



National Traveller Women's Forum,

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NTWF response to Commission on the future of Irish policing

Introduction:

The National Traveller Women's Forum is the National Network of Traveller women and Traveller women's organisations from throughout Ireland. We recognise the particular oppression of Traveller women in Irish society and are working to address this issue through the provision of opportunities to Traveller women to meet, share experiences, ideas and develop collective strategies and skills to work towards the enhancement of their position in society.

Traveller women's experience of inequality discrimination and racism differs to that of the majority population or other minority groups, as is their experience of racism and discrimination different to Traveller men. The needs of Traveller women may not be met by responses and strategies designed to confront and tackle gender inequality or ethnic discrimination alone, i.e. without an examination of the interaction of ethnic disadvantage/discrimination. Acknowledging and addressing this experience is central to outcomes for Traveller women, as the experience of a Traveller woman will sometimes be distinctive because she is a woman, sometimes because she is a Traveller, and sometimes because she is both.

We welcome the opening to submit our views to the Commission on the future of Irish policing. We begin by taking the opportunity to acknowledge the work over the years to address issues and gaps in relation to An Garda Síochána relationship with Travellers and with other marginalised communities. The Garda Commissioner established the Garda Racial, Intercultural & Diversity Office (GRIDO) in April 2000 and the staff members of the GRIDO co-ordinate, monitor and advise on all aspects of policing in the area of diversity. It has been our experience that the GRIDO have been very supportive and have made great efforts over the years to make links with Traveller organisations. In addition the addition of ethnic liaison officers to the An Garda Síochána and the development of a diversity strategy have been welcome developments.

Community Relations

The relationship between Travellers and An Garda Síochána has been informed by a legacy of conflict mutual wariness and at times discrimination and racism. In our discussions with Traveller women on the issue accounts of mistrust, harassment and misconduct feature. It does not help that much of the interaction between Gardaí and Travellers is associated with being denied access to, or removed from, particular locations, whether it be social venues or evictions from an area where families have camped. In these instances and in others where there can be large Garda presences at

Traveller events such as funerals, the Gardaí are viewed as being there for the benefit of settled people rather than Travellers. There is a perception among Travellers that the levels of protection that are afforded the majority population are not extended to the Traveller community.

The role that An Garda Síochána can and do play in relation to responding to family conflict/feuding is very important. Travellers themselves are those who are most victimised and impacted on as a result of internal conflict and it is important that they have the confidence to engage with local Gardaí and look to them for protection and for support in resolving the conflict. There have been instances where Guards have played a constructive role in conflict resolution and unfortunately times where they have not been able to do this. It is important that any learning gained in a conflict situation is shared with other members.

Traveller women and Gender based violence

Violence of one form or another is part of the real life experience of many Traveller Women. The nature of this violence is broad and varied and can be experienced within a domestic situation, as a member of a community isolated from mainstream society or in the form of institutional violence where services and supports are not open or available to Traveller Women. Anecdotally we are aware that for Traveller Women who are living with domestic violence either from a partner or other family member, the situation is amplified. The fear of the external settled community is having a large impact on the type and nature of the support Traveller Women will access. The National Study on Domestic Abuse documented that Traveller Women are often reluctant to seek help from outside of the Travelling Community due to a fear of experiencing prejudice and a general mistrust of the authorities.¹

Relationships with service providers including the Gardaí are crucial for women when they are seeking help within or leaving a violent relationship. A history of mistrust and a lack of understanding by Gardaí is often cited by Traveller women as a barrier to their safety, and an inhibiting factor when seeking help with many Traveller Women disclosing incidents where the Guards were not a support to them. Traveller women living in Traveller specific accommodation find it challenging in particular to reach out to the Gardaí for support because of a perception and in some cases past experience that the responding Guard might use the opportunity to deal with other policing issues which puts further pressure on the Traveller women who is already in a crisis situation.

Ethnic Profiling:

Ethnic profiling is a type of racial discrimination carried out by people in positions of authority, such as police, who target people for reasons of safety, security or public protection but rely on stereotypes about ethnicity (which can include one's colour, nationality, religion etc.) rather than on reasonable suspicion. People may or may not be aware that they are acting based on prejudice.²

Gardaí will state that they do not engage in ethnic profiling but in practise there are examples of it. Ethnic profiling played a role in the decisions to remove Roma children from their families in

¹ P 152, Domestic Abuse of Women and Men in Ireland, Report on the National Study of Domestic Abuse

² http://mrci.ie/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/Singled_Out.pdf

October 2013. A report into the cases by Children’s Ombudsman Emily Logan in July of the following year came to the same conclusion (it also stated that there was no evidence of institutional or official ethnic profiling within An Garda Síochána). The report looked at the case of a 7-year-old Roma girl who was removed from her family in Tallaght, and a 2-year-old boy who was taken from his family in Athlone in the same week. Both children were placed in care briefly before being returned to their families. The report asserted that in both cases that there wasn’t a reasonable or objective reason for the action taken except that the children did not look like their parents and more substantial enquiries could have been undertaken regarding the child’s identity prior to any contact being made with the family. The events undermined an “already fragile trust between the Roma community and State agencies,” the report found.

The report made many recommendations including that cultural competence within An Garda Síochána with respect to the Roma community must be enhanced. In addition to these incidents The Sunday Times on March 20th featured an article by about the recording of Traveller children on the Garda PULSE database, and there were many reports emerging around the time of Traveller families being recorded on the PULSE system including minors.

Traveller women in prison and their experience of the Gardaí

In research carried out last year Traveller women were interviewed in relation to their experience in prison – they were also asked about their experience with the Gardaí:

“Negative experiences of the Guards prior to conviction characterised the experience of many of those interviewed. A number of women expressed serious problems with treatment by the Gardaí including abusive, discriminatory and racist language and violence. Some of the women were known to the Gardaí in question sometimes as a result of previous offences and other times as a result of family altercations with the Gardaí including in relation to accommodation;

“See all our lives we’re getting run by the guards around the place, our caravans and things, discrimination. That’s going on me whole life”. (██████)

“We went to the Guards, we went for help. No help, no no no, you’re this, you’re that. I mean something really does have to be done about it. That’s the way they treat you, look at you, spit at you, you’re this, you’re that, you can’t, you’ve no rights basically. You have no rights because of who and what you are (██████)

“The guards provoke with name calling ‘you don’t deserve to have your children – you knacker junkie – thieving tinkers – all the same’”.

“I was kicked and punched in a garda chase when I was 7 months pregnant. I had my nose broken when I was 12 by a garda’s hand cuff” (in an incident where there was an altercation between Gardaí and her father).”³

³ Doyle, Rachel: Travellers in Prison Initiative “Hearing their Voices” Traveller Women in Prison 2017

Recommendations:

- The Garda Síochána could demonstrate their commitment to tackling ethnic profiling by making a clear statement that ethnic profiling is unacceptable through legislation if necessary⁴, with associated guidelines and training made available for members.
- The Garda Ombudsman should have a clear role to investigate complaints of ethnic profiling.
- An Garda Síochána needs to commit to continuing to build the relationships and dialogue with the Traveller community on their policing related needs and issues whilst also challenging stereotypes and discrimination linked to membership of the Traveller Community.
- Build on the work carried out and experience gained in some local areas in order to develop an understanding of, and provide support to those impacted by internal conflict in the community
- A partnership approach to policing and cooperation between the GRIDO, Diversity Officers and Traveller and Roma organisations
- Further work is needed on affirmative action programmes to encourage recruitment of Travellers including Traveller women into An Garda Síochána
- Identifying opportunities to develop trust and communication with the Traveller community including Traveller women.
- Continuing dialogue between the Garda Racial & Intercultural Office and Traveller community representatives.
- Development and delivery of anti-racist, anti-sexist and Intercultural training for all levels of An Garda Síochána (not just in Templemore)

⁴ AS recommended by UNCERD 2011