interviewees all responded positively to the idea of including a category for Travellers on the IPS' ethnic identifier tool. In doing this, Traveller culture would be recognised and, in a sense, presented as being equal to any other ethnicity.

10 FÁS was dissolved and a new further education and training authority, SOLAS, was set up in October 2013.

11 See pg 53 for a discussion on the use of ethnic identifier tools in data collection in the UK.

Lessons from rehabilitation therapy

Three of the ten interviewees had benefited from residential, drugs rehabilitation therapy. All three described how this came when they had, in their own view, hit rock bottom:

I kind of knew then after my last sentence, that's it, you haven't got in you. You either go on and change, big time, everything around you, or you're only going to be fit for the grave. Because to my mind I lost the children already. There was nothing left worth living for. So it was either dive or swim.

INT002

Two of these interviewees were still in rehabilitation, while the third person had completed it years previously. Since then, he had addressed his drug and alcohol dependence and was in secure employment.

All three spoke very positively about the support they had received in therapy. One important benefit, highlighted by all three, was being treated as an equal. These interviewees described how this was a distinctive factor in their therapy, and how it played a valuable role both in their recovery from substance dependency and, more generally, in their lives:

Just the way they relate to people, you know? They treat us all equal. ... It's not about being a Traveller in there. It doesn't come into it. Anywhere else I suppose, it comes into it, it's like there's nearly like a barrier or something. ... Out there it wasn't. Out there, I learned I was as good as the next person there. I was as valued as the next person there.

INT010

When I sat down with them [other Traveller women] and started talking about treatment, they said to me 'how did you feel going in there? Was there anyone there discriminating when you walked in the door?' And I said, 'no, I was made feel the exact same as everyone else inside of it.' Because when I first came into treatment, I thought that was what I was going to face, was discrimination. They said, 'did you feel different X?' I said, 'no, I felt the exact same way'. I said, 'it was the best thing I ever done'.

INT002

These interviewees felt strongly that rehabilitation therapy had made them emotionally stronger, which impacted positively on their relationship with their children and their parenting skills:

Emotionally I'm able to handle things. The things I've had thrown at me over the last couple of months, getting my kids back in my life. It was like, 'here's a bomb'. I went through a lot but I never seen them more clearly or felt them more than what I did in the last couple of months. But now I can sit down and I don't act the way I would act. Now I can be their rock if you know what I mean, when it comes to things.

INT002

or become involved in offending behaviour:

This place I'm getting proper treatment. ...We're going into criminology, we're going into addictions, we're going into life outside, what we're struggling with living out there. ... I'm finding out about myself, get the tools to teach me how to live.... I'm going home this weekend. And I get to town and I get to live life without taking drugs, do you know what I mean? This is rehabilitation to me, do you know what I mean?

INT001

I'd say I'm a different person today. My old life now is still there, but I wouldn't be able to live my old life no more because I'm not that person. You know? I don't think the way I thought.

INT010

Key points: Lessons from rehabilitation therapy

- Three of the ten interviewees had benefitted from residential, drugs rehabilitation therapy.
- All three spoke very positively about the support they had received in therapy. One important benefit was being treated as an equal. These interviewees described how this was a distinctive factor in their therapy, and how it played a valuable role both in their recovery from substance dependency and, more generally, in their lives.
- These interviewees felt strongly that rehabilitation therapy had made them emotionally stronger, which impacted positively on their relationship with their children and their parenting skills:
- They developed skills to enable them to not use drugs or become involved in offending behaviour.

They developed skills to enable them to not use drugs

8. Examples of good practice

This section describes emerging models of good practice in the UK and other jurisdictions that seek to improve access and services for Travellers and other indigenous minority ethnic groups in prison. It is based on desk-based research, as well as two telephone interviews with stakeholders in the UK.

A legislative basis for non-discrimination in prison

Since 2003, HM Prison Service for England and Wales has had structures and mechanisms in place to prevent and address inequitable treatment of prisoners. In 2003, following the publication of a formal investigation into racial equality in HM Prison Service by the Commission for Racial Equality (now Equality and Human Rights Commission), a race and equality action group (REAG) was established and an action plan for tackling racial discrimination in prison was developed. Subsequently, recommendations from a further enquiry into the death of a prisoner following a racially motivated attack were incorporated into this action plan, including that training for prison officers should stress putting themselves in the position of black or minority ethnic (BME) prisoners, and that consideration should be given to using an independent body to carry out the investigation of complaints of racism and to recruiting race equality officers from outside the prison service.

The Equality Act 2010 led to a public sector duty coming into force in 2011. This placed a legal obligation on the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) to have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other prohibited conduct against prisoners;
- Advance equality of opportunity between different groups (those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not); and
- Foster good relations between persons who share a protected characteristic and those who do not (NOMS, 2012).¹²

NOMS is also required, alongside all other public bodies, to publish information showing compliance with the Equality Duty and relevant objectives (Government Equalities Office, 2013).

Key changes made since the legislation suggest a move towards integrating these measures with generic prison policy, with the aim of offering 'the flexibility to adopt a different approach where this is more likely to achieve the fair outcomes that are the aim of the policy' (NOMS Agency Board, 2011). Measures to date have included:

- The extension of the existing race equality action plan to cover 'all equality strands' and for the

programme management board that was set up to oversee implementation of the REAG to report to the Equality and Human Rights Commission as well as to NOMS.

- Policy and stakeholder engagement, involving consultation with internal and external stakeholders;
- The development of Equality Impact Assessments, which combined previous processes of considering race, gender and disability issues separately to form a comprehensive equality impact assessment;
- The introduction of a Discrimination Incident Reporting Form (replacing a pre-existing Racist Incident Reporting Forms), as a first step towards all such incidents being handled through the general complaints system for prisoners;
- A continued mandatory requirement to engage in community engagement strategies, particularly members of minority groups;
- Greater flexibility in how each individual prison can manage the race equality action plan (consultation with prisoners in this process remains mandatory);
- Continued collection of data on ethnicity of prisoners.

Key points:

A legislative basis for non-discrimination in prison

- Since 2003, HM Prison Service for England and Wales has had structures and mechanisms in place to prevent and address inequitable treatment of prisoners.
- The Equality Act 2010 led to a public sector duty coming into force in 2011, which placed a legal obligation on the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other prohibited conduct, among other issues to be addressed.
- NOMS is also required, alongside all other public bodies, to publish information showing compliance with the Equality Duty.
- Key changes made since the legislation suggest a move towards integrating these measures with generic prison policy, and to offering greater flexibility in meeting objectives.

¹² In England, unlike Ireland, Irish Travellers have been recognised as an ethnic group (O'Leary v Allied Domecq, 29/8/2000, CL950275).

Involving Travellers in prison policy and service planning

In the HM Prison Service, there are prisoner equality and diversity representatives for different minority groups, with whom the prison service is obliged to consult. According to the HM Inspectorate of Prisons, all prisoners should know the identity of relevant equality and diversity representatives covering each protected characteristic, and should be able to contact them easily (HM Inspectorate of Prisons, 2012). The Inspectorate also stipulates that:

- Prisoner equality representatives have appropriate job descriptions and meet regularly, both with equality staff and as part of a wider forum including managers, staff and prisoners;
- Through regular consultation meetings and surveys, prisoners are able to raise issues on any aspect of equality.
- Equality representatives are able to develop their roles to support other prisoners.
- Prisoners have access to staff and outside agencies on a regular basis to answer queries and seek advice.
- Where possible, a recognised peer support scheme is in place for prisoners with a range of diverse needs (ibid.).

Traveller groups in prisons

Mac Gabhann has raised concerns that Travellers continue to be marginalised in many prisons in the UK (2013). However, he described the value of work by some prisons to take a more inclusive approach to Traveller prisoners, 'in which particularly dedicated staff ... facilitate group meetings for Travellers' (ibid., 2013, p. 20). Other commentators have also highlighted the value of this approach, as far back as 2004. Power described how they have 'helped Irish Travellers to negotiate prison regimes and provide them with a supportive social and cultural environment' (Power, 2004).

Traveller groups can be a means by which the experiences and needs of Travellers in prison can be identified. Minutes from meetings can play a real role in how prisons address issues of diversity and avoid discriminating against any particular group: Traveller representatives can use them to raise issues with prison staff. The view of consulted Traveller organisations in the UK is that Traveller groups improve the visibility of Travellers in prison, and increase the likelihood of their needs being addressed at policy level.

On introducing Traveller groups, an initial concern among prison staff was that they would increase the likelihood of so-called feuding taking place in prison. However, they have had no impact on this; on the contrary, they have been a valued source of social support.

Good facilitation has found to be an important factor in the success of Traveller groups; in this regard, the involvement of external organisations can be very

beneficial. Participating Travellers are informed of the parameters and aims of group meetings. It was also stressed that a proper channel must exist so that outcomes of meetings have a real impact on the development of policy and practice.

Key points: Involving Travellers in service planning

- In the HM Prison Service, there are prisoner equality and diversity representatives for different minority groups, with whom the prison service is obliged consult.
- The value of Traveller groups in prisons has been highlighted as a means by which issues facing Travellers can be raised and documented.
- Factors contributing to the success of Traveller groups include the support of prison staff and the involvement of external organisations, to support the groups' facilitation.
- The existence of a Traveller group in a prison increases the likelihood of Travellers' needs being addressed at policy level.

Ethnic monitoring: a proactive approach

As early as 2003, the specific problems faced by Travellers in prison in the UK were highlighted by the (then) Commission for Racial Equality (CRE). In their investigation into race equality in prison, they included 'access to goods, facilities or services' and 'low literacy skills' of some prisoners as failure areas, but also added that for Travellers, these concerns are compounded by 'prejudice and discrimination' (CRE, 2003, p. 83). Five years on, a NOMS review of progress made regarding issues raised by CRE found that Travellers continued to be marginalised and to face difficulties in accessing services, due to literacy problems, as well as discrimination from prisoners and some staff (NOMS, 2008).

This has been partly attributed to past failure to conduct ethnic monitoring of Travellers. The Commission for Racial Equality likened having an equality policy without ethnic monitoring to 'aiming for good financial management without keeping financial records' (CRE, 2002, p.3). Five years later, NOMS found that because Travellers were not included in any ethnic monitoring system, they were often ignored in discussions about race equality (NOMS, 2008).

Since the NOMS 2008 review, the category of 'Gypsy or Irish Traveller' has been added to their ethnic monitoring procedures on admission. While a clear step in the right direction, this system required Travellers to volunteer this information themselves; only 0.2% of the prison population (n. 219) were registered as Traveller. However, when the prison inspectorate asked every prison surveyed whether they considered themselves to be 'Gypsy/Romany/Traveller', 5% said yes. Moreover, the Irish Chaplaincy in Britain has found this information is not routinely sought across all prisons. This good practice seems to be a feature of some prisons in the UK, rather than the service as a whole.

Traveller organisations in the UK consulted for this research stressed that Travellers in prison will only self-identify as being a Traveller if it feels safe for them to do so. Importantly, it has been found that 'the prisons which actively promote awareness of Traveller life and culture' also had 'an increased willingness to by Irish Travellers to identify themselves as Irish Travellers', with Traveller prisoners indicated that it was 'only in establishments in which Travellers were treated equitably that they felt they could identify as Irish Travellers' (Mac Gabhann, 2013, p. 22).

Key points: A proactive approach to ethnic monitoring

- Past failure to meet the needs of Travellers in prison has been partly attributed to the failure to include Travellers in the prison system's ethnic monitoring tools.
- Recently, the category of 'Gypsy or Irish Traveller' was added to their ethnic monitoring procedures on admission.
- It was found that Travellers were more likely to acknowledge their ethnicity in prison when asked directly, rather than being expected to volunteer the information themselves.
- Effective ethnic monitoring occurs only in some prisons in the UK.
- Travellers are more likely to self-identify as being Traveller in prisons that actively promote awareness of Traveller culture.

Addressing literacy problems

The 'Toe by Toe' initiative

The 'Toe by Toe' literacy initiative (otherwise known as the Shannon Trust Reading Plan) was developed by the Shannon Trust in the late 1990s.¹³ In this literacy training model, a peer mentoring approach is used: one prisoner with moderate reading skills teaches literacy skills to another prisoner. Teaching takes place on a one-to-one basis. This informal, peer-based approach appears to be successful in engaging those who are reluctant to take part in formal education, and allows participants to take it at their own pace. It takes a 'synthetic phonics approach to decoding words'.¹⁴

Achievements are acknowledged by a Shannon Trust Award for Progress. The programme is also beneficial to mentors, who develop skills in communication, empathy and motivation, experience improved self-confidence and can go on to study for mentoring qualifications. Costs are low to non-existent, and according to the website of the Shannon Reading Trust, it has been demonstrated to improve prisoner behaviour and reduce rates of self-harm.

Roy et al (2007) identify the following benefits of facilitating peer support in prison:

- Peers actively go out and make contact with other users;
- Peers refer others into treatment;
- Peers promote the availability of other forms of support to people in treatment;
- Peers can liaise with family members and offer support;

¹³ For further information on the origins and nature of Toe to Toe, see <http://www.shannontrust.org.uk/our-work/the-reading-plan/>

¹⁴ Synthetic phonics is a method for teaching reading based on how the sounds of a language are represented by letters.

- Peer support can help prisons meet positive duties (Roy et al, 2007).

These features of Toe to Toe have made it very popular among Travellers in prison in the UK. Recently, it added a facility to its electronic prisoner information tool, P-NOMIS, whereby prisoners' progress on Toe by Toe can be recorded. In the case of a prisoner being moved to a different prison, this means that their studies can continue at the appropriate level in their new prison.

Relevant reading materials

The Irish Chaplaincy in Britain have developed new booklets for use in teaching reading to adult Travellers, containing plot and themes that are relevant to Traveller culture.¹⁵

Other steps to address literacy problems

In the UK, all prisons undertake basic skills screening to assess literacy levels among prisoners. This provides an opportunity for prisoners to attend a Basic Skills programme if required, which in many prisons is supplemented the Toe-by-Toe programme. However, voluntary organisations have found that barriers such as embarrassment and stigma can prevent Travellers from taking part in screening.

Some prisons in the UK have also taken steps to ensure that goods, facilities and services are accessible to those with limited literacy skills. These include the use of pictorial menus and cartoon leaflets explaining the complaints process.

Key points: Addressing literacy problems

- The 'Toe by Toe' literacy initiative is a literacy training model that takes a peer mentoring approach is used: one prisoner with moderate reading skills teaches literacy skills to another prisoner.
- Its peer-led approach has made it very popular among Travellers in prison in the UK.
- The Irish Chaplaincy in Britain have developed new booklets for use in teaching reading to adult Travellers, containing plot and themes that are relevant to Traveller culture.
- In the UK, all prisons undertake basic skills screening to assess literacy levels among prisoners. However, barriers such as embarrassment and stigma can prevent Travellers from taking part in screening.

Raising awareness of Traveller culture

Diversity awareness events

Some prisons in the UK organise cultural and cross-cultural events to celebrate different cultures and traditions, including those of the Travelling community. One example is found in cultural awareness days, which involved preparing posters and facilitating oral histories. Voluntary organisations in the UK have highlighted the important role of such events, which can be organised on a very cost-effective basis, in raising the visibility of Travellers in the prison system. They can encourage feelings of inclusion and pride. Moreover, it has been shown that prisons that facilitate such events are more successful in their efforts to conduct ethnic monitoring of Travellers (see above). They are also seen to reduce racism among prison staff.¹⁶

Media supports

The newspaper *Travellers in Prison News*, published by Chaplaincy for Irish prisoners, is circulated among Travellers in prisons in England and Wales. Established fifteen years ago, the magazine raised the visibility of Travellers in prison and has been found to be a useful source of support for Travellers.

In 2013, the fortnightly *Open Road* programme for Travellers was launched on the national prison radio channel in the UK. It features thoughts and stories from Travellers in prison, with a focus on education. Positive feedback from Travellers was reported by *Travellers in Prison News* in its first month of airing (Irish Traveller News, 2013).

Key points: Raising awareness of Traveller culture

- Some prisons in the UK organise cultural and cross-cultural events to celebrate different cultures and traditions, including those of the Travelling community. Such events can be cost-effective basis, encourage feelings of inclusion and pride and reduce discrimination.
- In the UK, prisons that facilitate cultural and diversity events are more successful in their efforts to conduct ethnic monitoring of Travellers.
- *Travellers in Prison News*, published by the Irish Chaplaincy in Britain and circulated among prisons, raises the visibility of Travellers in prison.
- In 2013, the fortnightly *Open Road* programme for Travellers was launched on the national prison radio channel in the UK.

¹⁵ See The Fight at <http://www.irishchaplancy.org.uk/Publisher/File.aspx?ID=116632>; We Are Travellers at <http://www.irishchaplancy.org.uk/Publisher/File.aspx?ID=102694>; and A Traveller's Home at <http://www.irishchaplancy.org.uk/Publisher/File.aspx?ID=102691>.

¹⁶ In Wheatfield Prison in Ireland, for the past three years, Pavee Point has conducted cultural workshops as part of Traveller Pride Week.

Culturally appropriate approaches to sentencing and imprisonment

This section outlines some culturally appropriate approaches to sentencing and imprisonment in other countries with indigenous ethnic minority populations. Many of these models are culturally specific and, in themselves, would not be applicable to the Irish context. They are included in order to illustrate that other jurisdictions have acknowledged the importance of a culturally appropriate approach.

Aboriginal courts in Australia

In Australia, Aboriginal elders are involved in court proceedings via 'Aboriginal courts'. In operation since the 1990s, the elders advise the court and can speak to the accused person in a culturally appropriate way. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), they 'encourage better communication between the judicial officer, the offender and other parties involved in the process' (2009, p. 67). Their role is to readjust 'the balance of unfair treatment of indigenous people within the criminal justice system, by accommodating their needs'. Initial evidence suggests they have improved justice outcomes for Aboriginal people and greatly improved court attendance rates.

Imprisonment as last resort in Canada

In Canada, the Canadian Criminal Code was amended in 1996 to provide that 'all available sanctions other than imprisonment should be considered for all offenders, with particular reference to the circumstances of indigenous offenders' (UNODC, 2009, p. 67). This aimed to reduce the level of overrepresentation of minority indigenous prisoners in Canada, and reflected recognition that their circumstances can differ from those of other offenders.

Aboriginal Corrections Continuum of Care model, Canada

This continuum approach, introduced in 2003, was developed by the Correctional Service of Canada in consultation with representatives of the Aboriginal community, in response to community research that found that the major factors contributing to Aboriginal offenders' success upon release were: participation in spiritual and cultural activities, and programmes; and support received from their family and community. It recognises spiritual values that are important to Aboriginal identity. Aboriginal communities play an active role in supporting Aboriginal offenders on release, as well as during a prison sentence.

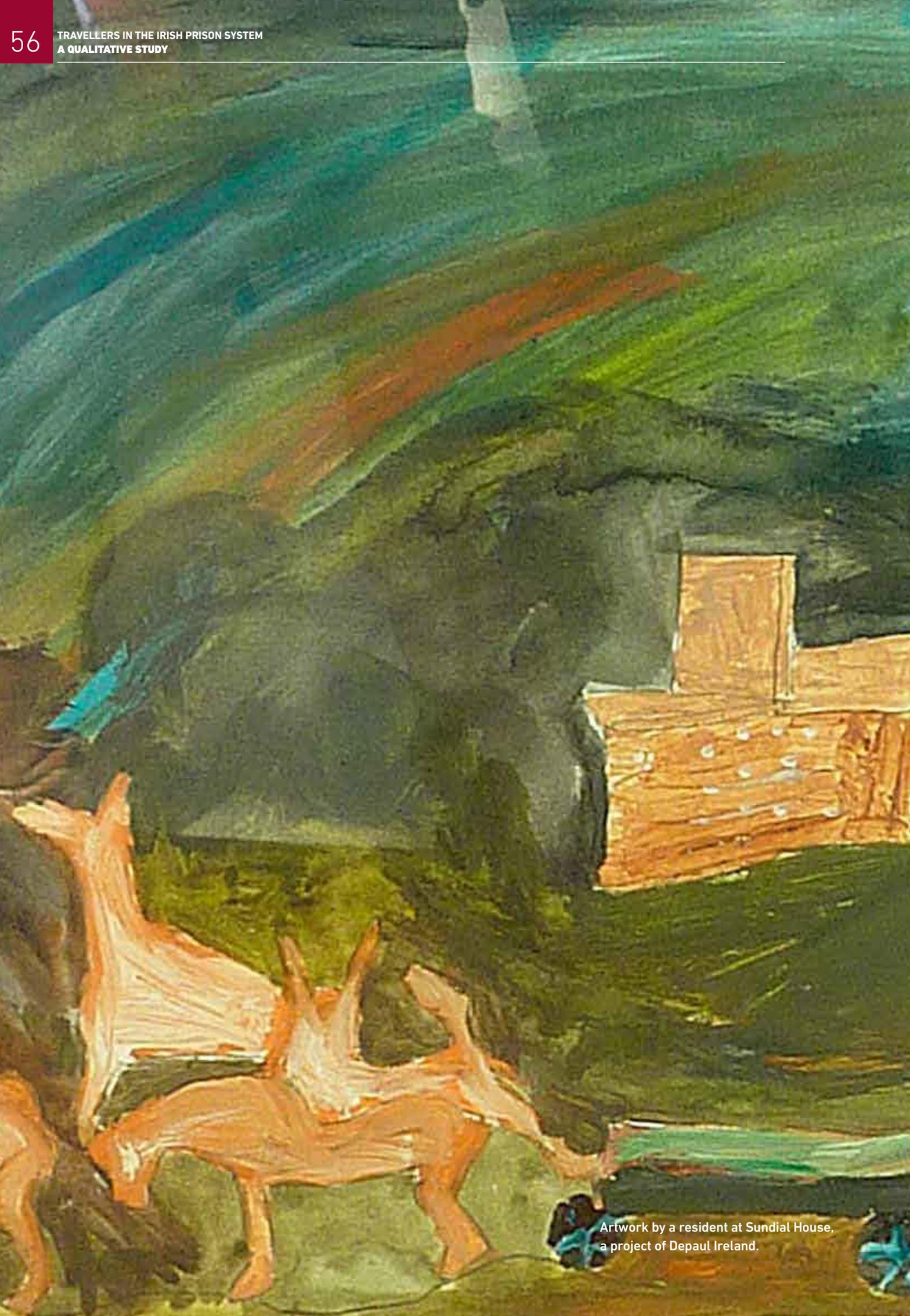
Involvement of the Aboriginal community is upheld in legislation: Section 84 of the Corrections and Conditional Release Act states that 'where an inmate who is applying for parole has expressed an interest in being released to an Aboriginal community, the Service shall, if the inmate consents, give the Aboriginal community:

- adequate notice of the inmate's parole application; and

- an opportunity to propose a plan for the inmate's release to, and integration into, the Aboriginal community.'

Key points: Culturally appropriate approaches

- In Australia, Aboriginal elders are involved in court proceedings via 'Aboriginal courts'; this encourages better communication between all parties. Initial evidence suggests they have improved justice outcomes for Aboriginal people and greatly improved court attendance rates.
- The Canadian Criminal Code was amended in 1996 to emphasise that non-custodial alternatives to prison should always be considered, particularly for offenders from indigenous communities.
- The Aboriginal Corrections Continuum of Care model was introduced in 2003 by the Correctional Services of Canada. It recognises spiritual values that are important to Aboriginal identity. Aboriginal communities play an active role in supporting Aboriginal offenders on release, as well as during a prison sentence. Involvement of the Aboriginal community is upheld in legislation.



Artwork by a resident at Sundial House, a project of Depaul Ireland.

9. Conclusion and recommendations

A clear finding to emerge from this research is that the biggest barriers to equality faced by Travellers in prison are the same as those faced by the Traveller community in mainstream society: discrimination, marginalisation and social exclusion were all common features across the narratives shared by the ten interviewees for this study.

Discrimination

Prejudice against Travellers is deeply engrained in Irish mainstream society. This is highlighted in a survey of attitudes among the Irish public towards Travellers, which found that 18.2% said they would deny Travellers citizenship, just over 60% would not welcome a Traveller into their family through kinship and 79.4% said they would be reluctant to buy a house next door to a Traveller (Mac Gréil, 2010). In this study, interviewees saw discrimination as a normal part of life both in and out of prison – as one woman put it, ‘it seems to go through a lot of what you go through when you’re a Traveller’. It could also pose a serious barrier to establishing stability and security on leaving prison. This was highlighted by the woman who, on trying to find accommodation for herself and her children found that the private rented sector was not available to her: as one potential landlord told her, because she was a Traveller, ‘don’t bother coming to view this house’.

In prison, interviewees experienced discrimination from both other prisoners and some prison officers. Discrimination from prison officers was particularly difficult to bear: the unequal power relations between officers and prisoners made it impossible to challenge such behaviour. While some took a stoical, even fatalistic approach to discrimination, the negative consequences could be significant. Some described associated deep distress and shame, while others spoke of how it created a fear of discrimination. This in turn prevented some from acknowledging their ethnicity, and from accessing or even finding out about relevant supports and services, including education. These findings echo those of the Irish Chaplaincy in Britain’s study of Travellers in the UK prison system (Mac Gabhann, 2011).

Conversely, perhaps one of the most striking findings of this research is the positive value of simply being treated as an equal. Those interviewees who had encountered non-discrimination, in the behaviour of some prison officers, for example, or in the general ethos of a rehabilitation centre, described how it made a real and valued difference in terms of their self-belief and in accessing needed supports.

Marginalisation

Interviewees described a tendency in the Irish prison service to place all Travellers in the same part of a prison. Rather than a fixed policy, this approach

seemed to vary across and within prisons, and seems to be based on prison officers assuming an individual’s ethnicity on the basis of their surname. Views on this approach varied: some prisoners identified advantages to this approach, such as feeling safer and more socially engaged with other Travellers, while others felt it could sometimes increase the risk of friction arising between Travellers and also that it represented a form of segregation, a situation that could be compounded by pressure arising within a group to stay together. Either way, it emerged that this approach can, either directly or indirectly, result in some Travellers being marginalised and excluded from activities and services in prison.

Interviewees, speaking of their own circumstances and those of other Travellers, spoke of how many Travellers in prison tend to socialise only with Travellers, while others are more likely to socialise with both Travellers and settled people. Those who tended to ‘mix’ with settled people outside of prison were more likely to do so in prison. In this way, prison can be a much more intimidating and marginalising experience for those Travellers with more limited contact with the settled community. This could be compounded for those who have literacy problems, an issue raised by interviewees as a particular problem for Travellers in prison. This reflects the finding in the research literature that ‘cultural resistance’ acts as a barrier to services for minority ethnic groups in prison. This barrier relates to literacy problems, different cultural norms, perceived and real discrimination and embarrassment (Mac Gabhann, 2011; Cemlyn et al, 2009; Fountain et al, 2007).

Diverse needs

Interviewees fell into two groups. One group (n. 5) had a history of multiple convictions, drug dependence and homelessness. The other group (n. 5) were serving a first sentence, had no history of drug dependence or homelessness and returned to their home or moved in with a family member on leaving prison. Like the settled community, the Travelling community is diverse, with varying needs and experiences.

This also illustrates that some Travellers are particularly vulnerable; those in the former group came from more deprived backgrounds, which reflects the finding of Fountain (2006) that for many Travellers, social and economic circumstances place them at risk of

problematic drug use.¹⁷ The former group also all had difficult childhoods; shared experiences include domestic violence, being placed in care, leaving education at a young age and theft normalised at a young age. They had all experienced discrimination from mainstream society as well as isolation from the Travelling community, due to drug use and, for women, involvement in offending behaviour, both of which were described as carrying great stigma.

A changing culture

Recent decades have seen significant changes to the Traveller community in Ireland. Factors such as a decline in rural-based economic activities, urbanisation and the government's policy of assimilation in the 1960s which led to the majority of Travellers living in houses, have all had affected Traveller culture. Nowadays, most Travellers live in houses (Walker, 2006). Travellers are marrying later (Pavee Point, 2008) and are more likely than before to separate from their partners (CSO, 2012). In this study, it is striking that of the 10 interviewees in this study, seven were separated from their partners. And some interviewees felt traditional expectations were lessening, one example being the interviewee who told his family he was gay, something he deemed would have been impossible 20 years earlier.

Stories of inter-generational conflict also emerged, particularly among women, which were related to evolving values in the Traveller community. For example, one woman became estranged from her family after she separated from her husband, and other women felt their relationship with their families had been damaged due to a history of drug use.

Impact on mothers and children

Time and time again, the research literature has shown the harmful outcomes of sending mothers to prison.¹⁸ As previously noted, Traveller women are more likely than the general female population to be mothers, to have a greater number of children, and to have children at a younger age. According to the CSO (2012), over one-quarter of Traveller households have six or more persons, compared to only 4.4% of the general population (CSO, 2012). Traveller women get married younger. In 2012, among those aged 15–29 years, 33.4% of Travellers were married compared with 8.2% of the general population (ibid.).

Four of the five female interviewees had at least one child, and all described serious harmful consequences of their separation from their children while they were in prison, both regarding their own psychological health and that of their children.

Recent policy developments

Certain recent developments have made this study particularly timely. They are:

- the welcome, ongoing development of a policy for Travellers by the Irish Prison Service (IPS);
- the recent introduction of ethnic monitoring by the IPS, which includes 'Traveller' as an ethnic category; and
- the recent commitment by the Irish government to introduce legislation that will require 'all public bodies [which includes the Irish Prison Service] to take due note of equality and human rights in carrying out their functions' (Fine Gael, Labour Party, 2011).

The latter will commit the IPS to ensuring that Travellers, and all minority groups, are treated on an equal footing to other prisoners, and have equal access to relevant supports and services. Finally, in January 2013, the prison complaints system was revised, so that now racial abuse and discrimination are now identified as grounds for the most serious level of complaint.

All these developments create a strong context for addressing the concerns and recommendations arising out of this report, thus enabling real progress to be made in ensuring that Travellers in prison are treated on an equal footing to other prisoners, with equal access to relevant supports and services.

While the research themes addressed above touch on broader policy topics than those relating solely to the criminal justice system, and warrant further research in themselves, they also have clear implications for the treatment of Travellers within the criminal justice system. The first recommendation arising from this research addresses the fact that Travellers can face discrimination, marginalisation and exclusion within the criminal justice system, which can lead to inequitable treatment and access to services.

¹⁷ While data is not available on incidence of drug use among Travellers, evidence suggests it is rising (see Fountain, 2006).

¹⁸ For further information, see IPRT (2013) *Women in the criminal justice system: Towards a non-custodial approach*, IPRT, Dublin.

RECOMMENDATION 1

Develop a strategy for Travellers in the criminal justice system

A dedicated strategy should be developed for Travellers in the criminal justice system. It should aim to:

- address how discrimination can impact Travellers' experience of the criminal justice system, be it through disproportionate arrest and conviction rates, or unfair treatment within the prison system.
- identify proactive steps to ensure that Travellers have equal and culturally appropriate access to education while in prison, including literacy education.
- set out steps to ensure equitable access to relevant supports for Travellers on leaving prison, including support in accessing employment and accommodation, as well as rehabilitation and other therapies, and in returning to their community.
- establish means by which Traveller organisations can play a role.

This strategy should be guided by the following principles:

Prison should be a **last resort** for convicted offenders, especially for women with children. Non-custodial alternatives should be prioritised where possible. Travellers should have **equal access** to relevant supports and services both within and outside the prison system.

Any **barriers** related to being a member of a minority ethnic group, such as marginalisation, fear of discrimination and exclusion, and ineffective dissemination of information, should be **eliminated**.

Steps could include:

- The introduction of intercultural and anti-racism training for members of the judiciary;
- The reinstatement of the intercultural and anti-racism module in Gardaí training;
- The development of an open prison for women¹⁹;
- Equality proofing and new policy or service planning in the criminal justice system;
- Mainstreaming the Toe by Toe literacy initiative throughout the prison system;
- Funding for Traveller organisations to become involved.

One clear priority of this strategy should be the development of an equality policy for minority groups in prison.

RECOMMENDATION 2

Develop an equality policy for the Irish prison service

In the UK, the Equality Act 2010 placed a legal obligation on the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) to address discrimination against prisoners and to advance equality of opportunity among them. In Ireland, similar legislation is expected to be introduced within the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Bill.

In order to meet this forthcoming requirement, the Irish Prison Service should develop an equality policy for all minority groups in prison, including Travellers.²⁰ This should set out how the IPS ensures that all prisoners receive equal treatment and enjoy equal rights. It should identify barriers to rights for particular groups of prisoners and how the IPS addresses those barriers. However, the focus should be on advancing equality and good race relations within the prison regime and building an inclusive ethos, rather than solely focusing on non-discrimination and responses to complaints or problems that arise.

Regarding Travellers, it should address the following issues:

- Discrimination from prison officers
- Discrimination from other prisoners
- Literacy problems and how they can prevent Travellers from accessing information
- Inclusion of Travellers and avoiding segregation
- Physical safety of Travellers in prison
- Access to appropriate mental health supports.

Steps should include the following:

Staff training on discrimination: In light of the deeply engrained nature of discrimination against Travellers in Irish society, it is particularly important that any staff training on discrimination should specifically address Traveller culture and discrimination against Travellers.

Cultural and diversity awareness events: As noted above, cultural events in prisons can help improve ethnic monitoring data. They could also help improve the inclusion of Travellers, by overcoming fears of discrimination and concerns some Travellers in prison have around accessing mainstream supports and services, such as education.

Introducing Toe to Toe across all prisons: IPRT welcomes the initial introduction of the Toe to Toe literacy programme in prisons. It recommends that:

- a formal piloting and evaluation process is carried out of Toe to Toe in the Dóchas centre;
- pending the findings of this evaluation that the initiative be rolled out to all of the Irish prison service; and

¹⁹ A recommendation made in IPRT's recent position paper on women and the criminal justice system.

²⁰ Other groups could include other minority ethnic groups, older prisoners, prisoners with disability and prisoners from the LGBT community.

- in doing the above, the IPS uses the reading materials prepared specifically for Travellers by the Irish Chaplaincy in Britain.

Establishing a clear channel between service planners and minority groups in prison: Experience in the UK shows that one effecting way of enabling prisons to provide an equitable service is by consulting with prisoners. Diversity representatives for different minority groups, including Travellers, should be established within each prison.

Addressing segregation: Prison staff should consult with prisoners, where possible, as to whether or not they would like to be given a cell close to other members of their ethnic group.

Proactive engagement: Prison staff should seek ways of directly engaging with all minority groups in prison, in order to ensure that all prisoners are equally aware of services and supports available to them, and feel equally entitled to access them.

A flexible approach: Learning from the UK suggests that individual prisons should be given a certain degree of flexibility in how they meet stated goals.

RECOMMENDATION 3

Conduct effective ethnic monitoring

IPRT welcomes the recent introduction of ethnic monitoring in the Irish Prison Service, and sees this as a very important first step. It makes it possible to collect data on Travellers committed to sentence, to monitor their needs and experiences and make it less likely that these needs will be overlooked.

Learning from the UK suggests that effective monitoring of Travellers in prison requires asking prisoners directly if they are a Traveller. It has also been shown that prisoners are more likely to self-identify as being a Traveller in prisons that actively promote awareness of Traveller culture.

Ethnic monitoring alone will not result in positive changes for Travellers. It must comprise the following:

1. Introducing ethnic monitoring in prisons, using the ethnic categories developed by the CSO to enable comparative data and taking a proactive approach with Travellers;
2. Analysing and publishing the results on a regular basis; and
3. Addressing any unjustifiable disproportional outcomes between Travellers and other prisoners.

RECOMMENDATION 4

Establish Traveller groups in prisons

Feedback from those involved in setting up and facilitating Traveller groups in the UK prison system suggests these groups are instrumental in ensuring that Travellers' needs are identified and brought to the attention of prison staff. They can also be a useful social opportunity. However, in order to work effectively, good facilitation is required. This involves the participation of community-based Traveller organisations.

RECOMMENDATION 5

Provide targeted reintegration support

Some interviewees faced difficulties in leaving prison, both in the form of discrimination from the wider community, and estrangement from the Traveller community. These findings reflect those of other studies of Travellers and other ethnic minority groups (Fountain et al, 2007; Power, 2004; Jacobson et al, 2010). These barriers to reintegration need to be targeted through specific measures.

Involve voluntary organisations: Relevant voluntary organisations, alongside the Probation Service, should be funded to support Travellers on leaving prison and to work with Traveller communities to address factors such as stigma surrounding drug use and offending behaviour.

Targeted support: For those who cannot return to their family, targeted support measures should exist to enable them to access secure accommodation and employment.

Raise awareness: Awareness needs to be raised among young people in the Traveller community regarding dependent drug use and its consequences.

RECOMMENDATION 6

Further research

Evidence from the AITHS (2010) suggests that Travellers are disproportionately represented in the Irish prison system. Emerging findings from this study suggest that, as is the case for a large proportion of people committed by sentence generally²¹, much offending behaviour among Travellers is largely rooted in a context of marginalisation and social exclusion, compounded by discrimination. This relates to what Mac Gréil refers to as a 'culture of poverty' (2010), whereby structural barriers to inclusion ensure that Travellers remain at a very peripheral level of Irish society. Further research is required to fully explore the relationship between social disadvantage, marginalisation and offending behaviour among Travellers.

²¹ See IPRT (2012) *The vicious circle of social exclusion and crime: Ireland's disproportionate punishment of the poor*, IPRT, Dublin.



Artwork by a serving prisoner inspired by a Pauline Bewick painting © Irish Prison Service Education

References

- Alaska Department of Corrections (2010) *2009 offender profile*, Alaska Department of Corrections.
- All-Ireland Traveller Health Study Team (2010) *All-Ireland Traveller Health Study – Summary of Findings*, School of Public Health, Physiotherapy and Population Science, University College Dublin, Department of Health and Children, Dublin.
- Bellis, MA, Hughes, K, Tocque, T, Humphrey, G, and Wyke, S (2005) 'Assessing and communicating the health and judicial impact of alcohol use', *Public Health*, Vol. 119: 253–61.
- Cavadino, P and Thompson, B (2006) *The Rehabilitation of Prisoners – the Role of the Custodial Institution*. Nacro and HM Prison Service Race and Equalities Group (UK).
- Cemlyn, S, Greenfields, M, Burnett, S, Matthews, Z and Whitwell, C (2009) *Inequalities experienced by Gypsy and Traveller Communities: A Review*. Research Report 12, Equality and Human Rights Commission, Manchester.
- Cheliotis, LK and Liebling, A (2006) 'Race matters in British prisons', *British Journal of Criminology*, Vol. 46, pp. 286–317.
- Commission for Racial Equality (2003) *Race Equality in Prisons: A Formal Investigation by the Commission for Racial Equality into HM Prison Service of England and Wales, Part Two*, Commission for Racial Equality, London.
- Correctional Service of Canada (2012) *Evaluation report: Strategic plan for Aboriginal corrections*, Correctional Service of Canada.
- Coyle, A (2009) *A Human Rights Approach to Prison Management: Handbook for Prison Staff*. International Centre for Prison Studies, London.
- CSO (2012) *Profile 7: Religion, Ethnicity and Irish Travellers*. Stationery Office, Dublin.
- Department of Corrections (New Zealand) (2007) *Over-representation of Māori in the criminal justice system: An exploratory report*, Policy, Strategy and Research Group, available at <http://www.rethinking.org.nz/assets/Maori%20and%20the%20CJS/Overrepresentation%20of%20Maori%20Corrections%202007.pdf>.
- Department of Justice and Equality (undated) *Ireland's National Traveller / Roma Strategy*, Traveller Policy Division, Department of Justice and Equality, Dublin.
- Fine Gael, Labour Party (2011) *Towards recovery: programme for a National Government 2011–2016*, Fine Gael and Labour Party, Dublin.
- Foley, L and Papadopoulos, I (2013) 'Perinatal mental health services for black and minority ethnic women in prison', *British Journal of Midwifery*, Vol. 21 (8), pp. 553–562.
- Fountain, J, Roy, A, Anitha, S, Davies, K, Bashford, J, and Patel, K (2007), *Issues surrounding the delivery of prison drug services in England and Wales, with a focus on Black and minority ethnic prisoners*, Centre for Ethnicity and Health, University of Central Lancashire, Preston.
- Fountain, J (2006) *An overview of the nature and extent of illicit drug use among the Traveller community: An exploratory study*, NACD, Dublin.
- Goffman (1961), 'The Characteristics of Total Institutions', in *Asylums*. Harmondsworth, Penguin, pp.1–124.
- Government Equalities Office (2013) *Equality Act 2010: Guidance*, available at <https://www.gov.uk/equality-act-2010-guidance>.
- HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2012) *Expectations: Criteria for assessing the treatment of prisoners and conditions in prisons*, Version 4.
- Hamilton, C and Kilkelly, U (2008) 'Human rights in Irish prisons', *Judicial Studies Institute Journal*, Vol. 2, pp. 58–85.
- HSE (2009) *Health Services Intercultural Guide: Responding to the Needs of Diverse Religious Communities and Cultures in Healthcare Settings*. HSE, Dublin.
- IPRT (2012a) *The Vicious Circle of Social Exclusion and Crime: Ireland's Disproportionate Punishment of the Poor*, Irish Penal Reform Trust, Dublin.
- IPRT (2012b) *Picking up the pieces: The rights and needs of children and families affected by imprisonment*, Irish Penal Reform Trust, Dublin.
- IPRT (2013) *Women in the Criminal Justice System: towards a non-custodial approach*, Irish Penal Reform Trust, Dublin.
- Irish Human Rights Commission (IHRC) (2013) *Submission on the Recognition of the Traveller Community as an Ethnic Minority in the State*. IHRC, Dublin.
- Jacobson, J, Phillips, C, and Edgar, K (2010) 'Double Trouble? Black, Asian and minority ethnic offenders' experiences of resettlement, Clinks, York, and The Prison Reform Trust, London.
- Jealous, BT, Brock RM, and Huffman A (2011) *Misplaced priorities: Over-incarcerate, under-educate*, NAACP, Baltimore.
- Kennedy, HG, Monks, S, Curtin, K, Wright, B, Linehan, S, Duffy, D, Teljeur, C, and Kelly, A (2005) *Mental Illness in Irish Prisoners: Psychiatric Morbidity in Sentenced, Remanded and Newly Committed Prisoners*, National Forensic Mental Health Service, Dublin.
- Linehan, S, Duggy, D, O'Neill, H, O'Neill, C, and Kennedy, HG (2002) 'Irish Travellers and forensic mental health', *Irish Journal of Psychiatric Medicine*, Vol. 19 (3): 76–79.
- Mac Gabhann, C (2011) *Voices Unheard: A Study of Irish Travellers in Prison*, The Irish Chaplaincy in Britain.

Mac Gabhann, C (2013) 'Irish Travellers in prison – The unknown prisoners', *Prison Service Journal*, Issue 206, pp. 19–26.

Mac Gréil, M (2010) *Emancipation of the Travelling people: A report on the attitudes and prejudices of the Irish people towards the Travellers based on a national social survey 2007–2008*, National University of Ireland, Maynooth.

Miller, J (2009) *21st Century Criminology, A Reference Handbook* (Volume 2), SAGE, London.

National Indigenous Drug and Alcohol Committee (NIDAC) (2009) *Bridges and barriers: Addressing Indigenous Incarceration and Health*, Australian National Council on Drugs.

National Offender Management Service (NOMS) (2008) *Race Review 2008: Implementing Race Equality in Prisons – Five Years On*, Race and Equalities Action Group, Ministry of Justice, London.

National Offender Management Service (NOMS) (2012) *Equalities annual report 2011/12*, Ministry of Justice, London.

NOMS Agency Board (2011) *Ensuring equality – instruction to prison governors*, Ministry of Justice, London.

Pavee Point (2008) *Auld Pavee Beoirs and Glokes: Emerging voices of older Travellers*, Pavee Point, Dublin.

Pavee Point (2011) *Irish Travellers and Roma Shadow Report: A Response to Ireland's Third and Fourth Report on the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD)*, Pavee Point, Dublin.

Payne, J and Gaffney, A (2012) 'How much crime is drug or alcohol related? Self-reported attributions of police detainees', *Trends and Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice*, No. 439, Australian Institute of Criminology, Canberra.

Power, C (2004) *Room to Roam: England's Irish Travellers*. The Community Fund.

Reilly, M. (2012a) *Report on an Inspection of Limerick Prison*, Office of the Inspector of Prisons, Nenagh.

Reilly, M (2012b) *Suggested Prisoner Complaints Model for Irish Prisons*, Office of the Inspector of Prisons, Nenagh.

Roy, A, Davies, K, Mir, Y, Fountain, J, Anitha, S, Bashford, J, Patel, K (2007), *Helping prisons to meet the drug service needs of Black and minority ethnic prisoners: a practice guide*, Centre for Ethnicity and Health, University of Central Lancashire.

Royal College of Psychiatrists (2007) *Prison Psychiatry: Adult Prisons in England and Wales*, College Report CR141, London.

Smit, Z and Snacken (2009) *Principles of European Prison Law and Policy*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Taylor, R (2006) *Women in Prison and Children of Imprisoned Mothers*, Quaker United Nations Office, Geneva.

Taylor, S (2013) 'Race, race equality and the criminal justice system – Possible issues now and into the future', *Presentation*, Department of Applied Social Studies, NUI Maynooth.

Travellers in Prison News (2013) 'Open Road Traveller Hour – Prison Radio Association', Newsletter of the Irish Chaplaincy in Britain's Traveller Project, Issue 9, December 2013, p.2.

United Nations Office on Crime and Drugs (2009) *Handbook on prisoners with special needs*, United Nations, New York.

United Nations (2005) *Human Rights and Prisons: A Pocketbook of International Human Rights Standards for Prison Officials*. Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, New York.

United Nations (2005) *Human rights and prisons: Manual on human rights training for prison officials*, United Nations, New York and Geneva.

United Nations (2010) *Minority Rights: International Standards and Guidance for Implementation*. UN, New York.

Van Hout, M (2010) 'Alcohol use and the Traveller community in the west of Ireland', *Drug and Alcohol Review*, Vol. 29 (1): 59–63.

Van Hout, M (2011) 'Assimilation, habitus and drug use among Irish Travellers', *Critical Public Health*, Vol. 21(2): 203–220.

van Zyl Smit, D and Snacken, S (2009) *Principles of European Prison Law and Policy*(Oxford University Press.

Walker, M R (2006) *Suicide among the Irish Traveller community 2000–2006*, Wicklow Traveller Interagency Group, Wicklow.

World Health Organization (2001) *Prisons, drugs and society – A consensus statement on principles, policies and practices*, WHO, Bern.

Human rights instruments

Basic Principles for the Treatment of Prisoners. Adopted and proclaimed by United Nations General Assembly resolution 45/111 of 14 December 1990.

Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment. Adopted by United Nations General Assembly resolution 43/173 of 9 December 1988. Available at <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/43/a43r173.htm>.

Concluding observations of the Committee against Torture: Ireland. Adopted by the United Nations Committee against Torture on 1 June 2011 at the 1016th meeting.

Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. Adopted and opened for signature, ratification and accession by General Assembly resolution 39/46 of 10 December 1984 entry into force 26 June 1987

Convention for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman and Degrading Treatment. Adopted by the Council of Europe in Strasbourg 26 November 1987.

Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief.

Proclaimed by General Assembly resolution 36/55 of 25 November 1981

Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities.

Adopted by General Assembly resolution 47/135 of 18 December 1992

European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance.

General Policy Recommendation No. 13 on combating anti-Gypsyism and Discrimination against Roma. Adopted by the European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance on 24 June 2011.

General Recommendation XXXI on the Prevention of Racial Discrimination in the Administration and Functioning of the Criminal Justice System, 2005, UN Committee for the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination's (CERD) available at http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/CERD/docs/GC31Rev_En.pdf

Recommendation 1203/1993 on Gypsies in Europe.

Adopted by the Council of Europe on 2 February 1993. *European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR)* Rome 4 November 1950

European Convention for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment Strasbourg, 26.XI.1987

Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. Adopted by the Council of Europe, Strasbourg, 1 February 1995, available at <http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/en/Treaties/Html/157.htm>

General Policy Recommendation No. 3 on Combating Racism and Intolerance Against Roma/Gypsies. Adopted by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) on 6 March 1998, available at http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/ecri/activities/gpr/en/recommendation_n3/Reco3en.pdf

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Adopted and opened for signature, ratification and accession by General Assembly resolution 2200A (XXI) of 16 December 1966, entry into force 23 March 1976

International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Adopted and opened for signature, ratification and accession by General Assembly resolution 2200A (XXI) of 16 December 1966 entry into force 3 January

1976

International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. Adopted and opened for signature and ratification by General Assembly resolution 2106 (XX) of 21 December 1965 entry into force 4 January 1969

Recommendation 1203/1993 of the Council of Europe – Roma/Gypsies in Europe. Adopted by the Parliamentary Assembly Council of Europe (PACE) on 4 February 1993, available at <http://assembly.coe.int/main.asp?Link=/documents/adoptedtext/ta93/erec1203.htm>

Recommendation Rec(2006)2 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the European Prison Rules. Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 11 January 2006 at the 952nd meeting of the Ministers' Deputies

Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners.

Adopted by the First United Nations Congress on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders, held at Geneva in 1955, and approved by the Economic and Social Council by its resolution 663 C (XXIV) of 31 July 1957 and 2076 (LXII) of 13 May 1977, available at <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/3ae6b36e8.html>.

Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Adopted by UN General Assembly Resolution 217A (III) of 10 December 1948.



Group artwork by residents at Sundial House, a project of Depaul Ireland which includes members of both the Traveller and settled communities.

Appendix A: Travellers in prison: a rights-based perspective

This was informed by a review conducted by students of the School of Social Sciences and Law, Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT).

Key points

- The right to equality is enshrined in human rights legislation and applied to the prison context by the European Prison Rules and the UN Committee for the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD). CERD identifies minority ethnic groups, including 'Roma/Gypsies', as being in most need of protection and sets out a range of ways in which their universal rights should be safeguarded.
- Other rights of Travellers are upheld in a range of human rights frameworks and treaties, including those addressing equality and universal human rights, and those addressing the specific rights of minority ethnic groups and of prisoners. For example, international standards state that the right to healthcare should not be restricted on the grounds of the prisoner's status and that services should take into account the cultural background of prisoners. Human rights standards also emphasise the importance of education for all, with the European Rules and the Minimum Rules prioritising the needs of prisoners with literacy and numeracy needs.
- Rule 38(1) of the European Prison Rules provides that 'Special arrangements shall be made to meet the needs of prisoners who belong to ethnic or linguistic minorities'.
- A new complaints system for prisoners in Ireland acknowledges that some prisoners, perhaps as an indication of discrimination, victimisation or abuse, will not complain. It also states that complaints involving allegations of discrimination must fall into the most serious of categories. However, despite obligations of the European Prison Rules, as of yet there is no prison ombudsman in Ireland.
- In 2012, a General Scheme of Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Bill provided for 'an express duty on public bodies to have due regard to human rights and equality'. This will place a duty on the Irish prison service to ensure equality and to protect human rights among all prisoners, including Travellers.

Right to equality

The right to equality and non-discrimination is enshrined in human rights legislation, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the European Convention on Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.²² This right is also upheld in a number of guidelines and conventions specifically concerned with minority ethnic groups. While these documents do not specifically address the context of prison, the principle of universality inherent in human rights treaties and legislation gives them clear implications in this regard. (See Table 1 for a summary of relevant rights as laid out in specific instruments).

Table 1: Right to non-discrimination in instruments pertaining to minority ethnic groups

- *The UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious or Linguistic Minorities*²³ lays down that 'States shall take measures, where required, to ensure that persons belonging to minorities may exercise fully and effectively all their human rights and fundamental freedoms without any discrimination and in full equality before the law.'
- *The Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities* states in Article 7 that 'The Parties shall ensure respect for the right of every person belonging to a national minority to freedom of peaceful assembly, freedom of association, freedom of expression, and freedom of thought, conscience and religion.'²⁴
- *Recommendation 1203/1993 of the Council of Europe on Roma/Gypsies in Europe* sets out a number of guidelines to Member States around the areas of education, culture, general rights including legislation, and 'everyday rights' to protect, respect, and fulfil the rights of Roma/Gypsies within Europe.²⁵
- *The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) General Policy Recommendation No. 3 on Combating Racism and Intolerance Against Roma/Gypsies* repeats the call to ratify relevant conventions and implement the principles into domestic law, while also taking specific steps to ensure the rights of Roma/Gypsies are upheld, particularly the right to non-discrimination.²⁶

22 Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that, 'Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion and persons belonging to ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities have the right to their own culture, religion and language'. Article 14 of the ECHR prohibits discrimination based on 'sex, race, colour, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth or other status', while Article 10(1) of the ICCPR states that 'All persons deprived of their liberty shall be treated with humanity and with respect for the inherent dignity of the human person'.

23 UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National, Ethnic, Religious, or Linguistic Minorities, A/RES/47/135, 18 December 1992, available at <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/47/a47r135.htm>, accessed 18 March 2013.

24 Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, Strasbourg, 1.II.1995, available at <http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/en/Treaties/Html/157.htm>, last accessed 29 March 2013.

25 Parliamentary Assembly Council of Europe (PACE) Recommendation 1203/1993 of the Council of Europe- Roma/Gypsies in Europe, adopted 4 February 1993, available at <http://assembly.coe.int/main.asp?Link=/documents/adoptedtext/ta93/erec1203.htm>, last accessed 29 March 2013.

26 European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) General Policy Recommendation No. 3 on Combatting Racism and Intolerance Against Roma/Gypsies, CRI(98)29 rev., adopted 6 March 1998, available at http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/ecri/activities/gpr/en/recommendation_n3/Reco3en.pdf, last accessed 29 March 2013.

The right to equality in prison

The main international instruments regarding the treatment of prisoners²⁷ apply to all prisoners without discrimination. Rule 13 of the European Prison Rules states that its rules regarding the rights of prisoners, 'shall be applied impartially, without discrimination on any ground such as sex, race, colour, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, association with a national minority, property birth and other status'. The UN Committee for the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination's (CERD) 'General Recommendation XXXI on the Prevention of Racial Discrimination in the Administration and Functioning of the Criminal Justice System' goes further, by specifying steps that should be taken in order to ensure that cultural differences are accommodated and to avoid discrimination in prison. Article 5(f), under a section entitled, 'Strategies to be developed to prevent racial discrimination in the administration and functioning of the criminal justice system', provides that states should make the necessary changes to the prison regime for prisoners belonging to certain groups,²⁸ 'so as to take into account their cultural and religious practices'. Articles 26(d) and 38(a) provide for 'the right to respect for their traditions as regards religion, culture and food'. In its preamble, it lists those groups most in need of protection as:

[R]acial or ethnic groups, in particular non-citizens – including immigrants, refugees, asylum-seekers and stateless persons – Roma/Gypsies, indigenous peoples, displaced populations, persons discriminated against because of their descent, as well as other vulnerable groups which are particularly exposed to exclusion, marginalisation and non-integration in society.²⁹

Article 38 provides that when minority ethnic prisoners are imprisoned, state parties should ensure they enjoy the same rights as other prisoners, in particular those

rights 'specially adapted to their situation'.³⁰ Women and children are afforded a special mention in Article 41, which lays obligations on state parties to:

[P]ay the greatest attention possible with a view to ensuring that such persons benefit from the special regime to which they are entitled in relation to the execution of sentences, bearing in mind the particular difficulties faced by mothers of families and women belonging to certain communities, particularly indigenous communities.³¹

Right to services and supports

Relevant instruments protect the rights of all prisoners regarding their access to healthcare, education and resettlement and reintegration supports.

Right to healthcare

Access to adequate healthcare (for physical and mental health) is internationally recognised as a right of all prisoners; the Council of Europe has laid down extensive guidelines in this regard. Rule 39(1) of the European Prison Rules stresses the universality of this right, laying down that 'Prison authorities shall safeguard the health of all prisoners in their care',³² while according to the Minimum Rules, this right should not be restricted 'on the grounds of race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status'.³³ CERD echoes this, providing that 'the medical, psychological or social services offered to prisoners should take their cultural background into account'.³⁴ According to Rule 38(1) of the European Prison Rules 'special arrangements shall be made to meet the needs of prisoners who belong to ethnic or linguistic minorities'.³⁵

Notably, Rule 22(1) of the Minimum Rules states that 'Medical services [within prisons] should be organized in close relationship to the general health administration of the community or nation'. One implication of this in the Irish context is that the HSE's intercultural guide to the provision of health services should be used in prison-based health services.

27 These include the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, the Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment and the Basic Principles for the Treatment of Prisoners.

28 '...persons belonging to racial or ethnic groups, in particular non-citizens - including immigrants, refugees, asylum-seekers and stateless persons - Roma/Gypsies, indigenous peoples, displaced populations, persons discriminated against because of their descent...' Preamble to the UN Committee for the Elimination for Racial Discrimination (CERD) General Recommendation XXXI on the Prevention of Racial Discrimination in the Administration and Functioning of the Criminal Justice System.

29 General recommendation XXXI on the prevention of racial discrimination in the administration and functioning of the criminal justice system available at http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/CERD/docs/GC31Rev_En.pdf, accessed on 14 March 13.

30 Art.38(a),A/60/18, pp. 98-108 available at http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/CERD/docs/GC31Rev_En.pdf, accessed on 14 March 13.

31 Art41.A/60/18, pp. 98-108 available at http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/CERD/docs/GC31Rev_En.pdf, accessed on 12 March 2013.

32 Recommendation Rec (2006) 2 of the Committee of Ministers to Member States on the European Prison Rules.

33 United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, 30 August 1977.

34 Art.38(a),A/60/18, pp. 98-108 available at (http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/CERD/docs/GC31Rev_En.pdf, accessed on 14/03/13.

35 Recommendation Rec (2006) 2 of the Committee of Ministers to Member States on the European Prison Rules.

Right to education

Principle 28.1 of the European Rules states that:

Every prison shall seek to provide all prisoners with access to educational programmes which are as comprehensive as possible and which meet their individual needs while taking into account their aspirations.

It goes on to set out detailed principles regarding the provision of education for prisoners, noting that 'priority shall be given to prisoners with literacy and numeracy needs and those who lack basic or vocational education'. In addition, Rule 77 of the Minimum Rules states that, 'Education shall be compulsory for young prisoners and illiterate prisoners. The prison authorities should give this high priority'. This focus on the education rights for people with literacy problems is of direct relevance to Traveller prisoners, among whom literacy problems can pose a barrier to both education and other services and supports.

Right to reintegration and resettlement support

International frameworks emphasise resettlement as a right of all prisoners. For example, according to Rule 81 of the Minimum Rules, and Principle 10 of the Basic Principles for the Treatment of Prisoners, 'all agencies and services responsible for the reintegration of prisoners into society shall ensure that all prisoners have means and available resources to maintain themselves in the period immediately following their release' (United Nations, 2005, p. 109, emphasis added).

The right to contact family and friends

The European Prison Rules recognise family contact as a human right for all prisoners.³⁶ While these provisions are in relation to the general prison population and not specific to minority ethnic prisoners, Rule 38(1) provides that 'special arrangements shall be made to meet the needs of prisoners who belong to ethnic or linguistic minorities.'

The right to complain

Prison complaint mechanisms are governed by internationally agreed minimum standards.³⁷ The European Prison Rules 2006 include the right of prisoners to appeal the decision to an independent authority. This is echoed by Article 36 of the Minimum Rules, which states that a prison complaint system should, in certain circumstances, have two aspects to it: one within the prison system and one independent of the prison system.

In Ireland, the Minister for Justice accepted proposals by the Inspector of Prisons in 2012 for a revised prisoner complaints system, whereby serious complaints would be investigated by external investigators with an appeal to the Inspector. These new proposals acknowledge that:

There will always be some prisoners who, no matter what they endure, will never complain at all. It means that they do not expect anything from the prison system, not even fairness. This may be an indication of systematic abuse, victimisation, discrimination or intimidation at some level within the prison or prison system. It may also be a sign that they have opted out altogether from any idea of ever integrating into mainstream society.

In relation to discrimination, they state that 'complaints involving allegations of mistreatment or discrimination must always be considered as falling within the most serious of categories.'

Despite these welcome developments, as of yet Ireland has no independent complaints mechanism such as a prison ombudsman.

Public sector duty to equality and human rights

The Irish Government's 2011 Programme for National Recovery contains a commitment to 'require all public bodies to take due note of equality and human rights in carrying out their functions' (Fine Gael, Labour Party, 2011). Following that, in 2012, a General Scheme of Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Bill was published, which provided for 'an express duty on public bodies to have due regard to human rights and equality'. This new Bill will apply to all prisons in Ireland.

36 Rule 24 sets down: 'Prisoners shall be allowed to communicate as often as possible by letter, telephone or other forms of communication with their families, other persons and representatives of outside organisations and to receive visits from these persons ... The arrangements for visits shall be such as to allow prisoners to maintain and develop family relationships as normal a manner as possible. ... Prison authorities shall assist prisoners in maintaining adequate contact with the outside world and provide them with the appropriate welfare support to do so'.

37 UN Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) General Recommendation XXXI (2005) on the Prevention of Racial Discrimination in the Administration and Functioning of the Criminal Justice System, available at http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cerd/docs/GC31Rev_En.pdf, accessed 12 April 2013; Council of Europe: Committee of Ministers, Recommendation Rec (2006)2 of the Committee of Ministers to Member States on the European Prison Rules, 11 January 2006, Rec (2006)2, available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/43f3134810.html>, accessed 12 April 2013.

Appendix B: Research Methodology

Due to the paucity of research literature in the Irish context, this study took an exploratory approach. Desk-based research was conducted to review and present relevant international research literature on the experiences of ethnic minorities in prison, focusing on studies that directly consider the experience of Travellers. This included a review of good practice measures, which involved telephone interviews with two key stakeholders in the UK. The desk-based stage also involved analysing international human rights and equality legislation instruments, both regarding minority ethnic groups and prisons, in order to identify the rights of Travellers in prison as protected by international standards.

The second stage of the research involved collecting primary qualitative data on the experiences of Travellers in the Irish prison system. A qualitative approach best lends itself to exploratory research (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). In-depth interviews were carried out with 10 Traveller ex-prisoners over September–November 2013. Interviewees were accessed via voluntary organisations working with Travellers. These interviews lasted between 45 minutes and one and a half hours. A narrative approach informed their conduct and analysis. This approach emphasises the experiences of interviewees ‘as expressed in lived and told stories’ (Creswell, 2007). This can help people to share information which might otherwise seem too obvious and even difficult to share (Gabriel, 1998).³⁸

Profile of interviewees

Interviewees ranged between 24 and 38 years. Five were male and five were female. The majority had children, with the number of children ranging between none and six. Three were single, five described themselves as separated from their spouse, one was married and one was in a long-term relationship. The number of sentences served ranged from one to 12.

Table 1: Profile of interviewees

Variable	Description
Gender	Female (n. 5); male (n. 5).
Age range	24–38 years
Children	0–6
Relationship status	Single (n. 3); separated (n. 5); married/in relationship (n. 2)
Sentences served	1–12

³⁸ Appendix C contains the ethical protocol submitted to an internal research ethics committee, comprised of members of the IPRT Board. This contains more detailed information on the methodological approach. It is available online, along with Appendix D: The research tools, at www.iprt.ie/iprt-publications

What can qualitative research really show?

It is worth briefly outlining the benefits and limitations of qualitative research. Qualitative research is an umbrella term, relating to any form of social inquiry that does not involve statistical analysis (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). One of its main benefits is that it can reach complex and subtle understandings; as Ritchie and Lewis put it, it has a 'facility to describe and display phenomena ... in fine-tuned detail and in the participants' own terms' (2009, p. 27). Its flexible and open-ended qualities allow for a great depth of understanding to be reached and, unlike survey-based research, it can easily capture a diversity of experiences and attitudes, even within a small population. Moreover, it enables the discovery of unanticipated relationships and explanations behind phenomena (Buchanan and Cousins, 2012). While it does not aim to arrive at statistical descriptions of a large population, one of its key strengths is that it gives voice to the experiences of diverse populations.

Learning from this study

In the early stages of this research, a roundtable meeting was held with national Traveller organisations. Participants at this meeting had a strong understanding of potential issues, such as the importance of establishing trust among potential interviewees, and issues faced by Travellers in relation to the criminal justice system. This proved to be very valuable in terms of designing the qualitative research phase and preparing the interview guide. For example, it was through this that the approach of recruiting interviewees through voluntary organisations working with Travellers was agreed. This approach was essential to the successful completion of the research.

This study only involved interviews with ex-prisoners. It was felt that these interviewees would be in a better place to reflect on and speak of their experiences of the prison system. It also meant that all interviewees would be in a position to discuss issues faced by Travellers on leaving prison. As a result, the interview data was rich and addressed many aspects of both being in prison and returning to the community.

As outlined above, voluntary organisations working with Travellers acted as gatekeepers. The majority of interviews took place in the offices of these organisations. However, despite the involvement of the voluntary sector, however, difficulties were still encountered in recruiting participants. It emerged that many potential interviewees, particularly men, felt initially apprehensive of becoming involved, even though they were assured that their involvement would be confidential and that IPRT is an independent body.³⁹ One male interviewee had an interesting perspective on this; he commented that, prior to the interview, he had associated the word 'interview' with being in a Garda station, 'and not saying anything'. For this reason, he felt many male Travellers might be reluctant to become involved. This chimed with feedback from service providers, who, despite their support of the study, found that some potential interviewees chose to not take part, due to past involvement in offending behaviour, and a distrust of institutions, all grounded in the marginalised position of Travellers in Irish society.

Another unforeseen outcome was that, due to the difficult circumstances in which many interviewees were living, some interviews were postponed and two were cancelled.

These factors meant that the process of recruiting interviewees took longer than anticipated and the final sample size was smaller than originally envisaged. Future qualitative research in this area may benefit from this knowledge, particularly in planning the research – this could have implications both in terms of funding and time allotted to the research.

³⁹ See the study information sheet for further information. Available from www.iprt.ie/iprt-publications



Irish Penal Reform Trust
MACRO Building
1 Green Street
Dublin 7, Ireland

T: +353 (0) 1 874 1400
E: info@iprt.ie
W: www.iprt.ie

ISBN 978-0-9573037-5-1



€10 cost

