

Craigavon Travellers Support Committee Submission to The Northern Ireland Affairs Committee on The Experiences of Minority Ethnic and Migrant People in Northern Ireland.

1.0 Introduction

This response has been prepared by Craigavon Travellers Support Committee as a contribution to the House of Commons Northern Ireland Affairs Committee's inquiry into the experiences of Minority Ethnic and Migrant People in Northern Ireland. Our response relates specifically to Irish Travellers who are defined in the Race Relations (NI) Order 1997 as *'a community of people commonly so called who are identified (both by themselves and others) as people with a shared history, culture and traditions including, historically, a nomadic way of life on the island of Ireland.'*

Craigavon Travellers Support Committee

Craigavon Travellers Support Committee (CTSC) was established in 1989 to meet the growing needs of the Traveller population living in the Craigavon area and to improve their quality of life. Our vision is *'a society in which Travellers are an integral part of the community'*. We work towards achieving integration and cohesion in several ways:

- Through a community development approach which enables and empowers Travellers to articulate and address their needs.
- Through partnership working with other agencies to inform and promote the provision of culturally sensitive services.
- Through challenging racism at individual, societal and institutional levels.
- Through the promotion of integration of Travellers and the wider community.

Our work is focused across six key areas:

- Early years and youth work.
- Education and training.
- Advice, advocacy, and support.
- Community development.
- Health promotion and well-being; and
- Policy and strategic support.

CTSC currently works with approximately 150 Traveller families across the Craigavon and Banbridge areas and typically, these families do not access mainstream or community-wide programmes. Approximately 25% of these families are nomadic, creating further obstacles to accessing adequate services.

2.0 Response Summary

To gain an understanding of the experiences and challenges faced by Irish Travellers, it is essential to outline several distinct but inter-connected issues from the outset:

2.1 Demographic Profiles of Travellers

All demographic data relating to Travellers should be treated with caution, particularly when used to determine service provision and public spending. The under-representation of Travellers has been

consistently highlighted by Traveller Support Groups and others for decades, particularly (but not exclusively) in relation to Census data. This is due to several factors including low levels of literacy resulting in an inability to complete Census forms; a lack of understanding of the purpose of the Census; many Travellers general reluctance to provide personal information to government agencies and little or no outreach by relevant agencies to support Travellers to participate in data collection. This was clearly evidenced in the 2011 Census which recorded a total of 1,301 Travellers in total in Northern Ireland and just 136 in the Armagh City, Craigavon and Banbridge District Council areaⁱ. An area which had (and has) two active, fully funded Traveller Support Groups each working with several hundred families. However, this 'official' data source has routinely been used by a range of statutory agencies to determine the level of service delivery, resources and access by Travellers. As recently as 2020, The Executive Office used the 2011 Census data to appoint members to the Racial Equality Sub-Groupⁱⁱ whose role is to work with government ministers to implement the Racial Equality Strategy. Predictably, there is no Traveller representation at this level, so they have effectively been excluded from the process.

It is also evidenced by the All-Ireland Travellers Health Studyⁱⁱⁱ (carried out by University College Dublin and funded by the Department of Health and Children in the Republic of Ireland and the Department of Social Services and Personal Safety of Northern Ireland) in 2009/10 which identified 3,905 Travellers in Northern Ireland a year before the 2011 Census, so the discrepancy is stark and has arguably had a negative impact of the scope and level of services both targeted at and accessed by Travellers in the last decade.

CTSC are concerned that the move from a paper to online Census in 2021 will have again resulted in low participation rates, particularly in areas where there are no or limited, Traveller support services. In addition to the issues highlighted above, the vast majority do not have access to the Internet and lack basic IT skills. We believe planning services with and on behalf of Travellers in the future should be carried out on a local level with a focus on understanding and addressing needs and not on official demographic data sources as they have consistently proved to be erroneous and misleading.

2.2 Lack of Ethnic Monitoring

CTSC believe addressing inequalities for Travellers (and other BAME groups) begins with the collection, monitoring and analysis of ethnically disaggregated data. Without robust evidence, Government departments simply cannot determine needs; demonstrate a clear understanding of where and why inequalities exist; target resources where they are needed most or inform good policy and practice. Research by Joseph Rowntree Foundation in 2013^{iv} concluded 'with the current absence of robust, reliable statistical or administrative analysis, significant gaps exist in the knowledge base' on BME groups in NI. The report also highlighted that 'any impact on outcomes is unclear as data is required to demonstrate the policy effectiveness.'

There have consistent calls to implement an effective, mandatory system across all NI Departments e.g. The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland has regularly recommended collection, monitoring and evaluation of appropriate data on Travellers to ensure effective policy/ service development and delivery and to fulfil Section 75 legislative obligations^v. These calls have been echoed by the Women and Equalities Committee at Westminster who concluded in 2019, 'the lack of consistent data collection on Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people means public bodies are failing to tackle inequalities that are clearly evidenced^{vi}'. This is also despite the publication by the then Office of First and Deputy First Minister in 2011 of an ethnic monitoring *guide* as part of the

implementation of the Racial Equality Strategy^{vii} which appears to have had little or no uptake or impact.

Without a mandatory regulatory framework and leadership from the NI Executive, data collection will continue to be low or non-existent. It will also continue to call into question how public bodies can possibly be compliant with the statutory duties outlined in Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and international obligations including The Committee on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination, the European Committee against Racism and Injustice and the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. How can public bodies demonstrate any level of compliance when they fail to consistently collate ethnically disaggregated data?

2.3 Lack of Research and Analysis across a range of Social Policy areas on Travellers

There is a paucity of robust, up-to-date evidence of need, analysis of Travellers experiences of public services or the impact of policies on Travellers and data is either years out-of-date, simply does not exist or where it exists, is not analysed or has not led to policy change or action. There are numerous examples of this including:

Health Status

The All-Ireland Traveller Health Study (2010) remains the only comprehensive survey of Traveller health and wellbeing ever carried out. The findings were stark (see 3.1 below) and are still quoted as official data some 11 years on. The Department for Health, the Public Health Agency and individual Health and Social Care Trusts have never set targets to address the findings, monitored progress towards addressing them or carried out any further research to evaluate the impact of any subsequent actions. There has been no co-ordination to tackle the health problems faced by Travellers and no robust data to evidence the current health and well-being status of Travellers.

Education Status

Similarly, the data relating to education outcomes is lacking. The Department for Education's Audit of Inequalities^{viii} (2018) provides some information (see 3.2 below) however, that too is a decade or more out of date. Anecdotally, we know that the vast majority of Traveller children have left school by the time they are 13 years old, and we simply do not know how many Travellers complete secondary education or how many have attained qualifications. However, the numbers are substantially lower than the general population and do not appear to have significantly improved over the last decade.

Employment Status

No up-to-date data exists to indicate the level of employment or self-employment amongst Travellers however, anecdotally, we know the rates are very low. Research^{ix} in the Republic of Ireland indicates the unemployment rate for Travellers is 80% while The EU Agency for Fundamental Rights, in a 2020 survey, found that, in comparison to the five other EU countries surveyed, Ireland had the lowest percentage of Travellers in employment (13% of Traveller men and 17% of Traveller women).^x We can only assume these figures would reflect a similar situation in Northern Ireland but without the data, it is highly unlikely any measures will ever be put in place to address them.

The lack of current baseline data across all policy areas demonstrates just how far down the agenda and consciousness Travellers are. The fact that no plans are in place to address these significant gaps in knowledge also indicate the lack of will to address the many inequalities Travellers face in their day-to-day lives.

2.4 Lack of Traveller Strategy

It is widely acknowledged that Travellers are amongst the most disadvantaged communities in Northern Ireland. O'Connell et al^{xi} concluded 'Travellers fare poorly on every indicator used to measure disadvantage: unemployment, poverty, social exclusion, health status, infant mortality, life expectancy, illiteracy, education and training levels, access to decision making and political representation, gender equality, access to credit, accommodation and living conditions.' (P49) There is no over-arching, government-led approach to addressing the deep and wide-ranging inequalities they face. Departments tend to work independently so no co-ordination exists to address the reality that e.g., poor accommodation (particularly on sites) has a direct impact on mental and physical health, education, employment, community relations etc. and low levels of education attainment at primary and secondary level have a direct impact on employment and reliance on welfare benefits. When it comes to Travellers, the relevant government departments are working in silos. Without a Traveller strategy and leadership from the Northern Ireland Executive, this will not change.

There have been many calls for a government to develop a Traveller Strategy (the Welsh Assembly, the Scottish Government and in the Republic of Ireland all have a Traveller Strategy) including by the Equality Commission and the United Nations Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination^{xii} in 2016:

25. Recalling its general recommendation No. 27 (2000) on discrimination against Roma, the Committee recommends that the State party: (a) Develop a comprehensive strategy, in consultation with members of Gypsy, Traveller and Roma communities, to ensure a systematic and coherent approach in addressing the challenges that they continue to face in the fields of health, education, housing and employment, and ensure its effective implementation by adopting specific action plans and effective oversight and monitoring mechanisms to track progress, with adequate human and financial resources;

CTSC believe a government-led Traveller Strategy would demonstrate a commitment by The Northern Ireland Executive to end the social exclusion, discrimination and poor outcomes for Travellers and ensure all departments realised their human rights obligations to Travellers.

3.0 The Experiences of and Challenges Faced by Travellers in Northern Ireland

The starkest method of understanding the experiences and challenges faced by Travellers is to simply re-iterate what we already know from previous research:

3.1 Health Status (Data from the All-Ireland Traveller Health Study 2010^{xiii})

- Life expectancy for males is 61.7 years, 15 years less than men in the general population. (Equivalent to average life expectancy of Irish people in the 1940s).
- Life expectancy at birth for females is 70 years of age, 11.5 years less than women in the general population. (Equivalent to average life expectancy of Irish people in the 1960s).
- Just 1% of Travellers are aged over 65
- Infant mortality is 14 per 1,000 live births, over three times that of the general population.
- Suicide rates among men are seven times higher.
- Higher levels of ill-health than the comparator populations including chronic diseases, and risk factors such as smoking, high blood pressure, cholesterol, and poor diet.
- Traveller children have higher prevalence of hearing, eyesight and speech problems as compared with all children

3.2 Education Outcomes (Data from The Education Authority NI Audit of Inequalities 2018^{xiv})

- Of the 1,002 Traveller children enrolled in primary, post-primary and special schools in Northern Ireland in 2015/15, 80% were in receipt of free school meals compared to 30% of the general population
- Traveller pupils continue to have exceptionally poor educational outcomes with only 11 children achieving 5 GCSEs at grades A*-C 2003/4 – 2009/10 and none went onto higher education.
- Attendance levels for Traveller children are 70% compared with 95% for the general population.
- From 2007/08 to 2014/15 anywhere between 50% to 80% of Traveller children left school with no GCSEs. (For the general school population that figure reduced from 3.5% in 2007/08 to 0.5% in 2014/15.

3.3 Employment

Analysis of the 2011 Census figures for Northern Ireland by the Equality Commission^{xv} (P:22) indicate Travellers are also less likely to be employed than both the majority population and other ethnic minority groups:

- 20% of Irish Travellers were employed compared to: 57.6% of the general population
- 69% of Travellers were economically inactive compared to 33.9% of the general population

3.4 Accommodation

A 2018 report by the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission^{xvi} found thirteen systematic concerns around Traveller accommodation including inadequacy of sites, racial discrimination and:

‘The inexorable impact of public policy has been to leave many Travellers with an unpalatable choice of retaining their culture while living in poor housing conditions or move into social housing.’

Other issues highlighted include the lack of Traveller-specific accommodation, lack of Traveller engagement, poor standard of basic services (electricity, water, sanitation, waste collection) and a lack of effective management. (P288 – 289)

In June 2019, the NIHRC reported^{xvii} that of the 45 recommendations made in the report, just 3 had been implemented effectively (P6)

3.5 Racism and Discrimination

Although the evidence suggests attitudes are improving slightly, the most recent *Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey*^{xviii} highlights the negative attitudes displayed towards Travellers in NI. In 2018:

- 61% of respondents said they would be willing to accept an Irish Traveller as living in a house as a resident in their local area.
- 72% said they would be willing to accept an Irish Traveller as a colleague at their work.
- 48% said they would be willing to accept a Traveller as a close friend; and
- 61% said they would be willing to accept an Irish Traveller as a relative, by marriage.

These figures are lower than the figures for the same or comparable questions in respect of Eastern Europeans, other minority ethnic groups, or Muslims. In all categories, there is a lower acceptance of Travellers. 41% of respondents said they used derogatory language about Travellers.

The NIHRC report^{xix} into Traveller accommodation found widespread racism against Travellers and tensions between the Traveller communities and settled community comprising racist name-calling;

intimidation in their homes including death threats; verbal abuse and damage to property through paint bombs and broken windows. A representative from NIHE reported that in one area private tenants were allegedly breaking windows in Traveller-specific accommodation. Other families reported leaving their homes even though the alternative was a bed and breakfast accommodation that was far from their children's schools and far too small for their family size. (p:271-2)

Another Traveller reported moving back to a Travellers' site from bricks and mortar housing because they were "always getting name calling, always getting hassle". Similarly, one Traveller living in social housing felt their family would be better going back to a Travellers' site where they "would feel more safe and more relaxed". (p:272)

Further examples of these experiences and the lack of integration between Travellers and the settled community were echoed by a local Councillor, Council officials, Housing Associations, Traveller Support Groups, the PSNI, the Public Health Agency Regional Traveller Forum and NIHE. This intimidation resulted in:

- Some Travellers being prevented from moving into standard social housing allocated to them.
- Cases of houses being graffitied with 'no gypsies allowed' and the insides of the houses "were wrecked, destroyed to keep them out".
- Some parents being afraid to let their children outdoors, leading to fear and depression. (Regional Traveller Forum)
- Travellers not reporting intimidation because of fear of repercussions.
- Representatives of Traveller support groups reported experiencing hostility and negative attitudes from the settled community because of their work. Armagh Travellers Support Group reported: *'At the residents groups meetings [we would attend], there would be all sorts of agencies around the table with the [settled] residents, but the level of hatred [towards us] really and truly, [is] very frightening... We were seen to be... Traveller lovers or whatever they were calling us.'* (p:272)
- NIHRC concluded tensions between the Traveller communities and settled community impacts the provision of housing for Travellers and compatibility issues within the Traveller communities can create difficulties in the provision of their housing and can result in resources not being fully utilised. (p:273)

CTSC firmly believe if these were the outcomes and experiences of any other community in Northern Ireland, there would be significant public and political outrage, public inquiries, and immediate interventions however, in the case of Travellers, they do not even seem to merit any particular consideration.

4.0 Steps the UK Government can take to help ensure effective racial equality legislation in Northern Ireland.

As a starting point to address racial inequality for Travellers, there must be:

- 1) Mandatory data collection, monitoring an analysis across all public services – without ethnically disaggregated data, it is not possible to evidence racial inequalities and develop subsequent interventions.

- 2) A government-led Traveller Strategy – many of the everyday inequalities endured by Travellers are as a result of poor policy, practice, planning and understanding but they are also cross-departmental so The Executive must take the lead on addressing them.
- 3) Full representation of Travellers at the Racial Equality Sub-Group – Travellers and their representatives effectively have no voice at the Racial Equality Sub-Group and no mechanism has been developed to ensure engagement or participation. The irony of which has not been lost on CTSC.

5.0 The health and economic outcomes of Travellers in Northern Ireland and the steps the UK government can take to help improve them.

Improving health and economic outcomes for Travellers can only start when government has a baseline understanding of the current health and economic status of the community. Current data is over ten years old or does not exist. Baseline data should then be used to co-design government-led strategies.

Improving health outcomes for Travellers must begin with a Traveller Health Strategy. In the Republic of Ireland, Traveller Health Strategic Plans are in place for each region as a direct result of the findings of the All-Ireland Traveller Health Study and from the 2017 Traveller and Roma Strategy where health is one of the key priorities.

Similarly, the education and employment outcomes for Travellers will not be addressed on their own, immediate intervention by Government is required. There are numerous examples of successful Traveller employment programmes in the Republic of Ireland and grants are available for Travellers entering further and higher education. In Northern Ireland, The Local Management of Schools (1990) policy provides an additional premium per Traveller pupil to enable schools to better meet the needs of Traveller children, however, the funding is not ring-fenced, it goes into the general school budget and schools have never had to demonstrate how or where they have used the money nor the impact it has had on the Traveller child. Given the extremely poor educational outcomes for Traveller children, CTSC believe targets must be set to access the additional budget.

6.0 Successful initiatives and programmes to encourage cultural exchange and diversity among people in Northern Ireland.

CTSC are unaware of any good practice in relation to Travellers.

7.0 Conclusion

We finish our response with the definition of institutional Racism because we believe until the Northern Ireland Executive, its Departments and arms-length bodies understand what it is and how it is manifested within an organisation, we will not see the kind of action that is legally and morally required to address the lack of progress towards racial equality for Travellers.

The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry^{xx} defines Institutional Racism as:

“The collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racial stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people” (McPherson, paragraph 6.34,1999).

References

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