An examination of the Barriers to Employment for travellers in County Kilkenny

February 2020

Executive Summary

This report has been funded by The Irish Human Rights & Equality Commission & the Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme through Kilkenny Leader Partnership and Kilkenny Traveller Community Movement (KTCM). The report was commissioned to examine the barriers to employment and poor levels of educational achievement demonstrated throughout the Traveller community in County Kilkenny. The material gathered in this report is limited to the Kilkenny region only and has been complied throughout October to December of 2019 through a combination of consultations and interviews with the Traveller community, organisations and agencies with whom travellers interact, employers, academic experts and other stakeholders.

There are 557 Travellers living in the County Kilkenny area, including urban and rural dwellers, with a significant percentage located on two sites in Kilkenny city. As part of the research for this report, through our questioning with stakeholders there is an agreed list of areas of concern among the Traveller community in relation to education and employment. They are as follows:

 Early school leaving among travellers in County Kilkenny continues, there seems to be little tracking of children who leave school early. There is a lot of frustration among the community that the visiting teacher exclusively for the Traveller community was removed and there was unanimous agreement that the reinstatement of this position would be major step in improving education attendance and attainment.

There is anecdotal evidence that low expectations for Travellers in schools are leading to poor attainment levels in both primary and post primary education. Higher expectations in class would offer significantly longer-term potential for students to gain the levels of education and understanding of its importance to their future success. Ensuring that expectations are not lowered based on ethnicity while developing parental engagement with the school system should lead to increased interaction with schools and the attainment of greater levels of education.

There is continuing poor literacy levels in the two housing schemes in Kilkenny which has remained despite supports in place. Many parents do not have a great appreciation of the benefits of education and training and how necessary it is for young people to survive and prosper in life. However in the community at large there is evidence that among younger more integrated parents there is a growing appreciation of the importance of school attendance for their children.

At post primary level the Traveller community in Kilkenny tends to be located in one particular school. It is not clear whether this school has the resources required to deal with the issues that this brings. Consequently there is a poor transfer to third level institutions among the Traveller community in Kilkenny, this is exasperated in relation to the provision of further education of girls in the Traveller community as many families would not agree to young girls attending college away from home.

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There are very low levels of employment among Travellers in Kilkenny mirroring the situation nationally. This is compounded by a resistance among some Community Employment and other schemes to engage young Travellers, thereby removing an important first step into employment for the community. There is also a low take up of training opportunities among the Traveller community due to a combination of reasons such as poor literacy, poor financial incentives for young married couples and lack of suitable places. Most young members of the Traveller community looking for training after leaving school will attend Kilkenny Employment for Youth (KEY). It is not clear whether there is a sufficient resource to support (KEY) in this work. In terms of accessing employment such as apprenticeships most Travellers would not know or have contact within the building industry and would require a placement service to gain access to these positions.

There is a lack of a joint up interagency approach to tackling these issues. The issues of low education attainment and high employment among the community are long term and persistent. Tacking this problem will require a sustained effort and considerable resources from all agencies with responsibility for this work. There needs to be a forum or program of work which would facilitate interagency cooperation on these issues.

There is a concern among many stakeholders that if existing problems in relation to education and employment are not tackled, persistent long-term unemployment and lack of opportunity will lead to addiction and an increase of criminal activity within the community.

The Traveller community in Kilkenny is not homogeneous and should not be treated as such. Many Traveller parents particularly in rural areas are more aware of the importance of education for their children. The report identifies a small but significant cultural shift that is showing a growth of employment opportunities for certain elements of the Traveller community in County Kilkenny, although continued work is necessary if the attitudes of potential employers are to be changed.

Finally, the research demonstrates the importance of a representative structure for Travellers such as the Kilkenny Traveller Community Movement (KTCM) and supporting organisations such as Kilkenny Leader Partnership and the positive effects that these agencies and support workers have on the Traveller community in Kilkenny in general.

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Acknowledgements

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Introduction

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1. Introduction

This research examines the barriers to employment and low levels of educational attainment in County Kilkenny for the Traveller community. It covers the time period from October 2019 – December 2019 and includes perspectives of travellers, agency workers, social care personnel, educational experts and other relevant stakeholders.

This report is divided into sections, starting with a methodology section, outlining the research methods employed.

The four main sections are:

- Traveller Context
- Stakeholders
- Employers
- Recommendations & Conclusion

This report has been funded by The Irish Human Rights & Equality Commission & SICAP through Kilkenny Leader Partnership and Kilkenny Traveller Community Movement.

The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission exists to promote and protect human rights and equality in Ireland and build a culture of respect for human rights, equality and intercultural understanding in the State.

Kilkenny Leader Partnership (KLP), is charged with leading and facilitating the creation of an integrated local development strategy to improve the economic, social and cultural quality of life of the people, communities and small enterprises at all County Kilkenny.

The Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) 2018-2022 is funded by the Irish Government through the Department of Rural and Community Development and co-funded by the European Social Fund under the Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning (PEIL) 2014-2020 (Pobal, 2018).

SICAP addresses high and persistent levels of deprivation through targeted and innovative, locally-led approaches. It supports disadvantaged communities and individuals including unemployed people, people living in deprived areas, people with disabilities, single parent families, people on a low income, members of the Traveller and Roma community and other disadvantaged groups (SICAP, 2018).

Statement of Research Ethics

A key component was that participation was completely voluntary, based on informed consent. During the fieldwork, the researcher was mindful of issues regarding invasion of privacy among the community and stakeholders alike. Anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed to all participants, along with the right to withdraw their participation in the research at any stage.

Key Objectives of the Research

The key objective of this research was to gather the experiences of travellers in County Kilkenny in relation to the educational system and employment opportunities through focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews. It is central to this study that the experiences of the Traveller are discovered through the Traveller and in their own words.

2
Methodology

" **It's all in the name."**

2. Methodology

For this research project, both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods were employed, including limited desk research. This research is based on qualitative and quantitative research. The collection of data at source that recorded the lived experiences of travellers in County Kilkenny was paramount to ensure quality of information. This data required collection from both Traveller sites in Kilkenny City in conjunction with other settled travellers across the county.

The research objectives and scope were set out at the outset and guided the examination.

To produce a report that examines the possible barriers to employment and educational opportunities in County Kilkenny and to make recommendations for the way forward for travellers in County Kilkenny.

Some of the specific questions that were asked to travellers included:

- Have you been employed in the last 12 months?
- Have you looked for employment in the last 12 months?
- Have you completed a training course?
- What areas of work are you interested in?

Some of the specific questions that were asked to agency personnel included

- What has been your biggest challenges when dealing with travellers?
- What do you think the barriers to employment are?
- What have been the positive aspects you have encountered when dealing with travellers?
- What areas would you like to see addressed that you have positive outcomes for travellers?

Some of the specific questions that were asked to employers included

- Have you ever employed a Traveller?
- If not, why not?
- What would stop you hiring a Traveller?
- What do you think are the barriers to employment for travellers in County Kilkenny?

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2.1 Rationale of Methodology

The qualitative section of the research was conducted using a phenomenological approach, for many reasons. A phenomenological approach is concerned with the "lived experiences" of the people involved (Groenewald, 2004; Greene, 1997).

This is an approach that concentrates on the study of consciousness and the objects of direct experience, this approach was chosen due to the request from Kilkenny Leader Partnership and Kilkenny Traveller Community Movement to ensure travellers from Kilkenny were heard for this project and in their own words. This approach examines the experiences of an individual from their perspective (Welman & Kruger, 1999). It is a paradigm that gives importance to subjectivity and personal interpretation (Lester, 1999). This approach is also helpful in understanding personal experiences of individuals and examining their motivations and actions without any taken-for-granted assumptions (Lester, 1999; Taylor et al., 2016). Phenomenological research is very efficient at bringing to the fore the experiences of individuals (Lester, 1999).

Within the human sphere, phenomenological research design translates into gathering "deep" information and perceptions through inductive, qualitative methods (Lester, 1999). Human experience is meaningful to those who live it, and that meaning can be captured by the researcher, without distortion (Dukes, 1984).

Adoption of this research philosophy for this study ensures that the personal experiences of the Traveller in County Kilkenny is heard, as it is that voice that will ultimately answer the research question – what are the barriers to employment and education for the Traveller community in Kilkenny.

2.2 Qualitative Data Collection

A series of semi structured interviews and focus groups were conducted with travellers, Traveller volunteer groups, inter agency personnel, employers, educational experts, social agencies such as youth groups and The Gardai over a period of three months. All participants were assured of anonymity and confidentiality and no names were recorded in the interviews or the focus groups. Interview notes were taken, then transcribed using numbers only with original scripts shredded.

IN GROUP	NO OF PARTICIPANTS	RESEARCH METHODS
Travellers	8	Focus Group 1
Travellers	12	Focus Group 2
Travellers	20	Semi Structured Interviews
Public Health Nurses	3	Semi Structured Interviews
Educational Experts (Primary & Post Primary)	12	Semi Structured Interviews
Early Years Educators	2	Semi Structured Interview
Agency Personnel	18	Semi Structured Interviews

A total of 75 people was interviewed for this research. Interviews ranged in length from one hour to three hours per person, with the focus groups taking 2.5 hours and 2 hours respectively.

2.3 Quantitative Data Collection

The first stage of quantitative data collection involved the completion of My Journey - a distance travelled tool. This questionnaire was distributed to 20 travellers. This distance travelled tool was specifically designed for this research project and was informed by the objectives and scope of the initial, and by the researchers review and subsequent changes made after conducting a pilot scheme.

The following questions were asked to all participants:

1. I know where to look for any courses that I would like to do

2. I enjoyed my time in school

3. I am still in contact with friends that I made in school

4. I have my own smart phone

5. I communicate with my friends online

6. I can drive or I am taking driving lessons at present (or plan to in the near future)

7. I have already attended a course

8. If you attended a course, did you enjoy it?

9. I know the areas that I would like to work in

10. I like to try new things/challenges

11. I feel confident in larger groups (possible education-based groups)

12. I have specific goals in life that I want to achieve

13. I am happy to look at all the courses that may advance my goals in life

14. I am comfortable interacting with people I do not know (possibly a boss)

15. I feel I have the right skills to complete a course

16. I know that if I start a course (even part-time) that I will finish it

17. I would ask for help with a course if I needed it

18. I feel part of a social group

19. I have someone that I can count on for support around my personal development (possibly education)

20. I feel ready to take the next steps towards my goal

3. Traveller Context Nationally

The Equal Status Act 2000 defines the term "Traveller community" as the community of people who are commonly called Travellers and who are identified (both by themselves and by others) as people with a shared history, culture and traditions including, historically, a nomadic way of life on the island of Ireland. There are at least 30,987 Travellers in Ireland (2016), compared to 29,495 in 2011 (Census, 2016). Travellers and their culture have had a long and varied history and in March 2017 travellers were formally recognized as an ethnic minority. They have historically suffered from discrimination, poverty, social exclusion, limited educational opportunities, difficulties in the labour market and poor health, issues which have been well documented (Census, 2016). In 2019 these issues remain; however, this report will highlight those areas focused on employment and education only. The National Traveller/Roma Integration Strategy (2017 - 2021), informs policy from a National level, citing that Travellers and Roma are among the most disadvantaged and marginalised people in Ireland. In fact, there are several anti-discrimination and legislative protections (the Prohibition of Incitement to Hatred Act 1989, the Unfair Dismissals Acts 1977, the Employment Equality Acts and the Equal Status Acts) which specifically identifies Travellers by name as a group that should be protected.

In 2006 the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government established "Traveller Interagency Groups" (TIGs) to help manage and improve the quality of services at a local level. The Traveller Interagency Group is designed to bring together all the stakeholders in the designated area such as representatives of the Traveller community itself, County Councils, An Garda Síochána, Youth/Health Services and other agencies.

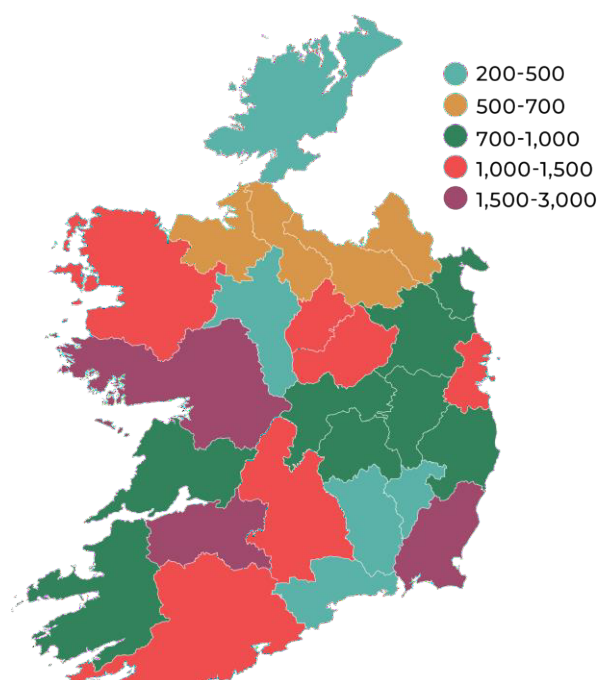Travellers make up

0.7%

of the total population in Ireland.

It's a Fact!

Only 2%

Of travellers are aged over 65.

30,987

Travellers currently live in Ireland.

Legend: 200-500, 500-700, 700-1,000, 1,000-1,500, 1,500-3,000

Health and Accommodation

Within the Traveller community there is also a reported higher rate of mental health problems. In addition to these mental health problems, the suicide rate is almost seven times higher among Traveller males than in the general population (Dept of Justice, 2017). There are also poor educational outcomes, due to poor completion rates of Traveller children reported from a 2019 report on Education inequality & disadvantage and Barriers to Education. Travellers themselves continue to raise issues around subjects such as education, employment, mental health, and discrimination. In fact, the Census of 2016 reflects these complex issues, with just 451 Irish Traveller males aged 65 or over representing just 2.9% of the total, which is significantly lower than the general population percentage of 12.6% of the total. Combined with the percentage of Irish travellers who were aged 14 or under in 2016, with the equivalent rate for the general population at 21.4% demonstrates the age profile generally for the Traveller community. The Traveller accommodation programme, 2014-2018 points out that the structure of the Traveller population is quite different from the general population, which, coupled with early marriage, creates a housing stress point for newly-forming families in need of accommodation and subsequently educational stresses for the future. There has been a significant increase in the population of Irish travellers in County Kilkenny and an age-level analysis of this population reveals that over half are under 20 years of age.

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Rural v Urban

Urban/Rural Divide

There is also an urban rural divide among the Traveller community with 78.6% living in an urban setting compared to 62.4% of the general population. The Economic and Social Research Institute issued a research paper entitled A Social Portrait of Travellers in Ireland (2017) which was funded by the Department of Justice and Equality, reported that Travellers stand out as a group that experiences extreme disadvantage in terms of employment, housing and health and that faces exceptionally strong level of prejudice. In fact, it cites 64% of the general population reject travellers based on their "way of life" and 80% of people would be reluctant to buy a house next door to a Traveller.

As part of the local government reforms, County Kilkenny has been divided into 4 electoral areas and 3 Municipal Districts, namely Castlecomer Municipal District, Kilkenny City Municipal District and Piltown Municipal District (Local Economic Community Plan, 2016)

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3.1 The Traveller Community in County Kilkenny

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3.2 Statistical profile of Travellers in Kilkenny

There are 557 Travellers in Co Kilkenny with the total population in the county at 99,232. (Central Statistics Office, 2016). The Traveller population has increased by 12.8% since the last Census in 2011. The National Traveller population was enumerated at 30,987, which also reflects an increase of 5.1% from the 2011 Census. This figure of 30,987 for travellers represents 0.7% of the general population. At the last count by the Kilkenny County Council (2018) there was a total of 209 Traveller families in County Kilkenny.

There were 10,653 travellers in the labour force in 2016 and of these 8,541 were unemployed, giving an unemployment rate of 80.2%. Irish travellers continue to have higher rates of disability than the

general population with almost 1 in 5 Travellers (19.2%) categorised as having a disability in 2016, up from 17.5% in 2011.

- There are 112 households that live in a caravan or mobile home in Kilkenny which represents 260 persons (although all may not be travellers)
- In Kilkenny city & environs there is a concentration of Travellers compared to rural areas in the county. There are two main Traveller sites (Wetlands and Hebron) at each end of the city with a small dispersal of travellers settled in the city.
- There is also an urban rural divide among the Traveller community with 78.6% living in an urban setting compared to 62.4% of the general population.
- There are 21.4% of travellers living in a rural area compared to 37.6% of the general population.
- There are travellers located county wide in areas such as Callan, Urlingford, Bennettsbridge, Rosbercon among others.
- Most low-density rural areas in Co. Kilkenny have no Traveller population.

Travellers were more urbanised than the general population with nearly 8 in 10 (78.6%) living in cities or towns (1,500 or more), compared with 62.4 per cent of the total population. The visibility of the two Traveller sites, along with the concentration of travellers in Kilkenny City has several advantages. For the Traveller community to access supports and those supports can access these sites quickly from most locations in the city.

There are

557 Travellers

living in Kilkenny.

They make up

0.57%

of the Kilkenny County population.

50%

are aged less than 25 years.

As demonstrated the profile of the Traveller community is quite different from the national profile. The Traveller population is young with 39.7% under the age of 14 in 2016, and only 451 Irish Traveller males over the age of 65 a feature of much lower life expectancy. Along with a young population in the Traveller community in Kilkenny there is significant poverty experienced. Although County Kilkenny enjoys a certain level of affluence there are particular groups in poverty and at risk of poverty. To measure levels of deprivation the Pobal HP Deprivation Index Haase and Pratschke (2012) is used. This is a score that given to the area based on a national average of zero and ranging from approximately -35 (being the most disadvantaged) to +35 (being the most affluent). A deprivation index of items and activities that are generally taken to be the norm in a particular society is compiled; people who are denied, through lack of income, items or activities on this list are regarded as experiencing relative deprivation (Local Economic Community Plan, 2016)

1.	Two pairs of shoes
2.	A warm waterproof
3.	Buy new, not second-hand clothes
4.	Eat meals with meat, chicken, fish (or vegetarian equivalent) every second day
5.	Have a roast joint or its equivalent once a week
6.	Had to go without heating during the last year through lack of money
7.	Keep the home adequately warm
8.	Buy presents for family or friends at least once a year
9.	Replace any worn out furniture
10.	Have family or friends for a drink or meal once a month
11.	Have a morning, afternoon or evening out in the last fortnight, for entertainment

Electoral areas within County Kilkenny which have the highest deprivation ratings referenced from the 2011 Pobal HP Deprivation Index.

| 1 | Urlingford | -12.1% |
2	Ferrybank	-11.2%
3	Freshford	-9.6%
4	Graiguenamanagh	-9.4%
5	Clogh	-9%
6	Castlecomer	-7.69%
7	Callan Urban	-7.16%
8	Kilkenny Urban 1	-4.73%
9	Kilkenny Urban 2	-0.9%

Poverty has a negative effect on people's quality of life. Poverty can impact the opportunities afforded to them and on their ability to fully participate in society. It can be generational and can be difficult to break the cycle. In particular, poverty can affect a young person future. If they are growing up in poverty, they are more likely to be early school leavers, remain unemployed and subsequently become poor as adults and the cycle remains for the next generation (Local Economic Community Plan, 2016).

It should be noted that the more rural based Traveller community that participated in this research were based in the areas or Urlingford, Castlecomer, Callan and urban Kilkenny – all electoral areas that have the highest deprivation ratings referenced from the Pobal HP Deprivation Index. Turning to the present, the county council has made its own assessments of need in the county. A key instrument is the Local Economic Community Plan (LECP) baseline report, but its focus was entirely on the population and location of the Traveller community. The actual plan noted that submissions to the council had identified the Traveller and Roma community as a priority group and that there was a need for data to capture their situation. The plan identified the need to support and encourage the participation of the Traveller community and other marginalized and disadvantaged groups. Specific needs were identified in the fields of health (information and the take-up of medical cards), accommodation, cultural awareness programmes, tackling discrimination and men's sheds.

Traveller Population around County Kilkenny (Census2011)

Electoral Areas	Census 2006	Census 2011
Kilkenny City (urban areas & rural environs)	156	263
Piltown	111	84
Ballyragget	31	40
Thomastown	45	86
Callan (urban areas & rural environs)	18	10
Total	**361**	**483**

Irish Travellers in County Kilkenny
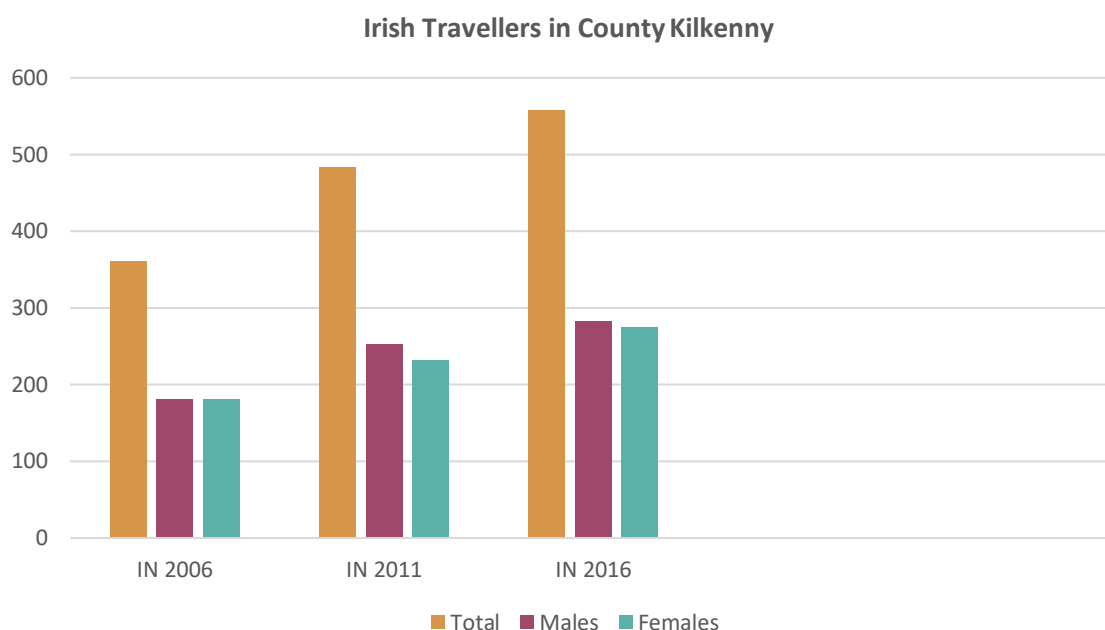
4
Research

"My medical card is gold."

4. Research

Support workers in Kilkenny are thought very highly of in the Traveller community in general. Trust levels were high for these employees and travellers reported being able to contact a support worker anytime and asking for whatever they needed. Different requests in areas for support did not necessarily go to the correct agency, rather the individual personal relationships that have be built up over many years outweigh the name over the door.

During the interview process there was a sense of disillusionment around the KTCM and KTIG structure from a small number of participants. Namely, the perceived lack of participation and engagement with the Traveller Interagency Group from KTCM. This was not a county wide issue by any means, rather focused in the urban areas of Kilkenny.

4.1 Traveller's Voice

For this research, many travellers were upfront and honest in saying that they were not looking for work "they were happy as they were" and most viewed looking after horses and dogs as a job for males. Culturally, females were expected to stay at home "and look after the children". Some travellers said there are people in their own community that "don't want to work – why would they - they're happy on the dole". Other travellers reported that "travellers see no benefit to work", especially if they "are doing something extra on the side" as this informal economy can augment existing social welfare payments for the individual and their families. The autonomy that this type of economy affords the Traveller suits their culture and home life. If a Traveller attends a training course it is viewed as work. This may be due to the fact they have been financially rewarded to take part in these courses historically. Some of what the travellers said when asked why are you not working. Some of the responses were:

"Don't paint us all with the one brush – its discrimination"

"It's all in the name"

"What can you do for me - what will I get if I work?"

"My medical card is gold"

"Losing my medical card would totally stop me taking a job"

"There is a lack of understanding on what you're entitled to"

"I have enough to be doing"

"I'm not taking any chances to lose anything - do you know how long it takes to get that stuff back"

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One Traveller said there is no possibility of them ever getting a job as they are seen as "lazy thieves" to employers as a whole. There is a feeling generally that the individual is judged on the whole groups 'activities, even though they may have no connection to some of the smaller sub groups.

Another Traveller said that "travellers are getting too much for nothing" when asked why travellers are not working in Kilkenny. He said, "why would they bother – everything is given to them?" Most travellers are not looking for work due to the negative impressions that employers have on the community as a whole. This Traveller said "they (travellers) have stopped looking and depend on the state for everything"

Access to a gym or an indoor handball alley was an area of concern to travellers that were interviewed when asked questions in relation to employment. This included both focus groups and individual interviews. Culturally, working out was important to males in the community as it can demonstrate their strength within the community. "I can't get into a gym anywhere – it's not my fault if there were problems before". Although, support workers stress the importance of access to these facilities, not just for health and wellbeing but to develop a sense of community and integration. The support worker said "I can't get them in anywhere – all I'm hearing is membership is full or membership is closed. Travellers said that this was an issue for them and focused on memberships for gyms when asked again about employment.

There is a lack of gender equality within the community, with females assuming the role of childcare and cleaning while men are left to "do men's jobs". These roles are defined among the community themselves as men look after the horses and the dogs, which is also seen as their job. Culturally, a lack of the values that surround adolescence was observed. Children once they have reached the age of the Junior Certificate level are for the most part allowed leave school and for females this can suggest early marriage, and subsequently little or no employment prospects.

4.1.1 Distance Travelled Tool
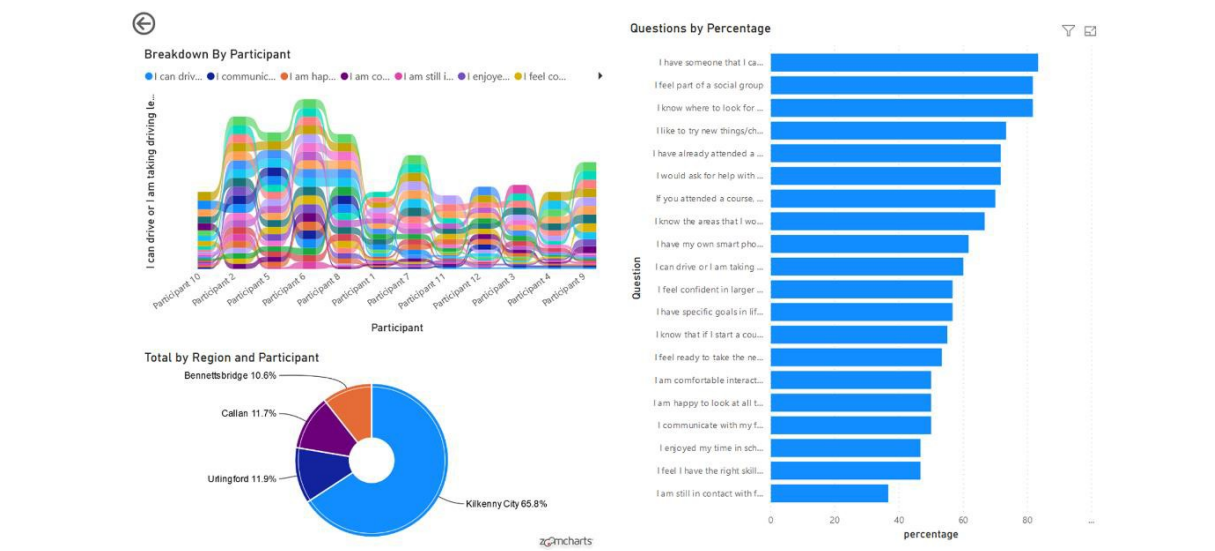
4.1.2 Lack of defined goals

Quite strikingly, two of the young males interviewed for this project had not been asked previously was were their ambitions for their lives – what were they interested in. They were taken aback by the question and were unable to verbalise what they would like to do in the future. Both had just completed their schooling, both unable to read and write to the required standard for their age.

Young male travellers in both focus groups and individual one to one interviews demonstrated a lack of decision making as to what they would like to do for employment.

When answering the question "What would you like to do next?" Two 16-year-old males both said: "We've never thought about that before – we'll probably just get a place in KEY".

Asked by the interviewer if they would like to do a course or seek employment the other young male said "We'll just go to KEY – that is fine for me and him".

4.1.3 Technology

Of the 20 participants surveyed for the Distance Travelled Tool all had a smart phone with the exception of one Traveller who had an older phone. This smart phone technology has different uses for the males and females within the community.

Females have stricter rules around using applications such as Instagram, with one interviewee saying, "Instagram is evil for young ones – people on it can mess with your pictures". This was due to the image-based nature of the application and these restrictions were placed on the females only by their fathers. Males did not seem to have the same controls placed on them with the younger males engaging with a number of different sites. "These digital natives are beginning to show signs of a slow generational improvement with improved literacy and numeracy online only while engaging with

certain technology. Travellers negotiated Facebook and Instagram with little or no problem, using images to navigate their way around.

4.2 Stakeholders & Agency Personnel

There were a small number of agency workers that refused to take part in this research paper. This was due to a perceived bias from the participant themselves and subsequently they declined to be interviewed.

There are many agencies that support the Traveller community in County Kilkenny. These supports whether educational, housing, health, training or informative are difficult to navigate due to the amount of them and understanding which agency is responsible for what as there are overlaps involved with certain agencies.

They was generally a sense of fatigue among the agency personnel that took part in this research. One participant stated that "the Traveller community are over supported as a group" and there "are no consequences whatsoever to their actions – they are a law onto themselves". This perceived over reliance on state subsidies was expressed from some other agency personnel interviewed, although this viewpoint was not held by all agency personnel interviewed. Those agency personnel that articulated this viewpoint wanted travellers themselves to take some amount of personal responsibility for their own situation. Agency personnel stated that they would like to see supports for travellers to remain the same and not be diminished, however, there should be no second chances.

One said; "If you don't turn up to your appointment you should go back to the end of the queue – as it is if you miss a hospital appointment"

Some support staff reported high levels of poor engagement which also led to the support worker themselves having difficulty is remaining positive and ensuring engagement on a consistent basis from the Traveller. There are reported high levels of "missed meetings" and "no-shows" from travellers even when the support staff member has gone to great lengths to ensure follow up and reminders have been given.

With staff saying; *"it's the same people over and over again"* and *"they're only playing the system".*

Engagement levels for some travellers seem to be adequate until the Traveller has to attend for training and/or employment, when issues around poor levels of reading and writing are reported to the support worker as a reason to not engage. There can be a disconnect between the agency and the Traveller community if the link (person) between both does not completely understand the culture of both. One participant said that "most people I work with don't get the culture, so they don't get the person in front of them". Another expert stated that; "there is a cultural gulf between how travellers live and organise their lives and how settled people life and organise their lives". This fundamental difference in how the Traveller community organise their lives can have a negative effect on placing travellers into employment if the agency representative does not understand the culture that they are working with.

There is also a perceived lack of communication between the travellers and the state bodies they interact with.

One agency employee said;

 "Everyone does a bit here and there" there is no common liaison between everyone (travellers) and all the other stakeholders".

An employee (state agency) said *"what I do on a day to day basis is in some ways not even related to my job, but what can I do?"*

The feeling that the Traveller community are over-supported was one that was expressed many times by agency personnel.

One employee said;

"There's nobody at the back of my house building a shed for my horse – if I had a horse".

"You have the same families time and time again".

There is also a number of agency personnel that go above and beyond for the travellers in Kilkenny, with work outside their remit. These are trusted within the community and have long term relationships build up over years.

One of these agency employees said;

"If I don't do it – who will?"

"I'd be as quick doing the job as I would be tracking down who could do the job".

A member of the Garda Síochána was interviewed for this research and they identified issues in relation to lack of integration within the community. There is little or no respect or fear around consequences for their actions, they feel that culturally there is no respect for law enforcement in Kilkenny and they said;

 "there is a lack of appreciation on the whole for what has been done for them".

There can be a sense of fatigue seen when dealing with those travellers that can cause trouble, saying; *"the way is set – what can we do to change it?"*

There is however a positive side to law enforcement involvement, where sports and activities are seen as a way to "get to know" younger travellers and try to have a positive influence on them in a "role model sense". This relationship building at a local level has paid dividends as the crime rate in Kilkenny, across all crimes committed, has fallen significantly over the five-year period from 2011 to 2015. There are many Garda initiatives that are being managed in Kilkenny to further help combat crime in the area. One of these initiatives is the focus (among others) on the relationships and that relationship building with community groups in the area (Local Economic Community Plan, 2016).

Feuds and the fighting among families can also be an issue for some support workers, in the areas of general communication as one worker said; "how to get my message across to them - how do I communicate with them when they don't even communicate with each other because they are fighting". Along with conflict in the family some support workers felt that literacy issues were not as

poor as reported by the Traveller and said; "it was an excuse to not engage or work – they have played the system very well". There is a lack of trust between the agency personnel and the Traveller community in general (with the exception of the small group of support workers) as demonstrated above.

What has worked very well in the opinion of some agency support staff was the driving licence initiative and the benefits to the community at large. This initiative was also praised by travellers themselves and was an important area of discussion during community visits.

4.3 Educational Barriers

Hannan suggests that: "educational disadvantage is leaving school early, without any qualifications or having failed the junior cycle examinations, or with disabling educational problems and minimal chances of employment" (Crooks, 1987, pp. 47- 48). Educational disadvantage means the "*denial of equal access to educational opportunities, the tendency to leave education at the first opportunity, and the hindrance of achievement by social and environmental factors*" (Mortimore & Blackstone, 1982).

Within all communities, employment is dependent on levels of education, literacy and numeracy. If these basic skills are not met, securing employment can prove difficult. While educational attainment in Ireland has been historically associated with social class, the provision of educational opportunities to all, regardless of class is imperative (Children & Young People's Services Committee, 2018). As the National Policy framework has emphasised the need to improve educational opportunities and attainment levels for young people there are many supports that are available in County Kilkenny. While educational attainment levels in County Kilkenny and the South East are below the national average, there are clusters of very high attainment levels in the North of the county.

There is also a correlation with higher levels of positive educational outcomes and engagement in rural areas as opposed to urban. One rural based Traveller said; "*there is so much less prejudice here than in Kilkenny city – if there's not loads of travellers in one school that helps too as the teacher can look after them more*".

Coupled with the correlation between a young person's educational journey and that of their parents, the CSO has published data on the educational levels of levels of mothers and the impact and importance of those on the young person. One of the travellers interviewed described how her mother and father were insistent that she finish school – during the interview it emerged that the family had been influenced by only one person that their aunt had encountered during work (not a teacher) and had thought her to read and write. The aunt then thought her mother and her mother then knew the importance of reading and writing. This generational and positive outcome all depended on one person taking the time to each the aunt in a way that was non-academic and while at work.

An education expert disclosed that there was a *"lack of expectations (academically) on Traveller students in a lot of classes, the student is not expected to do well so neither the teacher nor the student will try, especially if they can get away with it".*

Traveller students that were interviewed were of the same belief saying:

"I'm just left to myself"

"I don't really know what's going on in class"

"The teacher doesn't really care about me"

Travellers reported *"keeping the head down"* in class that it was just a matter of getting through the day as they everyone knew they were never going to remain in school anyway. Low expectations on the part of the teacher then filter down to the student.

Two travellers reported *"that if I sent the kids to school every day I would be seen as soft"* when asked if they viewed attendance as important for their children's educational welfare.

If schools are to achieve the desired goal of success for all students, they must hold high expectations for all, especially for those students at risk. They must view these students wholly different to the way they view them now. These students should be viewed as having strengths, not weaknesses, and adapt the class programmes and practices that help all students achieve their true potential. If teachers continue to believe that some students cannot learn, then as a result they will not expect students to succeed in school and continue the cycle.

Another barrier to education for travellers is that the supports that are required for each student arrives in a timely manner. This is particularly evident in the post primary cycle. Once the student has started school in September one education expert related concerns for the length of time it can take for the new school to completely understand the learning and cultural needs of the new student.

They said, *"by the time we figure out what their needs are and what supports they need, often its well into the school year and we've lost at least 4 months".*

A lack of National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) was also reported among post primary schools. NEPS psychologists work with both primary and post-primary schools and are concerned with learning, behaviour, social and emotional development. Each psychologist is assigned to a group of schools (NEPS, 2019). Again, this can lead to delays in understanding a child's learning difficulties and/or requirements. Two separate educational experts maintained that NEPS were not being conducted *"even if the behavioural issues that were presenting warranted one"*

The Visiting teacher for Traveller role was identified by many educators as the single biggest initiative that was beneficial to the educational well- being of the student, even all these years after the position was highly regarded.

One educator said;

"that role was of vital importance – it should never have been done away with".

Another educator said;

"she was the link between us all and I think is a role that is greatly missed"

The visiting teacher for Traveller role was held in high regard by both travellers and educators and is still referred to as an absolute need in the Traveller communities.

4.3.1 No Value placed on education

Travellers that partook in this research for the most part still do not value the importance of education. Many felt that school had failed them, with one Traveller saying;

"I was just told to sit at the back of the class – why would I bother doing anything?".

While, Traveller agencies advocate the importance of school and attendance, there are still remaining issues for attendance and low levels of engagement. Early years in particular are an important part of the educational system, both academically and socially. Many of the travellers that were interviewed for this research, did not send their children to pre-school, rather preferred to keep them at home. In early years or pre-schools Traveller children have low enrolment numbers, which was noted by the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Health and Children (2016). This is of concern as Traveller children are entering primary school already at a disadvantage, both academically and socially. Because of transgenerational issues where parents have poor education levels this can imply that it is more difficult to read or help their children with their homework. There was little understanding about what happens in early years or what is covered by the early year's practioner by the parents. This lack of early years education is only compounded by the fact that if the young person remains at home, reading and writing is not part of the family's routine – such as bedtime stories and they remain at a disadvantage.

One education expert warned of the need for exposure to early school years as *"they have no social skills, no boundaries, not used to sitting at a table doing schoolwork – they need those early years, so they don't start school at a disadvantage"*

Travellers still seem to have concerns sending their children to school with one father saying, *"the only reason they go is for the role call so no one can come and take them"*. Although he went on to say that *"if a car slows down the first thing that would come to my mind is someone coming to take the children"*. This demonstrates the long -held beliefs in the community around the mis-trust of education and those support workers that represent schools, even in 2019.

As part of the Traveller culture, marriage is taken seriously, and most are married at a very young age. The young males that were interviewed had no ambition or desire to remain in school after their Junior Certificate, with one young male interviewed unable to read or write at 16 years of age. His path was to attend Kilkenny Employment for Youth until he reached 18 years of age. His priorities were not based around education, rather would follow his father's footsteps and work with the dogs and horses.

He said; *"why do I need to know any of that – I'm fine as I am"*.

This lack of value placed on education can be seen in both the younger and older generations in County Kilkenny, except for 3 families that were interviewed for this paper. These parents insisted their children remain at school and had a clear understanding of the value of education, with one parent saying;

"I want my child to do better than me and he needs to be able to read to do that".

It should be noted however that even with parental insistence to remain in school, one young male left after completed he the Junior cycle as the culture for males is to help with the horses and dogs and he was removed from the educational system against his mother's wishes.

The All Ireland Traveller Health Study indicated a reluctance to continue in mainstream education as Travellers believed it is not associated with any positive outcomes because of the high level of discrimination faced by Travellers when pursuing employment. Travellers also did not enjoy the structure of the school day, and once they reached the Junior Certificate wanted to dis-engage with the service immediately.

4.3.2 Poor Attendance, Engagement and Retention Levels

The need to address absenteeism is a key issue. The level of school attendance was, in the view of some professionals interviewed, over-estimated. There were schools where Travellers were 'on the books' but whose absence was not reported for a number of reasons.

If there is poor attendance, The Education and Welfare Service of Tusla is responsible for this and any subsequent follow up, although there was a reported lack of referrals to this service (Educational Welfare Office) in County Kilkenny. The lack of attendance in schools is often explained by the mobility patterns of most travellers, however for this research all participants remained in their geographical area for most of the school year. One school in Kilkenny had a drop in attendance levels for the last two weeks before the Summer break due to parents Traveller outside the jurisdiction. Even with this stability of address, school attendance remains poor.

One of the travellers when asked about the low levels of attendance *"I can't be hanging around for the Summer – we go when we go"*

One participant asked how her attendance and she was replied; "*it was pretty good*" when probed further it emerged that she only attended one day per week.

A teacher told of a young Traveller female student that had great potential and who they (teachers) "*minded like a baby"* in the school to ensure she remained and yet "even with all that help, we still couldn't hold on to *her – she left to get married"*.

Along with poor attendance, the possibility of building personal relationships with their peers and/or teachers are diminished due to lack of integration in the classroom and playground.

All the students interviewed said they "*stuck together*" and "*I just hung around with my cousin*" rather than make friends with the general school population.

When asked about class -work students said;

"I don't know why I have to learn this – when am I going to use it"

"I just don't get it – I need to know other stuff"

"How am I supposed to get this"

"I don't care about this"

One of the younger participants interviewed who had just left school said;

"*I just didn't like school – and no one can make me go, not even my mother".*

An Educational expert also disclosed that they are concerned about the lack of a welcoming attitude back to school when the young person has returned after any absence. Knowing the culture and the possibility of poor attendance teachers should;

"make a bigger effort when they do come back".

The expert said that; *"even a smile can go a long way to making the Traveller child feel welcome – they are not on the outside".*

They noted that "*this does not happen a lot - so the barriers around education for the young person remain and that feeling of not being welcomed only makes a bad situation worse for the student".*

"One nice teacher is all it takes to make a difference" said one education expert.

Mentorship and creating a culture of openness and support for the student in school can have a positive effect on the retention rates for all students.

There is considerable lack of co-operation reported from Traveller students and their parents with teachers, which can lead to a sense of weariness among those teachers as parents are not turning up for parent teacher evenings or communicating with the school in any real sense to help their son/daughter. That co-operation can also be helped with the visiting teacher for Traveller role with one teacher saying; "*that visiting teacher was link between us all and helped with parental engagement too".*

The visiting teacher would informally distribute books to the Traveller community there were received from the Kilkenny County Library that could no longer be used. "*They (books) were given out like snuff at a wake"* said one teacher. These books helped the overall development of the child because the visiting teacher would encourage the parent to even look at the pictures with the child and irrelevant of the mother's or father's literacy levels they can pass on a love of books to their child. Homework clubs have proven to be essential in developing a culture and ethos around schooling and homework for Traveller children. Social Skills are also an important part of homework clubs, however engagement with the service is key for the student as they can be inconsistent when attending clubs.

4.3.3 Extra Curricula Activities

Youth groups and drop in centres are beneficial to travellers as they can connect to the service without any of the formalities of a structured educational environment. Some informal learning may be covered in the youth clubs, and can include hair, makeup, and other short -term courses.

Travellers can drop in whenever they want and play a game of pool and just "*have a chat*". The informality of the centres is liked by younger travellers as they "*do not want to be kept to someone else's time*". Some of the groups can be utilised as waiting areas for the Traveller as they may be on a waiting list for another service. The ad-hoc nature of the service is one the they like, with one Traveller saying; "there's nobody at you here" and if I decide to come here "*I decide how long I stay*".

One educational expert interviewed described the importance of sports and extra team building activities that could link into the Leaving Certificate Applied Programme and as "*a extra curricula activity would only help to build relationships*".

4.3.4 General Lack of Confidence

While conducting one of the focus groups, one of the parents said that "*her daughter had done brilliantly last year, but her (daughter's) writing is not as good this year*".

When the researcher explored this statement, the participant said;

"*that her daughter's teacher last year was wonderful, this year they have not been as lucky*". When asked by another participant in the focus group "*would she go in to the teacher and have a word*" she responded "*no way*" when asked why she said "*I couldn't go in to her and tell her (teacher) her job*". While this demonstrated a lack of confidence on the part of the mother, everyone that attended the focus group said they would be the same and would not go and speak with the teacher to check if there was a problem.

In parallel to this lack of confidence, fear can also play a role for the Traveller in seeking employment. Young travellers do not feel it is even worth trying to look for a job as they are fearful of the outcome and any perceived bias that they feel the settled person may have for them when trying to secure employment. That fear of failure some travellers said "*is really big*" and "*I don't want to be made a fool out of*". Health workers reported a lack of confidence seen among all age brackets of travellers saying "*there is a fear of failure and in some cases a fear of success*".

4.4 Training

Training and employment are viewed as the same by the travellers that took part in this research. Historically, travellers may have been paid to attend courses and so, over time they have come to expect payment and view training as employment.

 "T*ravellers are in a cycle of perpetual training and its obviously not working for them or us*" was a sentiment that was reported time and again from the training sector.

"Ongoing training in most areas do not always have positive outcomes – as the learner may just move from one training scheme to the next without any consequences" said one of the trainers that participated in this research.

A support worker said, "it feels like we're just training for trainings sake".

Another said; *"We're just looking for numbers and when there's nearly full employment it's hard to get them"*

Personnel responsible for training reported "travellers would be there one day and gone the next". The Traveller would start the course on day one and we wouldn't see them again – they are only here because someone told them they have to be – normally social welfare".

"Kilkenny Employment for youth has become the norm" said one of the participants.

Kilkenny Employment for Youth has become a route out of secondary school for travellers. Even though they are engaged in worthwhile training and learning life skills they are not considering any other options. The financial reward and skills that they are developing there ensure that KEY remains as one of their only choices, especially if they had siblings that attended.

One participant said, "*we need to be more creative when it comes to training for travellers – we are not measuring outcomes"*. This was said in the context of the prevalence of Traveller not being able to read or write, sometimes after years of taking part in reading and writing classes. When this participant was asked about their thoughts on other training generally, they answered; *"that training around cultural issues is not really working – service personnel are sometimes not being professional when dealing with travellers"*. This is a sentiment that other agency personnel referred to, the need for understanding and ensuring "the right person in the right job" to place travellers into specific training programmes. Training personnel reported that having a background knowledge in the culture that surrounds travellers is *"extremely important when trying to place them on a course"*. Sometimes even *"ensuring that you have all their contact details can be an issue"*. This background knowledge is *"also important when you know the name you can usually know where in the city, they're from as sometimes families don't mix and if you place one wrong person in an existing group you could lose them all"*. Family dynamics must be understood and appreciated at a local level when it comes to training placements to ensure retention.

Traveller men do not see the value in training to upskill. Local training programmes were described by them as *"no use"* and of *"no benefit"* to anyone.

One Traveller asked for training in areas such as" *reading and counting money"* where she felt that skill would be something that she would like to learn.

4.5 Employers

There were several employers that refused to take part in this research. This was due to a perceived bias from the participant themselves and subsequently they declined to be interviewed.

The labour force participation rate for the early school leavers was 38.1 per cent compared with 61.4 per cent for the population generally, reflecting the older age profile of this group. Unemployment among early school leavers was 24.9 per cent, almost double the overall unemployment rate of 12.9 per cent (C.S.O, 2016). For this report many of the young travellers that were interviewed believed that there was no point in seeking employment because there was no chance of securing paid employment because of discrimination.

"Everybody is painted with the same brush" was a sentence heard over and over from all travellers interviewed. Even those that had completed a safe pass courses were not employed and did not envisage getting employment "*due to discrimination"* among employers in County Kilkenny.

However, when travellers were asked in the second focus group had they applied for a job, all the males in the group said that they had not looked for a job, except one older male who had asked about working on a building site in the area but was refused.

One employer maintained that there was a "*fear in hiring travellers generally, as although the person you hired may be grand, others in the community may not be"*.

Another employer said that there is a lack of integration and personal responsibility within their jobs as those travellers that do work *"need such an amount of supervision that it becomes not worth it"*.

This employer who had previously taken on travellers said that *"it is not something he would ever do again, as it caused problems with the team generally as the Traveller was not part of the team"*.

When asked what was meant by that he said "they (Travellers) don't even try becoming part of the team – they are just waiting for someone to say something to them, I get the feeling they are looking for a reason to leave – any reason".

One employer said why would I hire a Traveller when every time I pick up the Kilkenny People their names are in the court section.

It is my reputation at stake, not theirs" *you hear the name, you know the family"*.

Another employer said, "*there is a definite negative vibe from the Traveller themselves when it comes to work and all you get is excuses as to why they're late"*.

This employer said that they would not "*look at employing a Traveller unless they came with golden personal recommendations as it doesn't always work out"*. He did go on to say, "*that it doesn't work for everyone, even non travellers, but someone he trusted saying give such and such a chance carries a lot of weight for me"*.

Other employer statements when asked about travellers and employment;

 "I'd be very careful about who I'd hire"

"They don't appreciate the opportunity that you have given them"

"They'd just be there to have a look around & tell all their friends the information so they could come back later"

"If they don't look after their own stuff ~ they're not going to look after mine"

One agency worker said; "*you would be surprised who is against the travellers*"

Institutional discrimination within a small community such as Kilkenny can be a destructive force for those travellers that want to work. However, those travellers that were interested in employment were only interested in working in "Traveller led community groups" and possible health workers positions. Not one of the travellers that participated in this research showed an interest in working in areas outside their culture and could not explain why.

One employer revealed that *"the only way I would hire a Traveller - it has to be a personal recommendation – and who is going to give me that?"*

Another employer said that although he did receive a personal recommendation for a Traveller- *"that person still did not work out".* reported issues of poor timekeeping and a poor work rate.

Some participants did however hold down a job. One such example was in the construction industry and the other in the Tourism sector, both of which were working out well. The employer in the tourism sector was very happy with the employee but went on to emphasise the fact that the Traveller in question has a "*great personal work ethic – which he hasn't seen before".*

The employer said, "*Some of the teething problems were ironed out right at the first week so after that settling in period, everything has been great"* He went on to say that *"the employee in question was the exception to the rule".*

Employers maintained that it is the lack of trust rather than discrimination to not being hired. Building trust with an employee takes time and travellers tend not to stay too long employed, so those barriers tend never to be broken down. In Kilkenny "*when you hear their name you know who exactly it is and where they are from*". One employer who had hired a Traveller and had issues with non-attendance to work said *"why would I bother again; it was a lot of trouble for me".*

If travellers are not working and there are no role models in their family, work be seen as a poor option for them. One Traveller, when asked about a recent job they were on, he said that "*he was slaved*" when he went to work for an employer and that he would not be going to work there again for anyone.

Traveller Primary Healthcare Programme

Based in O Loughlin Court centre the Primary Health Care consists of a group of health workers who are employed to service the needs of their community in the area of health. The health needs of Travellers in Kilkenny have been identified by the Health Service, and are in the areas of cardiovascular health including type 2 diabetes, cancer, suicide, mental health, addiction and domestic violence. The Health workers concentrate on communicating information to the Traveller community at large and as an employment tool has proven to be very successful.

Trust is the overriding requirement for both the employer and the Traveller when it comes to work opportunities. Building relationships between both the Traveller and the employer and developing trust should improve the employment opportunities available to all travellers.

4.5.1 Childcare

There are ninety-seven childcare facilities in County Kilkenny as reported by Kilkenny Childcare Committee (CCC). While childcare costs remain among the highest in the E.U. the CCC report that 1,885 Early Childhood Education and Care (ECCE) registrations were completed in 2017 in the county. Also reported is the fact that there are 86 training and employment (TEC) registrations, which are to support parents on eligible training courses and eligible categories of parents returning to work (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2016). There were 1441 community childcare subventions in County Kilkenny. While early education creates an important foundation for the child's academic skills, the social skills that are developed there can be more predictive of outcomes into adulthood.

Childcare has been generally reported as an issue and a barrier to employment for travellers nationally. However, for this research, childcare was not reported as an issue for looking for employment.

One Traveller reported that she would be seen "*as lazy*" if she put her child in creche.

She said that the other women in the Traveller community would say that all she wanted "*was a free leg*". Although this was not the case, she would not put her child into creche for" *fear about what the other mothers would think of her".*

One participant said;" that childcare was not an issue for her as she had loads of help and her mother would help her out if she wanted". But she went on to say that for certain families in the area trust issues around creches remained and they decided to keep their children at home because of that lack of trust.

5
Recommendations

" **What can you do for me?"**

5.1 The need for an interagency approach

Kilkenny Traveller Interagency Group should be re-instated as a matter of urgency. All new projects, including small cost interventions should be driven by KTIG. The agency can leverage the group to ensure that minimisation of inefficiencies in delivery supports to travellers and should co-ordinate all actions from a top down approach. Continue the re-organisation of the Kilkenny Traveller Community Movement began in 2019 and Link into national policy through the national Traveller agencies such as Pavee Point and the Irish Traveller Movement (ITM)

There needs to be clarity around what agency is responsible for what with routes clear and understandable for delivery of service. The use of acronyms should also be limited in all written submissions from all agencies to reduce lack of understanding.

Recommendation: Re-instate Kilkenny Traveller Interagency Group

5.1.2 The need for a strong representative voice for the Traveller community

During 2019 Kilkenny Traveller Community Movement implemented a review which also included a leadership training program and the development of a three-year rolling plan which contains a set of aspirations outlined by Traveller members.

This work was funded by The Community Foundation for Ireland and underpins the importance of having a strong representative voice for Travellers in the County. Resources should be directed towards the support of the KTCM and developing Traveller leaders within the community.

Recommendation: Maintain a strong/resourced representative structure for Travellers in Co. Kilkenny

5.3 To many short-term or once off initiatives

The barriers facing the progression of members of the Traveller community through the educational and training sector into employment are long term issues that have existed for many years and will continue to exist. Consequently, solutions to these issues require a long-term consistent approach with appropriate resources including staffing.

Those workers that are employed long term in the Traveller sector have demonstrated an understanding of culture and systems and are thought of very highly among the community. They have built personal relationships and as such are rewarded with trust.

Recommendation: Agencies must take a long term consistent approach to Traveller development.

5.4 A lack of joint up approach among agencies working with Travellers.

A core dedicated team for the county, possibly under the remit of KTIG is recommended. This maybe an informal group which may consist of a visiting teacher for travellers, public health nurse, social worker, on-site/housing person and Traveller leaders.

Such a structure can ensure information flow between all agencies. Agency to Agency information sharing – utilising professional relationships and sharing background knowledge and building those personal relationships into the future. Within the core county team, a taskforce (informal) which comprises primary and post primary teachers should be conducted in early September each year. The transition from primary to secondary school is of vital importance and possible issues, including academic issues, should be reported. "A Gateway to secondary school" information session for educational officers coupled with 'joined up' thinking among school management that builds on the prior achievements of the students would be of immense benefit.

Recommendation: Greater inter-agency Cooperation is required working directly with the community.

5.2 Education

5.2.1 Lack of educational supports for parents and children

This is an area that was brought up consistently through the research, from both travellers themselves and agencies. The visiting teacher for Travellers role has been positively referred to even though it ceased in 2011. The role of the visiting teacher for travellers was removed through a change in National policy, with some participants describing the role as the "*most successful intervention*" that had ever taken place in Ireland for the Traveller community. The loss of the Traveller visiting service was profoundly felt among the Traveller community and educational officers alike. The visiting teacher can also keep attendance in conjunction with national policy and help to ensure a higher level of parental involvement, in combination with services such as the Tusla Education Support Service.

The role and the power behind the role ensured equality of education for the Traveller community or threat of sanctions through the Department.

Recommendation: The dedicated visiting teacher for Traveller role is vital and should be re-instated without delay.

5.2.2 Low educational expectations for members of the community

Low expectations among educational officers, for both primary & post primary, was observed. This is not a cultural awareness issue but one that should be addressed through consultation with each school to identify and eliminate barriers to engagement. . In line with the School Development Planning Initiative if schools are to achieve the desired goal of success for all students, they must hold high expectations for all, especially for those who are at risk. They must view these students wholly different to the way they view them now. These students should be seen as having strengths and adapt

programmes and practices in the classroom that help all students achieve their true potential. "*Poor expectations lead to poor attainment*" said one educational expert.

This situation has resulted in many young Travellers progressing through the primary and secondary system without learning to read and write. To tackle this we would recommend a renewed focus on reading and writing is required, with the expectation that no Traveller child leaves school unable to read and write. This ambition should also underpin work in the various homework clubs.

Recommendation: Educational & training agencies need to increase their expectation for educational outcomes for members of the Traveller community.

5.2.3 Poor literacy persisting among members of the community particularly in the Kilkenny city area.

Literacy and general educational difficulties have their roots in the home, there is not a great appreciation among the community of the importance of books in the home and reading to children. A scheme of book lending to the community should be initiated involving key personal such as Traveller outreach workers, PHN, educational staff and Kilkenny Library to ensure parents have access to and realise the importance of books in their homes.

A pilot scheme of learning through digital platforms may be beneficial for some Traveller students that need to improve their reading and writing skills. Self -learning through these e-learning platforms may also prove beneficial for completion rates due to work being carried out at home. The National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) offer free courses that could play a part in this pilot scheme.

Recommendation: interventions to support literacy and increase reading in the community should be implemented.

5.3.4 Lack of a career direction/goals among members of the community

With low expectations inherent on both sides most students from within the Traveller community have not given any thought as to what they should "do". Also, while the number of individuals is relatively small compared to the agency personal involved there is no tracking or ongoing support from education to employment.

We would recommend increased career guidance and a "case conference" approach in particular for the small number of very disadvantaged cases. Due to the numbers of travellers attending KEY it is recommended that there are clear and robust meetings between KEY and other Traveller organisations. As travellers graduate KEY, a personal "follow on" programme should be established for each individual service – this should ensure there is a route to employment and necessary supports available.

Reduced class timetables are also an issue that may have a negative impact on the expectations and educational attainment of the student

Leaving Certificate applied (LCA) is also an avenue for students – information should be made available for all travellers as early as possible in the cycle. Youth reach offer the LCA but at the moment have just one Traveller student, with no other requests from travellers as most want to attend KEY.

Recommendations: Higher ambitions and better career guidance for young Travellers in school

5.3 Training

5.3.1 Low take up of available training opportunities within the community.

There is at any one time a large number of training course available within Kilkenny. The majority of courses are provided by the Kilkenny Carlow ETB. These courses are very suitable for Travellers who are not engaged in employment. To date the take up of these courses among the Traveller community have been extremely poor, due to a number of factors:

- Computer based application system which is difficult for young Travellers to access.
- There is no financial incentive for individual to take up this training, the incentive that exists are minimised as many young Travellers who are married are already on the higher payment.
- Literacy acts as a barrier to entry to many of the programs (which underlines the importance of tackling this at school level)
- Most courses are generic, targeting all unemployed individuals as opposed to a tailored course specifically for the Traveller community.
- There may be some fears or cultural resistance among members of the community to joining groups dominated by settled community.
- There is also a reluctance in some families to allowing young woman to engage in such groups.

Kilkenny Employment for Youth is seen as a route to a payment after leaving the school system, as opposed to a training scheme. It cannot be deemed a long-term strategy as although there have positive outcomes for some, for most they are in a holding pattern until they reach 18 years old. There was a need for practical education courses, like windows, metalwork, furniture-making and repair, arts, crafts and woodwork, which may also explain the success of KEY among the Traveller community.

Discussions with staff within the Kilkenny Carlow ETB indicate a strong desire to engage with this group, in particular given that the number of unemployed individuals available for courses in shrinking.

Given the complexities outlined above the report recommends the following:

1. **That KCETB review their engagement with the Traveller community in terms of its effectiveness and look at developing a new approach towards engaging the community. This would include examining the role and resources available to key players such as Kilkenny Employment for Youth who appear to be the primary engager with young Travellers who have left school.**
2. **That among the various agencies responsible for training, an individual with sole responsibility for training /employment for members of the Traveller community be engaged.**
3. **Resources be allocated to tailor course's targeting the community.**

4. A review of the financial incentives for Travellers engaging with training services.
5. **A parenting /educational program be targeted at the Traveller community to raise awareness of the possibilities and benefits of education and training. This could be accompanied by a short plain information leaflet on what you will gain if you work, not what you will possibly lose, how many hours a week you can work without affecting payments etc. This could be distributed and/or communicated to travellers. The benefits of work on one side of the above information leaflet with the structure of who is responsible for what, such as employment, education, and training and housing. This information of structure will also benefit the support workers that are new into the system/area.**

The Department of Education and Skills and TUSLA and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (via the Education and Training Boards) will strengthen cooperation between formal education and non-formal learning sectors to address the high rate of early school-leaving in the Traveller and Roma communities based on best practice models and reviews of existing programmes.

5.4 Employment Opportunities

Unemployment among the Traveller community in specific areas in Kilkenny is almost 100%, particularly if employment within Traveller organisations is excluded. The causes of this are complex and have been outlined in detail in this and other reports. In the very long-term unemployment will only be effectively tackled by equipping members of the community with the education and skills to enable them to compete successfully in the employment market. This is an ongoing process which involves tackling a number of the issues in training and education alluded to above.

However, in the short run the following immediate actions could be taken to try to improve the current disastrous situation.

Recommendations:

1. **A specific position be created through the Kilkenny Traveller Interagency group (KTIG) for a dedicated worker to support Travellers into employment.**
2. **Specific Traveller related incentives schemes for taking up employment be introduced to support members of the community into employment.**
3. **Local authority and other agencies to have targets for the employment on members of the Travelling community in their organisations.**
4. **Community employment and other funded labour market schemes to have a target or quota for engaging with members of the community.**

5. **Statutory agencies should create in systems placement and employment opportunities for people most distant from the labour market.**
6. **A panel of organisations willing to offer apprenticeships to members of the community be created as an access point to training in employment.**
7. **Good role models within the community be fostered.**
8. **In lieu of any likelihood that the employment situation will improve in the short run, and consequently there being a large number of unemployed individuals currently in the community that resources be immediately directed to the development of an engagement programs designed to engage individuals in areas that hold possibilities of personal development and improved wellbeing.**
9. **To examine the feasibility of a social economy project for the employment of individuals in meaningful work. Example of successful social economy projects exist for example. Mattress recycling in Galway. It is likely that the green economy will offer opportunities in the area of recycling.**
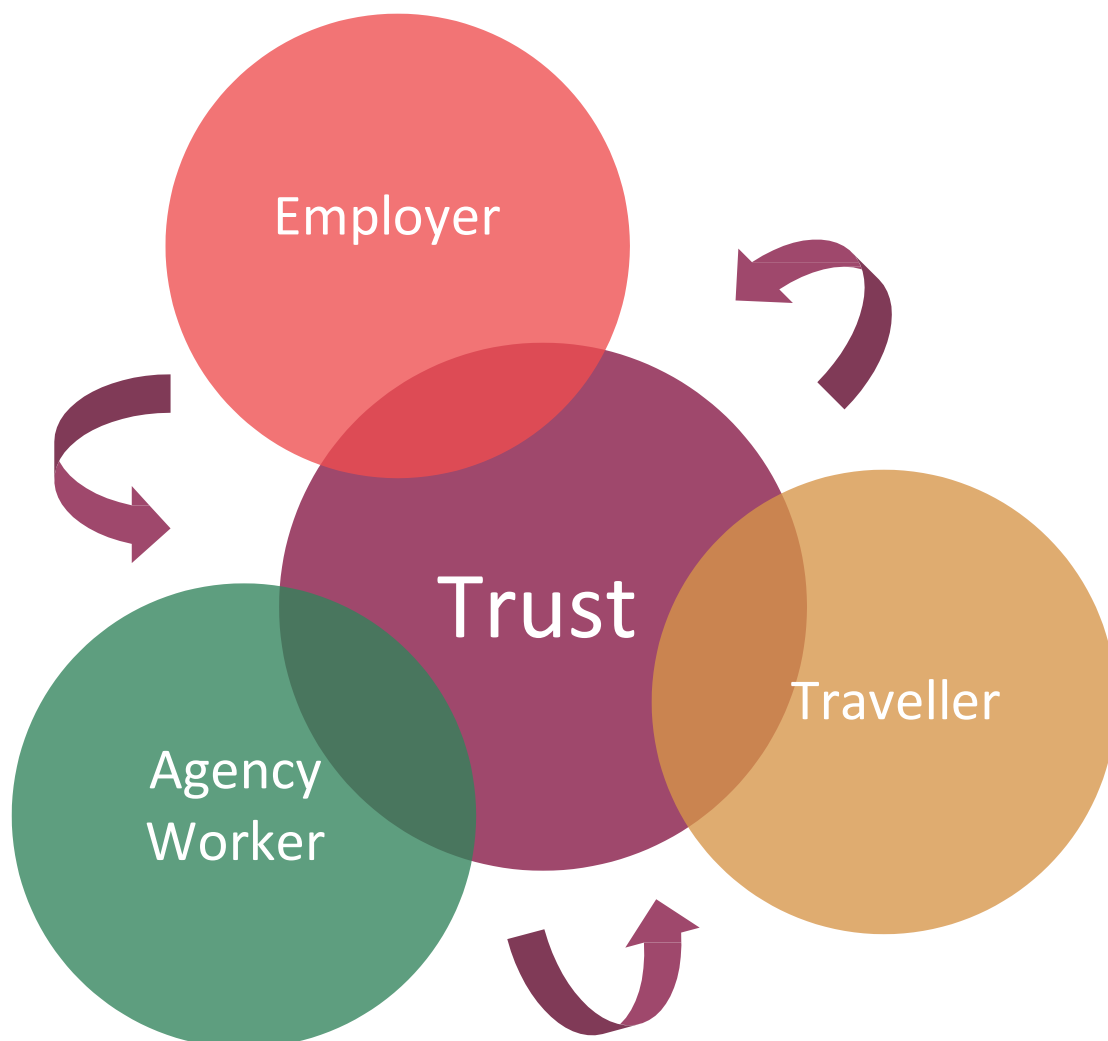
6
Conclusion

> "One size does not fit all."

6. Conclusion

The Report of the Commission on Itinerancy that was published more than 6 decades ago reported that Irish Travellers are one of the most marginalised groups in Irish society and they remain so. Resources, both financial and support driven have been provided to ensure the improvement of the Traveller community. Nevertheless, as an ethnic group they continue to perform very poorly in the areas of employment, literacy, poverty, health status and representation. This community is not a homogenous group and should not be treated as such. There are many complex personal issues and differing educational needs for each person within a family. A "one size fits all" approach does not seem to be making in-roads into growth of employment levels in Co. Kilkenny. Many of the participants that were interviewed and even at leaving certificate levels of education were only focused on Traveller led employment/training schemes and did not look outside their culture for employment. Poor representations of travellers have produced long term social stigma and social attitudes that may be difficult to change. These long- term held beliefs and stereotypes have become "truth" for the community at large.

Travellers that are completing their education are not being employed as role models for their community - although understandably this may be due to lack of consistency on the travellers' part. These role models could develop links and those links should be nurtured one person at a time. Peer to peer support and the importance of those role models are of the utmost importance for education. Attendance and engagement in schools are also a focus for TESS, the new brand from Tusla which incorporates The Home School Community Liaison Scheme HSCL) and the School Completion Programme (SCP) under the Welfare Service. With the lack of positive outcomes, due in part to poor attendance, a sense of fatigue seems to have set in from agency personnel, educators and the travellers themselves. They will engage with services up to a certain point and subsequently dis-engage with the service, due to a myriad of personal reasons.

The visiting teacher for travellers is a role that should be re-instated immediately over all other initiatives. This focus on the youngest generation of the community may communicate the value to education for the next generation and subsequently improve employment options for the community. This re-instatement of the visiting teacher and a re-focus on parenting classes for younger parents can only lead to positive outcomes for the future generations of travellers in County Kilkenny.

KTCM and The Kilkenny Traveller Interagency Group are undergoing a review process and it is hoped that these groups will become the voice of Traveller in County Kilkenny. Kilkenny TIG and KTCM should be re-energised through engagement with all stakeholders as a matter of urgency, with a focus on communication between all agencies and support personnel.

The research has suggested that one of the main needs was for a change in expectations for the travellers from educators. This change in expectations should offer long term improvements for the students from Traveller communities. Ensuring expectations are not lowered based on ethnicity and developing parental engagement with the school system will also improve outcomes.

In 2009, a Traveller transition programme in Co Wexford identified key needs in the areas of educational disadvantage, children falling behind at school at an early stage, early school leaving, alienation from

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the educational system and the lack of job prospects afterward, even for those with an education. The programme was based on the specific need to address poor transfer rates from primary to post-primary school, or where such transfers did take place, to ensure they remain into the second year or beyond. These same issues seem to have re-emerged in County Kilkenny in this research, confirming that there is still a lot of work to be done to ensure the educational needs and ultimately employment prospects of the Traveller are met – this can begin one person at a time.

Recommended Structure of Agencies

Perceived Agency Routes for Support

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