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, 18 Bealtaine 2021

Tuesday, 18 May 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,	Joe O'Reilly,
Dessie Ellis,	Pauline O'Reilly,
Éamon Ó Cuív,	Ned O'Sullivan.
Bríd Smith.	

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

Traveller Employment and Labour Market Participation: Discussion (Resumed)

Chairman: I welcome attendees to our virtual meeting this afternoon and thank the Business Committee for making it possible to have witnesses attend. I remind members that they must be in Leinster House, or in the grounds of the Convention Centre in Dublin, in order to attend this meeting. If any member attempts to participate from outside of Leinster House, I will ask them to leave the meeting. I remind witnesses that because they are giving evidence from outside of Leinster House, they may not have the same privilege as if they were in Leinster House. They may think it is appropriate 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. They may stop if I say that I think they are breaking the rules.

To complete some committee business, I propose that the minutes of the last committee meeting, held on 4 May 2021, are agreed and approved. Is that agreed? Agreed.

Today's hearings are on employment. Before we hear from our witnesses, I propose we publish their opening statements and submissions on the committee website. This includes our guests from the Irish Business and Employers Federation, IBEC, the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, ICTU and the Travellers in Prison Initiative. Is that agreed? Agreed.

This is the fifth meeting of the committee on Traveller employment. On behalf of the committee, I am delighted to welcome our witnesses today. From IBEC, Dr. Kara McGann, head of social policy and Ms Meadhbh Costello, policy executive; from ICTU, Mr. David Joyce, equality and social policy officer and Ms Lisa Connell, assistant general secretary of Fórsa; from the Travellers in Prison Initiative, Ms Anne Costello, programme co-ordinator and Mr. Martin Ward, BBR manager, Galway Traveller Movement. I suggest each organisation take five minutes to make its opening statement. We will then have questions and comments from members. Each member will have approximately five minutes and they may have the opportunity to speak a second time. I now call on Dr. Kara McGann to give her opening statement.

Dr. Kara McGann: I thank the joint committee for the invitation to IBEC to appear today on employment issues with respect to the Traveller community. I look after social policy for IBEC, Ireland's largest business representative and lobbying group, and I am here with my colleague Ms Meadhbh Costello.

The significant employment gap between the Traveller community and other groups within the population has been well documented. It is a gap that has persisted regardless of periods of economic prosperity or recession. Covid-19 and its impact on care, construction, and service occupations, in which Census 2016 data suggest many Traveller men and women work, will compound this employment situation further. The reasons for this employment gap are complex with multilayered challenges contributing to the stark figures. Research suggests low levels of educational attainment, disincentives built into the social welfare system, inappropriate activation supports and discrimination while job seeking among these challenges. However, these barriers to work seem to have their roots in systemic societal prejudice and exclusion of generations of the Traveller community, which have resulted in low confidence for action and support in achieving employment goals. As such, a structured whole-of-society approach with tailored interventions will be required to address the multifaceted issues and repair the damage done with collaboration from all stakeholders, including business. While my submission to the committee has greater detail, I will touch on some key areas IBEC believes are impacting the situation and where there might be scope for change.

Travellers have been omitted from Government activation or employment strategies, like the Pathways to Work 2016-2020 strategy or, if featured, the strategy lacks detailed targets, timelines and owners to ensure they are achieved resulting in the Traveller community often being invisible in labour market policy. In the wake of Covid-19, and as labour market activation measures are engaged to support people back into employment, it is essential that the Traveller community is named in these activation and employment strategies to ensure it does fall further from the labour market in the recovery. Given the significant levels of Traveller unemployment, as well as including Travellers in such policies, further targeted supports may be required. It is essential that Intreo addresses these needs and that there are specific actions and approaches to increase Traveller engagement. Using the adage "nothing about us without us" it is also important that these supports are properly researched, funded and developed in collaboration with Traveller organisations.

In general, the Traveller community has been seen to have lower levels of education than the population at large, which can hamper access to employment. As such, a fully integrated approach to education and training, apprenticeships and pathways to employment, needs to be formulated in line with various Government strategies. Removal of the challenges within education for members of the Traveller community would also be key, as many report instances of discrimination or harassment, or having to hide their identity for fear of same. Employer involvement in the content of work-ready programmes offered by Traveller and partnership organisations could also support the development of in-demand skills, and ensure that participants are kept as engaged with the labour market as possible through work experience and placement opportunities. The Traveller graduate network currently being created by Travellers for Travellers has the potential to provide peer support, role models and mentors for young Travellers coming through second and third level education and making the transition into employment. This needs to be supported by Government and employers to ensure its success.

The experience and perception of prejudice and discrimination towards Travellers in education, training and employment is a significant barrier which will require intensive work to mend relationships, address stereotypes and debunk these beliefs if real participation is to be achieved. We have seen the impact the use of personal stories can have in other marginalised groups in breaking down assumptions and stereotypes, and cultivating empathy and compassion. Therefore, opportunities to portray Travellers, their cultural heritage and the roles they play in Irish society, including in the workplace, should be taken to change the narrative and address unconscious bias and prejudice. This can be included in the media, teacher training, the education curriculum in schools, as well as part of diversity and awareness training in organisations.

Tackling discrimination against Travellers in the workplace should be supported by a wider public awareness and anti-racism campaign which specifically addresses anti-Traveller racism. This would be particularly valuable to address racism against employees in public-facing occupations and the creation of workplaces where a person can feel safe and respected in bringing his or her whole self to work. Such a campaign should be considered as part of Ireland's upcoming national action plan against racism.

For many employers, the Traveller community is an unknown entity and, as such, this may result in a failure to encourage participation. An awareness campaign to educate employers and showcase some of the successful case studies around the country in social work, recycling, caring and landscaping, to name but a few initiatives, may help to influence employers to actively engage with this often talented and skilled untapped pool of labour. The work done in 2006

with the integrated workplace initiative co-ordinated by the Equality Authority, and supported by trade unions and employers, could be revisited to encourage the valuing of all cultures and ethnicities, and the creation of truly integrated workplaces. A successful initiative under way to support people with disabilities into work and provide an employer disability information service called Employers for Change is currently being run by Open Doors. This initiative offers employers information, advice and support to enable them to confidently recruit and retain people with disabilities. A similar model could be undertaken for the Traveller community and employers.

Opportunities for work experience or internship programmes should also be considered, possibly through the Open Doors initiative or a bespoke collaboration between employers and Traveller organisations. This would equip Travellers with the necessary experience that is sometimes lacking, offer mentoring, build their networks and smooth their transition into the workplace. This would require commitment and co-operation of a cross section of leaders, including members of both the Traveller and settled community, Government, Traveller groups and employers.

To be fully inclusive as a country, we must ensure that Traveller men and women are provided with the necessary supports, resources and services to enable them to fully realise their potential as active members of the Irish population. As other commentators recently said, there have been a number of reports about the Traveller community over the years and now is the time for concerted action. We have work to do to restore trust and belief within the Traveller community to expect success in education and employment, and work to ensure that we tackle racism and discrimination within those experiences that are hindering engagement. Changing embedded and systemic issues will require a whole-of-society approach involving all stakeholders, and, when successful, will impact positively on individuals, organisations and Irish society. I thank members of the joint committee for the opportunity to present IBEC's views on this issue.

Chairman: Thank you for that, Dr. McGann. I now call on Mr. David Joyce, equality and social policy officer with ICTU, to make his opening statement.

Mr. David Joyce: I am pleased to take up this invitation, with my colleague Ms Lisa Connell, to discuss with members the topic of Traveller employment and labour market participation, having regard to the unemployment rate of 80% among Travellers. Of course, this figure is quoted from prior to the pandemic, so we do not really know what impact that will have on the Traveller community. Due to an absence of ethnic equality monitoring in the collection of employment data, the rate of unemployment among Travellers post Covid is not known at this stage.

As Government supports people back into employment post the pandemic, it is imperative there are positive action measures which ensure that Travellers, and other under-represented groups in the labour market, are not left behind. We sent in a written submission earlier this year and it outlined a history of standing by and supporting Travellers and Traveller organisations in our movement. I do not intend to go over that today because of time constraints. We stated in our submission that, welcome as it is, the recognition of Traveller ethnicity alone will not deal with the 80% unemployment rate, a statistic underpinned by a range of issues affecting Traveller participation in the labour market. Factors such as severe educational disadvantage, inequality and discrimination in the workplace all contribute to this situation. It is clear that rights must follow, and that an institutionalised policy response is needed to address all of these issues.

We went on to outline the policy framework, including the national Traveller and Roma inclusion strategy, and the shortcomings and limitations of the strategy, in respect of both its programme and targets relating to Traveller employment enterprise. We have also participated in the St. Stephen's Green Trust Traveller enterprise and employment policy programme and believe the project has had a significant input in that the findings relating to employment are a lasting legacy for this work and include areas such as the need for national strategies underpinning growth, recovery, employment and enterprise to name Travellers as a target group; strong encouragement of the incorporation of the census question on ethnicity into the work of all statutory bodies; positive action measures to increase supports for Travellers into enterprise and employment; consultation with Traveller organisations, which is key to developing appropriate and accessible programmes; and the need for all measures to include monitoring, evaluation and learning frameworks which capture the impact on Travellers. Positive action measures should also be gender-proofed in respect of Traveller women. Lessons from the public sector duty and the diversity and inclusion strategy of the Public Appointments Service could be used to model changes being sought in the private sector.

We also believe investment in workplace integration can help to make our workplaces effective role models for wider society. As Dr. McGann mentioned, in 2006, in the context of the national action plan on racism, we worked with the Equality Authority and other partners to develop the concept of the integrated workplace. By that I mean workplaces that are free from discrimination and harassment; that are welcoming to all migrant workers and other black and minority ethnic groups, including Traveller employees and customers or service users; that acknowledge and provide for cultural and linguistic diversity among employees and customers as well as making adjustments for diversity among all employees; that take practical steps, including workplace anti-racism training, in order to achieve full equality in practice for all workers and employees; and that communicate a message promoting greater equality within the wider culturally diverse community served by the enterprise. It is timely now that, along with IBEC and the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, IHREC, we are seeking to revive some of this work in the hope of contributing towards securing better employment outcomes for excluded groups, including Travellers. Our general secretary, Patricia King, also participates in the anti-racism committee that will make recommendations to the Government later this year on how best to strengthen its approach to tackling racism. The anti-racism committee's work will culminate in a new draft national action plan against racism for consideration by the Government.

As all this renewed focus comes about, it is worth mentioning - and I know the committee discussed this in its previous session - the publication of the research titled "Travellers in the Mainstream Labour Market: Situation, Experience, and Identity", which explores the experiences of Travellers who, despite the many barriers, have successfully negotiated a pathway into mainstream employment. The research findings are in three areas, namely, getting work-ready, getting into employment and experiences in development and progression while in work. We read with interest the committee's engagement with two of the authors of the research, Rachel Mullen and Niall Crowley, at a previous session and note the barriers that were identified at that meeting, including people not being comfortable with being open about their ethnic identity in the workplace and not being afforded opportunities to progress as well as the fact that many felt this was directly because of their Traveller identity.

The research also reinforces the critical need for Travellers to be named in mainstream labour market policies and the fact that the key policy in this regard would be the new pathways to work strategy being developed in the Department of Social Protection. Underpinning the

policy strategy should be the more effective implementation of the public sector equality and human rights duty. We also agree that systemic work experience programmes across the public sector that involve internships specifically targeting groups that are very distanced from the labour market would be very useful. The last recommendation, involving the importance of guidance and supports for employers and trade unions, is an acknowledgment of our role to play in employment pathways for the Traveller community. One of the key elements emerging from the research was the importance of workplace cultures that allowed people to reconcile work and family life, which is crucial for access, particularly for Traveller women but also, interestingly, for men in the Traveller community. We have been working to ensure the effective transposition of the EU work-life balance directive, advocating for workers' rights to request flexible working arrangements and generally trying to make improvements in that area. The personal accounts in the report will, it is hoped, inform the development of policy and actions to address the challenges experienced by Travellers. We in the trade union movement will not be found wanting in continuing our work with the Traveller community to achieve better outcomes.

I thank the committee for the opportunity to speak.

Chairman: Thank you very much, Mr. Joyce. I now call on Ms Anne Costello to make her opening statement.

Ms Anne Costello: I thank the Chair, Senator Flynn, and members of the committee for giving us this opportunity to address it on the issue of positive action in employment for Travellers and other under-represented groups. The Travellers in Prison Initiative is a St. Stephen's Green Trust programme and is part-funded by the St. Stephen's Green Trust, the Irish Prison Service and the Probation Service. Its overall aim is to embed changes in policy and practice that will have a positive influence on Travellers in prison and their families and communities.

The committee has heard over past weeks about the stark unemployment situation for Travellers from others including the St. Stephen's Green Trust, Values Lab and the Galway Traveller Movement. I will not go through those statistics today except to say that the chances of accessing employment are bleaker still for Travellers with a criminal record. Today we want to focus on possible practical solutions to improve employment rates among Travellers. I am particularly pleased to introduce Martin Ward from the Galway Traveller Movement, who manages Bounce Back Recycling, a social enterprise employing 16 Travellers. Joanna Corcoran made a presentation on BBR to this committee recently, but Martin is here today to talk specifically about how this type of social enterprise could be scaled and replicated.

As many of you may be aware, Travellers are very over-represented in prison. This over-representation is not unique to Ireland; there is the same trend among indigenous and minority ethnic groups in many other countries. Hopefully I will have an opportunity at some other date to speak to the committee specifically on the issue of Travellers in prison, but today we are focusing on employment. When I go into the prisons, the main questions I get asked by Travellers in prison are "Can you help me to make a living to support my family when I come out of prison?", "What can you do to help me get a job?" and "Where can I get help to get work?". Unfortunately, there are some Travellers in prison for whom employment is not their priority due to other issues such as poor mental health, addiction, trauma, homelessness and other issues. I really welcome the establishment of the Government task force to consider the mental health and addiction challenges of persons interacting with the criminal justice system, and we would welcome the opportunity to work with them. In any case, in response to the requests from prisoners for help with employment, the Travellers in Prison Initiative looked at positive action measures in other jurisdictions to address this issue. We soon realised doing this research

that while we are talking about this from the perspective of Travellers with a criminal conviction, our recommendations apply to all Travellers and indeed also to other under-represented groups.

What do we mean by positive action? When we talk about positive action, we are talking about things that employers, including State agencies and Government Departments, can do to increase Travellers employment in their workplace. We have identified some key factors organisations need in planning and introducing positive action measures. First, there needs to be leadership and senior management buy-in. We need "senior champions" in organisations. Organisations need to have an understanding of the issues for under-represented groups, and for this we recommend some cultural competency training, where people have opportunities to address their own unconscious biases. There needs to be zero tolerance of discrimination and no place for derogatory language, stereotyping and so on. We need a recruitment process that is simple and easy to navigate. New employees need mentor support and support for promotion and progression in the workplace. Internships must result in opportunities for permanent positions. We have had pilot programmes over recent years but it now needs to be mainstreamed. We have had enough pilots.

Mr. Ward recently spoke on the radio and referred to the fact that there are 400,000 people working in the public sector in Ireland. He said that if even 0.1% of these employees were Travellers, we would have 400 Travellers working in the public sector. Of course, if the public service was truly representative of the population of Ireland, the number of Travellers employed in the public sector would be much higher. It is very disappointing to think that we have not even achieved this tiny percentage.

What needs to happen? The Government needs to commit to a public sector that is representative of the population. Any new public sector recruitment campaign must include provision for targeting Travellers. We need a Government internship programme, similar to those in Australia, across all Departments and public bodies. These should follow the good practices identified in our research and lead to proper jobs. These programmes need to be led from central government. The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform should be the lead Department as issues of public sector reform fall within its remit. This matter also directly relates to one of the pillars of the Department's policy, Our Public Service 2020.

Local and national Traveller organisations need to be resourced to support Government agencies in undertaking these positive action initiatives. These organisations are well-placed to assist Travellers in taking part in these programmes. It is also really important that criminal convictions do not automatically exclude people from recruitment opportunities.

We know that the public sector is only part of the solution. We must also support Travellers' access to employment in the private sector, the social enterprise sector and to self-employment. We welcome initiatives and strategies such as the Irish Prison Service and the Probation Service's strategy, Working to Change, which aim to help ex-prisoners access employment. Our recommendations include doing a lot more so that Travellers in custody who are preparing for release are job-ready on release. With regard to social enterprise, Bounce Bank Recycling provides an excellent model for good practice. We need to build on this model to support the development of social enterprises for Travellers.

We need to be ambitious. We cannot be having these conversations again in five years' time. Now is the time. The solutions are there and the benefits will be felt by this generation and future generations.

Chairman: I thank Ms Costello for that presentation. We will take a minute or two to hear from Mr. Ward if he wishes to make any comments or points.

Mr. Martin Ward: Ms Costello and the other speakers have covered most of it. The recommendations are very clear. Anything is possible if the will is there to roll out the recommendations which have been put forward. We have showcased what can be achieved if opportunities are given to members of the Traveller community by growing a social enterprise from three staff members to 16 in three years. We have busted the myth that Travellers do not want to work. We have people knocking on our door looking for jobs every day of the week. The sad fact is that we have to turn them away because we cannot be the only employer of Travellers in Galway. We believe there is a lot of potential for jobs in the public service but there are also opportunities in public procurement, on which €20 billion is spent every year. If some of that was ring-fenced to ensure the delivery of social impacts, we would be well on our way to creating some jobs. Let us start with laying down some targets. These targets would be realistic and would grow year on year. As other speakers have said, we feel we have been overanalysed as a community. Many reports have been done. We are losing a great deal of time. A report comes out every three to five years. The statistics have not changed. It is not the community saying the statistics have not changed, but report after report doing so. As other speakers have said, it is time to get on with it.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: I thank all of the contributors for their contributions to this debate. In five years' time, we need to be able to say that the percentage of Travellers who are unemployed has decreased. In other words, if actions do not lead to results, those actions are not good enough. It is as simple as that. What strikes me from today's debate is that the approach must be multifaceted.

I was on Galway Bay FM this morning. Keith Finnegan was reading out the questions and comments. One of the comments made a few times was inevitably that Travellers do not want to work. I have heard that before but not about Travellers. When I was a child, I heard that Connemara people would not work. I think that view has been disproved. Given an incentive, most people want to work and do work. We should therefore dismiss this as a valid argument.

I was particularly interested in one thing on which Dr. McGann touched because I am a member of the Joint Committee on Social Protection, Community and Rural Development and the Islands and we are, at the moment, preparing a budget submission. She said that there are disincentives built into the social welfare code. I am interested in her view as to how that could be changed. There are lots of things in the social welfare code I would change. I will be pushing for lots of change. What are these disincentives? Is means testing one? Obviously there has to be a social welfare code. I certainly would not be in favour of disimproving it in any way because most of us would find it hard to live on what people who are in receipt of social welfare get. What are those disincentives and how could we improve on them? There are possibly very simple things we could do. When I started working and was employing small farmers, I certainly came across many disincentives that were quite bizarre. Some still exist but we have managed to improve in respect of others over the years. I am interested in Dr. McGann's view on that.

I was very interested in what Ms Costello had to say. I am interested in the idea of taking very specific actions this time. Would Ms Costello agree that one of the best ways to break down prejudice is to get Travellers into work so that people get to know them intimately as workmates and find out that, like everybody else, they are not so different? Would she therefore agree that, regardless of all our courses and talking, unless we get a significant number of

Travellers into work, we will not really overcome people's underlying prejudices? The best way to overcome such prejudices is for people to become friends and workmates with people from communities they find strange. In that way, they become people they trust. Would she agree that there are some places in which such recruitment will be easier than in others? An example is the public sector. We should focus big time on that. Ms Costello was involved in setting up the social enterprise in Galway, which has been very successful. Unfortunately, it was difficult to achieve the contract for the insulation. It immediately did what a good business would do; it reformed itself and came back again stronger than ever. Do the witnesses feel that more of these schemes around the country and a programme administered by the Department of Rural and Community Development could play a significant role in creating a bridgehead into other types of employment and, again, that people would get used to services being provided by people in the Traveller community?

There is the Criminal Justice (Spent Convictions and Certain Disclosures) Act 2016. Are employers still looking for records? Is there a massive prejudice against anybody with a record? Presumably, somebody with two, three or four convictions is in an exponentially worse position. Do significantly more resources need to put into interacting with people during the first time they go to prison so that they do not go back to prison and thus do not create a double jeopardy for themselves?

Dr. Kara McGann: From our perspective, in talking with Traveller community and partner organisations, and using the research on health, the big disincentive relates to the loss of the medical card. Looking at how we address this must be quite multifaceted. For somebody to even consider that would have to trust enough to take the opportunity for employment, and trust that it was going to work out. There is work that we could look at on the Department's side and, equally, on the employment side to tackle the issue.

We are working on spent convictions with Working to Change. My colleague, Ms Costello, sits on the that working group. Broadly in respect of criminal offences, and not specific to the Traveller community, we are bringing a focus group of employers together in the coming weeks to understand where the challenges and barriers are, and what we can do to change that going forward.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: One of the big problems that I find with the medical card is that it is given for three or four years but after a year and half there is a review. Let us say we introduce a fixed term for a medical card of three or five years for all of society, irrespective of income changes, that period would be sustained so people would have a guarantee of the time they would have a medical card and would not have to worry that as soon as they got a job, they would lose it. Would that simple step make a difference? This medical card issue has done my head in because it relates to all sorts of issues such as exam fees. The problem with it is it is not just a health card. Do the witnesses think it would be helpful if the powers that be put a fixed time on a medical card and that it could not be reviewed unless the Department could prove that someone had told utter lies in the initial application, irrespective of any income change?

Dr. Kara McGann: That would give people the confidence to make plans around how they move forward. It would take one of their concerns or worries out of the equation in making those decisions, for sure.

Chairman: Pavee Point and the primary healthcare team have called for Travellers in low-paid jobs to be entitled to a medical card. An article was published in *The Irish Times* a few weeks ago in which Ms Ronnie Fay, co-ordinator, Pavee Point, called for medical cards to be

provided to low earners within the Traveller community. Because of the health inequalities, Travellers are not looking just a free medical card. Some Travellers can afford healthcare but many Travellers cannot because of unemployment. Then, if Travellers do seek employment, say, in a primary healthcare programme or in other areas they should be entitled to a medical card because of the health inequalities. Pavee Point is doing an awful lot of work on this issue at the moment and the initiative would be a solution going forward.

Ms Anne Costello: I fully agree with Deputy Ó Cuív that we need to see Travellers in employment to start to break down some of the myths but we need to make workplaces safe for Travellers. I constantly hear from people who are in workplaces, including a young man who is training to be an electrician, about the constant micro-aggressions and the comments about Travellers and other groups. That has a hugely negative impact on people's mental health, where they either deny that they are Travellers or they face a barrage all of the time and have to try to defend themselves. We know from Galway and Mr. Ward's experience that he is inundated with applications for any vacancy that he has because Travellers know that it is safe to work there and the environment is not going to impact on their mental health and well-being. We have outlined how workplaces can be made safe.

The South Dublin County Council introduced internships for Travellers 15 years ago when I worked in Clondalkin. Mr. Joe Horan was the county manager at the time but, unfortunately, he is now deceased. He was at the top of the organisation and he changed its culture because he said that he would not accept racist comments and discrimination. His action had a domino effect on all the other staff and that is why it is so important. If the manager or leader of an organisation says no to discrimination then that mindset will filter down to other staff.

I agree that the public sector must show leadership in this regard. It is the biggest employer and it has the resources to support the employment of Travellers. When Travellers are employed in the public sector, and I am not saying that the private sector should wait until that is in place, but that can really show the huge contribution that Travellers can and do make.

The issue of spent convictions is huge. Let us say an 18-year old commits a number of crimes. After he or she turns his or her life around, he or she can never get convictions wiped to access opportunities. Again, the public sector is the first organisation that needs to consider this matter and ask whether a conviction matters to the post that is being applied for. If it does not, then it should not be taken into account.

Mr. Ward will talk about social enterprise. He can talk about First Class Insulation and what happened with that very strong social enterprise.

Mr. Martin Ward: We believe that social enterprise is part of the solution but we are talking about jobs in the hundreds when the Traveller community needs thousands of jobs. Social enterprise is part of the solution and breaks down many barriers. We have first-hand experience because we went into homes to deliver the warmer homes scheme to the fuel poor across Galway city and county. In the beginning, homeowners said that they would not allow Travellers in to complete the work because there was that much racism and discrimination against the community. However, we had the full backing of the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland, SEAI, which was a positive action measure so there was no tolerance. So if a homeowner made racist or discriminatory comments towards the community we had the backing of the SEAI because we were on the panel of contractors and delivered a 100% pass rate and quality on the work. For us, as a team, that gave us an awful lift to believe that we had the backing and such weight behind us that there was going to be no tolerance. Before that, we would have probably

shied away from the work and viewed the scheme as a challenge. A homeowner talked about going on the radio and the whole team was deflated because we believed we were going to be out of the jobs and were never going to be able insulate a house in Galway. That backing was a very positive action by a contractor. A number of calls should be made for community services programmes, with Travellers taking them up across the country, and the special initiative for Travellers. That was key for us in the beginning, to look at the development work, at mainstream and public sector jobs, and at the roll-out of social enterprises. None of the Traveller projects is resourced to take this on right now, which is a pity. The peer-led primary healthcare model was such a success during the pandemic, with people being reached out to, connectivity on the ground, and working with Travellers to bridge them into the services. We would definitely call for the special initiative for Travellers to be housed in the Traveller projects.

Many of the supports right now are for an individual changing, but even if an individual makes all those changes and upskills, it still does not result in a job. That has a ripple effect back in to the community. We are such a small community. If Martin goes the whole way through college and it does not conclude with a job, people will say that it has been a waste of Martin's time, because even though he is well educated, he is still not in control to change mindsets. It is a case of no tolerance, starting with the public service and the social enterprise model, because then we can start to break down so many barriers and go after the public sector. It has been well-supported at Government level, so where are its inclusion and diversity policies for Travellers?

Senator Pauline O'Reilly: It is good to see the witnesses again and to have three Galway people, one after the other. I said last week that it is always a pleasure to see the trucks going around Galway. It makes a big difference because of the impact that it has not just on the community that the witnesses are serving but also because everybody sees that and it is almost an advertisement for the work that Travellers are doing around the county. I have met the witnesses several times and have mentioned that outreach in universities is critical. Deputy Ó Cuív has worked with the Traveller community for many years and has a great record. He has also worked with those who have been in prison. I am delighted to be on this committee and to support the work that everyone is doing.

One issue that raised its head is the idea of the Traveller community's history of entrepreneurship. Do the witnesses have thoughts on how that can be better supported? That is why social enterprise can be really successful, being creative about the kind of work that people want to do and have skills in, historically and otherwise. I agree with the comments about the public service. It is being funded by the public and has an obligation that can be measured. I note the comments in one of the opening statements, that there is an obligation for the public service to reflect the community that it is serving. We always talk about that with regard to gender and minorities. This is critical and could be able to mend relationships, apart from just in the workplace but because it has a public-facing role in many instances. As the witnesses outlined about the SEAI, it has a ripple effect. It is not just about the job but everybody that comes into contact with people. As Mr. Ward said in a radio interview, if 0.1% of people in the public service were Travellers, that would be 400 jobs. If it was truly representative of the Traveller community, I worked out that there would be 570 jobs, so 400 is not even getting to the level of being truly representative.

What are the witnesses' other ideas about entrepreneurship? I agree with Deputy Ó Cuív that we have an opportunity now. Much of the work and the plans happening at present are good, such as the pilot programme in the Department of Justice, but we can all do that when it

comes to internships.

Ms Anne Costello: I thank the Senator. Self-employment is a popular choice among Travellers because their tradition is one of self-employment. They have always been the entrepreneurs. It also protects them from discrimination in the workplace if they are employed by themselves. I have only begun to explore the back to work schemes. I was hoping that it could be introduced into prisons so that Travellers in prison and other prisoners could start preparing for this back to work scheme while in prison and doing up their business plans so that, when they come out, there is not a long gap before they can start back in to employment. My understanding is that the back to work scheme has got much more complicated, bureaucratic and difficult to navigate. We need to look at back to work allowances that work, are real and will make a difference for people who are distant from mainstream employment and are choosing to work as entrepreneurs.

The Senator mentioned the internship in the Department of Justice, which is welcome, but it is just four or five positions. We are glad that the Garda has also introduced an internship for Travellers but this needs to happen across all public bodies. It has to be mainstream. We have done pilots. We did pilots 15 years ago which show that this works. Those internships have to lead to jobs. That is the only way. It is about word of mouth in the community. If somebody goes in for a year to do an internship and leaves without a job, that does not give the community hope. If people are able to do the job, then the internships have to lead to a job.

Mr. Ward might speak on self-employment because that is his area of expertise.

Mr. Martin Ward: Many Travellers would look at self-employment, business opportunities and entrepreneurship. As Ms Costello says, that is because that was really the only option available. Many Travellers have to become entrepreneurs in order to survive at times. They face the same challenges operating a business. One could look at the public procurement directive and whether social considerations were given to that and how Traveller entrepreneurs or businesspeople might be able to get some of those small contracts and so on, while addressing the bigger picture and the changes needed in attitudes and behaviour against the community. My background is one of running business. We had to hide our identity in order to get contracts and had contracts pulled when competitors referred to us derogatorily. Contracts never came to us in the post even though we won them in paper. The biggest advantage that somebody had over me in business was my ethnicity. People still face similar barriers. They are dealing with many overheads when trying to take on staff and run a building. It can be tough to be a Traveller running a business.

Ms Lisa Connell: On the discussion about the public sector, I work for Fórsa trade union, which is the largest public sector union in the country. The conversation about the importance of a focus on employment in the public sector is important. We are aware that the public sector is where best practice exists. There are strong policies and procedures in place across the public sector. The benefit of those is that they are negotiated with the trade unions to ensure that our members are free from discrimination and disadvantage within the workplace. It is important we ensure Travellers within the workplace are free from any potential discrimination in terms of their access into the public sector.

The trade unions are becoming a lot more comfortable with and aware of engaging with the public sector duty. The Irish Congress of Trade Unions has been particularly helpful in organising sessions on what the public sector duty looks like. It is important there are frameworks in place and we ensure they are implemented in our negotiations with employers within the work-

place. Certainly the conversation on the public sector is important in terms of focus.

Senator Pauline O'Reilly: The fact internships do not evolve into jobs is a big blockage. We can all pat ourselves on the back that we have internships but they never produce anything. It is great to hear from Fórsa that standards exist once people are in the jobs. We must now focus, therefore, on getting people into jobs and ending any blockages.

Chairman: Most definitely.

Deputy Bríd Smith: I thank all of the witnesses for their presentations. In January 2019, the Joint Committee on Employment Affairs and Social Protection examined the experience of JobPath and heard from researchers from the Waterford Un/employment Research Collaborative. One of the first things the researchers mentioned was the experience of the Traveller community on JobPath. Among other nasty experiences there was a young man who not only was put on the wrong course but was enrolled by JobPath on a course that required what were described as reasonable levels of literacy despite the fact he had low levels of literacy. The worst part was they forced him to amend his CV against his wishes to hide his ethnicity. The Department responded to the claim saying it had no awareness of such an allegation nor had any complaint to that effect been made. That is fair enough but these JobPath services are provided by the Department of Social Protection through Turas Nua and Seetec. The services are outsourced and a lot of money was paid for them in the past.

I am frustrated and wish to ask Dr. McGann a question, and not in an entirely negative way. Where are the protocols, standards and training when it comes to JobPath, Seetec, Turas Nua and even the members of IBEC? Whatever about the public sector, it is outrageous that such a situation happened to the young man although an official complaint was never made. I know, having lived in Ballyfermot, that when young Travellers seek jobs, in particular in shops, the negativity from employers they are met with is humiliating to say the least, and these employers are members of IBEC. Have protocols, standards or training for employers been put in place? I ask because shops are the first port of call, particularly for young Travellers who may only want to take up temporary jobs during the summer or at Christmas time and do not necessarily wish to have a permanent job or go into a public sector workplace.

I totally agree with what has been said about using the public sector to give people a chance to get work experience and training. Dr. McGann referred in her submission to "The work done in 2006 with the integrated workplace initiative co-ordinated by the Equality Authority, and supported by trade unions and employers". I ask her to expand on that aspect because that was 15 years ago and I have no recollection of the initiative or any involvement in same. She proposed that it would be worth revisiting the initiative and considering what it achieved. What did it achieve? What was the value of it?

I wish to comment on the experience Mr. Ward described. He told us a wonderful story about Travellers working on the warmer homes scheme and being backed by the contractor against the negativity meted out by people whose homes Traveller workers had to go into to carry out the necessary adjustments to people's homes. I am a member of the Joint Committee on Climate Action. This is a great opportunity for us to be inclusive of Travellers doing work because it is not just about moving away from our carbon footprint being too high but also about providing green new jobs. If there are green new jobs available in insulating homes and improving people's life experience by not having to use too much carbon to heat their homes, would it not be a good suggestion to ask the Government to box off a certain amount of these jobs for the Travelling community, to upskill both men and women of the Travelling commu-

nity to carry out this work, and for the Government to see this initiative as part of a green new deal? The whole basis of a green new deal is about being more inclusive, sustainable and having a fairer and more caring society. The initiative would be a good example of that. If all this money is being put into warmer homes schemes, retrofitting and improving people's lives, it should be used to the advantage of the Travelling community.

I totally and utterly agree with the public sector being obliged to give Travellers a chance, in particular local authorities because that is where Travellers will be seen, whether it is working in the public domain, in the parks or, indeed, on public desks dealing directly with the public. As is always said, if you cannot see it, you cannot be it.

I agree with all that has been said about having safe workplaces and having local authorities. I am very interested, however, in finding out how we impose standards and protocols on both employers and companies like Turas Nua, Seetec and anybody who must deal with Travellers either by refusing them employment or by helping them to attain employment.

Dr. Kara McGann: In terms of the work that IBEC would do with its members across the area of equality, diversity and inclusion, I am 13 years with IBEC and, if you take equality as a base and everything else building from that, we have seen a huge increase in the number of employers starting to engage on this topic, some of whom were well established and more of whom are looking at the diversity of their workforce. That is just the structure. The important work is on the inclusive and belonging piece, and on ensuring we stamp out things like racism and discrimination.

As I said in my opening remarks, trust is a huge issue where, as has been mentioned, people have gone looking for jobs and have experienced humiliation. That cannot be allowed to continue in 2021. It was never acceptable and it absolutely is not acceptable with all that we know. We need to tackle that head on and overcome the systemic social prejudice and exclusion of generations of the Traveller community. Employers have put in place awareness-raising and training programmes on diversity and inclusion. The Donegal Traveller group has a diverse aware programme that I know a number of our employers have gone through. We need to see greater uptake of that and that is something we are strongly encouraging and seeing good uptake on.

We had one of the Traveller advocacy groups in to talk to IBEC's diversity forum, which would have 200-plus medium and large public and private sector employers. The group is about networking, sharing best practice and talking about initiatives. This was in January of last year. We found that there was major interest in understanding what were the challenges facing the Traveller community, how those challenges impacted members of the community when they looked for employment, or, indeed, those already in employment, and what, therefore, we needed to do. The ladies who came to speak to us were phenomenal. They were really engaging and we had very positive feedback from the employers we represent. Then Covid-19 hit. I feel we would have gained some momentum and seen some initiatives come to pass if the timing had been different. We are hoping we will see that situation revisited now. That is where we are with that aspect.

Turning to the integrated workplace strand, this undertaking was made up of a range of different initiatives concerning the area of cultural integration, and unions and employers engaged with the endeavour. Mr. Joyce and I worked together on several different elements of it. To give one example of the projects we worked on, we rolled out an initiative on cultural integration in the workplace. That involved addressing what the latter looked like, talking about

language and banter and all these things that are often excused as just being a joke or the way we do things around here. However, in reality, that involved examining those elements of behaviour under an equality, diversity and inclusion lens and then considering how we could do things differently.

That was at a time when we had moved from being a homogeneous society - organisations are very much a microcosm of society - towards looking at how we were integrating the range of cultural diversity which existed. The project did not focus solely on the Traveller community, and that is something we could build on now. However, it was very successful in raising awareness and educating people about the importance of integration, as well its value. It also raised awareness among employers regarding how this type of undertaking benefits not only them but the individual and society as well. In that sense, it is a no-brainer. Mr. Joyce may have more examples of the other initiatives that were a part of that integration project.

Mr. David Joyce: To add briefly to what Dr. McGann said, it was a useful initiative. We had some funds to support projects within trade unions and to organise migrant workers in different sectors of the economy, including in the mushroom industry at the time. Unfortunately, the initiative died a death with the onset of the financial crisis. We are now engaged in conversations with IHREC with a view to revitalising some of that work. This can be part of the building back better facet, in that we are not talking about going back to business as usual post-pandemic, but about moving beyond what was the situation before Covid-19 struck to a more inclusive future.

Deputy Dessie Ellis: I thank the witnesses for their presentations. I am taking on board many of the things people have been saying. I often wonder how much things have changed, because sometimes in the community it is difficult to see that aspect. I have developed many relationships in dealing with people in places like Finglas. We have a large Traveller community in our area. I am in and out of different locations and communities and changes come very slowly. When Dr. McGann was talking about IBEC, do we know how many Travellers each year are employed through IBEC and its associated groups? Do we have any idea of the figures in that regard? I ask that because it seems that everything is happening very slowly.

Within the Traveller community, people have their own minds and a blockage in that regard in respect of certain things. I refer to the attitude towards women in the Traveller community, which can be a bit difficult to understand for many people. I certainly agree that the local authorities and organisations such as the Civil Service should be taking in people, particularly those with disabilities, from the Traveller community. There should be positive discrimination in that regard. There is positive discrimination in general in the Civil Service in respect of people with disabilities. However, I would love to see the figures for the local authorities and the Civil Service in respect of how much things have improved over the years.

Turning to people from the Traveller community with criminal records, that is a difficult issue. From what I can see, employers are very reluctant to employ Travellers who have criminal records. Regarding how we go about tackling that issue, I was interested to listen to some of the ideas suggested in this regard. That aspect needs to be carefully thought out and worked on, because it is very worrying. I refer, in particular, to people having convictions held over them. It is an area which needs to be looked at very carefully. Much comes down to education as well, and to trying to get people into the workforce and break down these barriers which exist in certain jobs and in taking up certain types of employment. I believe sometimes we come across people in the Traveller community who do not feel that a certain area is for them, and we must break down those barriers.

Work is needed in organisations such as the old FÁS, now replaced by SOLAS and the education and training boards, ETBs, and other training centres to get people past that step. We can sometimes get people in and get them training, but then getting them to a stage where they pick up permanent jobs or some other employment is really hard. There is a great challenge involved in trying to bring people on, as opposed to just getting them trained. We need more stable jobs, more consistency in jobs coming up and to try to target people and get them into those jobs. Those are my thoughts in respect of this matter.

Chairman: I am sure Ms Costello wanted to come in earlier, but I will give her the opportunity to contribute now, if she wishes. The witnesses can then reply to Deputy Ellis.

Ms Meadhbh Costello: I have two points to make. First, I will return to the earlier conversation concerning the issue of inclusion in the workplace. The upcoming national action plan against racism is an excellent opportunity to provide a framework for this type of action that can be undertaken in the workplace. I refer to building an initiative within employment, where employers can become leaders in this area. The opportunity with this national action plan stems from taking a whole-of-society approach that really tries to address the underlying institutionalised elements of discrimination in society and that can provide an opportunity through resourcing and guidance for employers to take an active role in tackling racism and discrimination. It has been almost ten years since we have had an action plan like this one, and it has also been some time since we have had an integrated workplaces initiative. This is, therefore, an excellent opportunity to consider how we could feature some of these types of activities in that upcoming strategy.

My second point concerns the issue of spent convictions. IBEC is increasingly involved in this issue with the Working to Change strategy. In fact, as Dr. McGann mentioned, in the coming weeks we are going to have a focus group on this issue with the Department of Justice to best try to understand what the challenges, attitudes and behaviours are in the workplace that are preventing that pathway to employment for people with previous convictions. We are trying to set a baseline there and trying to understand the issue as it stands and then to develop from that resources that can best support employers to better integrate people with previous convictions into the workplace. That is something we are seeking to be active on with employers who are currently engaging people with previous convictions or who perhaps have not considered this as an opportunity before. Again, that is something that we are looking forward to working on.

The second part of the strategy is about trying to get people who are active in the social enterprise sector into mainstream employment. There are possibly some learnings that can be taken from this strategy in terms of many of the issues raised in the discussion by Ms Anne Costello and Mr. Ward. We will consider how we can adopt them to help to support people from the Traveller community who are currently working in social enterprises into mainstream employment. That is something we are also going to be active on this year.

Chairman: I thank Ms Meadhbh Costello. I see Ms Anne Costello is anxious to get back in to respond to Deputy Ellis.

Ms Anne Costello: A number of issues were raised about employment for people with criminal convictions. In the UK it has been shown that people with convictions are very good, loyal employees. In the UK, companies have gone into prisons, met prisoners, done training with them in prison and then they have gone straight into jobs when they came out because they met them as people. That is the kind of initiative we need to take.

A number of Travellers have told me that prison was their first positive experience of learning in either the education or the training centres. They had such a negative experience of education in schools that they were reluctant to go to the school in the prisons but when they did, many of them were pleasantly surprised that it was a different approach and a different attitude. It is so important that we do more while we have a captive audience with men in particular. A number of them raise issues around the type of skills they are interested in and the jobs market. We could do an awful lot more to match people up with their interest and skills and get them the training in prison to access the jobs when they come out.

Did Deputy Ellis ask me another question? I am trying to remember what he asked.

Deputy Dessie Ellis: No, I was only talking about the take-up on SOLAS and various training facilities. I was wondering where we go from there to get people into full-time employment and a more permanent daily routine. That is very important.

Ms Anne Costello: I agree.

Senator Joe O'Reilly: It is commonly said that men are bad at multitasking, but I have been multitasking successfully today. I have not heard the oral presentations but I have read the written submissions and I get the drift of what has been said. I am very encouraged by the submissions and what has come up in the discussion among my colleagues, in that we are focusing on prospective actions that could be taken. Each one of us attending the meeting is capable of spending an hour each discussing the reasons for the under-involvement of Travellers in employment. There is not one of us that could not discourse on that for an hour but that is no use in the long term. It is important that such research was done and that we had context, but now it is time for action. I am very pleased that is the mode of the discussion today.

I would like to mention a number of issues. There is no question about it but we will have to push this agenda as a committee. Those present might hear the bells in the background. I am in the convention centre. If people can hear me then I will continue. We need quotas in the public service, on community employment schemes, as well as on JobPath and other schemes. Each Government initiative in the employment and training spheres needs realistic quotas, as in the case of people with disabilities. The same is true of the public service.

I am interested in hearing the responses of witnesses and any I do not hear, I will read. We need support for employers. The Government must get involved in actively supporting employers to deal with this question. It is not enough to wish employers would take on Travellers and have anti-racism and anti-discrimination policies in their workplaces. That is a fine aspiration, but to give it expression we need practical support for employers and we should not shy away from that.

When they get the opportunity, the capacity of Travellers is very well chronicled in the Bounce Back Recycling business in Galway. That is a great example of success for Travellers and it should give heart to others. There is merit in giving support to Travellers for their own enterprises because that tradition is very deep-rooted. That should parallel the provision of support for employers to get involved, as well as putting in place a quota system.

If one wants to look at it in purely clinical or cold economic terms, there will be an economic output to such an approach, as taxes will accrue, as will savings. This is not a wasted investment or expenditure. There will be an output and an outturn from it and it is important to be aware of that.

The point about the prison situation is interesting and valid. In another context, I came across the fact that in London and other parts of England youth workers are employed who have had a challenging youth experience themselves. They may have had addiction issues or they went off the rails in some area and they are now employed by the state to work with other young people. The output has been impressive. I attended a seminar where it was discussed in detail. I will not bore the meeting further on it. I do not have the figures to hand but the output from it was impressive, hence the merit of the interventions in prison. One of the witnesses, possibly Ms Meadhbh Costello, who made that point is onto something big. There is enormous potential in that regard.

All in all, I just want to make those comments and to support the thrust of what other colleagues said. I agree with what Deputy Bríd Smith said about warmer homes. That is another area where an inbuilt quota system could be put to work. That idea has potential.

I no longer have the bells ringing in the background. Those are the points I wished to make. I look forward to the responses. I will listen to them and then I will leave to go on multitasking.

Chairman: Would any of the witnesses like to reply to Senator Joe O'Reilly?

Ms Anne Costello: I thank the Senator for his comments. Supports for employers are important and the public sector is a big employer that needs to lead by example. The learning from that can give confidence and hope to private employers. We are focusing today on the public sector because sometimes one can put a lot of effort into the private sector with very little result. I agree with the Senator around the need for targets. We need realistic targets for Travellers in employment and the Government has control over the public sector.

The issue around supports for prisoners is important. It costs a lot to keep somebody in prison and it is a shame not to take advantage of that time to give him or her skills that make him or her less likely to return to prison. Prisoners who take up employment are much less likely to return to prison.

Dr. Kara McGann: I thank the Senator for his comments. On the point he made about employer supports, and taking Ms Anne Costello's point into consideration, I think that some employers, if they were to decide now that they would like to employ members of the Traveller community, would not know where to start. Raising awareness and the piece of work Ms Meadhbh Costello has already mentioned around anti-racism and anti-discrimination need to go hand in hand as we consider how to move forward. The Senator is absolutely right when he says the time for talking is over. It is the time for action and there is willingness for that. We have engaged with employers to look at marginalised groups and how we move forward with this. We can get supports in place, put in structures around the issue and move forward with action.

Ms Meadhbh Costello: As was mentioned previously, there will be an opportunity to shape a basket of supports through two upcoming strategies that will be beneficial not only to employers. There is also an opportunity to co-create those supports with members of under-represented communities, whether they are members of the Traveller community or other individuals who the strategies are targeting. It is a good opportunity.

I raise the point that as part of the Working to Change strategy, there will be opportunities for employers to engage in mentorship with people who are currently in the prison system, as well as a couple of other initiatives like that. It will be worth watching that area and seeing how

those initiatives can be rolled out or shaped in the future, and what potential exists.

Mr. Martin Ward: I thank the Senator for the question, which was similar to the question asked by Deputy Bríd Smith about the warmer homes scheme. First Class Insulation was a social enterprise we set up in 2010 and we delivered on the panel of the warmer homes scheme from 2010 to 2020. We had ten years' work done on that. We think it is important that social considerations are built into any procurement process. That is a European directive that is now in Irish law. We were lucky enough to sit on that panel for five years because we were a community-based organisation, like a number of others throughout the country. In 2014, the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland, SEAI, decided that it would put contracts out to tender and part of the direction for the first two tenders put out by the SEAI was that a special lot was put in place for community-based organisations in order for us to compete and maintain the jobs. We were successful twice in that regard. There was a change in directive thereafter which meant there were no more separate lots so we would have to tender against the big contractors. We are, therefore, no longer on that panel, which is a shame because it meant we lost seven jobs in that area. We completed 2,000 homes under that scheme.

Through our social enterprises, we are delivering social, economic and environmental impacts. Our application of the warmer homes scheme was about targeting who we considered the real fuel poor. We went out of our way to deliver to a lot of the Gaeltacht areas. We took the scheme into the Aran Islands and delivered deeper measures. For us, it was not about targeting 40 homes in the one housing estate, as a big contractor would, but was about finding that one home that was never going to be found and ensuring it got over the line to enable it to get the service. It would be great if there was a push by members of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Climate Action to ensure that separate lots are brought back and that community-based organisations can take up a contract because many organisations throughout the country have lost their contracts for the warmer homes scheme. We will be here for the long term whereas the bigger contractors might come and go when the boom starts again. It would be good if that issue was brought up at the climate committee.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: I will be brief and only ask about a few things. Mention was made of extra complexity to the back to work scheme. When I was in the Department, I always said that big policy is easy but problems arise in the detail. Most schemes have become more complex just because somebody somewhere might have got something to which they were not fully entitled. It would be useful for us if somebody with experience of looking at and applying for contracts was to disassemble the process on the form and tell us what could be taken out and what could be made simpler. I have always reckoned that a scheme must have a certain amount of risk of abuse, or whatever, because if a scheme is made 100% tight, it often locks out 100% of the people. Schemes have been introduced in recent times with very little pick-up.

To give an example of what I am talking about, some of the forms for small grants were far too complicated during my time in the Department. One night, I stayed up late and rewrote some of the forms much more simply. We had a meeting the next day and I sat down with the officials and told them what information on the form was essential and could be filled in by anybody without expert advice. I suggested we get on with it. I would be interested in that possibility.

Departments are meant to proof all the forms and processes against real people and I am sometimes not sure if that happens. I had a very simple test that I used to ask my officials to use. I suggested that somebody in a different section to the person who created the form would be asked if he or she could fill out the form. If somebody who was already working in the public

service could not fill out the form, if their attempt to fill it out got a blank as an outside system would, it would obviously be hard to expect the public to fill out the form. There is a lot that can be done here. It is fairly micro work but an awful lot of people are getting caught on the micro stuff. I am interested in this. If somebody wants to come back and tell us all of the conditions on the form that could be changed, it would be very useful to us.

First Class Insulation was hugely successful and there is no question or doubt about that. It happened in my constituency and I know how successful it was. It was a tragedy when First Class Insulation lost the contract. Did the SEAI ever give a valid reason, based on law, EU law, competition law, or some other reason, as to why it changed the process? That is something on which we have to follow up. Mr. Ward should just tell me if he knows of a reason or not.

On the issue of internships in the public service, my view is that to give people a chance to prove themselves, internships have to be reasonably long and stretch to six or seven months. Has any consideration been given to the idea that if an intern subsequently applies for a job in the public service that the internship would be a credit, like an exam credit, for interviews and processes? Does that idea have merit? If an internship is completed successfully, it could count as bonus points in going for a job at the level equivalent.

In the context of education and training in prisons, Ms Costello's comments are very important. Could we do much more in prisons with regard to academic work and practical training and linking them to jobs on the outside so that people could make a smooth transition when leaving prison? Could we do more than what we do now?

Ms Anne Costello: I can respond to the question on prisons. There is certainly more we could do. There is disparity across prisons, with some doing more than others in equipping prisoners with skills to make them more job-ready when they leave prison. We should do more around career guidance. Many people in prison have never had an opportunity to pursue formal education. They have no idea what kind of opportunities they could aspire to.

I have a young man on work experience with me and he has done approximately ten years in prison in all. He is now back studying community and youth work in Maynooth. He said it was never an idea for him but the Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed sent people to Coolmine to speak about those possibilities. He is now thriving in college and he will be a really good community worker. That man was not drawn to paving, welding or some of those other jobs but I have met a number of men in prison asking for practical skills. Many of them do not have formal education but they are saying that if they were trained as mechanics, tilers, drivers, or similar jobs, they could fend for themselves when they leave prison. Unfortunately, some of them say they are doing lollipop stick stuff in prison and that does not lead to jobs.

Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív: Which prison would be best to visit in this regard?

Ms Anne Costello: From what I hear, Wheatfield has very good training resources. Unfortunately, although prison staff are allocated to training, if a security emergency arises anywhere else, it is the first element shut down. Even if somebody must be escorted to hospital or court, a training workshop for woodwork might be the first area to be cut. Security must be a prison's priority. Unfortunately, that is what happens. Many people in prison tell me they never get access to training.

Deputy Joan Collins: I will not repeat much of what has been said, although I agree with everything proposed. The question of targets is important as a marker of how to get things

moving. We could recommend or insist that Departments or parts of the public sector have a percentage of jobs going to the Traveller community. It might be more difficult with social enterprises but we could actively advocate programmes to link with social enterprises.

It is more difficult to see this being done in the private sector. Have parts of the private sector been targeted to engage in this, such as the supermarket or trade sectors, including registered mechanics? Is there engagement on cultural and equality rights and encouragement to recruit Travellers? We should target jobs in the private sector for the Traveller community as well. I know a 50-year-old Traveller who was sleeping rough and he is now in a bedsit. He wants to work but does not know where to go to get it. The Department of Social Protection does not know what to offer him. These issues affect middle-aged men or women in the Traveller community, or even people in all communities. Has a pilot been tried in the private sector to bring about positive discrimination in the workplace for the Traveller community?

Dr. Kara McGann: I thank the Deputy for the question. The short answer is I do not know of anybody who has specifically run a pilot or targeted programme for the Traveller community in employment. We have seen different sectors, after the previous economic crash, looking at specifically targeting people on the live register and trying pilot programmes that encourage people back to work. It is not beyond the realm of possibility. It is important that to set this up for success, we need to ensure awareness training is done, with strong and engaged cultures ready for this. The last thing we would need is more betrayal of trust in the community. It is something that employers should want to engage in again and again. The Deputy is right in that if we get this up and running successfully, the momentum would build and go from there. I do not know of any particular sector that has run such a pilot but, equally, I do not see why we could not look at something like that.

Mr. Martin Ward: I will quickly address Deputy Ó Cuív's question on the back to work scheme. We have just heard on the ground in Galway that the majority of Travellers who apply to that scheme are not accepted. We would be quite happy to a look in a bit more detail at that piece and revert to the Deputy.

Deputy Joan Collins: I appreciate Dr. McGann's comments.

Chairman: If nobody else is looking to get in, I have one or two questions. As a Traveller woman, I hope with all my heart that in five years' time things will be better. Things cannot get any worse for Travellers in the labour market. I really hope we will never need to have discussions like this again. It is very disheartening, with many different layers of inequality affecting Travellers' well-being and education. When I hear people referring to having certain schemes for Travellers, it is even more disheartening. Travellers are sick of schemes and legislation that exist but that do not work. I am a bit fed up reading about legislative policies. I speak to people in Traveller non-governmental organisations and currently there is discussion about a quota for the number of Travellers to be employed in the public and private sectors. That is a step in the right direction. It could be a recommendation in our report but it must be acted upon.

Many Travellers have completed second level education and may have done a course, such as the hairdressing course done by many Traveller women or nail and beauty courses. My uncle drives for a bus company in Bluebell and he has just been named driver of the year. We should look at some of the good practices. He is able to bring the bus into Labre Park and there is no prejudice from the company. That is lovely and we must see more of that. We must see action.

I said at a previous committee meeting that if Travellers were not employed by Traveller

organisations, including non-governmental organisations, there would be more than 80% unemployment in the community. Employment for Travellers must be meaningful. Tokenism and positive discrimination can be beneficial. Being in a job and not being successful in the workplace is not a nice feeling. People are being set up for failure and we have to look at this as well.

I have a question for the unions. How do they think we can get Travellers to be open about identity? I have an aunt who works in a nursing home and does not identify as a member of the Traveller community because she cannot do so. Many Travellers cannot identify as Travellers because straight away they are put at a disadvantage. During the week I saw on social media that a Traveller qualified as a consultant and another is a doctor in a hospital. This is very good and positive and it should be in the media. We need stories that are positive towards the Traveller community.

I have a question for Ms Costello on something Deputy Ó Cuív asked earlier. I have a great interest in the intersectionality between being a Traveller and a woman, being a Traveller and being in prison and being a Traveller and having a disability. We say the prisons could do more. Many Traveller men drive lorries and buses. Yesterday, along with Oein DeBhairduin, I was in a conversation about how everything today is about being green and recycling but Travellers have always recycled through wheeling and dealing and street markets. My family was a market family in Athy, which was lovely. We come from this and it is part of our survival as a community of people.

What do the witnesses believe we can do better in our prisons for women and for men? I also invite the witnesses from the unions to respond to the other issues I have highlighted.

Ms Anne Costello: I thank the Chair. There is agreement that it is the period in the few months immediately after release that is a very precarious time for prisoners. It is the time they are most likely to reoffend and end up back in prison. This is why it is so important that they are prepared for this pre-release and that there is proper preparation. We have organisations such as the Irish Association for the Social Integration of Offenders, IASIO, and we are working closely with them but we need more. We need proper training in prison so people come out with real skills and have career guidance in prison to look at where their skills are. Many of them have no idea of their potential because it has never been tapped. This is why this type of career guidance is important, as is looking at the jobs market and trying to match up the training people get in prison with real jobs in the community.

Traveller organisations are open to supporting travellers when they come out of prison. Again, resources are so scarce in Traveller organisations that they are often torn between who they can support and they do not have enough resources to do this work.

Traveller women in prison is a heartbreaking issue. At least 15% of all the women in prison are Traveller women. We have interviewed them and written up their stories. We spoke to 12 women in particular in the Dóchas Centre and Limerick Prison about how they ended up there. Their stories are of trauma, abuse, neglect, being in care and their children being in care. We speak about the Magdalen laundries and this is it all over again, not just for Traveller women but for so many women in prison. We need to put the spotlight on them. Unfortunately, many of them are so broken and traumatised that employment is not on the cards but for those who are anywhere near it we need to do a lot more to support them.

Mr. David Joyce: I thank the Chair for the question. We have touched on how we create the type of atmosphere in workplaces that would allow Travellers, and indeed anyone else, to

be themselves at work. The whole concept of the integrated workplace, which I outlined in my opening statement, is one where people's differences are accommodated and that it is upfront. It is about workplaces committing to ensuring everyone who comes to work can do so in an atmosphere that is free from discrimination. This is very important.

I am very glad the Chair mentioned the concept of meaningful employment. We often speak about decent work. We are on the same page on this. This goes back to something Deputy Bríd Smith and Senator Joe O'Reilly mentioned about the opportunities perhaps that might be created in the new green economy, be it through a national retrofit programme or whatever, to try to use these programmes to achieve social objectives such as the employment of groups which have traditionally been excluded from the labour market.

The sustainable development goals are deliberately very broad. They include environmental goals because clearly there are no jobs on a dead planet but they also cover social and economic issues. Goal 8 of the sustainable development goals refers to ensuring decent work for all by 2030 and includes a target of achieving full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value. We are in the middle of 2021 and we have less than a decade to go to achieve this goal. This is something that governments voluntarily agreed to try to do. We have heard many practical suggestions today as to how it can be achieved for the Traveller community and we wish the committee the best of luck with this work.

Ms Lisa Connell: Something the Chair mentioned, and Mr. Joyce also addressed, is the very important issue of decent employment and ensuring we have decent pay for Travellers in the workplace and that there is the prospect of further meaningful work. While internships are important, they are not sufficient in terms of meaningful and long-lasting employment. We need to make sure that in employment Travellers are safe, their dignity and respect is upheld in the workplace, discrimination is not allowed and the duty of care to all staff is upheld in the workplace. It is very important that employers ensure they have unconscious bias training in the workplace to ensure these provisions are met.

At present, quotas are in place in the public sector for employing people with disabilities. There is certainly no reason we cannot look at this for members of the Traveller community. When such quotas are not upheld, it is important that we look at what happens subsequently to ensure employers meet these quotas and other requirements. The role of the trade union movement is that we have the ability to collectively bargain on a sectoral basis to ensure some of these provisions are met. Certainly the public sector is a very important area. It is about decent employment and decent employment prospects.

Chairman: I thank all of our witnesses for coming before the committee. This has been a great discussion. I have enjoyed it because we have been given many actions to put into the report. I hope our report will not be left on the shelf and that it will be meaningful for members of the Traveller community and will lead to employment. On behalf of the committee, I thank the witnesses. Hopefully we will be able to meet you in person some day in Leinster House. Stay safe and thank you.

Unless members wish to raise any other business, I propose we hold our next private meeting on 1 June 2021 to be followed by public session at 12.30 p.m. Is that agreed? Agreed. At that meeting, we will move on from Traveller employment to Traveller accommodation.

The joint committee adjourned at 2.35 p.m. until 12.30 p.m. on Tuesday, 1 June 2021.