

## **The Irish Traveller Movement - Draft Paper August 2007**

**The Irish Traveller Movement (ITM) is a registered charity and was founded in 1999, it is a national ‘voice’ group which aims to raise the social inclusion of Irish Travellers and challenge discrimination against this minority.**

### **Economic Inclusion for Travellers**

#### **Background**

(i) Economic inclusion is where families have a sound financial base and are able to access the full range of opportunities and life chances society has to offer. This means decent employment opportunities, access to business support and development and training initiatives and ability to secure credit. Opportunities which it appears are difficult for Travellers to secure.

(ii) The Irish Traveller Movement in Britain (ITM) contacted the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) in January 2007 and has successfully initiated a debate on Traveller economic inclusion. The ITM has involved other Traveller groups and Travellers in this process. A DWP seminar on Traveller economic inclusion was held on 31<sup>st</sup> May which involved a broad range of Traveller groups.

(iii) Different government departments like Communities and Local Government and the Departments for Children, Schools and Families and Health are working together on this issue with the Department for Work and Pensions because they all have a part to play in developing new policies.

(iv) The ITM organised a meeting with the then DWP Minister Jim Murphy MP to give him some overview of the issue. The delegation involved various Gypsy and Traveller groups (ITM, Friends Families and Travellers and the Federation of Gypsy and Traveller Liaison Groups). The minister set out a key concern to know and learn about projects and initiatives in the UK or abroad that are working to raise the economic inclusion of Gypsies and Travellers.

The following paper raises some of the key issues and seeks to give a brief summary of various projects that are assisting in raising the economic inclusion of Gypsies and Travellers in:

- **Education**
- **Training and Employment**
- **Business Development**
- **Social Services**
- **Policy Formulation**

## **Travellers and Economic Exclusion**

Gypsies and Irish Travellers are one of the most excluded minorities in British society (Commission for Racial Equality 'CRE', 2006, 13). Gypsies and Irish Travellers fare the worst of any ethnic group in terms of health and education: life expectancy for men and women is ten years lower than the national average; Gypsy and Irish Traveller mothers are twenty times more likely than mothers in the rest of the population to have experienced the death of a child (Van Cleemput et al, 2004).

In a recent letter from the Education Minister Lord Andrew Adonis to Directors of Children's Services Adonis listed a number of statistics that threw into relief the level of educational exclusion suffered by Gypsies and Travellers. The letter states that in 2005 22.5% of pupils of Irish Traveller heritage and 14.7% Gypsy/Roma gained 5+ A -C GCSEs, the average for all pupils was 54.9%. Furthermore, 46% Travellers of Irish heritage and 42% Roma/Gypsy were identified as Special Education Needs (SEN) without a statement in 2006 and were over four times more likely to be excluded than other pupils. Adonis described these statistics as “bleak” (Adonis letter, 16<sup>th</sup> November, 2006).

In recent years the policy debate has focused on accommodation issues, the government rightfully recognising the shortage of sites as a major impediment to social inclusion for Gypsies and Irish Travellers. The government through the Housing Act 2004 and Planning Circular 1/2006 has started to address the accommodation needs of Travellers. However, one major area that has not been adequately explored is the question of economic inclusion. The Cabinet Office report 'Ethnic Minorities in the Labour Market' which was published in 2003 makes no single direct reference to Gypsies and Irish Travellers.

## **Employment**

Travellers have a set of traditional practices associated with their economic activities. The 'Traveller economy' can be characterised as having a focus on the extended family as the basic economic unit and source of training, a preference for self employment and flexibility in response to market demands and a combination of home space and work space. For some nomadism makes some marginal economic activities viable.

Changes in the economy have meant that Travellers have steadily moved away from traditional employment in agriculture and scrap metal towards other economic activities such as landscaping, construction and market trading. However, for some families these economic activities are becoming difficult to sustain because of competition and a skills deficit. A lack of literacy which impedes the ability to understand the bureaucracy of business and inability to secure credit is making it harder for Traveller economic enterprises to grow and expand. Some Travellers have expressed a desire to increase the degree their business enterprises conform to state regulations but again illiteracy and a lack of knowledge regarding business bureaucracy hinder this process.

Some Travellers now wish to enter the waged economy but a lack of qualifications is a significant hurdle to these aspirations. However, there is strong anecdotal evidence to suggest that Travellers are being discriminated against in this process. Many Travellers complain that employers are not interested in employing them because they are Travellers and live on a Traveller site or if they are employed they are hiding their identity for fear of discrimination.

A lack of childcare is another barrier for Traveller women. Traveller family sizes are above average and young women can be expected to take on adult responsibilities for children in the extended family, giving them little opportunity to return to education or training (Gaffney, 2000, 14).

### **Training and Education**

Travellers are said to favour vocational training for their youth and have a long tradition of providing such training through family economic practices. However, child labour laws and marital break up within the Traveller community are diminishing such opportunities. A high proportion of Travellers 'drop out' of school in Key Stages Three (Ofsted, 2003). There has been a significant rise in the numbers opting for Elective Home Education (Ivatts, 2005, 24). This means that few Travellers are accessing the more vocational elements of the Key Stage Four curriculum. Some would argue the vocational opportunities available in Key Stage Four are not sufficient and in fact it has been argued that such opportunities need to be made earlier in Key Stage Three. A number of reports state that many Travellers are alienated from school by a static secondary school curriculum and high levels of bullying towards Travellers (Clark and Greenfields, 2006, 225).

### **Credit and Debt**

For many Travellers it is difficult to secure finance for property mortgages or business development. For some Travellers their employment in a varied range of occupations or having no fixed abode creates difficulties in securing mortgages and other finance. At the moment Traveller families often rely on informal in-family loan processes, especially concerning land to live on. However, such informal support mechanisms will be placed under strain under the government's new accommodation policies. As once local authorities identify land (Planning Circular 1/2006) for Traveller Site development the price will increase greatly and will be greater than the cost of land Travellers purchased in the past. Illiteracy can even cause difficulties in opening bank accounts. Some Travellers unable to secure credit from mainstream lenders are seeking credit from creditors who charge higher interest rates. Some Travellers are also falling into debt as a result of their illiteracy and lack of numeracy which means their household budgeting skills in some cases are such that they lead to debt accumulation. A lack of awareness and literacy also means that Travellers are not always aware of their rights or benefits they are entitled to, again plunging some families into debt.

### **The Economic Impact of Living on Traveller Sites and in Housing**

County council and RSL-owned sites, have been brought under a system of regulation so that the amount of housing benefit payable is less than the economic rent, many existing sites are now loss-making, and there is no incentive for social landlords to develop new sites where the rents would need to be higher if they cannot recover the amounts from tenants who are on benefit. Sometimes because of the number of benefit claimants on sites some landlords are maximising the possible chargeable rents. Niner in her report for the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 'The Provision and Condition of Local Authority Sites, 2002' indicates that the rental costs of some sites could create major challenges to families trying to come off benefit and seeking employment. Research carried out for the Department for Work and Pensions led to a recommendation that the allowable rent for benefit purposes on all Gypsy sites should be increased by 15 pounds per pitch to reflect the cost of management on the site, depending on its attainment of quality standards for maintenance and health and safety. To date this recommendation has not been implemented.

Some families living on rent paying sites are also being adversely affected by the high utility costs that exist on some sites, where Travellers are paying higher rates for electricity and other utilities than occupants of bricks and mortar accommodation (CRE, 'Common Ground', 2006, 104).

There has been increasing pressure for health and safety reasons or the shortage of development space to limit or ban economic practices on Travellers' pitches on rental sites, a development though which is again causing hardship as Travellers find it difficult to find alternative space to operate these activities.

The shortage of Traveller sites has led to a growing number of Travellers moving into housing. Housing though has had a negative impact for many Travellers as it has in some cases undermined the Traveller economy and traditional economic practices. Service providers have failed to identify the scale of this problem or develop effective strategies to assist.

## **Strategies to Tackle Gypsy and Traveller Economic Exclusion**

### **Education**

#### **Key question – How can the high drop out rate in secondary school for Gypsy and Traveller pupils be reversed?**

The employment of Traveller classroom assistants has played an important role in improving relations between home and school and creating positive role models (For more information contact Greenwich and Cambridgeshire Traveller Education Service). The Department for Children, Schools and Families also recommends the appointment of school governors from the Traveller community (Ofsted, Aiming High, 2003). This has been successfully carried out in Essex where two Irish Travellers sit on the governing body at Cray's Hill Primary School. 'Working relationships' between Travellers and schools, helps develop trust and a sense of 'ownership' of and 'buy in' in the formal education process

for Travellers.

In Central/Eastern Europe peer mentoring schemes have helped Roma pupils stay at school by linking young pupils with older Roma pupils who have successfully stayed on at school. This scheme sometimes referred to as a 'buddy programme' provides support and encouragement to stay in school.

In Key Stage 4 (pupils aged 14 to 16) some schools have been able to retain Gypsy and Traveller pupils at school through extended work experience which allows pupils to spend significant time in learning/training programmes with employers and attending school on a reduced timetable. In some areas Connexions advisers have played a role in maintaining Gypsy and Traveller pupils' interest and involvement in education/training. The Haringey Travelling People's Team and London Gypsy and Traveller Unit were able to organise a number of initiatives that adapted the mainstream connexions service to make it more inclusive to Travellers (see appendix).

### **Training and Employment**

**Key Question – How can the skills deficit some young Travellers face be challenged?**

#### **Initiatives in the Republic of Ireland**

Senior Traveller Training Centres were established in the Republic of Ireland in 1974 to provide basic compensatory education for Travellers between the ages of 15 and 25. There is a network of thirty-three centres throughout the country. The aim of the centres is to provide Travellers with the skills required to successfully make the transition to work.

The target group is people who have left school with either minimal or no qualifications, however. Particular effort is made to encourage parents on to the programme as it is argued that this can impact on their children's subsequent participation in schooling. The programme is aided by the European Social Fund.

The administration of these Centres is the sole responsibility of the Department of Education and Science. The centres seek to impart the essential skills of literacy, numeracy, social / life skills, woodwork, metalwork and home economics, among many others, for Travellers who have left school after primary level or who may not have gone to school at all.

The programme is delivered in a 44-week duration over two years and this training period can be extended if necessary to facilitate access to Leaving Cert (equivalent to A levels) qualifications or equivalent. The programme is designed to be flexible to respond to the needs, talents and interests identified by Travellers.

Local referrals networks play a key role to play in the successful delivery of the programmes in Centres, links with schools, youth organisations, the probation services, the Juvenile Liaison Service, EWS and the Health Service are important

in ensuring that those in need have access to appropriate programmes

FÁS (Training and Employment Authority – in the Republic of Ireland) were invited by the Department of Enterprise, Trade & Employment to develop a special initiative to explore practical approaches to redressing the imbalance in Traveller unemployment and support Travellers already engaged in the Traveller economy and provide a Special Training Fund (small grants) to address the training needs of adult Travellers.

A pilot scheme was developed that focused on Travellers' access into employment, enterprise development and training. Four pilot regions were targeted - Clare, Cork, Dublin and Galway, while the Special Training Fund focused on the training needs of adult Travellers nationally. In 2007, FÁS proposed to facilitate the expansion of the initiative for Travellers to other counties and to develop the 4 pilot regions for a further two years in order to commence mainstreaming key aspects of the work.

Traveller women have been trained as Community Health Workers in Ireland. This was a project that was developed by Pavee Point in partnership with the Eastern Health Board (1994) Part of the work of this project was to train Traveller women to work as health-care workers in their own communities. The project was evaluated and deemed a success. Sheffield University research also refers to it as a good model of practice. This programme has now been rolled out across Ireland (Traveller Primary Health Care – Qualitative Evaluation (Carried out by Community Consultants for the Traveller Health Unit in HSE South, June 2005). The involvement of Travellers in projects can therefore address not only the health or education needs of Travellers but by direct involvement create employment and empowerment opportunities.

### **The Traveller Internship pilot programme**

The FÁS (Irish Training and Employment Authority) Community Employment Programme has enabled Travellers to take up 'apprentice' community work positions and other roles within their community. The High Level Group in its report in 2006 made a number of recommendations, including that departments and state agencies should be directed to make work placement opportunities for Travellers and that the Department of Finance should develop in consultation with Traveller organisations and the Appointments Service initiatives to help Travellers obtain public service employment. The Traveller Internship pilot programme was established to improve pathways for Travellers' entry to the civil and public service. This programme is currently being evaluated.

The Council of Europe offers a three month Roma internship programme for Roma/Gypsies who have completed secondary education/preferably university or equivalent level. Experience as social workers and mediators/advisors on Roma issues is also considered as useful experience for entry into the scheme.

### **Schemes in the United Kingdom**

In the UK Travellers have benefited from a number of successful employment and training initiatives.

- Driving theory courses – Haringey Travelling People’s Team (in association with CARA Housing and Haringey Libraries) and Brent Irish Advisory Group. The course helps Travellers gain their driving license and is important in raising confidence and wider access to employment.
- On site child care training courses at the Westway Travellers’ Site community centre.
- The Brent Irish Advisory Service (BIAS) organised a number of "Taster" courses with the college of North West London for young Travellers. A significant number went on to train as welders, hairdressers etc.
- BIAS also recruited mentors from the Traveller and non Traveller community and offered career advice to young Travellers unsure about what to do next in their lives.
- Friends Families and Travellers carried out a woodland skills training course for Travellers that involved them in coppice development. Evaluation revealed that a significant number secured employment or further training after completing the course (Save the Children, 2001, 272).
- The BOSS (Building One Stop Shop) has been successful in Brent in helping young Travellers secure places in mainstream training programmes.

However, such initiatives have unlike in Ireland been localised and lack mechanisms to exchange and disseminate good practice. In the UK where Gypsies and Travellers have been referred to employment and training schemes they have tended to be mainstream courses not focused or tailored to the needs of Gypsies and Travellers. Research found that in West Belfast there was a failure by mainstream training initiatives to attract Travellers compared to highly successful culturally appropriate schemes being implemented in Europe and the Republic of Ireland (Traveller People in West Belfast, Nonan, 1994). The same observation may be applicable to the rest of the UK. In a piece of research commissioned by the UK Irish Employment and Training Consortium Gaffney states “Irish Travellers are a group with very specific needs requiring a highly tailored approach” (Gaffney, 2000, 13). However, in the UK such an approach has rarely materialised.

There is some evidence however to indicate that Travellers have benefited under mainstream schemes such as ‘New Start’ and New Futures’, some Travellers have enrolled at colleges and completed NVQ courses in skills such as bricklaying and hairdressing (Save the Children, 2001, 271).

The establishment of a forum in the UK to help disseminate good practice and to coordinate tailored employment and training programmes for Travellers and or increase the take up of mainstream training and employment initiatives would be

welcome.

### **Social Services and Support Agencies**

#### **Key Question - How can Gypsies and Travellers be made aware of their welfare entitlements and supported to access them?**

Gypsies and Travellers' awareness of benefits and entitlements has improved as a result of the development on on-site support services and advice centres. This might be where communal Traveller site buildings are used for one day a week to give advice and support to Travellers.

Advice Centres like the Bell Farm Christian Centre (Hillingdon) have developed successful 'drop in' centres for Travellers where advice and support is given. Local Traveller support groups like the York Travellers' Trust have been successful in giving welfare advice including advice in dealing with debt and developing budgeting skills.

Citizen Advice Bureaus with advice and training from the Traveller group Friends Families and Travellers have developed their expertise at making Travellers aware of and able to access their welfare entitlements.

### **National Policy**

#### **Key Questions – How can Gypsies and Travellers be assisted to cope with the impact of new national policies that may impact on their economic practices?**

##### **The Netherlands – 'Adapt'**

In the Netherlands in response to the End of Life Vehicle Directive issued by the European Commission, which was believed would impact heavily on Travellers in the Netherlands, led to the establishment of the 'Adapt' Training Programme. The 'Adapt' programme provided assistance and training for Travellers to engage in the regulated system and procedures for car recycling in the Netherlands. Support measures included:

Helpdesk advice for operators

Advice meetings

Training courses re: management and fulfilling the requirements of procedures

Social guidance and advice

Assistance with administrative functions

In the UK such initiatives have not been introduced to assist Gypsies and Travellers when central government has introduced new policies that heavily impact on this group as was the case with the Department for Trade Industry

restrictions placed on doorstep selling and ‘cold calling’

A programme like ‘Adapt’ could also be utilised to help Gypsy and Traveller businesses expand and develop.

### **How can Gypsies and Travellers be more involved in the policy formulation and decision making process on issues concerning economic inclusion?**

The Council of Europe gave consideration to this question in 2001 (Recommendation (2001 -17) on improving the economic and employment situation of Roma/Gypsies and Travellers in Europe) and stated that Roma/Gypsy communities and organisations should participate fully in the processes of designing, implementing and monitoring programmes and policies aimed at improving their economic and employment situation.

#### Eastern/Central Europe

The Decade of Roma Inclusion, 2005-2015, is an initiative adopted by eight countries in Central and Southeast Europe, and supported by the international community. It represents the first cooperative effort to change the lives of Roma in Europe. An action framework for governments, the Decade will monitor progress in accelerating social inclusion and improving the economic and social status of Roma across the region. Roma participation is a core value of the Decade. Roma representatives and civil society organizations are involved in every stage. Roma shaped and defined the vision from the outset and have been involved in the Steering Committee and preparation of country action plans. Roma civil society groups and experts identified policy priorities and played a key role in defining Decade goals and targets. Roma participation is believed to be central to regular oversight and monitoring of the process over the next ten years.

#### The United Kingdom

Central Government initiatives to involve Gypsies and Travellers in issues of economic inclusion may benefit from looking at the models of involvement developed by the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) – which focus on accommodation issues and involves twice yearly meetings between civil servants and Gypsy and Traveller representatives to discuss issues of importance and the progress of policies. These meetings have also involved government ministers. Such meetings also take place in a number of regions and are coordinated by CLG officers working in government regional offices. This consultation framework and policies on Traveller accommodation grew from an initial policy review process that started in 2003. The All Party Parliamentary Group for Traveller Law Reform (Chair Julie Morgan MP) has been a useful funnel for information and support into the wider political process for these initiatives and has been especially successful at involving Gypsies and Travellers in its meetings and events.

## **At a local level how can Gypsies and Travellers be supported to Achieve Economic Inclusion?**

Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) exist in nearly all local authority areas in England and Wales. They bring together representatives from the local statutory, voluntary, community and private sectors to address local problems, allocate funding, discuss strategies and initiatives. They aim to encourage joint working, and community involvement and prevent 'silo working' (i.e different agencies that share aims working in isolation) with the general aim of ensuring resources are better allocated at a local level. LSPs could be utilised at a local level to address the issue of Traveller economic inclusion.

**We want your opinion - The Irish Traveller Movement is asking for Travellers and service providers to comment on some of the questions raised in this paper and tell us about successful projects. This feedback will be used to further develop this paper and to press for policy change. We also hope to include an appendix with detailed case studies of projects that have been successful in raising Traveller economic inclusion.**

Some questions for consideration:

- Can mainstream training and employment services adequately give Gypsies and Travellers the support they require or is there a need for tailored and focused projects for Gypsies and Travellers? Or is it a case that there is a role for both according to Traveller needs?
- This paper suggests that there is a lack of sharing and awareness of good practice in the UK. How can a forum in the UK be established to help disseminate good practice?
- Could a forum on Traveller economic inclusion include civil servants from key departments including the Departments for Education, Work and Pensions and Communities and Local Government be extended to include Traveller representatives and meet at a local and national level like the Communities and Local Government forums?

### **Areas of assistance and debate**

- Start up programmes for Traveller businesses

- Support to develop existing businesses
- Securing mortgages
- Training and securing employment
- Improved advice on benefit entitlement
- Designing and managing sites to assist in improving Traveller economic inclusion
- Identifying ways by which Traveller nomadism and traditional skills such as recycling can be more effectively harnessed by the mainstream economy
- The exploration of initiatives introduced in the Republic of Ireland, the Netherlands and other countries and transferring good practice initiatives to the UK.
- The establishment by the DWP of a Task Force (similar to the DCLG Gypsy and Traveller Task Force) to monitor new initiatives and propose new ones.

**Send your comments by the 5th October 2007 to:**

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