

Pavee – A Road Less Travelled



In our work to promote the inclusion and participation of all young people, it is important that we are mindful of one of our oldest indigenous minority communities– and arguably one of the most marginalised - The Irish Travelling Community.

The Irish Travelling Community refer to themselves as 'The Pavee' and have been documented as being part of the fabric of Irish society for centuries.

The community is noted for their musical and story telling abilities which they would have traditionally shared with the different localities that they travelled to.

Recognised in the UK and Northern Ireland as an ethnic group, The Irish Travelling Community is protected under the Race Relations Act 1997. The group have a long shared history and value system and a distinctive language known as **Shelta** (or **Gammen, Sheldru, Pavee**, or simply "**The Cant**"). The culture, customs and traditions of the Irish Travelling Community should be preserved and protected by all of us.

Customs and Culture

'A Nomadic people – for centuries they have travelled in caravans, from place to place, and it is this lifestyle that gives the Travelling Community a unique perspective to life and the world around them. Nomadism is often described as a state of mind. Therefore - even where Travellers occupy houses they regard accommodation as essentially temporary in nature - as do other nomadic peoples around the world. A Traveller living in a house is still a Traveller - just as an Irish person living abroad is still Irish.'

(Pavee Point Travellers Centre, Dublin)

Key Concerns of the Irish Travelling Community:

- Accommodation provision
- Health Care
- Education
- Equality
- Access to goods and services

Available statistics suggest that approximately:

- 30,000 Travellers live in the island of Ireland (1500 or so present within Northern Ireland).
- Approximately 15,000 live in England.
- 7000 are recorded as living in the United States of America.

"92% of Travellers have no GCSEs – compared with 4% of all school leavers."

Caitríona Ruane,
NI Assembly Statement
25 Nov 2008

Experiences of Exclusion

Travellers, as individuals and as a group **experience a high level of prejudice and exclusion** within Irish and British society. Many have to endure **living in intolerable conditions**, with approximately **one third** having to **live without access to the basic facilities of sanitation, water and electricity**. **Infant mortality** among the Travelling Community is **three times higher** than the settled community.

"We are dying too young, only now living to the same age as settled people did in the 1940s." Irish Traveller

Recent research indicates that 57% of the population in Northern Ireland would not want a Traveller for a neighbour.

Studies have shown that there is a critical link between improved accommodation for Travellers and better uptake of education.



The Irish Traveller Movement carried out a survey with members from the Travelling Community to determine levels of discrimination experienced and found the following:

53.9% said they had been **asked to leave a SHOP**

66.1% had experienced **others being served before them**

Getting to know others....

Use the questions below to test your knowledge of the Irish Travelling Community and related issues.

- 1. Approximately how many Irish Travellers live in Ireland?**
- 2. What is the traditional language of the Irish Travelling Community?**
- 3. What term do Irish Travellers use to refer to themselves?**
- 4. Infant mortality rate is higher amongst the Travelling Community than it is in the settled community. How much higher?**
- 5. What year was the Race Relations Act first introduced into Northern Ireland legislation?**