# DÁIL ÉIREANN

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

## JOINT COMMITTEE ON KEY ISSUES AFFECTING THE TRAVELLER COMMUNITY

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*Déardaoin, 16 Deireadh Fómhair 2025*

*Thursday, 16 October 2025*

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Tháinig an Comhchoiste le chéile ag 12.30 p.m.

The Joint Committee met at 12.30 p.m.

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Comhaltaí a bhí i láthair / Members present:

| **Teachtaí Dála / Deputies** | **Seanadóirí / Senators** |
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| John Connolly, | Malcolm Noonan, |
| Séamus McGrath, | Noel O'Donovan,* |
| Maurice Quinlivan, | Anne Rabbitte. |
| Pádraig Rice, | |
| Barry Ward. | |

* In éagmais / In the absence of Senator Joe O'Reilly.

Teachta / Deputy George Lawlor sa Chathaoir / in the Chair.

*The joint committee met in private session at 12.51 p.m., suspended at 12.52 p.m. and resumed in public session at 12.54 p.m.*

## Human Rights and International Standards for Traveller and Roma Communities: Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission

**An Cathaoirleach:** Apologies have been received from Deputies Ellis and McCormack and Senators Eileen Flynn and Joe O'Reilly. Everyone is very welcome. I ask anyone attending remotely to mute themselves when not contributing so we do not pick up any background noise or feedback. As usual, I remind all those in attendance to ensure their mobile phones are in silent mode or switched off. Members attending remotely are reminded of the constitutional requirement that in order to participate in public meetings they must be physically present within the confines of the Leinster House complex.

As the witnesses are within the precincts of Leinster House, they are protected by absolute privilege in respect of the presentation they make to the committee. This means that they have an absolute defence against any defamation action for anything they say at the meeting. However, they are expected not to abuse this privilege, and it is my duty as Cathaoirleach to ensure this privilege is not abused. Therefore, if their statements are potentially defamatory in relation to an identifiable person or entity, they will be directed to discontinue their remarks. It is imperative that they comply with any such direction.

Members are also reminded of the long-standing parliamentary practice to the effect that they should not comment on, criticise or make charges against a person or entity outside the Houses, or an official of the Houses, either by name or in such a way as to make him or her identifiable.

The agenda of today's meeting is an engagement with the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, IHREC, to discuss human rights and equality standards. Our witnesses are Mr. Liam Herrick, chief commissioner; and Dr. Iris Elliott, head of policy and research. I invite Mr. Herrick to make the opening statement and after that we will proceed with a question and answer session.

**Mr. Liam Herrick:** Gabhaim buíochas leis an gCathaoirleach. I thank the committee for the invitation to appear. Traveller and Roma communities in Ireland remain two of the most discriminated-against groups in our society. Consequently, the lived experience of Travellers and Roma is persistently at odds with the basic expectations of living in a wealthy European country. Substandard accommodation, homelessness, poor health outcomes, poor educational support and poor access to essential services and even to justice are all persistent realities that members of those communities face throughout their lives. In a country that prides itself on being progressive and based on human rights, progression of rights for Travellers remains staggeringly slow.

Over the past year, Ireland has engaged with several international human rights mechanisms of relevance to Traveller and Roma rights. IHREC has contributed extensively to those processes. In June 2025, during Ireland's eighth review under the UN Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, CEDAW, that committee endorsed our call for a resourced and integrated national Traveller and Roma inclusion strategy, co-ordinated with the National Strategy for Women and Girls. It also called on the State to address systemic

issues for Traveller women, such as low educational attainment, employment barriers and limited access to healthcare. The CEDAW committee issued strong recommendations on access to justice, noting research previously supported by the commission that highlighted structural obstacles to legal redress, and the over-representation of Traveller women in the prison system. The absence of civil legal aid in discrimination cases was specifically criticised by that committee. In July of this year the Government completed its review of the civil legal aid system and we expect it to bring forward proposals for reform. Lawmakers, including members of the committee, should avail of the opportunity to scrutinise developments in that area when the Minister for justice brings forward his proposals.

A second international monitoring mechanism, namely, the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, also issued an opinion in February of this year. It reiterated our concerns about the lack of legal recognition for Travellers and Roma as national minorities and the need to repeal laws that criminalise nomadism. That Council of Europe committee called for urgent legislative action on accommodation, equality data and reform of hate crime. On the latter point, hate directed at Travellers remains a serious issue and Travellers and Roma are consistently identified as those groups in society towards which the worst public attitudes prevail. We ask the committee to encourage the Government to progress its commitments in the programme for Government to modernise the Incitement to Hatred Act 1989.

In that regard, we note comments by the Minister for justice just last week, which indicated a different approach to that which was committed to in the programme for Government. Ireland was scheduled to submit its sixth national report to the Council of Europe framework convention on national minorities by 1 September of this year, but at the time of speaking this deadline has been missed. We hope that report will be submitted shortly.

Turning from international bodies to domestic legislation, we wish to draw members' attention to two specific issues of law reform. First, and most urgently, we have consistently called for section 19 of the Intoxicating Liquor Act 2003 to be repealed. This provision excludes uniquely licensed premises from the jurisdiction of the Workplace Relations Commission, which deals with all other discrimination cases. IHREC has long highlighted how this unique delegation of the cases to the District Court undermines access to justice and is inconsistent with the European Union’s race equality directive and the EU's Charter of Fundamental Rights. We warmly welcome reports that there is an intention to include in the general scheme of the equality and family leaves miscellaneous provisions Bill measures to enact this repeal. However, delay in progress in this area undermines victims’ rights to an effective remedy and signals a lack of urgency in tackling entrenched discrimination.

As a second matter of law reform, under the EU standards directives, the State is obliged to ensure equality parties including IHREC, as Ireland’s national equality body, are accessible and available to all people. Articles 12 and 13 of those directives place direct responsibility on the State to resource and enable access, especially for marginalised groups such as Travellers and Roma. This includes not just physical access to our services but outreach information dissemination and legal literacy. We urge legislators to scrutinise how these obligations are being fulfilled in practice and to ensure budgetary and operational alignment with EU law. We note that members' colleagues in the Joint Committee on Children and Equality are considering legislation in this area.

Finally, to turn to our own work in this area, over the past 11 years, the commission through its section 40 function to provide legal assistance has provided and continues to provide legal assistance, advice and representation to a significant number of Traveller clients. The biggest cause of complaints in our work is in the area of accommodation. Not only are Travellers consistently denied culturally appropriate accommodation, but they are often left living in conditions not fit for human habitation. Our legal team has represented many Traveller families, including disabled people, elderly Travellers and children, who are currently living in or adjacent to landfill sites, without electricity or running water and often subject to rat infestation and other pests. The scale of discrimination faced by Travellers is such that it has become one of our legal team's biggest areas of work. We have addressed the systemic dimension to this discrimination, not only through representing individual clients but also through exercise of our equality review power, focusing on the drawdown of funds for Traveller-specific accommodation by local authorities.

A third area of our work relates to the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission's worker and employer advisory committee, which has recently completed work on developing a guide for employers on inclusive employment practices for Traveller and Roma. We will be publishing this guide next month. I note the initiatives that have also been taken by the public service in this area to the Traveller and Roma placement programme, which the committee heard about at one of its previous meetings.

In conclusion, as this committee knows and as it marked at one of its previous meetings, we recently passed the tenth anniversary of the fire at Carrickmines halting site, in which the discriminatory barriers faced by Travellers manifested in the most horrific of tragedies. Ten years on, in our view, discrimination against the Traveller community is as persistent, systemic and wide-ranging as it was then. I refer to the words of our friend and colleague the Council of Europe commissioner for human rights, Michael O'Flaherty, who recently stated:

> We must confront the injustices faced by Roma and travellers, the racism and discrimination that we allow to persist on a massive scale. This is one of Europe's greatest human rights scandals. [Traveller and Roma] voices are strong and clear, and we must finally listen to them, respect them, and act on their demands for equality and justice. The time for indifference is over.

In that regard, IHREC greatly values the work of this committee, and we wish to support its work and assist the committee in any way that we can through this meeting and in its ongoing and continuing work.

**Senator Malcolm Noonan:** I welcome Mr. Herrick and Dr. Elliott here this afternoon. I apologise; I was probably the cause of the delay in starting the proceedings because we had the Taoiseach with us in the Seanad.

Since its inception, this committee has deliberated with many public Traveller rights organisations. In terms of the challenges we face, this is one of the strongest worded reports we have received. In marking the anniversary of the Carrickmines tragedy, as we did last week, ten years on, the discrimination against Traveller communities is as persistent, systemic and wide-ranging as ever. I know from my own experience through my work in our community with Traveller families that we are seeing very little progress. That is deeply upsetting for the Traveller families that I know, and for us all. It behoves us all as a State to once and for all

start addressing the systemic discrimination, racism, accommodation and employment issues, etc., faced by Travellers.

An area of interest within the local Traveller accommodation consultative committee, LTACC, in my own county is the issue of the criminalisation of nomadism. This has been fundamental to many of the challenges Traveller families are facing. Where Traveller accommodation programmes are concerned, I do not think there is accommodation anywhere in the country that recognises the nomadic lifestyle of Travellers. There are families who like to travel during the summer and having temporary bays and sites they can visit is a huge challenge. I would welcome Mr. Herrick's views on how we can address that. It is certainly a local-level issue, but from what he has said, there are laws criminalising nomadism that are a real barrier to families being able to practise their cultural nomadic lifestyles.

**Mr. Liam Herrick:** I thank the Senator. I will give some initial points and then refer to my colleague Dr. Elliott, who may add to that. We very much agree and it has consistently been a recommendation of the commission and, indeed, our predecessor bodies that provisions in legislation that provide for the criminalisation of nomadism as practised by Travellers should be removed. It has also consistently been a recommendation of the international human rights bodies to which I referred. Our position on that is very clear.

More generally, we are and have been engaged in significant legal work on behalf of and representing families in all parts of the country, on being able to access appropriate halting side accommodation that is fit for habitation. That work is ongoing. The work we did with local authorities on equality reviews, where we invited all local authorities to review their practices with regard to provision of accommodation and requested a number of those to develop equality plans, focused initially on the failure of many local authorities to draw down available central funding. It does seem that that position has improved, and the proportion of funds being drawn down has significantly increased. However, the rate of provision has not. Our analysis of that is that it seems the funds being drawn down are generally being directed to refurbishment as opposed to the provision of new suitable units.

I will make two other points that, in our analysis, partly explain the problem to which the Senator refers. It has been consistently recommended, and it is our position, that there should be a national agency to oversee the provision of Traveller accommodation. That was a recommendation of the previous task force set up to consider the question. That is still not the case, and we do not see any Government commitment to addressing that question.

Local authorities are still exercising evictions against Travellers. We believe there are no appropriate processes in place to assess the impact of those evictions in advance to see if there are alternative mechanisms and measures that might be put in place. We share the Senator's analysis of the scale of the challenge and those are some of the factors we are identifying. It is very much an ongoing priority area of work for us. Dr. Elliott may wish to add to that.

**Dr. Iris Elliott:** I thank the Senator for his question. I want to respond in a number of different ways. There has been a criminalisation of nomadism and there is a need for positive measures by the State to support nomadism in the culture of Travellers. That starts with legal recognition of Travellers in a way that allows them to vindicate the rights they have. That matter has been raised by a number of international committees. Because there is no legal basis

for recognition of the Traveller community as an ethnic minority, there is a limit to the support they receive and to their ability to access their rights.

There is also a concern in the commission that not only through legislation but also policy, practice, service provision and the lack of data and evidence, there is an undermining of nomadic lifestyles. That is a concern for us in Ireland. Because of our role under the Good Friday Agreement, we take an all-island perspective, which is particularly important for nomadic lifestyles. Our sister body, the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, has done research on Traveller rights from an all-island perspective. There is a growing concern for us that the culture of nomadism is being undermined by the lack of culturally appropriate accommodation and the lack of access to supports for Traveller cultural practice. That will have a generational impact. We are in a concerning period.

To speak to the criminalisation of nomadism, one of the things we have recognised is that there has been legislation proposed on the Statute Book for years and it never progresses. The legislation on the control of horses, for example, needs to be changed. Mr. Herrick spoke about the practice of evictions. Legislators can positively build a legislative framework to remove legislative provisions that criminalise the Traveller community.

I also draw the attention of the committee to, and will talk more about, the work we have done around access to justice for Travellers. IHREC and the Irish Research Council commissioned a research report on Irish Travellers' access to justice. Within that, it was clear that there is a lack of trust of the justice system at all stages among the Traveller community. It also showed that they are overpoliced and underprotected, and yet would persistently have a commitment to law and order. There are particular groups who are over-represented within the Irish prison system, particularly Traveller women. We only know that because the Irish Prison Service has introduced an ethnic identifier. We do not even really know the full extent of the criminalisation of the Traveller community because other public parts of the justice system do not collect that information.

**Senator Malcolm Noonan:** May I ask one more question? I thank the Chair. Responsibility for Traveller accommodation is not being taken away from local authorities. There does not seem to be an appetite to create a national body to oversee Traveller accommodation. In many ways, the local Traveller accommodation consultative committees, LTACCs, have an important function. Perhaps we need a clearer definition of the roles of LTACCs and additional training for members of LTACCs or clear parameters about their responsibilities. There are inconsistencies across the country. Is there an interim measure that this committee could recommend to strengthen and redefine the roles of LTACCs and their responsibility to deliver culturally appropriate accommodation? I would be interested to hear the witnesses' views.

**Mr. Liam Herrick:** I thank the Senator. If you look at the outcome of the equality review process that we led, with engagement from all local authorities, you do, as the Senator says, see very inconsistent practice. You see examples of better practice and worse practice. Some local authorities are making greater efforts. There is learning that could be done at that level.

The other key factor is that all public bodies, particularly in this context local authorities, under the public sector duty to advance human rights and equality have obligations to ensure that in the development and planning of their policies, and the measuring of the outcomes, they demonstrate how they are taking into account human rights and equality principles. Some local

authorities are doing better than others. There is an opportunity there to look collectively at how the local authorities learn from each other and how they aspire to meet better practice. We have seen that the problems are concentrated more with some local authorities than with others. The population of Travellers is not evenly distributed, but some counties are doing better and others are struggling.

**Deputy Maurice Quinlivan:** I thanks Mr. Herrick and Dr. Elliott for their opening statement, which I read earlier. I have a couple of questions. I ask the witnesses to excuse my voice. I am recovering from the flu. If IHREC had a magic wand and could make three immediate changes to Government policy regarding the treatment of the Traveller and Roma populations, what would be the first three adjustments the witnesses would make?

**Mr. Liam Herrick:** I thank the Deputy. I am not usually big on having magic wands. It can be difficult to address a question such as that. One of the key immediate issues-----

**Deputy Maurice Quinlivan:** My basic question is what would IHREC do first.

**Mr. Liam Herrick:** One of the most straightforward questions to address is a legislative question relating to the repeal of the Intoxicating Liquor Act. As members will recall, that legislation was a 2003 development. A case was made that discrimination cases to deal with pubs, restaurants and other licensed premises would, uniquely, be dealt with separately and go to the District Court. We have analysed the experience and the effect this has had on access to justice for members of the Traveller community in particular, but not only members of the Traveller community. Discrimination in licensed premises has also been prevalent for people living with disabilities and other members of ethnic and racial minorities. There is consistent analysis. We have provided analysis of the legislation to the Government on a number of occasions. We have just completed the latest analysis under section 30 of our Bill, which will be submitted to the Government shortly. It has been consistently recommended by international bodies that the case for treating pubs and restaurants differently in discrimination law from other areas of life is not consistent with the race directive or EU law. It is easily fixed. We greatly welcomed commitments from the Government to include it in the equality legislation that is currently being developed. However, there is no such text in the general scheme, as originally published. We will see the Government's intention when we see the legislation, which we hope will happen shortly. That will be a significant measure, not just in its symbolic value but also with regard to access to justice and with regard to discrimination.

Other groups have presented to the committee. Accommodation is a central problem. It is visceral in the effect it has and the conditions in which Travellers are living, often in halting sites. There has also been the experience of discrimination in accessing private rental accommodation. Travellers are exposed to discrimination in accessing that category of accommodation to a far greater extent than anybody else.

Efforts have been made by Governments and local authorities over the years to improve the situation, but we are not seeing outcomes that reflect that. The establishment of a national agency for Traveller accommodation, with a central repository of responsibility of duties in that regard would be very significant and would finally see that progress. Is there a third area that we would prioritise from the others?

**Dr. Iris Elliott:** One thing would be legal recognition of the Traveller community and the outworking of that. To supplement what Mr. Herrick has just said about actual investment in

accommodation and other public services for the Traveller community, census 2022 found that there were just under 23,000 Traveller and Roma members of our society. That is not a large cohort of the population. When we were reviewed by the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, there was a strong message from the UN that Ireland is a wealthy country. Any argument that we do not have wealth to invest in solving one of the most intractable human rights violations simply is not accepted by the UN. We do other work around human rights budgeting and equality budgeting. It is very much that message about how Ireland is using its wealth. Within a very short period, if there was that investment in accommodation, change could be achieved. One of the things we are concerned about is the investment. Although we welcome the fact that there is an expenditure, the reality is a lot of the expenditure on Traveller accommodation is simply repairing. It is not increasing the number of culturally appropriate units of accommodation. There is simply no reason the prioritisation of our national wealth could not take place. That is just a decision to be taken.

**Deputy Maurice Quinlivan:** The IHREC's work on an employment advisory committee and developing a guide for inclusive employment practices was mentioned. How is that work progressing? What are the key discriminatory actions the IHREC is encountering in relation to the Traveller and Roma populations?

**Mr. Liam Herrick:** It is well-known to this committee the extreme divergence that there is in employment rates for members of the Traveller community compared with the rest of the population. The same applies in a slightly lesser extent to the Roma community. I will say a bit about our worker and employer advisory committee. This set up under our statute. It has representatives of the trade union movement, some of the larger trade unions, IBEC and other employer bodies as well. There is a really strong commitment across both trade unions and employers to achieve greater diversity and inclusion in the workplace. The committee has chosen as a priority the low level of employment of Travellers. There has been really commendable leadership of both the unions and the employer side to try to find practical ways to advance this.

Next month, we will publish a guidebook to employers as to how we can support them in employing more Travellers. A big part of that would be leading by example. There are a number of private sector bodies that are already showing leadership in taking their own pilot programmes to employ Travellers. As I referred to in my opening comments, special recognition needs to go to the Civil Service in terms of its Traveller and Roma placement programme. It is really crucial that the public sector shows leadership in this regard too. We can all understand that if we could bridge the gap of employment that the effects, not just in socioeconomic terms, but also in terms of stigma and prejudice against Travellers would be very profound.

**Deputy Maurice Quinlivan:** I thank Mr. Herrick. That is one of the most positive responses I have ever had to a question I asked in a committee in my nine years of being a TD. I look forward to the document being done next month. In the past week or so, I think the committee wrote to a number of bodies asking what their policy on employment is.

My final question is for Dr. Elliott. She referred to her concern with the Control of Horses Act. I have huge concerns about that. It does not work, for instance. A horse has never been seized for not being chipped. All horses are supposed to be chipped. It just does not happen. In my own city of Limerick, the number of roaming horses seized was 24 or 26 this year.

Hundreds of horses are not being collected. There is a variety of reasons they do not do that. The council will only collect horses that are stray. They are only collected during the evening and when the council has gardaí with them. The Garda resources do not often exist. If the Garda resources exist, the pound can only collect a certain number of horses. Gardaí do not think it is worth their while going out. Instead of pretending the number of horses seized has gone down hugely, they have gone down hugely because we are simply not collecting them. They are everywhere across the city. I have raised this in a number of Topical Issues and priority questions over the past number of years. It is just getting worse and worse. Did Dr. Elliott have specific concerns about the Control of Horses Act? She might come back to me on that.

**Dr. Iris Elliott:** I can send the Deputy some information about our views on that after the session. I welcome the opportunity to have engagement on that.

**Deputy Maurice Quinlivan:** I thank Dr. Elliott and Mr. Herrick.

**Senator Anne Rabbitte:** I apologise to our witnesses. The Taoiseach was in the Seanad. It only happens once in five years, so I could not leave. I apologise for being late.

I have read their statement as they have been responding. I was really taken with the final remarks on accommodation. Coming from Galway, we have one of the largest Traveller populations in the country. I live four miles away from a halting site called Capira. I am very aware of the sites in Ballinasloe where the flood waters come up. I am also aware of the Curraghline Road in Galway from a traffic point of view, but also from a Traveller's point of view. Yes, all the money is being spent because the cost of building has gone up. More money is being spent because of the cost of repair work, as opposed to the cost of investment in enhancing and expanding. It is very clear. You would not see some of the halting sites in my country in the slums of Africa. I can only talk about my county. I see the floodwaters rise on the banks of the River Shannon in Ballinasloe. The water is up at the base of the axle of some of the mobile homes. Pregnant ladies cannot find alternative accommodation and are not supported to find alternative accommodation because there is that inherent bias, when the floodwaters rise, as to where people can be accommodated.

While I hear what Mr. Herrick is saying in relation to an independent agency, we have very good, well-intended public officials on all of our local authorities but they lack the support to deliver investment. That is my own opinion on it. We have great public representatives that meet with all the Traveller organisations and all organisations, but it has to be that will within the local authorities. Where does it sit within the human rights element, the dignity and the safety? There is no way being in a mobile home with the floodwaters going up around you is safe where you have children. It is a totally undignified experience, not to mind down to the basic toileting of young children out in the cold with just a shed to go into. I would like to see the people who set the standards in local authorities live there for a night and use the services.

I agree with the witnesses on the accommodation. I would love to see more focus. One of the elements of being on this committee is to ensure that children get a fair start. They are not getting a fair start. I respect the right of Travellers to choose where they so wish to live. If it is a halting site, we should ensure that it is a fit-for-purpose halting site. I did not want to open my TikTok there, but I really wanted to check something. I have seen Mr. McNamara on it there recently.

He showed on TikTok how he was refused entry to a public house. He brought us through the whole process. If you watch it on TikTok, you see that he goes up, he is refused, he goes away, and he goes to the Garda station and asks to be breathalysed to prove he has no alcohol in his system. He does this in a timely manner so that you are seeing it as it is. He goes into the Garda station and he comes out. He has a clear breathalyser and goes straight back down again to the same gentleman on the door. He is still not allowed to enter. To be quite honest, I am appalled that in this day and age we talk about inclusion and integration but we neither respect nor trust the right of a person as they present. The inherent bias that is built in demonstrates itself in many ways, but it is not good for society at a basic level.

I support Dr. Elliott in what she says about the legislative change that is required but I do not know what we can do with the young person who goes to school and does not know the difference, and then all of a sudden perhaps discrimination happens within the education system. For whatever reason, it does. Children do not discriminate so I am trying to understand where the discrimination starts within the education system because it has to start somewhere. Children are let into school. They are inclusive. We have now an early childhood care and education, ECCE, scheme that ensures that everybody can be inclusive. We are doing so much to open up, to integrate. Where are the problems, from their point of view? I would really like to hear that.

I am glad we have touched on employment because the employment element of it has been a focus of the last number of weeks.

Dr. Elliott talked about the overly populated women's prison. This is the piece I want to go to because Dr. Elliott said there is good data. We had Tusla in here last week. Tusla cannot give us data on anything - I find that shocking - and yet at the same time we know that children from a Traveller background are over-represented among children in care. We do not have the figures to back up that statement but we know it. I do not know how they know it, if they cannot crack the figures. It is really a contradiction, but they are able to tell us. If we are able to track it in our prison services, can Dr. Elliott shine a light on it? How can we get more information? How can we get data, because if you do not have data the Government cannot change policy and the money cannot follow? It is a vicious circle. IHREC has a wealth of experience in negotiating. What are we missing? What are we not asking from the various agencies to help to establish the change? Tusla was here last week and it shocked me. They have changed their system but they still do not capture the data.

What is IHREC's view on kinship? Last week was Kinship Week but yet that process no longer exists really within Tusla. However, if you know the Traveller community, you will know that members of that community like to hold on and support. We have got rid of that process, however.

I would love to hear the witnesses' views. Apologies, I have thrown in an awful lot there.

**Mr. Liam Herrick:** I invite Dr. Elliott to address the specific question about data, first of all. Then I will address some of the other ones, if that is okay.

**Senator Anne Rabbitte:** I thank Mr. Herrick. Absolutely.

**Dr. Iris Elliott:** I thank Senator Rabbitte for her question on data. What was striking for us in our Irish Travellers Access to Justice report was that because the Irish Prison Service had

introduced an ethnic identifier, we had that data. We did not have that data in the Courts Service. We did not have that data in An Garda Síochána. We did not have that data in lots of other public services. There is a need for it. We have an equality data strategy which is waiting to go to the Cabinet and be published. We have been waiting for that for over a year. That will provide a whole structure around improving data in Ireland because it was co-led, as a strategy, with the CSO. The CSO has played a leading role in getting good definitions and common categories. It has a great deal of experience around the collection of data. I am also aware, because we have very much benefited from it, that the Traveller community itself has regionally leading expertise on data collection. I would never accept a public body saying it does not know how to do this given that Pavee Point representatives, for example, have gone to Spain to advise the Spanish Government and engage with the Roma community there. Pavee Point recently chaired a workshop on equality data at our inaugural annual conference. Therefore, the expertise is within the State in the CSO and the Traveller and Roma community, and we have a policy that needs to go to the Government and move forward.

The other opportunity is that the new European directives on standards for equality bodies have a number of different articles around data collection which will empower IHREC to make recommendations about what data is collected, to have a right to access data and to produce reports using that data in terms of all the different groups in the State.

We are nearly there. We have something box-fresh that is ready to produce. We have the opportunity to transpose the EU directives on standards for equality bodies very well. That is currently on the legislative programme. Definitely, there is work that can be done there.

There is also a need to invest in research. Obviously, Research Ireland has a role in the research that is funded into the Traveller community. Ideally, you would have a strong administrative data system and a strong national data infrastructure. Those who compiled the Irish Travellers Access to Justice report, which we commissioned from the University of Limerick, spoke to one in 100 Travellers in the country, to representative organisations and to public bodies. That is also a useful way to have data. I very much appreciate the frustration. The over-representation of Traveller children in care is known in the Traveller community and in the human rights and equality community but it is treated as if it is anecdotal evidence. We are in a little bit of an endless circle around that but we are nearly there around moving forward legislatively and at a policy level on data.

**Senator Anne Rabbitte:** Before Mr. Herrick comes in, I will follow up on a point that has been made. If Tusla is not gathering the data, it is not playing a part in ensuring it is accurate. It has the toolkit to ensure it is factual, as opposed to it being anecdotal. Would Dr. Elliott agree that if this agency of the State co-operated, gave us that and played its role, we could at least look at education and the employment of the parents, look after housing and address child poverty?

**Dr. Iris Elliott:** Strong data is vital in terms of having accurate policy, monitoring human rights and equality, being able to measure improvement, and measuring regression when that happens as well.

**Mr. Liam Herrick:** The Senator raised three other broad areas: accommodation, exclusion and discrimination with regard to licensed premises, and social attitudes.

On the question of accommodation, we have been bogged down for decades in Ireland in the bureaucratic and administrative reasons we are failing to deliver Traveller accommodation. Those reasons are peculiar to the way we have organised our system of governance. If you look at it from the perspective of the human rights obligations on the State, you see there are very definitive views from international bodies that the State as a collective has clear legal obligations. The Council of Europe committee on economic and social rights found that the provision is clearly deficient and unacceptable. That is why the kinds of situations the Senator sees in Galway are not about the obstacles in the way of the local authority there, but about the State having to take overall responsibility for meeting the fundamental rights of those families.

With regard to the Intoxicating Liquor Act, the experience that the Senator referred to would be typical of the cases that our legal team has been involved in. It has represented individuals who have experienced arbitrary discrimination in accessing licensed premises and have clearly been treated differently from other members of the community in the same place at the same time. It is a persistent problem. However, I think Ireland has changed.

Where, politically, the exceptional treatment of licensed premises was accepted by the Oireachtas in 2003, we now know in a changing society that if a member of a particular religious or ethnic group or a person with disability is treated differently in accessing a pub, this is a discrimination which can have a really profound effect on them and really damage their confidence and their social integration. We now know how serious it is and how unacceptable it is. We are moving to a point, and we hope that Members of both Houses in the coming months will show leadership, to repeal the Intoxicating Liquor Act to ensure that discrimination in one sphere of access to goods and services is treated the same as all other ones.

With regard to social attitudes, the Senator is absolutely right to point to the progress that has been made at the school level here. I remember growing up when Traveller children in my local school were in a different yard to play, were let out at different times and were treated in different rooms. That is a while ago but it is not that long ago. That is no longer the case but what is disturbing is the attitudes that children may hear in their own homes. Consistently, when we look at research by the ESRI, for example, it shows that prejudice against Travellers is far stronger than it is against other ethnic minorities in our society in terms of what adults report of their attitude to one of their children bringing home a Traveller friend, sitting next to a Traveller child in school or other questions and tests about socialisation. We have an education piece to do, not just about children but with the attitudes of adults generally. In that regard, we are disappointed by recent statements by the Minister for justice that seem to renege on the Government's commitment to look at the incitement to hatred legislation again. The programme for Government clearly commits to review of the incitement to hatred legislation but the Minister, on 9 October, indicated that it was not his intention to proceed with that review. This is deeply disappointing.

**Senator Anne Rabbitte:** I just want to say-----

**An Cathaoirleach:** I am conscious of time.

**Senator Anne Rabbitte:** Just to be clear for the VFI members who would be looking in here, or anything else like that, I just used one example. I was not singling out pubs or anything like that.

**An Cathaoirleach:** I thank the Senator.

**Deputy Pádraig Rice:** I am deeply concerned about the scale of the human rights abuses of members of the Traveller community. It is worth taking a moment to reflect on those comments from Professor Michael O'Flaherty, the Commissioner for Human Rights with the Council of Europe who said:

> We must confront the injustices experienced by Roma and Travellers, the racism and discrimination that we allow to persist on a massive scale. This is one of Europe's greatest human rights scandals.

That should be setting off alarm bells in Government Buildings, in Government Departments and across the Oireachtas. I am concerned that it is not, that things are not changing and that the pace of change is far too slow. I would also pick up some of the earlier remarks around Traveller and Roma communities being two of the most discriminated against groups in Irish society and that the progress on the rights of Travellers remains staggeringly slow. Why is that the case?

**Mr. Liam Herrick:** That is a very broad social and political question. I would say that important aspects of progress have been made. The existence of this committee in the previous Oireachtas and in this Oireachtas is a very important and significant step forward, we believe, in giving visibility to these questions of human rights and equality in the national Parliament. We strongly welcome the publication of the new Traveller and Roma inclusion strategy. We had the opportunity to contribute to that. There are many important and positive attributes in that, not least the consistent measurement of progress against its implementation and the central place it puts on the public sector duty for human rights and equality in the strategy. There are other aspects we would have liked to be stronger but there is good progress and good political will. There is no doubt that underlying social attitudes and prejudice are a problem here but what we are trying to identify, and indeed what the international human rights bodies are trying to identify, is whether there are specific legislative and policy changes that can be made that will make a meaningful difference to people's lives over time. We have identified some of those law reform issues, some of which are modest enough in themselves but would make a step in the right direction. We have a national strategy now but, in terms of its implementation, we would like to see a strong role of measuring human rights and equality measurements against that. As Dr. Elliott has pointed out, one of the great challenges we have is how we can measure progress if we are not counting effectively and efficiently. We are very clear, and Dr. Elliott has led our work on this over several years, that public sector bodies are demonstrating they can do this and some of them are doing it but it is not general yet. It greatly frustrates the aspirations of policymakers like the committee members when they cannot measure the progress and the success or failures of different policies that are introduced.

**Deputy Pádraig Rice:** Absolutely. I also have a key concern around the implementation of the strategy and I have raised this with the Department of equality. Across a whole broad range of measures, the State suffers from implementation deficit disorder in implementing many of the great strategies we have. We have some brilliant glossy documents for strategies but many of them we have failed to implement. We also get some promising political commitments and then those get pulled back on. Mr. Herrick highlighted one, which is the modernising of the incitement to hatred Act, concerning the remarks about commitments made potentially being rowed back on. Will Mr. Herrick talk to us more about what he would like to see in the

modernisation of the Act and why it is important the Government does modernise the incitement to hatred Act.

**Mr. Liam Herrick:** Sure. Dr. Elliott might add on the data points as well. We made detailed submissions on what was to become the hate offences Act at the time. As the Deputy will recall, the original intention of the previous Government, and its initial proposal, was that the legislation would deal with the review of the Prohibition of Incitement to Hatred Act 1989. Subsequently, there was a decision that it would also address the provision of hate crimes in Irish law. I think we are all familiar with the fact that, ultimately, the provisions regarding incitement to hatred were removed from the legislation. At that point, however, there was a commitment by the outgoing Government, and it was retained by the incoming Government in its programme for Government, that the question of incitement to hatred legislation would be revisited. It is the general view of all of the principal human rights bodies at the UN and at Council of Europe level that Ireland's law on incitement to hatred is deficient. Of most legal significance here is that the European Union has taken a view that the law as it currently stands is not compatible with the relevant European Union framework directive.

**Deputy Pádraig Rice:** Would IHREC agree with that?

**Mr. Liam Herrick:** That has been our view. The comments of the Minister, and these are his public statements, are that he now believes Irish law as it currently stands is sufficiently in line with the EU framework directive and no further legislative action is needed. A question arises whether that view will be accepted by the European Union. On the face of it, there would seem to be a difference between the Minister's position, what is in the programme for Government, and the stated position of the European Commission. That opens the possibility that Ireland may not be in compliance with European Union law in this area. That could have consequences. That is where we stand.

We are very conscious that this is a matter of significant public interest and public controversy. There is an opportunity, in our view, to introduce a review of the incitement to hatred legislation in a way that appropriately balances all human rights and equality concerns. There are, of course, important concerns with regard to constitutional rights such as freedom of expression and rights under the European Convention. Other states have found an appropriate balance of those rights and we do not see any reason Ireland could not do so too.

**Deputy Pádraig Rice:** I will move on to housing. Not only are Travellers denied culturally appropriate accommodation, they are often living in conditions not fit for human habitation, which is deeply concerning. A previous submission from FLAC called for a constitutional right to housing. Is this something that IHREC supports?

**Mr. Liam Herrick:** It has been our position that there should be a constitutional right to housing. We have made that submission. That was the view of the Housing Commission previously too.

**Deputy Pádraig Rice:** Should that include specifically the right to cultural appropriate accommodation for Travellers? What is the IHREC position on that?

**Mr. Liam Herrick:** I do not know whether we have adopted that as a specific position with regard to the text. We have not adopted a recommendation of what the text of the constitutional provision should be. That would need to be explored in further detail. I think it would be

consistent with our general approach that any right in this sphere would need to take into account the principles of equality. This would mean the need to take into account the specific needs of particular communities.

**Deputy Pádraig Rice:** In addition, the Traveller accommodation expert review has called for an overhaul of the 1998 traveller accommodation Act because of its failures in terms of Traveller accommodation. Would the commission support that?

**Mr. Liam Herrick:** We have referred previously to the fact that the task force established to look at this question recommended a general review. We very much endorse that approach, including, as I have said, the establishment of a national agency, but obviously the other recommendations that emerged from the task force as well.

**Deputy Pádraig Rice:** It is always important to take a intersectional approach to human rights, in particular taking account of concerns around the rights of Travellers with disabilities, LGBT Travellers and others. I have previously worked in LGBT human rights and I had concerns around IHREC's previous strategy statement for the period 2022 to 2024, which under the priority in the previous strategy talked about the eradication of racism, ableism and sexism but not homophobia. I would like to put on record that I think the exclusion of LGBT people from the previous strategy statement was unjustified and unjustifiable. I would like to hear what the witnesses think, or if they have concerns, about the rights of Travellers from other minority groups, be they LGBT or disability, and how we can progress some of those because I have concerns around that intersectionality.

**Mr. Liam Herrick:** If it is okay, I might refer that point to my colleague Dr. Elliott.

**Dr. Iris Elliott:** I would like to respond to a number of points that the Deputy made and indicate documents that we will forward to him. On the discussion on culturally appropriate and adequate accommodation, we commissioned an ESRI report on the right to adequate housing, which identified six key dimensions, including culturally appropriate accommodation. That was very much a consensus document so it is a useful resource because it looks at international standards and domestic implementation.

On the constitutional right to housing, we compiled a policy statement on the constitutional recognition of economic, social and cultural rights. It might also be a useful resource. This week, we made a submission to the European committee on the European Social Charter and focused on the State's non-acceptance of Article 31, which is the right to housing. We referenced Traveller accommodation in that. We will share our submission with the committee.

We view intersectionality as one of the essential core components of equality strategies. We have just published a document called the Policy Statement on Core Components of National Equality Strategies, which looks at five different elements, including intersectionality. I appreciate why this committee would particularly focus on the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy, NTRIS, but we are very conscious, particularly with the very strong comments by the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, CEDAW, that there should be a strong focus on Traveller women and girls, so we are particularly minded to look at the women and girls' strategy at the moment. In June, we had called through the CEDAW review, as soon as we got the concluding observations from that UN committee, that it should inform the national strategy for women and girls, which was due in 2021 and we still await. We take a similar approach to the policy tier around the national

action plan against racism and the other equality strategies, including the LGBTIQ strategy. We believe it is important to have both a strong policy tier and a strong legislative tier. In the opportunity to reform the equality Acts, we need to have a provision around intersectionality at that tier, which would enable us to have that relationship between Traveller and Roma and all the other intersectional groups.

We also have a resource that is basically a list of all the recommendations to do with Traveller and Roma that all UN, Council of Europe and EU mechanisms have made. We can share that with the committee because it will enable members to see what they are saying about Ireland's non-compliance around an issue like housing, education and also things like intersectionality, women, children, etc. We will send that to the committee and it might help stimulate some more questions.

**Deputy John Connolly:** I echo Senator Noonan's earlier comments about the profound nature of IHREC's initial statement and how it highlights the breadth of work that is ahead of us in terms of the issues that affect the Traveller community and the work that we must do to address those.

The measurement of progress has been mentioned a lot. The commission laments the continued lack of legal recognition of Travellers and Roma as national minorities but in 2017, the State officially recognised Traveller ethnicity as distinctive. What would be the fundamental nuts and bolts of proceeding to legally recognise both Travellers and Roma as national minorities?

**Dr. Iris Elliott:** The Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities report came through in February of this year. It said that one of the challenges was that the lack of legal recognition creates ambiguity in rights protections under the framework convention and that applies elsewhere as well. Although there is a policy indication in very specific areas, for example the Traveller ground in the equality Acts, the fact the actual legal recognition of the Traveller community is not cross-cutting means it limits the scope for that to enable them to vindicate all their rights. I will forward the analysis by the framework convention and the Deputy can follow up with us on that matter.

**Deputy John Connolly:** Yes.

**Dr. Iris Elliott:** Essentially, it is to eliminate ambiguity and give more force than simply a policy indication.

**Deputy John Connolly:** I want to respond to the comments that Mr. Herrick made about the education system. I think the progression that has been made in recent years in curricular development and more inclusive practices in schools is much better placed than he acknowledged. As Senator Rabbitte pointed out, why are we not seeing that in attainment among the Traveller community?

**Mr. Liam Herrick:** That is the big question. I was referring to the research done by the ESRI and others. Indeed, research done by the European Union Fundamental Rights Agency, for example, suggests we are not seeing a positive change in social attitudes with regard to Travellers that we might have expected given the changes that have happened in the education system. We are not seeing a change in social attitudes. Why that is a continuing problem is a complex question. As we said, there is a question about incitement to hatred and

communications. There may be issues relating to social media and political leadership. There has been much greater political leadership. The Deputy referred to the former Taoiseach's statement of recognition of Traveller ethnicity at a political level, but we are not seeing that.

To follow on from that, what we are saying here today is that in specific areas of life, the political aspiration for equality just is not being delivered for various administrative and legal reasons. It is difficult to address this question without being very sombre about the scale of the challenge that we face. I think members will have heard this from others before. We do not have as much data as we should, but some of the data we do have about health, education, employment and life-expectancy outcomes are very stark and are not improving.

The lack of education progress is definitely very significant, but it is not just that. It is also at a cultural level. I think the committee has heard previously from the Department of Children, Disability and Equality that we are now positively celebrating Traveller culture and identity, which is a really significant long-term change for us in terms of the State having a positive recognition of the values of Travellers in our society, but it is not translating to the level of outcomes yet.

**Deputy John Connolly:** On the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the State's response to it, does that come under the remit of the Department of justice?

**Mr. Liam Herrick:** I believe it does. There has been some change because some of the responsibilities previously under the Department of Children, Disability and Equality have transferred back to the Department of justice. This means the national action plan on racism, for example, now sits in the Department of justice, which also has responsibility for migration and home affairs matters. The other equality strategies generally sit within the Department of Children, Disability and Equality. With regard to the framework convention on national minorities, I am not sure. We can certainly come back and clarify it. There has been some movement of units in these two Departments which we might need to confirm.

**Dr. Iris Elliott:** I appreciate Senator Rabbitte might have a better insight but my recollection is that it is the Department of equality. My colleague is nodding at me. I think it is that Department. The slight restructuring of the Departments has caused quite a lot of challenge.

**Deputy John Connolly:** I have no legal background but with regard to section 19 of the Intoxicating Liquor Act 2003, I have heard stories similar to those recounted by Senator Rabbitte. It obviously does not allow the same recourse to members of the Traveller community to take legal cases as it might for other groups being discriminated against.

**Mr. Liam Herrick:** What the legislation provided for is uniquely with regard to licensed premises. If equal status cases and employment equality cases involve any other area of goods, services, shops, businesses and so on they are dealt with by the Workplace Relations Commission, which is the specialist body that deals with this area. Uniquely, licensed premises revert back to the District Court.

**Deputy John Connolly:** Even if it were not a labour relations issue or was not something relevant to employment?

**Mr. Liam Herrick:** If you or I believe we are discriminated against with regard to accessing a restaurant that does not have a licence, for example, or a shop that sells clothes, groceries or

whatever, then a discrimination case would go to the Workplace Relations Commission, which inherited the previous functions of the Equality Tribunal. This was to do with reorganisation more than ten years ago. Uniquely, cases of discrimination involving licensed premises go to the District Court. What we have found in our analysis of this over the years, and we are about to produce new analysis on this, is that in effect this has led to problems of access to justice, cost and so on. Very often there have been poor outcomes. We have intervened in many of these cases ourselves. We do not think the justification for the specialist treatment of licensed premises stacks up at this point in time. The Government has committed to addressing this issue and we hope this happens shortly.

**Deputy John Connolly:** Mr. Herrick suggests that we scrutinise how the obligations of equality bodies such as IHREC are being fulfilled and how accessible and available they are. What changes does he propose? Obviously, additional resourcing would be one. Are there specific changes he feels we should introduce that would make bodies such as IHREC more accessible and available to members of the Traveller community?

**Mr. Liam Herrick:** It is not so much even our view on this. The European Union has developed a set of directives in this area that require all member states to improve and strengthen their equality bodies. This applies to Ireland, and Ireland has to introduce national legislation by the middle of next year to do this. We are expecting that some time in the coming months, the Government will indicate and bring forward legislative proposals to do this. We have done an analysis and it is very clear to us that these directives will require significant enhancements of how we are accessible to members of all minority communities. It will require our powers to be strengthened and our resources and level of provision to be improved.

**Deputy John Connolly:** Resourcing will be a significant issue.

**Mr. Liam Herrick:** Resources will be an aspect of it. We have done quite detailed analysis. We are in ongoing engagement with the Department of Children, Disability and Equality on this and what the fundamental requirements of the legislation will be. The Government has said it will shortly indicate whether it intends to introduce self-standing legislation to implement these directives or whether they will be encompassed in the equality, family leave and miscellaneous provisions Bill which is already on the agenda of the Oireachtas. A decision needs to be taken on the management of the legislation, which we expect will happen quite shortly.

**Dr. Iris Elliott:** We can send the committee some information on this. There is an article in the standards directive. There are two directives and the text is the same. There is an article that looks at human, technical and financial resources and is specified. The European Commission will publish a set of indicators as part of an implementing Bill in the coming months, probably at some point in the autumn. This will then give us a clear indication of what is required in terms of the area of resources. There is also an article that looks at equal access for all. It is for equality groups and for the entire population, so rural Ireland and urban Ireland will all be covered. We can send a summary on what the key points of this are.

**Deputy Séamus McGrath:** I thank Mr. Herrick and Dr. Elliott for being with us today. I apologise for missing a good part of the committee but, unfortunately, it clashes with the Committee of Public Accounts. I want to pick up on a few points. Looking at the opening statement, and I appreciate the frankness and honesty of it, it refers to the tenth anniversary of

the Carrickmines incident and states that issues regarding discrimination and deficiencies are as persistent and systemic now as they were back then. Is this Mr. Herrick's overall assessment? His initial remarks referred to the work the organisation has been doing over the past 11 years. Does Mr. Herrick feel things are as bad as ever? Does he feel there has been any improvement in addressing some of the core issues regarding discrimination, access to services and so on? I know this is a broad question but I want to get Mr. Herrick's overall sense.

**Mr. Liam Herrick:** When we look at the types of legal cases coming to us in which our legal team is involved with regard to discrimination and with regard to accommodation, we are not seeing a significant change. We are not seeing any diminution of need or demand. This is reinforced by the data that is produced about the level of accommodation provision. Senator Rabbitte referred to what we can all see in terms of the conditions on halting sites and in accommodation. There has not been any significant improvement in the number being provided and there is not significant advancement in the conditions people are experiencing. Regrettably, we are not seeing progress. We are not seeing significant improvement in the overall outcomes for Travellers, which are being measured elsewhere.

**Deputy Séamus McGrath:** Is it fair to say there is more discussion and more acceptance of issues? They are discussed more openly than they would have been in the past but, at the same time, this is not translating into measurable outcomes as Mr. Herrick says. This is where the breakdown occurs. Is it fair to say that funding of various programmes targeted towards these issues relating to the Traveller community in particular, has improved?

**Mr. Liam Herrick:** Yes, I think as we have said, it is measurable that funding has improved. We have also recognised in our work under equality reviews with local authorities that the proportion of funds being drawn down has also improved. There was a problem, with which everybody in the committee is familiar, that for many years local authorities did not choose to draw down funds that had been made available to them. They are drawing down these funds now but it is not translating to an increase in the volume of provision. It may be because of a backlog of need for repairs and maintenance but the resources are going into this area rather than an increase in culturally appropriate provision.

**Deputy Séamus McGrath:** Are the 31 local authorities drawing down the full amount or thereabouts at this point? Mr. Herrick is saying there is an improvement.

**Mr. Liam Herrick:** The equality reviews done several years ago showed there was not a consistent approach across all local authorities but there was certainly an increase in the proportion being drawn down generally. We can share the information about specific local authorities.

**Deputy Séamus McGrath:** I think that would be helpful.

**Mr. Liam Herrick:** A number of local authorities were asked to take a second step at producing a plan, including Cork City Council. There is variation in the level of detail in each of these plans also. Generally, it is a fair observation that there was an increase in the proportion of funds being drawn down from a low base previously. We can share the detail of this with the committee.

**Deputy Séamus McGrath:** It would be good to get this information because they have a responsibility to draw down the funding, use it wisely and try to improve outcomes. With

regard to the housing crisis the country faces, it is fair to say it probably affects the Traveller community more acutely, in the sense that prior to the housing crisis there were always issues with accommodation and standards of accommodation.

When there are fewer options available, that is felt acutely among the community.

**Mr. Liam Herrick:** Yes. I made reference earlier to the high proportion of reliance on the private rental market, which, as we all know, is a problem generally within housing provision in the country. When that is coupled alongside the widespread discrimination against Travellers, we see that they are at an extremely increased risk of discrimination. The report that we produced jointly with the ESRI in 2019 stated that Travellers were 22 times more likely than white Irish people to experience discrimination in the housing market. For example, that means responding to an advertisement for rental accommodation and then being excluded for no objectively justifiable reason. That is the reality they are experiencing. We can all understand why that might come about.

**Deputy Séamus McGrath:** Mr. Herrick referred to the national strategy earlier. The Government as a whole is responsible for that, but what Department does it sit with specifically? Which one has ultimate responsibility?

**Mr. Liam Herrick:** The Department of Children, Disability and Equality that has the overall responsibility. There is also representation from all of the key Departments.

**Deputy Séamus McGrath:** All of the key Departments. I am not putting words in Mr. Herrick mouth's, but is he somewhat critical of the implementation process in terms of the key recommendations and so on?

**Mr. Liam Herrick:** We have tried to constructively contribute during the Government's development of equality strategies in a number of areas, including the LGBT community, disability, women and girls, Travellers and so on. It has not always taken the same approach with each of the strategies. We produced the document on the core components of national equality strategies so that things would be, first, standardised, but also that they would talk to each other. Deputy Rice referred to the principle of intersectionality, such as gay Travellers, women refugees and so on. We need to find a way of joining the dots on all of that.

**Deputy Séamus McGrath:** There is commonality there.

**Mr. Liam Herrick:** Yes, and there is definitely some progress there. We fed into the process recommending structural aspects of the national Traveller and Roma inclusion strategy, and some of those were taken up. There is a strong emphasis in this particular strategy on the public sector's duty to advance human rights and equality that has not been evident in others. There is a review of progress provision in this strategy, which is not in others. We are seeing some progress. The Council of Europe is going to produce a strategy next year and there is an EU strategy in this area too. We are not doing this alone. The fact that the Council of Europe has identified the treatment of Travellers and Roma as being a priority is very positive as well.

**Deputy Séamus McGrath:** What is the timeline for the review mechanism?

**Mr. Liam Herrick:** It is six months. Every six months, there has to be-----

**Deputy Séamus McGrath:** Some assessment done.

**Mr. Liam Herrick:** Yes, of implementation and achievement.

**Deputy Séamus McGrath:** The committee has an important role in discussing those progress reports as well. It is something to consider in our work programme.

**An Cathaoirleach:** I will go to the second round of questions. I ask members to be conscious of time.

**Senator Malcolm Noonan:** I have two very quick questions and I appreciate that it has been a useful engagement. I have to tip out to a meeting shortly. I have a question relating to Ireland's Presidency of the European Union. Every member state that has an incoming Presidency is keen to tie up infringements and other issues around human rights in the run-up to it. Does Mr. Herrick see an opportunity to press the Government harder on trying to address some of the systematic issues around the EU's view on the law being deficient here in terms of human rights for Travellers and Roma? Could this be a collective opportunity to try to address some of the systematic issues?

**Mr. Liam Herrick:** The Senator has raised a very important point. We have been engaging with the Government on its priorities for its Presidency of the EU. We have also been engaging at a European-level with our colleagues in the network of national equality and human rights bodies. There is a great level of hope and expectation across Europe that Ireland will show leadership on issues of equality and human rights when it takes up the Presidency at what is a very difficult time for equality and human rights across Europe. There have been some very positive statements from the Government about its commitment to European values, including values of equality, around the Presidency.

In particular, a couple of European legislative issues are likely to be on the table for Ireland when it takes up the Presidency. We have referred to the standards directives for equality bodies, which Ireland and all other states will have to transpose immediately before Ireland takes up the Presidency next July. That is one issue. A second issue is that there has been a long-standing logjam at the European level about the introduction and achievement of an equal-treatment directive that would require all member states to have the type of equality legislative framework that we have where all grounds are covered by equality legislation. That has hit a number of roadblocks over the years. No EU Presidency has been able to get it over the line. It is likely that Ireland will have responsibilities in this area too. There is lot of hope because Ireland is seen by our peers as a leader on human rights and equality at the European Union level. The political commitment of successive Governments has been strong in this area. We share Senator Noonan's hope that Ireland will play a very strong leadership role on the broad equality agenda next year. The EU will be delivering further initiatives relating to Roma and Travellers in that time as well. If Ireland is in that leadership position, one hopes that it will encourage it to achieve more at the national level too.

**Senator Malcolm Noonan:** It is encouraging to hear that. That aside, from what we have been listening over the past couple of months, Ireland's reputation and its leadership of equality and human rights in law and in principle is one thing, but the reality of the situation for Travellers and Roma in Ireland is something very different. It has to manifest itself in a way that is meaningful in the lives of Travellers and Roma.

**Mr. Liam Herrick:** What have seen incredibly strong statements from EU and Council of Europe bodies that they recognise that the treatment of Travellers is one of the most serious

and grave human rights issues in Ireland and that the treatment of Travellers and Roma across Europe is one of the most serious and grave human rights issues that the whole Union faces. A high level of priority is being afforded to Traveller and Roma issues by both the EU and Council of Europe at this time.

**Senator Malcolm Noonan:** I have a quick final question on a local issue. We have discussed Traveller heritage and celebrating Traveller culture. It is most welcome to hear there is positive news around Traveller pride, etc. Does Mr. Herrick have any anecdotal evidence that there are young Traveller families hiding their identity because of systematic discrimination? I know from speaking to Traveller families that it can be an issue and it is not something we want to see happen.

**Mr. Liam Herrick:** We certainly come across that anecdotally in the research work we do. Those public sector bodies that have taken leadership roles in recording data are also experiencing that, for example, staff in public sector bodies not being comfortable identifying themselves as Travellers. It is something we have come across.

**An Cathaoirleach:** I thank the witnesses for their attendance. I hope they found the meeting useful. We, as a committee, found it useful to engage and interact with them. We look forward to working with them and the other groups we invited to meetings long into the future.

The joint committee adjourned at 2.19 p.m. until 12.30 p.m. on Thursday, 13 November 2025.