DÁIL ÉIREANN

AN COMHCHOISTE UM SHAINCHEISTEANNA RÍTHÁBHACHTACHA A THÉANN I GCION AR AN LUCHT SIÚIL

JOINT COMMITTEE ON KEY ISSUES AFFECTING THE TRAVELLER COMMUNITY

Dé Máirt, 20 Aibreán 2021

Tuesday, 20 April 2021

Tháinig an Comhchoiste le chéile ag 12.30 p.m.

The Joint Committee met at 12.30 p.m.

Comhaltaí a bhí i láthair / Members present:

Teachtaí Dála / Deputies	Seanadóirí / Senators
Joan Collins,	Rebecca Moynihan,
Patrick Costello,	Joe O'Reilly,
Dessie Ellis,	Pauline O'Reilly,
Paul McAuliffe,	Ned O'Sullivan.
Denise Mitchell,	
Éamon Ó Cuív,	
Bríd Smith,	
David Stanton.	

Seanadóir / Senator Eileen Flynn sa Chathaoir / in the Chair.

Business of Joint Committee

Chairman: I welcome all our guests to this meeting and thank them for taking part. I also thank the Business Committee for agreeing to this meeting today. Before we hear from our witnesses, we have some committee business to attend to. I remind members that they must be on the grounds of Leinster House or the Convention Centre in Dublin to attend this meeting. If any member attempts to participate from outside Leinster House, I will ask him or her to leave the meeting. I remind witnesses that as they are giving their evidence from outside Leinster House, they may not have the same privilege as they would were they within the precincts. Witnesses may wish to take legal advice on this matter. They are again reminded that they should not criticise, or make charges against, any person or damage the good name of any person. Witnesses must stop if I say I think they are breaking the rules.

I propose we approve the minutes of a few of the private meetings. Are the minutes of the meeting of 19 November 2020, those of 3 December 2020, 17 December 2020, 14 January, 28 January, 11 February, 25 February, 11 March and 25 March agreed? Agreed. I thank members.

Traveller Employment and Labour Market Participation: Discussion

Chairman: Before we hear from the witnesses, I propose we publish their opening statements on the committee webpage. Is that agreed? Agreed. This is the third public meeting of this committee on Traveller employment. The first meeting took place in December 2019, when we heard from Traveller organisations. On behalf of the committee, I am delighted to extend a warm welcome to our witnesses. I welcome Professor Frances McGinnity and Professor Dorothy Watson from the Economic and Social Research Institute, ESRI; Ms Shirley Comerford, CEO, Ms Aoife Lyons, head of assessment services and Ms Cathriona Tumelty, equality, diversity and inclusion partner from the Public Appointments Service, PAS; and Ms Jeanne McDonagh, CEO, Open Doors initiative. I suggest each organisation make an opening statement of approximately five minutes. We will then have questions from committee members, each of whom will also have five minutes. I now invite Dr. McGinnity to make her opening statement.

Dr. Frances McGinnity: I thank the committee for extending an invitation to the ESRI to appear today. I am here, virtually, with my colleague Dorothy Watson. We are presenting results based on our work as senior researchers at the ESRI with more than 15 years' experience in the areas of social inclusion, equality and discrimination. As researchers, we have studied the disadvantage experienced by a range of groups, particularly those covered by the nine grounds specified in equality legislation. Of these groups, it is fair to say that the degree of disadvantage experienced by Travellers is by far the greatest across these groups in a range of areas, including the reported experience of discrimination, educational attainment, employment, housing and health. Those are key domains of life.

We would like to take this opportunity to draw your attention to some specific points in our submission. Our submission is largely based on a report using census data, which captures the entire population in Ireland and compares Travellers and non-Travellers. This report uses data from 2011 because those were the data available at the time, but evidence suggests that little has changed since then. We found very high levels of educational disadvantage. Among those of working age, between the ages of 25 and 64, only 8% of Travellers had completed the leaving certificate, compared with 73% of non-Travellers. Only 1% of Travellers of working age

had a third level degree, compared with 30% of non-Travellers. We found that the gap between Travellers and others in completing second level was larger among younger adults. Among those aged 25 to 34, an estimated 91% of Travellers left school without completing second level education, compared with only 14% of non-Travellers. This suggests that Travellers had not benefitted as much as non-Travellers from the considerable improvement in levels of education in Ireland since the 1960s.

I will turn to employment levels, which is the focus of today's session, and the importance of education. As many members know, paid work is important for many reasons. It provides people with a source of income, facilitates financial independence and allows them to contribute to society, as well as conferring social standing, a sense of identity and a sense of purpose. Not having a job is strongly linked to poverty and social exclusion, as well as physical and mental health challenges. We found dramatic differences between Travellers and non-Travellers in employment rates. Some 11% of Travellers aged between 25 and 64 were employed, compared with 66% of non-Travellers. Of those in the labour market, the unemployment rate was 82% for Travellers aged 25 to 64, compared with 17% for others.

Education differences have a big impact on the chances of employment. In our work, we found the lower levels of education among Travellers were very important in accounting for Travellers not having a job. The statistical model we used allowed us to ask what would be the results if Travellers and non-Travellers had the same characteristics in terms of their education, age and other characteristics. It is a what-if model and, if we apply it, the employment rate of Travellers would be just under two times lower instead of the observed six times lower. This helps us understand some of the barriers to employment and also highlights the importance of educational qualifications in the labour market. Travellers who had higher levels of education had a much better chance of being employed than those with lower levels of education. We had data on all Travellers from the census. Some 57% of Travellers with further or higher education were employed, compared with 9% of Traveller with no second level education. Even at higher levels of education, however, it is important to note that the employment level of Travellers was lower than that of others. The fact that a twofold gap in employment between Travellers and others remained, after accounting for education and other factors, suggests that there are additional barriers in the labour market that make getting a job more difficult for Travellers.

Other research we have done examined the self-reported experience of discrimination among the population in Ireland in 2014. Irish Travellers reported rates of discrimination in seeking work that were ten times higher than other white Irish, even accounting for age, education and other background characteristics. These results suggest that discrimination in recruitment is likely to play a role in accounting for the high unemployment rate among Travellers, as well as lack of social networks, not hearing about opportunities and other factors. Lack of work is closely linked to poverty and social exclusion and this, in turn, has consequences for living standards, particularly with regard to poor housing and homelessness, and for physical and mental health.

There are policy implications of our findings. Enhancing the educational achievement of Travellers is crucial to ensuring that they can participate in employment and in society more generally. It is unlikely that this can be achieved through mainstream policies alone. Targeted approaches that address the specific challenges of Travellers are needed. The size of the disadvantage in employment rates suggests that as well as being included in mainstream employment policies, additional targeted supports are necessary. The level of prejudice against Travellers needs to be tackled by promoting a positive image of their culture and contribution to society.

Discrimination in employment should be tackled as a matter of urgency. There is a role for Government policy and for action by employers to monitor, prevent and respond to discrimination affecting Travellers in seeking work and in the workplace. Incorporating actions into the anti-racism strategy that is currently being drafted is also important in this regard. The scale and persistence of labour market disadvantage among this group means considerable effort will be required through multiple policies and measures, and it may take time.

Chairman: I thank Dr. McGinnity for that eloquent presentation. It was brilliant to hear from her. I now call on Ms Shirley Comerford to make her opening statement.

Ms Shirley Comerford: I thank the committee for inviting me and my colleagues here today to discuss our work in this area. I am the CEO of PAS. I am joined by Ms Aoife Lyons, head of assessment services, and Ms Cathriona Tumelty, our equality, diversity and inclusion partner. It is an opportune time to talk about the recruitment of the Traveller community, given the recent launch of our first equality, diversity and inclusion strategy, but also in light of last week's Travellers in the Mainstream Labour Market report, which was launched by the Minister of State, Deputy Joe O'Brien, on behalf of St. Stephen's Green Trust. The report outlined the significant employment gap between Travellers and non-Travellers. I welcome this opportunity to hear the insights of this committee into these matters and for our organisation to demonstrate and establish our intention to address it, both in our work to date and our future plans.

As outlined in the submission paper, PAS is the recruiter for client organisations in the civil and public service. We source candidates for roles in the Civil Service, local authorities, An Garda Síochána-----

Chairman: Sorry, Ms Comerford. Could I pause you for a moment, please? I ask members to put themselves on mute. Carry on, Ms Comerford. I am sorry about that.

Ms Shirley Comerford: Thank you, Chairman.

We source candidates for roles in the Civil Service, local authorities and An Garda Síochána and a range of management and specialist roles across the civil and public service. Additionally, we play a key role in identifying members for State boards. In our work sourcing, assessing and delivering candidates to our clients, we are committed to equality of opportunity for all people who wish to pursue a career in the public service.

Despite this commitment, we are all too aware that the level of recruitment and employment of Travellers in the public service is deeply unsatisfactory. The report launched last week cited 80% unemployment of Travellers. In our submission the committee will have seen that for our 2018 temporary clerical officer competition we had just 21 applications from people who identified as being members of the Traveller community. The figures are frankly much too low and unacceptable. It is incumbent on us as a public sector recruiter to extend proactively the hand of outreach, to listen to the challenges and to enable access and participation from Travellers to a much greater extent.

Our first equality, diversity and inclusion strategy, launched last month, identifies three strategic priorities broadly focusing on attaining greater knowledge and understanding of the public sector workforce and recruitment and promotion processes that enable access for diverse candidates and modelling best practice in equality, diversity and inclusion, while collaborating with clients to create inclusive work environments. This strategy is the product of a significant consultation process, including input from representatives from the Traveller community, and

provides a framework for addressing key challenges in a systematic and sustainable way.

The public sector equality and human rights duty rightly places an onus on public sector bodies to promote equality, prevent discrimination and protect the human rights of their employees, customers, service users and everyone affected by their policies and plans. I understand and appreciate why a focus on equality, diversity and inclusion is increasingly important against the backdrop of growing diversity in Ireland. We know that a public service that is energised and enriched by the contribution of employees from all sectors of society supports the delivery of a more responsive and inclusive public service. We need to recognise and design workplaces that embrace and celebrate that diversity. As the main recruiters for the Civil Service, this is particularly important for PAS. Inclusive workplace cultures also play a key role in attracting and retaining people from diverse backgrounds, driving business and team performance and supporting collaboration and innovation. We want to collaborate with our partners and colleagues in the civil and public service to ensure that strong, developed, inclusive workplace culture in order that we can be confident when recruiting people from marginalised communities that they are going into enabling environments where they can realise their potential and bring their "whole selves" to work.

There is much to do. There has been good work to date but we acknowledge that we need to do more. The area of diversity and inclusion has seen increased attention and support over recent years, with a greater imperative to address the need to increase visible representation in the public sector and enhanced understanding of the benefits for service provision for all the people of Ireland. Recruiting and employing a diverse public sector workforce that is reflective of the communities it serves is not just a moral imperative; there is also a significant social, political and cultural imperative to have a public sector that mirrors the composition of our society. We also appreciate the positive impact employment has not just for the individual but also for their families and communities. This includes benefits way beyond monetary considerations. For Travellers this goes beyond employment opportunities; it is about having access to and presence and participation in the venues and arenas where discussions, decisions and social policymaking that impact us all take place.

We outlined in our paper some of the work we have done in this space. We have held workshops with Traveller organisations to provide guidance and information on application and recruitment processes. We have advertised employment opportunities in Traveller publications such as the *Travellers' Voice* magazine and engaged with Jobs Ireland to ensure people on the live register are aware of our current recruitment activity. We are pleased to support the Department of Justice on its internship for Travellers. In line with the national Traveller and Roma community inclusion strategy, the Department of Justice will this year initiate a one-year work experience programme for members of the Traveller and Roma communities, with roles at clerical and executive officer level. The Public Appointments Service will support participants through the provision of a careers clinic at the latter stage of the programme, with dedicated, tailored sessions covering how best to prepare for different elements of the recruitment process.

Becoming an active partner and sponsoring the Traveller education awards for the first time last year was, I hope, the beginning of a long-standing partnership which will facilitate increased engagement with the Traveller community while allowing us to promote public sector careers.

We have more to learn. Participating on the St. Stephen's Green Trust traveller employment and enterprise policy programme advisory group enhanced our understanding of barriers to employment while working with other relevant stakeholders to develop opportunities to increase

access. Its report on Travellers in the mainstream labour market gives valuable insights into the experience of Travellers in the workplace. We need to increase our outreach to hear directly from Travellers the challenges they encounter in accessing employment and the difficulties they encounter when they do enter the workplace. We must continually challenge our own thinking, increasing our engagement with Traveller organisations to better understand the perceptions of the public service and the lived experience of recruitment and employment. We will build more relationships, nurturing those already formed. Our new equality, diversity and inclusion strategy places a key emphasis on engagement with under-represented groups and we are eager to continue to expand the scope of our work within this frame.

This will not be a quick fix. I am acutely aware that our equality, diversity and inclusion strategy on its own is a document and that to give effect to and achieve our ambition will take a lot of work. We need a concerted effort, collaborating with key stakeholders across the civil and public service, to bring about sustainable change while being mindful of the need to find ways to accelerate progress. We understand the significant role we have to play as a recruiter while acknowledging that we are one element of the cohesive response that is required.

There is a phrase that is often used in the disability sector, "Nothing about us without us". This is applicable across the entire diversity spectrum. Travellers themselves need to be at the centre of decision-making, policy considerations and legislative development to ensure real change. Our goal as the recruiter for the civil and public service is to enable them to be present in these spheres.

We welcome this opportunity to talk to the committee. This is a really useful forum to invoke self-reflection and critique and to challenge us to think about how we are doing things. We look forward to the committee's views.

Chairman: I thank Ms Comerford for that. It is very much appreciated. I now call on Ms McDonagh from the Open Doors Initiative to make an opening statement.

Ms Jeanne McDonagh: I thank the committee for having us. It is a very welcome opportunity. I am the CEO of the Open Doors Initiative. We are a group of more than 95 organisations that work in collaboration to create pathways to work for marginalised groups. These include refugees and migrants, youth from disadvantaged background, people with disabilities and any intersectionality. We are also expanding our work to include the Travelling community and other groups that are impacted by low employment. To do this we organise training, work experience, mentoring, research and employment itself. We also help entrepreneurs on their journey. Last year, we helped more than 2,300 people find pathways to work for the first time. President Higgins said recently that we have not suffered Covid equally, that poor people have suffered disproportionately and that Roma and Travellers have been even further impacted. They are very key words. This shows in the 80% unemployment rate the Travelling community faces and even higher barriers they have to gaining employment. We have put together several recommendations. I will run through them quickly. We think these would be practical ways to make some change in this situation and as both previous speakers have noted, this will take time.

First, all programmes should be guided by members of the Travelling community itself. They are best placed to know their needs and what would encourage people to participate. Peer-led services will have the most success when the funding, supports and resources that are required are put in place. Specific training, education pathways and job supports such as pre-work assistance and on-the-job supports also need to be put in place. This helps both the

employer and employee and ensures recruitment on merit, retention and career progression.

Discrimination and racism need to be addressed in myriad fora, including in recruitment and human resources and among employers. We really encourage the inclusion of anti-racism training as part of the learning process for everyone involved in this area.

People from marginalised backgrounds have substantial entrepreneurial capabilities, yet no national strategies have been designed to enable people from the Traveller community to pursue self-employment as a career opportunity. To pick up on what Ms Comerford mentioned, a great example was highlighted last week with the launch of the report of the St. Stephen's Green Trust. It featured Bounce Back Recycling, a Traveller-led social enterprise. There needs to be more work in this area.

We echo the need to increase the local government and public sector percentage of diverse hiring. Given the challenges that lie ahead after Covid in securing employment, local government should take the lead and proactively increase the number of people from the Traveller community whom it employs. Department of Justice internships comprise a real step in the right direction in this regard.

We feel we should establish a large-scale mentoring programme. In our work, this has been a really successful element in helping people to get into employment. We encourage businesses to join in the programme as role models to help to instil confidence in jobseekers, allow them to begin to make connections and a support network and lead them through the process of applying for jobs and gaining interview skills. The new Traveller Graduate Network is a very good example of this peer support. It was set up just recently.

As childcare, caring roles and transport can also be an issue for various groups, we suggest that a network of remote working hubs be built nationwide to accommodate people to work away from home, if that is their choice or requirement. The hubs need to have reasonable accommodation for people with disabilities. We could then link in with industry and organisations such as Grow Remote to help to create specific internships and jobs for people in these settings.

Another area is the digital divide. We feel there is a need to maximise access to hardware, Wi-Fi and training in digital skills. Covid has certainly emphasised the divide in communities. Therefore, it is really important that this be addressed.

In our own work, we recently launched a project called Employers For Change, which is directly aimed at aiding people with disabilities in entering work. It operates in conjunction with the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. The aim of the project is to empower employers with all the information and advice they need to hire inclusively and employ, manage and retain staff with disabilities. We feel a similar hub with information on the Traveller community, pointed towards employers, would be incredibly useful. There is discrimination, misunderstanding and a lack of knowledge of the culture, language and needs of the Traveller community, who are particularly marginalised when it comes to employment.

In summary, there is a requirement for targeted supports to be put in place to ensure fair and full representation in the workplace for the Traveller community. Diverse workplaces help business, existing employees and people themselves. There is also a greater societal benefit arising from of inclusive practices, with the reduction of stigma, bias and racism. Support by the Government is key to this and we welcome the new strategy being prepared by the Depart-

ment to help make progress on employment within this community.

I thank members for their time. I welcome any questions they may have on my statement.

Chairman: I thank Ms McDonagh so much for that presentation.

Deputy Dessie Ellis: I thank everyone for their presentations and for the hard work done. It is very important. It struck me when listening that, according to the ESRI, there is terrible discrimination against women in the Traveller community. They tend to lose out an awful lot. Very many women Travellers are not in employment because of the way they were brought up. In many cases, they tend to be in the home a lot more. I wonder what strategies are being rolled out in this regard. Education obviously plays a big role in this regard and trying to educate people to a higher level is very important.

The number of Travellers coming forward to join the Civil Service is low. Is there positive discrimination in the Public Appointments Service or is it something we are not allowed to do any more?

Regarding the Open Doors Initiative, are we encouraging Travellers to work from home? Are there incentives to do so? Where a person is not computer literate or does not have education up to a certain standard, what is the position?

Dr. Frances McGinnity: I thank the Deputy for the question on Traveller women. Many of the gender differences parallel those we find in the population more generally. Traveller women are a little more likely than Traveller men to complete secondary education but are less likely to be at work, especially married women and mothers. In the whole population of Ireland, women have higher educational qualifications than men but lower employment rates. One policy solution to this is to try to facilitate childcare. There is some policy action through the national childcare scheme and the facilitation of childminders. Some of the solutions are Traveller-specific and some are matters of improving national policy and upping the game regarding supports for working families.

On working from home, the ESRI was not focusing specifically on Travellers but on migrants and Covid. One of the points to make about working from home is that regardless of the issues an employee might have with the home workspace, such as overcrowding, the Internet connection and whether he or she has a computer, there are many jobs in the Irish labour market that cannot be done from home. These include the jobs of essential workers and all those in the food and accommodation industry, who are on temporary lay-off now. On working from home, I hope circumstances will improve. It should really be borne in mind that people such as binmen just cannot work from home.

Ms Shirley Comerford: On Deputy Ellis's second question, on positive discrimination, we know that where we use targets and quotas, they can create a focus for people. We have had disability targets within the Civil Service and across the public sector for a number of years. That is definitely worth considering.

We are very aware of internships and work placement programmes, which are important, but what is most important is that there is some pathway to employment. As the recruiters, we do not have responsibility for policymaking. That lies with our colleagues in the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. However, we have been in discussions with the Department on the issue of pathways to employment and we have made some inroads in that regard in recent years. I would point the members to the Oireachtas work learning, OWL, programme where we

have had a very positive impact. Six of the OWL graduates have gone on to employment, two with our organisation and four within the Houses of the Oireachtas. There are solutions that are being worked on to make sure we have pathways to employment. We have had similar success in other areas. We are currently looking at the willing able mentoring, WAM, work placement programme. We are hoping that, through the discussions with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, we will be able to find a way to forge a pathway to employment. That is where we are currently with regard to that.

We are a merit-based recruitment appointment service so we need to be conscious of making sure all of our processes are compliant with codes and can stand up to scrutiny. We have had very positive experiences which we are hoping we can use in terms of the issue we are dealing with. I hope that answers the Deputy's question.

Ms Jeanne McDonagh: To pick up on the final part of Deputy Ellis's question, that is why we suggest remote working hubs, digital skills training, access to computers and so on to make it an equitable situation. Currently, there is great inequity. Some people are in the position where they can work from home. Others, because of childminding, caring, overcrowding and various factors, cannot work from home. We believe that plugging into the Government policy on remote working hubs will benefit people and give them opportunities. We want employers to engage with that.

I mentioned Grow Remote, which is an organisation that is encouraging remote working and putting supports in place. It would be worth engaging with it on that entire area as it has a real understanding of how best to make it work. It also requires practical supports to ensure people have the means by which they can connect.

Senator Pauline O'Reilly: I thank Ms Jeanne McDonagh, Dr. Frances McGinnity and Ms Shirley Comerford for coming before the committee and giving such thoughtful opening statements. I very much appreciate it. I will start by addressing an issue that relates to the care of children by women or men. Even if it is seen as being a traditional role, that does not mean it is wrong for people to want to do that for a period when they have young children. I do not want to get into the debate that people have to be dissuaded from what they believe is acceptable culturally. I do not believe a strategy for the Traveller community over and above the general population in terms of getting people who have small children out to work would be appropriate. However, childcare needs to be put in place to ensure everybody has the opportunity to choose which is appropriate for them. That is the main issue. It is not about the way they have been made to feel that, culturally, something is appropriate and something else is not. That is the first response in addressing the point made by Deputy Ellis, which is important to mention.

I understand from Dr. McGinnity that this is more about a deep level of disadvantage when it comes to employment. It is important we focus on that. The statistics she gave are stark. Soul-searching is a wonderful way to think about it and it is incumbent on all of us to see what we can do in our everyday lives.

Dr. McGinnity mentioned that if we look at educational attainment and all things being equal in terms of an individual in the Traveller community and someone in the settled community, the individual in the Traveller community is twice as likely to experience unemployment whereas they are six times more likely to experience that if they do not have the same level of educational attainment as the person in the settled community. That shows education is clearly significant and means there is something very focused we can do in that regard.

On the other issue, I am interested to hear if Dr. McGinnity's research uncovered the types of employment where the discrimination or bias may happen. Is there something around the public or the private sector we could point to that might help Ms Comerford's organisation, for instance? Are there are issues other than education or going into the community to which we can point? Is there something specific around the public or private sector in that regard that she could help us with?

Dr. Frances McGinnity: I thank Senator O'Reilly. Where we looked in the research at, say, the experience of discrimination in seeking work and compared the different groups, we did not have enough Travellers to examine in detail the jobs to which the recruitment discrimination was applied. We do not have that sort of detailed information. I know from other research I have done on the experience of discrimination in recruitment that good training on recruitment in terms of equality policies is important. I refer to a small company not having a human resources, HR, person but the employer has a sense of what is appropriate and the law around equality. In bigger organisations, and ideally everywhere, there should be rules around recruitment, which can guide people. That might also reduce the chance that people will simply act on some of their preconceived ideas or hunch.

There is a general finding that recruitment discrimination tends to be lower in the public sector, but we did not have enough evidence to say whether that was true for Travellers. We did not have that kind of detailed information in the survey we looked at.

In terms of discrimination in the workplace, certainly in terms of the Central Statistics Office, CSO, and other big surveys we would rely on that survey the whole population, it covers a range of issues, including harassment, microaggression and bullying. It can also cover people believing they are discriminated against in terms of how much they are paid and their promotional prospects. In the front-facing service jobs, it can be the experience of discrimination at work from the employer but it can also be from co-workers or, in service occupations, from customers, clients or whatever. Recruitment is in the hands of the person giving the job, the employer, but when someone has a job and is experiencing discrimination in the workplace, that is a wider issue. I hope that answers the Senator's question.

Deputy Paul McAuliffe: I have a number of questions and I ask the witnesses to respond as appropriate. I am interested in hearing the views on the issue of Traveller training centres. Several years ago, a decision was taken to phase out the provision of Traveller education through dedicated training centres and for them to be mainstreamed. Have any studies been done in respect of this area to determine whether it has worked? In Finglas, the closure of the St. Joseph's Traveller training centre had a big impact in terms of engagement on the part of the Traveller community, particularly for older members who subsequently became more cut off from the wider community. I suspect an effort to mainstream education services and prevent segregated education has not worked. I would be interested if the witnesses have any experience in this regard.

I want to hear more about the graduate network for Travellers. What measures can we put in place in the context of mentoring? Innovate Communities has a clever programme called INSPIRE which links people who have been successful or graduated from university with younger people in disadvantaged communities. Could we do something similar for the graduate network for the Traveller community?

No one will be surprised if I say the most flagrant and blatant form of racism in Ireland is that experienced by the Traveller community. We see that around basic issues such as book-

ing family events at hotels and so on. In the darkness of a recruitment process, it often is just between the owner of a business and the CVs in front of him. Given that SMEs are a big part of the economy and that, in the context of lower-skilled employment, there are fewer formal structures like HR and so forth, how do we intervene to prevent that racism from excluding people at such an early stage in a recruitment process?

Ms Jeanne McDonagh: Open Doors has a blended approach to training. I am not saying that is better or worse, but we like to think it mimics real society a little better. We have migrants working with people with disabilities, disadvantaged youth and so on.

I take the Deputy's point on a specific support with nothing else in place to assist the Traveller community in a targeted way. I very much believe in all boats rising. When one supports different members in society, it is an equitable approach and everyone benefits. Once the supports are in place, that is the key thing. Once everyone benefits, that is a good and holy thing. It is obviously an issue that a Traveller education service has gone from the area. Something certainly needs to be done on that basis.

On the graduate network, I must hold my hand up and admit I only have surface knowledge. One of the key starters of it is Gavin Hennessy, who works in the diversity and inclusion section of Irish Life's HR department. It is a clever idea because it creates role models and peer support. That feeds into mentoring because if one cannot see it, one cannot be it. One needs to have people in place to whom one can aspire and talk, as well as learn from. With our mentoring, we have had so many successes just by dint of the fact that someone with experience is willing to share their time, network and ideas, as well as bringing someone along from a place where they have none of those things to a place where they have confidence. That is the commonality between all the groups we deal with, namely, a lack of confidence. Those sorts of networks and mentoring give a degree of confidence and help people move along.

We are looking at recruitment and are having discussions with the national recruitment agencies about how to get cultural training into the recruitment area. This would mean people would have some knowledge of difference. It is easy to mirror oneself, especially in recruitment. If a recruiter sees someone who looks like them, talks like them and went to the same school, the natural inclination is to gravitate towards them. We need to get recruiters to see difference because they are the gatekeepers. They work with companies and companies are guided by them. They can sieve out CVs before they even get to the employer, who may be very inclusive. The recruiter is working on a certain basis and may feel that only certain candidates can be put forward. That is a piece of work to be done. We started it in a small way but it needs a lot of work to get recruiters to think in a far more inclusive and diverse way. We need them to put forward candidates who might not necessarily tick every single box but who will bring with them diversity of thought, creativity, lateral thinking and problem-solving, all of which are assets to any workplace.

Dr. Frances McGinnity: On the Traveller training centre, I am not familiar with the particular example raised by the Deputy. It is a tricky balance between having targeted programmes for a particular group, as well as additional supports in a mainstream programme. This is clear with migrant integration. If there are segregated schools and living spaces, then that is a challenge in terms of social cohesion. The majority group can also learn from training that includes diverse groups. Non-Travellers in a group will also see that he or she is doing a training course which in turn educates and changes the perceptions of the majority group in the training group.

I agree with the point on SMEs. In the recovery from Covid, it will be small companies

and low-skilled jobs that will be very important. These companies will not have that whole HR infrastructure or may not know the rules. Building on some of the points Ms McDonagh made, the ideas of support and information in terms of recruitment for these companies is important. Trying to get the message out so that they are aware is also important. They might not be recognising the difference or the skills. It is not necessarily that they do not want to employ somebody. That might be the case in some companies. Educating employers more generally, including small business employers, about the benefits of diversity and what is a fair and just recruitment process is important.

Senator Joe O'Reilly: I thank our guests for being with us. It is clear from the first presentation that educational participation is crucial. That must remain a great policy objective. It was fascinating to see the modelling of six versus two. The two figure is dreadful with the same educational level while the six is extraordinary.

There was a break in my feed but one Deputy raised the issue of positive discrimination. For a start, has the Public Appointments Service considered internships in every Department?

The second issue is quotas. All the female members of the committee and women guests know that we had to introduce quotas in public life to achieve gender equality in participation in public life. That was the correct thing to do and had to be done. Similarly, quotas will have to be introduced for Travellers, particularly in public service areas where that can be done and can work. I ask the witnesses to comment. The anti-racism policy that is coming offers potential in that regard.

I have visited Youthreach centres for a couple of reasons in my time and I noticed high Traveller participation in Youthreach. Can Youthreach participants transfer into jobs? The point about training centres, which was raised by Deputy McAuliffe, is also interesting.

Many of the Travellers I know personally do not look for jobs simply because they consider it a hopeless pursuit and they have no expectation of success. I have no expectation of success in snooker, ballet, dancing or whatever and, consequently, I do not pursue those pastimes. Where we do not think we will succeed, we do not do it. I would like a comment on that. There is need for input from the Traveller community to create some sort of a desire or confidence to actively seek work.

In that context, Ms McDonagh's point about lifting all boats is relevant. We have an excellent Traveller accommodation centre in Cavan. If a couple of people there got jobs, Ms McDonagh's point arises in that it would create an expectation and a desire in others.

I ask for a comment on community employment, CE, schemes. We have community employment schemes all over the country, including in my home town. Community employment is successful. Why could quotas not be applied to the CE scheme? Why could it not be made a prerequisite for funding a CE scheme that it have a workable quota? We cannot have crazy quotas initially. We need reasonable policy objectives but there is potential for quotas.

Will the witnesses comment on the anti-racism document that is being produced and its practical outputs in terms of employment for Travellers? It will need to be more than a mission statement or vision for anti-racism. It will have to have some practical implications. How could these affect Travellers and Traveller employment opportunities?

I thank the witnesses. The papers presented were extremely interesting. I read nearly all of them to the end.

Ms Shirley Comerford: I thank Senator O'Reilly. I am happy to respond. As we said, it is important that we continue to do the work we are trying to do. From our perspective, we have to ensure we have a strategy that declare our intent in relation to our aspirations to create a public service that is reflective of the society that it serves. There is a role for government in showing leadership on this matter. There is certainly a policy element around establishing targets and quotas because, as I stated, they focus minds.

As recruiters, it is incumbent on us to make sure we are visible, continue with our outreach work, continue to try to engage with the various groups and model best practice. There is much that we can do in terms of liaising with other government organisations. We are fortunate in the Public Appointments Service in that our reach goes beyond the Civil Service. We have a key role in shining a light, sharing best practice, training interview boards and ensuring they are aware of diversity and unconscious bias, as well as making sure that the composition of interview boards participating in recruitment processes is such that they live that diversity as well. There is much that we can do in this area.

I totally agree with the Senator about the expectation of success. One cannot be what one cannot see. We know from other disadvantaged or marginalised groups in employment that networks and having role models are important, as are mentors and other support mechanisms that could be put in place. We would welcome any policy developments in that area.

We have made a commitment to do our piece around using our influence with the HR communities across our sectors, highlighting to the public sector organisations that they have a public service duty. We will use our influence and reach to try to expand HR and other organisations' knowledge around inclusivity and the importance of this. We are acutely aware that we might get people in the door but if they are going to organisations that do not have an inclusive culture, that work experience for them will be negative. It is important that we have a two-pronged approach where as well as getting people in to organisations, we make sure those organisations are creating environments where people can succeed. I hope that answers the Senator's question.

Dr. Frances McGinnity: If there is time, I will echo the points Ms Comerford made. This is about acknowledging that negative experiences, both in education and the workplace, will have an effect on self-belief. In addition, it is about emphasising the role of education and training and the fact that it could be a pathway and that younger Travellers will start to believe that might happen. There is also the issue of role models. People who have done internships well may feel they can move on having had these kind of experiences. Internships might also feed into self-belief. However, we must acknowledge, particularly in a context where someone's parents have had negative experiences in the labour market and education, that it is harder to break that. It is important that Traveller children recognise the importance of skills and education.

Deputy Joan Collins: I thank the witnesses for their contributions. Last week, I attended a meeting of the St. Stephen's Green Trust to discuss Travellers in the mainstream labour market. One of the points made was that the travelling community feels it has been looked at under a microscope to the point that is has been almost wiped out. There have been so many reports and recommendations on accommodation, the labour market and so on but Travellers need to see action. This is an important juncture for the travelling community. We have to put in place structures that will have an impact in order that Travellers see that they are moving on from where they were. The public sector has a positive role to play here. I have seen that in disability groups. My office is in Agriculture House and I see people with disabilities all around the build-

ing. They play a key role in the workplace. That has a good impact in that they become role models in the community. That, to me, is the role the PAS can play. It will be a very responsible role on the shoulders of the PAS to bring that forward.

When we look at the fact 8% of the Travelling community completed a leaving certificate, there is a massive section of the community who are low skilled. Where do we bring them in terms of work experience and so on? There are three or four prongs to this. In particular, the graduates who have come through comprise a very small group but there is a role they can play in assisting the community and getting more young people through the education system. It is a question of how we can put in place structures that allow low skilled members of the Travelling community to come through the SMEs.

I was interested to hear Ms McDonagh's point about mentoring and role models. That will be crucial. I knew the working class kids in the 1970s. I grew up in the Coolock-Artane area. If someone put Coolock beside their name, they got nowhere. People just did not put down their addresses because they would be immediately identified as working class if they did. It was only when the public sector opened up in the late 1970s that a lot of my peers got jobs in the Civil Service and so on. That had a huge impact. There was also the other aspect of migration, but the Traveller community now has no chance of doing something like that. Therefore, it is very important that we get as much right as possible. We can make mistakes but we need to learn from our mistakes. The mentoring programme is going to be very important, as well as how we use organisations like Bounce Back, in terms of how we work with the SME sector to promote people from the Traveller community into those areas of work.

Ms Shirley Comerford: I totally agree with the Deputy. There is a huge responsibility on us, as the PAS, to realise the aspirations and ambitions that we have in our strategy. We have done something. We have established an equality, diversity and inclusion, EDI, function, which is very important because we need to have structures in place that enable us to engage and enable us, most importantly, to listen. As the Deputy rightly said, we have made significant progress in the disability sector, so we know there are things we can do. I am absolutely not saying that sector is the same as the Traveller community but there are things that we have learned can work and that we can use. We have shared some of those things with the committee today, for example, diversifying our board members, looking at networks, outreach work and visibly sponsoring Travellers. All of those things are very important and we know they have worked because they have worked before for us with the disability community.

I would love to be able to say there is something we could do that would effect an immediate change but, certainly in my experience, it is an incremental process, one block on top of another, to actually get there. We and our board are very committed to the ambitions we have in our EDI strategy.

Dr. Frances McGinnity: I want to respond to a point made by Senator Joe O'Reilly regarding what the anti-racism strategy does and what kind of specific actions it can propose. One that it is very likely to propose is the introduction of an ethnic identifier on administrative datasets, but also on survey data. This is the idea that what gets measured gets monitored. There are some instances, for example, the post-primary database has a Traveller identifier, but there is lots of other policy activity where we do not have any information on groups like Travellers and how they are progressing. That would be one way of keeping track of how well Travellers are being served by different needs.

Another possibly relevant point is that, within the ESRI, my team have been commissioned

to do an international review of policies to combat racism and discrimination in the labour market in order to support the work of the anti-racism committee. It is sometimes difficult to do a proper evaluation, and evaluations can be expensive, but we would be looking for really good examples that show ethnic minority groups that have benefited from various initiatives abroad. Of course, there is also the issue that each group has its own challenges, but we believe there is some policy learning whereby we can transfer examples of good practice from other countries in terms of racial and ethnic minorities.

I have not worked on evaluations of Youthreach but I have colleagues in the ESRI who have. If it is helpful, I could send the committee some information on that.

Chairman: Please do. Thank you. I call Ms Jeanne McDonagh.

Ms Jeanne McDonagh: I want to echo what has been said by Deputy Joan Collins. There have been too many reports and it really is the time for action. We need very pragmatic, practical steps to be taken to ensure involvement in employment, if that is a person's choice, obviously. As was pointed out, many within the Traveller community have no expectation of success. It is up to us to instil confidence and create the expectation that they can achieve what they wish to achieve, whether it be a career, progression or whatever. It needs people to come together with very practical solutions and with learnings from other areas, such as the disability sector and the disadvantaged youth sector, because there is a commonality between all of the groups. What has worked for one, with a tweak, can work for another. There have been real success stories. It is very important that that success is transplanted onto different groups and helps them as well.

I am very passionate about this. A great deal of talking has been done for many years about the Traveller community and it is really important that it is now actioned. The recent report by the St. Stephen's Green Trust gives a real call to action and contains some really practical solutions. It is not beyond us to come up with a programme of work that can benefit these communities.

Ms Cathriona Tumelty: To add to what Ms McDonagh and Ms Comerford have said, we are aware there has been this sense of document fatigue. We have had a lot of research strategies and action plans, and now is the time to see action. As Ms Comerford stated earlier, our EDI document is just that: on its own, it is a document without the action. She talked about what we are trying to do under it. I also want to mention that, at a national level, at the launch of the Travellers in the Mainstream Employment Market report, it was mentioned that Travellers will be named in the next Pathways to Work document and strategy, and also that the next iteration of national Traveller and Roma inclusion strategy will include a Traveller and Roma training and enterprise plan. Hopefully, we are starting to see that action coming through on a national level and, from our side, we will certainly be working on it.

Deputy Denise Mitchell: I thank the witnesses for coming in and for the presentations. I have a few questions. I want to start with the PAS. With regard to the equality, diversity and inclusion strategy, is it intended for this to be reviewed annually? How will the impact of this report be measured?

Could the witnesses elaborate, for the benefit of people watching this meeting, how the internship actually worked in the Department of Justice? They might talk us through that, particularly in the context of what the success rate was for people and whether anybody got full-time employment out of it. I would appreciate it if they would talk us through the process

from the beginning to the end.

Professor McGinnity said a great deal about targeted approaches, so I will put her on the spot. What targeted approaches does she wish to see emerging? Otherwise, as she said, we will be producing reports. What are we going to take on here today?

Ms Shirley Comerford: Our strategy is a new strategy which we launched recently. It is a living document so as part of our normal business operations we would review it on an ongoing basis. From that perspective, it will be a living document.

With regard to impact, the ESRI representative made a very good point about data. One of the strategic change areas in our strategy is the piece about us having better knowledge and understanding of the recruitment market and the public sector workforce. We are very aware that we have gaps in our data and that we need to build our knowledge and understanding of the workforce and the recruitment pipelines and how they reflect the diversity of society. To do this we must develop our data capability and we have to develop accessible data-driven evidence bases. That is the piece on how we can establish that baseline so we can measure and see any interventions that we make, whether they are achieving anything or whether we are succeeding with them. Some of the associated elements would be items such as seeking to refine our messaging on diversity and inclusion data collection, to encourage candidates to complete it and to start building and increasing our knowledge. We know anecdotally that many people do not declare their EDI data when they are filling in forms or applying for roles. There might be something to do with the messaging on that. That is something which is an immediate focus for us.

Once we have that we will develop the key metrics relating to the brand awareness piece. We will have baseline data for our protected and diverse groups on public jobs, so we know we are going to be reaching people and whether we are reaching those diverse groups. That is something we are trying to do because we want to ensure that we are targeting our audiences.

We are also hoping to commission some independent research into EDI-related candidates' experiences of the recruitment process. We are doing this to try to help us understand where the barriers and the areas for improvement are. That will then contribute to the development of robust and sustainable mechanisms for mapping the EDI profile for the public sector. That is one of the first big pieces of work we will be giving our attention to this year. Obviously, we have to establish the baseline in order to have the measurement piece.

The internship programme for the Department of Justice is a new programme. It was to start in January this year, but it was delayed because of Covid-19. I understand it is going to start in May. There will be paid internships at clerical officer, CO, and executive officer, EO, levels for an 11-month period. The interns will have work experience across various departments in the Department of Justice when they are finished. We will come in towards the back end of that to run a careers clinic. We have run some of these previously. It is helping to support candidates through application processes, such as how to apply, how to present at interviews and tips, tricks and the like, with the aspiration that once the internships are finished they can go on to meaningful employment.

Does that answer the Deputy's question or is there anything else she wants me to discuss?

Deputy Denise Mitchell: Ms Comerford spoke about getting the data and so forth. What is the timeframe on this?

Ms Shirley Comerford: It is a three-year strategy. The Deputy should not think that nothing has started or nothing starts until the strategy is published. This is an area in which we have been mobilising ourselves for a number of years, and we will continue that through our outreach work, our collaboration and exercising our influence in terms of being able to talk to policy makers and to share our experience and our evidence. We will continue to do that, as we have been doing over the years.

The strategy development process was an interesting piece of work for us because we did a great deal of collaboration. We carried out consultation with experts, academia and the NGO sector. We got a large amount of information and learning from that for ourselves as an organisation. That is the other piece in that regard. It is about making sure that we are confident diversity and inclusion champions in the sector, that we live our values and that we can demonstrate best practice both in our culture and through my workforce in PAS. Again, it is just building on the work we have been doing over the last number of years.

Dr. Frances McGinnity: Deputy Mitchell had some questions for me. On the point about data, many members of the committee will know that ethnicity is rarely measured in Ireland. Getting an ethnic identifier on these data sets and these services to allow tracking takes a while. If it is in a certain health database, primary school database or the Department of Social Protection database it will take a while to build that up to inform how Travellers are progressing and to allow people to monitor what is going well and what is going badly. While I strongly advocate for a mix of targeted plus the mainstream, the mainstream will only work if one is monitoring. One has to monitor the mainstream policies to check if the needs of the disadvantaged group are being met in a mainstream policy.

With regard to the specific policies in areas, they would target the specifics of Traveller disadvantage, for example, broadband hubs, which were mentioned by Ms McDonagh, facilitating working from home for groups, places to study, childcare where people live, support for parents to support children doing homework and support for parents on the value of education. Even if they do not have it themselves, it is valuable and a good thing to have. Staying in school is a good thing to do. I mentioned earlier additional supports rather than separate institutions for training. There may be benefits there for the other people, the non-Travellers, who are engaging in the training so they see what Travellers and a minority group can do. That is a hidden advantage of having the training. However, if very disadvantaged groups such as Travellers are going to be brought into any mainstream service, that is where one needs to watch that their needs are being met.

Chairman: Do any of the committee members wish to contribute? They can contribute on the second round if they wish.

I wish to make a few points, as a Traveller woman. First, many Traveller women, like women from the general population, choose to be stay-at-home mothers and wives. For members of the public who are watching these proceedings, there is nothing shameful about choosing that as a career. We all know, as mothers and as young mothers, it is one of the hardest jobs in the world, but for women who stay at home it is not recognised enough. I wish to clarify that.

In addition, and I hope I am not being cheeky in saying this, it is not part of Traveller culture not to work. Years ago, my father, the Lord have mercy upon him, worked as a mechanic. He did not have a qualification for it. Members of my extended family are really good as electricians, plumbers and mechanics, especially some of the men, and the women work with hair and make-up, caring and so forth. I was in a school before Christmas and before the restrictions

and a young Traveller woman said to me: "Eileen, you are lucky. We all will not end up in the Houses of the Oireachtas. We all would not get those jobs. At the end of the day, we are only going to be seen as Travellers". This was a young girl of 12 years of age in a secondary school. I remember my grandfather or my big daddy, the Lord have mercy upon him. He is more than 12 years dead and he used to say to us that Travellers could rule Ireland - he meant that they could be in politics, jobs and so forth - if only they had the opportunity to do so. I believe he was right. Many times we say that if Travellers can go forward and be something, the other Travellers will see it and want to be it as well. Unfortunately, that is still not happening because racism and discrimination are beaten into one from a young age - in primary school, secondary school and at third level in university. I am just stating that from my experience. One of our biggest problems is getting young Travellers to complete second level education. That is something the Irish Traveller Movement, Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre, the Minceir Whiden Society, Exchange House Travellers Service and all the national organisations are working on at present.

As a Traveller woman, I am sick to death of policies, of sitting in rooms, not just today but for the last ten years, of looking at jobs and employment, how to get the Travellers through the door and saying the Travellers need A, B, C and D. It is very tough, as an activist, seeing that ten years later. My colleague, Oein De Bhardúin, works with me in the Oireachtas. We work together, hand in hand. It is brilliant and we have big conversations in which we say, "If only". In every employment we look at the status of women and men. That information should be available for ethnic minority groups too. Every employer should be employing people from ethnic minority groups, which include members of the Traveller community. There are many Travellers who work in nursing homes and are front-line workers in the midst of the pandemic. There are also doctors, nurses, school principals and so forth who went on to get masters and doctorates. They work in the Department of Education. There are many great Traveller people. While we are having this conversation, and without me running on a little too much, let us look at one of the positives, that we have many Travellers in employment. Unfortunately, however, many of those Travellers have to hide their identity to be successful.

(Interruptions).

Chairman: We have to draw up a report on employment for the Traveller community. Many of the questions I had have been asked. Deputy Mitchell mentioned the identifier and so forth. I will refer back to the women who presented here today about going from the real to the ideal. The real is that we do not have many Travellers in employment. What do they see as the ideal solution to that, to get access for Travellers and also to be successful when having access to mainstream employment?

Ms Jeanne McDonagh: I will respond first to that. The absolute ideal might be a little idealistic, but it should be that one is in employment because one wants to be in employment and one just happens to be a Traveller, a woman or a person with disability. However, one is there, first and foremost, on merit as a good employee. It is very important to get the mindset across to recruiters, employers and people who are already in the workforce that people deserve a chance and deserve to be there on merit because they bring something to the workplace, to their colleagues and to the work. I would like to see a situation where if the fact that one is a Traveller arises, it is in light of a discussion, such as saying: "That is interesting; tell me a little more about yourself". I recognise that this is the ideal, but it should be by the way, and not just because, if that makes sense. A great deal of work has to be done to achieve that, as well a great deal of education and learning and a lot of confidence building for the Traveller community

themselves. I do not know when that will be, but the will should be there and very practical steps must be taken to achieve that. The work of this committee will be important in driving that home, that it is not a talking shop but an action shop and something good comes out of all this.

Ms Shirley Comerford: I agree with Ms McDonagh. That is the utopia, and it would be a fantastic place for us to reach. Our experience with marginalised groups is that it takes a while. We need purposeful interventions by organisations or by sectors. If the Chairman were to ask me what things have worked well previously, we can point to the experiences we have seen in apprenticeships and work placement programmes that provide access to employment. Although the numbers are small, it is a start. I believe that could work. On the other side of that, it is not just that entry piece. The committee has heard me say previously that it is about ensuring there are appropriate supports in place - supports for the individual and supports from an organisation perspective. It is a journey. While I can speak for my organisation, I am sure other CEOs would say the same. It is a journey, a learning and purposeful journey that an organisation must have. There are conversations that must happen, interventions and initiatives must be there and an understanding must be created. That training piece is very important in organisations. HR communities have an important role to play in ensuring that they are having these conversations at the top table and holding leadership accountable for driving inclusive workplace cultures.

The other thing is not to be complacent. It is about making sure that we are engaging with individuals, understanding their experience and using that to ensure we develop appropriate interventions and initiatives. I cannot say that we have all the answers, but if we had something like that it would be a very good starting point from which we could build and develop.

Dr. Frances McGinnity: From my perspective, the goal is that Travellers have the same opportunities as other groups in Irish society. One should not have to be exceptional like you, Chairman, to achieve in society. One should have the same opportunities. The ultimate aim is closing that gap. It is not that we want to downplay diversity or difference; it is that we want to value diversity and inclusion so we can close some of the gaps in education and employment and get to the stage where Government policy makers, employers and the Traveller community believe Travellers can positively contribute to the Irish labour market, and they will.

Chairman: Thank you for your feedback. Does Deputy Stanton wish to contribute?

Deputy David Stanton: Yes. I apologise for not being able to attend the meeting. It clashed with another meeting, but I was watching and trying to listen on the monitor. I will read the transcripts later. I got the gist of what took place. I congratulate everybody on what they have been doing. This is a huge challenge and a great deal of work must be done. I am familiar with Ms Enright and Dr. McGinnity and the work they have been doing. We are reported out of it at this stage. I chaired a committee for four years and we have many reports, but we need action now. We need hands-on activity on the ground to make this happen.

We need to find out, first, why Travellers are not getting employment. I heard somebody say earlier that much of it is related to their self-esteem. I visited many Traveller communities over the last number of years and one thing that struck me in one place was all the young people hanging around, and this was when we had full employment before the pandemic. They were fabulous young people just hanging around with nothing to do and all day to do it. I wondered what was going on and why those people were not being engaged. Education has a big part to play, as somebody mentioned earlier. It is about getting through school, getting out the other

side and getting some type of recognition. Self-esteem and self-belief are very important. They are part of it.

I am aware of the work Ms Enright is doing. The Irish Association for Social Inclusion Opportunities, IASIO, and other organisations are doing fantastic hands-on work on the ground, and hand holding in some instances. Employers and businesses need to be hand held as well and brought along. It is a huge amount of work. I heard what Ms Comerford said about diversity, which is massively important, and challenging people at the top table.

Chairman, you and the committee are doing great work in this area, but we must keep at it. I will read the transcript and I sincerely apologise for not being able to attend all of the meeting. It is due to the way matters broke today.

Chairman: Thank you, Deputy. There are no final comments so I thank our witnesses for attending the meeting today. It was an eye opening and educational afternoon for me. Sometimes we think we know the gaps and inequalities, but it is always important to be reminded. I hope the witnesses will be able to come to Leinster House in person in the near future to present to us again. On behalf of the committee I thank them for a very educational afternoon. Hopefully, other Members of the Oireachtas, members of the public and Ministers who were watching today's meeting will learn from it how difficult it is for members of the Traveller community to access employment in Ireland today. I and the committee look forward to working with all of you in the future.

There is no other business so I will adjourn the meeting.

The joint committee adjourned at 2.16 p.m. until 12.30 p.m. on Thursday, 6 May 2021.