



# **Pre-Budget Submission**

## **Pavee Point Travellers Centre**

### **September 2007**

Pavee Point is a non-government organisation, which is committed to human rights for Travellers. The group comprises Travellers and members of the majority population working in partnership to address the needs of Travellers, who as a minority ethnic group experience exclusion and marginalisation.

## **Responding to social exclusion**

Current government policy recognises that certain minority groups, such as Travellers, face particular problems in terms of social inclusion. It is further recognised that these groups require particularly focussed efforts if they are to be removed from this situation. In the past year, the Central Statistics Office has produced the results of the most recent census, which provides an up-to-date and clear picture of the level of social exclusion experienced by Travellers and the poor outcomes that relate to Travellers in terms of accommodation, education, health and participation in the labour force. As the Census 2006 documents:

- Labour force participation for Travellers is low with 74.8% of Travellers in the labour force unemployed compared with 8.5% unemployed amongst the national population
- Educational outcomes are poor with only 3.4% of the Traveller population over the age of 15 years having attained upper secondary education; higher (non-degree, degree and higher degree) education compared with 48.2% for national population. Similarly, 52.7% of all Travellers aged 15+ years have obtained primary only/ no formal education as their highest educational attainment compared to 15.4% the national population are in the same category
- Accommodation for Travellers is of a very low standard with 83.5% of Traveller households having no central heating, 24% of Traveller households having no piped water and 23% of Traveller households having no sewerage facility
- Health outcomes for Travellers have dis-improved since the last census. Travellers aged 65 years and older now account for just 2.6% of the entire Traveller population, down from 3.3% in the 2002 Census. The same age cohort in the national population comprises 11% of the population.

### **Recommendations:**

#### ***1. An integrated Approach***

*Recommendation:* Establish and resource a National Traveller Agency with responsibility for co-ordinating of all service provision for Travellers.

*Rationale:* A vast range of policies in areas that include health, education, accommodation, social inclusion, equality and labour market participation guides the planned provision of services for Travellers. Many policies have yet to be implemented and service providers are often not aware of official guidance relevant to their interaction with Travellers. A National Traveller Agency would provide for greater coordination and integration of procedures across Government at national and local levels, as well as between these levels and insure implementation of agreed policies. This co-ordinated strategy for social inclusion is in keeping with principles that have been articulated within the *National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007 - 2016*.

## **2. Securing Adequate Income**

Pavee Point welcomes the achievement of the NAPS target to benchmark social welfare payment against what €150 was worth in 2002 terms, or in effect 30% of the gross average industrial wage. The maintenance of this relationship is vital. Pavee Point believes this should be increased.

*Recommendation:* The basic social welfare payment should be increased by 10% to €204.38 and the Qualified Adult Allowance should be increased to 70% of the basic rate bringing it up to €143.07.

*Recommendation:* Bring the Child Dependent Allowance up to €33 per week.

*Rationale:* Though Child Benefit has been increased in recent years, the Child Dependent Allowance remains very low. This is a particular pertinent issue when one considers the issue of early school leaving, the cost of participation in formal education and the strong links between educational and employment status.

*Recommendation:* Pavee Point calls for a significant increase in the income limit allowed before secondary benefits are affected. There should be consistency across schemes with regard to eligibility and the potential impact of participation on secondary benefits. Where changes are introduced to address inconsistencies the changes should be upwards. The limit of €317.43 where it still applies should be removed or increased to €400.

*Rationale:* As with the loss of the Medical Card, the prospect of losing secondary benefits is a disincentive to seeking entry in to the active labour force. We would support the call from the INOU that those solely dependent on social welfare be automatically entitled to a medical card.

## **3. Education**

*Recommendation:* Where the phased integration of Traveller specific pre-schools take place, ring-fence relevant budgets in a transparent manner to support intercultural responses in ECCE for Traveller Children.

*Rationale:* Traveller children have specific issues in relation to education and additional measures are required. This means ensuring that investment in ring-fencing of funding currently provided to segregated service provision will provide funding raising the possibility of a exchequer neutral programme in the area to support intercultural responses. .

## **4. Accommodation**

*Recommendation:* Provide funding and sanctions to ensure that the 17 Local Authorities currently not meeting their own Traveller Accommodation Programme (2005 – 2009) Targets do so by the end of 2009 so as to ensure accommodation for the 629 Traveller families currently living on the roadside and the 391 families in shared housing – (more than one family in a dwelling designed for a single family)

*Rationale:* Towards 2016 provides that funding will be made available to local authorities to support the implementation of their second Traveller Accommodation Programme, which covers the period 2005-2008. The commitments made within social partnership are not on track to be met and the State has responsibility to ensure that Local Authorities meet agreed targets.

*Recommendation:* In the past a loan and grant scheme was operated to support Travellers to secure good caravans: Pavee Point is calling for the re-development of this scheme with a more consistent and effective roll-out across the country.

*Rationale:* Progress on addressing Travellers accommodation issues has been slow. Again, 2016 has made a commitment to “embrace special housing needs (the homeless, Travellers, older people and people with disabilities).” The development of a caravan loan scheme would be a cost-effective means to meeting this commitment.

## **5. Developing Employment Opportunities**

*Recommendation:* Travellers maintain the right to a medical card over a period of five years once they have entered the labour market either as an employee or self-employed as per the Report of the Special Initiative to Expand Employment Prospects for Travellers.

*Rationale:* Travellers’ marginal socio-economic status is very evident in their poor health status: in this context the importance of the medical card cannot be overestimated. This is an enormous barrier to Travellers who wish to progress on from training and employment schemes to the mainstream labour market.

*Recommendation:* Recommence the Department of Finance initiative exploring accessing to civil service employment

*Recommendation:* Pavee Point welcomes the extending the Special Initiative to Expand Employment Prospects for Travellers and we would urge the government to add a further two years and its expansion into other eligible regions and areas.

*Rationale:* Towards 2016 commits all social partners to “give concentrated attention to achieving progress” in the area of employment for groups that have experienced long-term difficulties in labour market participation, including providing opportunities for Travellers to participate in employment and measures to promote positive communication between Travellers and the wider community.

*Recommendation:* Schemes such as CE and JI should be adequately resourced and supported and Travellers employment within the Community Sector should be recognised and supported also. Recruitment to JI should recommence.

*Rationale:* Active Labour Market Programmes have and still do provide second chance training and education opportunities to Travellers and for many Travellers are the only chance of employment.

## **6. Support for Community Development**

*Recommendation:* Re-institute Multi annual funding and address low staffing levels 1.5 workers in community Development Projects.

*Rationale:* CDPs in themselves present work and progression opportunities for Travellers an important route into paid employment and a professional careers. At the end of 2006, there were some 181 projects participation in the Community Development Programme supported by the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. Of these, 20 were CDPs, which targeted Travellers as their main community or interest.

## **7. Health**

Pavee Point notes Travellers' marginal socio economic status, which is very evident in their poor health status: in this context the importance of the medical card cannot be overestimated. This is an enormous barrier to Travellers who wish to progress on from training and employment schemes to the mainstream labour market. Pavee Point is calling for positive action on this issue by proposing that Travellers retain their medical cards for five years after taking up employment.