



National Women's  
Council of Ireland  
Comhairle Náisiúnta  
na mBan in Éirinn

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Submission to the Seanad Public Consultation  
Committee on 'Travellers Towards a more equitable  
Ireland post-recognition'.

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## Introduction

The National Women's Council of Ireland (NWCi) welcomes the opportunity to submit our views to the Seanad Public Consultation on Travellers Towards a more equitable Ireland post recognition. This work is kindly supported by the Department of Rural and Community Development through the Scheme to Support National Organisations (SSNO) administered through Pobal.

The NWCi is the leading national women's membership organisation in Ireland. Established in 1973, it represents a membership base of over 180 groups and organisations across a diversity of backgrounds, sectors and locations and is committed to the promotion of full equality between women and men.

Despite developments in recent decades, Traveller women in Ireland continue to experience persistent inequalities, including higher rates of poverty and lower representation in decision-making. Women from the Travelling Community are likely to experience multiple health inequalities. NWCi have long advocated for the equal representation and participation of women in all areas of decision making that affect their lives and this should include women from a diversity of backgrounds including Traveller and Roma women.

Traveller women experience discrimination as women, discrimination as Travellers and discrimination as Traveller women. Traveller women experience stark health inequalities due to structural inequalities and social determinants of health, including poor accommodation conditions, poverty, illiteracy and discrimination.<sup>i</sup> Traveller women have also identified significant barriers to health services, employment, accommodation including: discrimination and racism (both at individual and institutional levels); lack of trust with providers; lack of culturally-appropriate service provision; and limited engagement from service providers with Travellers and Traveller organisations. Travellers are disproportionately represented in our housing and homeless statistics. Travellers make up 9% of the homeless population although Travellers make up just 1% of the overall population.<sup>ii</sup> This has particular consequences for Traveller women who bear the brunt of living in poor conditions, dealing with local authorities and looking after the family.

Although women in Ireland, including Traveller women, have higher life expectancy than men (or Traveller men in the case of Traveller women), women are more likely to: be poor; undertake the majority of work in the home; experience violence from their partner; be the victims of sexual assault; and experience anxiety and depression.<sup>iii</sup>

NWCi has, over 30 years, built a strong relationship with Traveller organisations, particularly the National Traveller Women's Forum (NTWF) and Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre. While advocating for women's human rights, we are cognisant of the diversity of all women, particularly women who experience endemic, systematic racism on a daily basis. In solidarity and partnership, NWCi continues to support and celebrate Traveller women's contribution to Irish society and their status as a minority ethnic group in Ireland. The official recognition of Travellers' ethnic status should enable the Government to introduce gender specific objectives, targets, activities, indicators, timeframes and adequate human and financial resources for the social inclusion of Traveller and Roma women in all policy areas.

Travellers experience systemic and institutional racism, lack of social mobility making connections in the political sphere extremely challenging. Barriers that exist for women are compounded for Traveller and Roma women by the experience of racism and discrimination. The impact of women's exclusion from the political process is very evident. Women do the overwhelming majority of care and domestic work leaving less leisure time to build the essential networks and relationships necessary to break into the political sphere. The male-designed and dominated culture is off-putting to many Traveller and Roma women. Quotas and designated seats represent only one part of the solution, however, to a complex issue of women's participation in public life more broadly. Politics needs to be a place where Traveller and Roma women feel welcome

An intersectional approach to the collection and monitoring of data is essential. Currently in many areas we have a lack of gender and ethnicity disaggregated data and it makes it impossible to measure the situation or ensure that policies and programmes are fully equality proofed.

### **Traveller Participation & Politics....your ideas to:**

#### **Strengthen the political representation of Travellers locally, nationally and internationally.**

- A code of conduct would make debates in both Houses less intimidating and alien, and make women's voices more likely to be heard, including more diverse groups of women.
- Specific training on gender, racism and equality would assist Oireachtas members in understanding the gendered nature of Irish society, the social impact of that gendering and stereotyping, and how the fulfilment and promotion of Traveller and Roma women's rights is essential for an equal society.
- Extend the Seanad Franchise to provide universal access. The current panel system is exclusionary to members of the Travelling community. Less than 1% of Travellers are in third level education.<sup>iv</sup> It is critical that the existing voting system be extended to recognise the diversity of voices that exist in Ireland today.
- Establish an electoral commission to address areas around voter turnout, voter education and registration and quotas. The lack of a permanent address can be a barrier to members of the Travelling community in exercising their right to vote. The Commission should have a focus also on raising awareness about voting among voters from marginalised communities including the migrant community, the Traveller community and persons who are homeless. The commission could consult with members of the Traveller community and Traveller organisations on the best way to carry out voter education. Information online and offline should be user-friendly and accessible and in plain language. The Commission should research other jurisdictions and best practise in this area and aim to remove any obstacles to voting or voter registration. NWCI believes that the Electoral Commission should monitor the gender quota for General Elections and oversee how political parties compare in relation to meeting the quota which is currently at 30% but will rise to 40% in 2023.
- A commitment to using Taoiseach nominations for a Traveller in the Seanad after the next general election is welcome but we need a critical mass.
- Targeted training, mentoring and other initiatives to support Traveller and Roma women's participation/uptake in political structures is required. Develop a network of supports for Traveller and Roma women.
- Additional bursaries for Traveller and Roma to run for election as finances are a huge barrier.
- Recently in the Local elections, three Traveller women ran for local office in Cork, Galway and Longford. When women from minority backgrounds run for office, they create change through standing and also provide role models in their own communities.

- Political parties should suspend representatives who make anti-Traveller remarks and agree appropriate sanctions.
- Local campaigns should be supported where Travellers are running for local or national office.
- Politicians could take on Travellers for work placement working with Traveller NGOs for support and recruitment

**Promote and support increased involvement of Travellers in decision making processes within the public sphere.**

- We support the call of the NTWF to develop an implementation plan for the National Traveller Roma Inclusion Strategy with clear targets, indicators, timeframe and resources to ensure it delivers change for the Traveller and Roma community including equality for Traveller and Roma women.
- Clear cohesion is required between the National Strategy for Women and Girls 2017 – 2020(NSWG) and the National Traveller Roma Inclusion Strategy (NTRIS).<sup>v</sup>
- We support the recommendations of the NTWF for clear measurement and demonstration of how actions in NSWG are impacting positively on Traveller and Roma women and girls and the identification of specific and targeted actions to increase their participation in all areas of public life.

**Increase the inclusion of Travellers within civil structures, governmental agencies and departments.**

- Traveller and Roma Women should be named across all government strategies and specific targeted measures included to address racism and inequalities.
- All public bodies need to take into account and make explicit in their communications and direction the legislative implications arising from the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014 which confers a positive duty to have regard to, in the performance of their functions, the need to ‘(a) eliminate discrimination, (b) promote equality of opportunity and treatment of its staff and the persons to whom it provides services, and (c) protect the human rights of its members, staff and the persons to whom it provides services’. Public bodies are now required in their annual reports to report on related ‘achievements and developments’ pertaining to, for example, State obligations to prioritise the most marginalised and vulnerable in society and to ensure that women enjoy equality with men in political and public life.
- Recent reorganisation of local government structures and processes has yet to be interrogated as to how they have effectively included and supported the voices and participation of Traveller and Roma women. Public Participation Networks (PPNs) are the primary mechanism for the nomination of community and voluntary representatives on a number of local authority decision making structures and others. A seat should be designated on all Public Participation Networks Secretariats to address the underrepresentation of Traveller and Roma Women on all local decision making structures. The voice and concerns of Travellers could be diluted within the social inclusion pillars. It is critical considering the role and responsibilities Local Authorities have that impact on the lives of Traveller and Roma Women. Over €5.5 million (48%), allocated to local authorities to spend on Traveller specific accommodation in 2018 was sent back unspent.<sup>vi</sup> It is necessary also those individual PPNs are reporting on the inclusion and participation of Traveller and Roma women.
- Civil society organisations and community development projects have suffered considerably as a result of austerity cuts. Travellers, Traveller Projects and Services were severely impacted.<sup>vii</sup> This disinvestment across a huge array of programmes and initiatives meant continued hardship, rowback on progress achieved and narrow definitions of what accounted for value for money. Additional investment and resources are required for local Traveller women’s groups and National representative organisations including the National Traveller Womens Forum. Community

Development processes and projects have been particularly instrumental in building and developing leadership within the Travelling community. Implementation of the forthcoming 10 year strategy document “Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities – a Ten year Strategy to Support the Community and Voluntary Sectors in Ireland” currently being developed by the Department of Rural and Community Development, should focus on the importance of sustainable independent funding for community development work with Traveller and Roma women.

- There are other independent community spaces where groups come together to organise, plan and take action. This type of organising, outside of established Local Authority or government led invited spaces, is legitimate and necessary so that communities can direct their own agenda and can be more inclusive of diverse voices including Traveller and Roma women.
- Local authorities should sign up to the Charter for equality between men and women in local life. In order to promote gender equality at the local and regional level, the Council for European Municipalities and Regions launched the European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life in 2006. The Charter is both a political document and a practical instrument. It encourages local and regional governments to make a public commitment to equality and to implement the principles listed in the Charter. The Charter proposes concrete methods by which equality of women and men can be pursued in different fields of competences: political participation, employment, public services, urban planning, etc. Today, over 1600 local and regional governments in 32 European countries have signed the Charter. No local authorities in Ireland have signed up to this charter.<sup>viii</sup>

## **Dialogue and Traveller Social Inclusion....your ideas to:**

### **Foster inclusion, dialogue and relationships between Travellers and the wider community.**

- Traveller and Roma culture, history and traditions should be reflected in primary and secondary school curriculum.
- Local authorities should provide funding and investment for Traveller pride events in local communities and create spaces for Travellers and the wider community to come together.

### **Address the stigma, prejudice, racism, discrimination, social exclusion and identity erosion experienced by Travellers.**

- We support the call for the urgent development of a new National Action Plan against Racism.
- There should be a culture of Zero tolerance policy in Local Councils, in the Oireachtas and across all government institution and departments for anti- Traveller remarks and sentiment.

### **Ensure accurate and fair treatment in the media.**

- Although the proliferation of new media outlets and formats has led to a dispersal of hierarchy and a democratisation of the media the fractured nature of the internet means that the scope to influence on a mass scale is still rather limited to broadcasters and sections of the print media. There is an effective marginalisation of voices within the media. Broadcasters should seek to ensure that a diverse range of perspectives and voices are included in programmes. Criteria should be developed, by each broadcaster, for the selection of contributors. These would be used to guide programme and production staff in their choices. These criteria should include reference to achieving gender balance across the course of the programme. Other

additions should include diversity of perspectives based on geography as well as age, ethnicity, sexual orientation and disability.

Significant power, still rests in the hands of a comparatively small number of individuals who hold editorial control or influence and can consequently influence trends in public opinion on political and public affairs. This power is rested in the hands of people who already reflect the power structures within society.

Traveller and Roma women can experience extreme vitrol and abuse online, in the print and other forms of media. We need authentic voices including organisations representing Travellers.

Our democracy is more complete when a diverse range of individuals and sectors engage fully in representing their own perspectives, particularly in the formulation of policy.

In conclusion we support and endorse the submission by the National Traveller Women's Forum.

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<sup>i</sup> Pavee Point (2017) Shadow Report to CEDAW Committee. <http://www.paveepoint.ie/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Pavee-Point-NTWF-2017-Joint-Shadow-Report-to-CEDAW-Committee-19012017.pdf>

<sup>ii</sup> Raffaele Grotti, Helen Russell, Éamonn Fahey, Bertrand Maître Discrimination and Inequality in Housing in Ireland June 2018

<sup>iii</sup> Pavee Point Presentation 'Our Geels: Mental Health and Suicide'. Presentation to the World Congress on Women's Mental Health, Dublin March 2017. [http://www.paveepoint.ie/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/PP\\_Missie-MaryBrigidCollins\\_WCWMH.pdf](http://www.paveepoint.ie/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/PP_Missie-MaryBrigidCollins_WCWMH.pdf)

<sup>iv</sup> Central Statistics Office, Census 2011 Profile 7- Religion, Ethnicity and Irish Travellers at 32.

<sup>v</sup> National Strategy for Women and Girls 2017 – 2020 Action 4.15 "Undertake initiatives to promote the participation of Traveller and Roma women in leadership positions including in the community and voluntary sector." Action 4.6 "In the context of supporting a greater focus on women's participation and on gender issues at community level, the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme(SICAP) will provide key supports to those most in need in our communities including disadvantaged women, Traveller and Roma women..."

<sup>vi</sup> Answer to PQ <https://www.paveepoint.ie/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/2018-Traveller-Accommodation-Spend.pdf>

<sup>vii</sup> Brian Harvey(2013) 'Travelling with Austerity' Impacts of Cuts on Travellers, Traveller Projects and Services [http://www.paveepoint.ie/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Travelling-with-Austerity\\_Pavee-Point-2013.pdf](http://www.paveepoint.ie/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Travelling-with-Austerity_Pavee-Point-2013.pdf)

<sup>viii</sup> <http://www.charter-equality.eu/>