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Traveller Women and Employment

Introduction

During 2012 the National Traveller Women's Forum carried out a consultation with our members and also with key stakeholders in employment services. This policy paper seeks to set out the key issues and barriers in relation to Traveller women and employment, the services and supports available to Traveller women and our priorities for the future

Traditionally Traveller women worked within the Traveller economy as part of the family unit involved in income generating, this work would have included selling door to door, at markets, collecting good for selling, and childcare. Recent years have seen the deterioration of many of the income generating opportunities for Traveller families, particularly scrap metal recycling, horse trading and market trading are dwindling. There have been many reasons for this including restrictive legislation, (eg the Casual Trading Act, 1995). Traveller women were particularly affected by the Market Trading Act as many women ran market stalls at both private and public fairs.

Consequently, Traveller women's access to income generating opportunities in the Traveller economy has declined, while opportunities within the labour market have not replaced them, leaving many Traveller women unemployed and living on social welfare.

Outside of the now limited opportunities for Traveller women in the Traveller economy mainstream employment opportunities continues to be for the most part something that is outside the reach of Traveller women due in part to low education attainment, traditional gender roles and discrimination from employers. The employment statistics over the last decade paint a stark picture.

- The 2002 census highlighted 63% of Traveller women are unemployed in comparison to a national figure of 8%.
- Data from the 2006 Census reveal that only 13.8 per cent of Irish Travellers over the age of 15 years are in employment compared to a national average of 57.2 per cent. Among Travellers, women (11 per cent) are less likely to be employed than men (16.9 per cent).
- The 2010 All Ireland Traveller Health Study found that only 4.8% of Travellers in the republic of Ireland were either employed or self-employed.

- Census 2011 reveals that out of a total labour force of 4,144 Traveller women 81.2% were without work. Also one in three Irish Traveller women (32.7%) were looking after the home and family, nearly twice the rate of the general population (17.5%) .

Limited as the census data is – it paints a stark picture, and with Ireland in recession and unemployment rising the challenge of supporting Traveller women into mainstream employment is greater than ever.

Barriers

One of the most important areas of employment and training for Traveller women in the last 20 years has been within development work, Traveller organisations and Traveller specific programmes. These type of employment and training outlets offer many Traveller women training and development opportunities, the ability to work in 'safe' (in that they are free from discrimination) working/training environment, and to work and train in areas that promote initiatives to support their own community. These initiatives have been crucial and it is important that they continue to be supported and developed and that progression from training and employed opportunities are developed and strengthened. However when discussions with members in relation to their experience of mainstream employment or their attempts to access mainstream employment the discussion is dominated by negative experience rather than positive. There were a number of issues which emerged in the discussion constantly – educational attainment, discrimination, childcare and family commitments, and welfare issues.

Education

There is a strong and well documented link between formal education and employment with clear correlation between educational attainment and access to employment. The history of provision of education to Travellers women has been poor and we are still seeing the resultant inequality of access, participation and outcomes. There is now a strong transfer rate for Traveller girls from primary to post primary but progression through second level and more importantly attainment levels are still not on a par with settled equivalent.

The following table highlights the major gap between Travellers starting second level at 448 and only 70 in their final year.

Table: Travellers in second level academic year 2010 – 2011¹

Junior Certificate to Leaving Certificate – 2010 - 2011

			Male	Female
Junior Certificate	Year 1		183	265
	Year 2		170	242
	Year 3		207	250
Transition Year			32	54
Leaving Certificate	Year 1		58	69
	Year 2		31	39

Poor education outcomes for Travellers is evident in the findings of the 2006 census.

- 52.7% of all Travellers aged 15+ years have obtained primary education only with no formal education as their highest educational attainment compared to 15.4% the national population are in the same category
- With only 3.4% of the Traveller population over the age of 15 years having attained upper secondary education; compared with 48.2% for national population.
- Only 0.57 of Travellers over the age of 15 years had completed their education at third level.²
- There are also lower numbers of Traveller women engaging in higher and further education, the 2006 census shows that only 19 Traveller women had obtained a third level qualification at degree or higher level³.

¹ Department of Education and Skills: Travellers in second level academic year 10/11

² <http://beyond2020.cso.ie/Census/TableViewer/tableView.aspx> .

³ Census 2006 - Table 24 Irish Travellers aged 15 years and over, classified by highest level of education completed and sex

2011 Census results revealed:

- Only 3.1 per cent of Travellers continued their education past the age of 18 compared with 41.2 per cent for the general population.
- The number of Irish Travellers who completed third level in 2011 was 115 or 1 per cent. This compares with 30.7 per cent of the general population excluding Irish Travellers.
- The percentage of Irish Travellers with no formal education in 2011 was 17.7 per cent compared with 1.4 per cent in the general population. Of the 115 – **76 were women**.
- A new question 'field of study of the highest qualification completed to date (excluding secondary school qualification)' was asked in 2011. The number of Irish Travellers who responded to this question was 615 of whom 378 were female. The top three fields of study for Irish Traveller women were Health and welfare (156 females), Personal services (65) and Social sciences (54).⁴

It remains to be seen if the Department of Education and Science can bridge this significant gap between Traveller women and the general population in the short to medium term given their current cost cutting policy. In addition to this Senior Traveller Training Centres closed in June of 2012 and approximately 597 Traveller women aged between 16 and 50 plus lost training spaces. The funding of these training positions was not ring fenced for enhanced training for Traveller women in the mainstream nor were any alternative provisions put in place for the 597 Traveller women participating in these centres. While NTWF was not opposed to the closure of Senior Traveller training Centres the way in which the closure took place was a missed opportunity to look at the training and education needs of the participants or to identify what additional supports might participants need in order to access employment.

Discrimination and Racism

Traveller women highlighted the impact of discrimination in the labour market and the survival strategy of hiding one's identity to gain access to it. This strategy is a double edged sword. It not only has negative consequences for the individuals concerned but also has wider social implications. Without the visible inclusion of Travellers in the labour market there is little opportunity to challenge the prevailing negative stereotypes. Likewise without the appreciable outcomes many Traveller parents regard engagement in formal education as a dead-end.

Childcare

⁴<http://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/census/documents/census2011profile7/Profile,7,Education,Ethnicity,and,Irish,Traveller,entire.doc.pdf>

A recent NWCi publication describes childcare as “the dominant employment barrier for women”.⁵ Traveller women have primary responsibility for children. Without access to childcare, Traveller women cannot work, cannot work on a full-time basis or cannot obtain the further education or training that would enable them to access work. Traveller women are marrying and starting a family at a younger age than the general population. Given the poor education outcomes for Traveller women ability to access further education and training is crucial. Universal childcare, available as a right, is absolutely essential. Without it, there will never be education equality for and between women, nor will there be employment equality for and between women.

One in three Irish Traveller women (32.7%) were looking after the home and family, nearly twice the rate of the general population (17.5%)⁶. Traveller women have traditionally cared for their children within the extended family. In our discussion with Traveller women it is evident that this tradition is not practised as much. In addition to quality childcare provision being provided the specific needs of Traveller children must be recognised and included in the policies and approach of the early years setting if Traveller women are to have the confidence in their children being cared for outside the immediate family.

Fear of losing secondary benefits

The fear surrounding the potential loss of secondary benefits in particular the medical card was cited in many of the consultation sessions which we held. It is very difficult to determine the value of a medical card – it depends on how often it is used, some families may use it on a regular basis while for others it is more a safety net, - you never know when you might need it. And given the health status of Traveller women these fears are not unfounded.

These fears and concerns are not specific to Traveller women and are well documented: “The loss of a medical card is particularly pertinent for people with children as it passports eligibility to other child related supports (school transport, exam fee exemptions).”⁷ The challenges in addressing this are not just challenges for Travellers and Traveller organisations but also statutory bodies and employers. South Dublin County council acknowledge that when targeting participants for their Traveller employment initiative they deliberately targeted young Travellers as they would be “unlikely to have family responsibilities with the supporting income from social welfare – this would help to overcome the barrier of foregoing such income experienced by those taking up short term opportunities”⁸.

⁵ Dr. Mary Murphy. (2012). From Careless to careful activation making activation work for women. NWCi.

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<http://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/census/documents/census2011profile7/Profile,7,Education,Ethnicity,and,Irish,Traveller,entire,doc.pdf>

⁷ Dr. Mary Murphy. (2012). From Careless to careful activation making activation work for women. NWCi.

⁸ Dublin Employment Pact. (2006). Opening Pathways to Employment for Travellers in South Dublin County Council.

The potential loss of the medical card, which would result from employment and some training, is a huge disincentive then to Traveller women. The fear of losing the benefits provided by a medical card prevents Traveller women from accessing employment and training opportunities, which in turn results in the loss of a means of empowerment and access to progression out of a poverty trap. This is an issue which particularly affects Traveller women as they are primarily responsible for the health and well being of their families. Therefore, it is Traveller women who are most often being denied access to employment, or being asked to choose between basic health care and employment opportunities. Some training and employment initiatives are developed in such a way that secondary benefits such as the medical cards, can be retained. These flexible approaches to promoting access into training and employment opportunities need to be mainstreamed, to ensure the continuing development and support of Traveller women's programmes.

Unemployment Services – A changing landscape?

There are a wide variety of supports and training available for the unemployed, while these are all open to Traveller women, participation of Traveller women in FÁS or DSP programmes is not readily available. There is much change taking place in this sector at the moment and while there is no end date for the full establishment of SOLAS transfer of functions looks set to continue for much of 2013.

In July 2011 Minister Ruairí Quinn announced that a new further education and training authority called SOLAS was to be established. Minister Quinn said, "The new SOLAS mandate will be to ensure the provision of 21st century high-quality further education and training programmes to jobseekers and other learners. These programmes will be integrated, flexible, value-for-money and responsive to the needs of learners and the requirements of a changed and changing economy."⁹ The transition from FÁS to SOLAS is underway and is being overseen by the SOLAS implementation group.

- FÁS will be disbanded
- SOLAS will operate under the aegis of the Department of Education and Skills and co-ordinate and fund the wide range of training and further education programmes around the country.
- There will be a shift away from traditional occupations like construction and a greater focus on other occupations in growth areas like the services, ICT, medical devices, food and biopharma sectors.
- In cooperation with the Department of Social Protection's new National Employment and Entitlements Service, as part of the National Employment Action Plan, those on the Live Register will, for the first time, be systematically referred to further education programmes.
- Over time, FÁS Training Centre premises and most FÁS regional staff will be transferred to the reformed VECs – ETB's. (Current FÁS headquarters staff will remain as the staff of SOLAS). The training function will be held with the ETB.

⁹ <http://www.education.ie/en/Press-Events/Press-Releases/2011-Press-Releases/PR11-07-27.html>

- The employment services and employment programmes of FÁS transfer to the Department of Social Protection.

As of December 2012 the transfer of 700 hundred staff to the Department of Social Protection has already taken place. The next phase – the establishment of Education Training Boards (ETB) will be formed by legislation in 2013.

The Department of Social Protection now has responsibility for the employment/enterprise services/programmes and also some back to education supports. Included in their responsibility are a number of programmes which have played an important role in supporting Traveller Employment are:

Community Employment Scheme: Community Employment is an employment programme which supports unemployed people to re-enter the active workforce through enhancing and developing both their technical and personal skills. Many local Traveller organisations run CE schemes.

Community Services Programme: The Community Services Programme supports community businesses to provide local services and create employment opportunities It provides funding support to around 425 community companies and co-operatives.

Special Initiative for Travellers: The Special Initiative for Travellers focused supporting Traveller access into employment and enterprise development. In 2010 the Programme was delivered in thirteen areas nationally and in 2011 it was delivered in three areas. Again in 2012, there was a call made for applications under this fund, this was open only to the three areas which had previously drawn down funding under SIT. As of December 2012 there is not clarity as to the future of the SIT, however the Department does have plans to streamline its programmes including this one.

The training and employment/enterprise programmes that has been developed and provided by Traveller organisations has been extremely important in beginning to create a space for Traveller women to explore and identify more specific skills training and potential employment opportunities. Statutory funding though programmes like CE, CSP, SIT and the Local Training Initiative have been crucial in supporting this particularly given that progress onto mainstream training remains slow (due in part to challenges in accessing the training itself and also the impact of an inaccessible labour market on potential participation.)

Moving Forward:

Given this lack of access to the mainstream labour market cutbacks in employment/enterprise programmes could have particularly negative implications for a group as distant from the labour market as Traveller women.

Focus is required on three fronts to deal with the access issue and to develop employment opportunities.

- The State as employer has a clear role to play in realising Travellers employment through pro-

active interventions. There have been some interesting initiatives to promote Travellers in employment such as the Traveller Internship Pilot Programme: This Internship pilot programmes which took place in 2006 – 2007 allowed 23 Travellers to take up clerical officer and general operative positions across various government departments. The goal of the Internship programme *was to enhance the skill sets and range of work experience of Travellers in line with the commitment of the Department of Finance to diversity within the Civil Service*¹⁰ and it proved to be an invaluable learning experience highlighting the issues to be addressed in putting equality into practice.

- The private sector must also play a role. Little work has been done or progress made in this area.
- Given the reality of little or no access it is the community sector (using the mechanism of active labour market and other employment/enterprise programmes). The consequences of this engagement is visible in an increasing range of service provision primarily to their own community. It is crucial that the opportunities that have opened up for Traveller Women through a range of training and employment programmes are maintained and developed.

Full implementation of Traveller Education Strategy will be an important step towards achieving a high educational attainment among Traveller women.

Affirmative action on the issue of Traveller women's income thresholds and the maintenance of medical cards is required to tackle the massive inequality in health status without endangering Traveller women's access to employment and training. Traveller women should maintain the right to a medical card for a longer period of time – for example five years once they have entered the labour market

Quality and affordable childcare is crucial to Traveller women. To ensure quality childcare for Travellers requires the implementation of anti-racist policies, and the use of culturally and developmentally appropriate curriculum and the visibility through positive measures of Traveller role models employed in the service.

Traveller women need access to good quality mainstream training and in addition to this specific targeted training and employment strategies run by or in partnership with Traveller organisations.

¹⁰ Ralaheen Ltd. (2007). Review of a Civil Service Traveller Internship pilot programme. Department of Justice Equality and Law Reform