

Examining the Impact of the Recognition of Irish Traveller Ethnic Minority Status on Education through the Lens of Nancy Fraser

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Abstract

This paper examined the impact of the 2017 Recognition of Irish Travellers as an Ethnic Minority through the lens of Fraser's model of justice. A number of interviews were held with a community development worker, a Traveller support worker, a Traveller education officer and three groups of Traveller women in relation to the impact of the recognition, and several themes emerged. Overall, the recognition as an ethnic minority was celebrated by Traveller organisations but for Travellers in the community there was little to no impact on their daily lives and on education provision, and no impact on Traveller status and recognition of the Traveller culture. Gaps in educational provision persisted with insufficient literacy and other learning supports. Awareness of Traveller culture was needed in schools for staff and students, and discrimination continued to be an issue.

Keywords: *ethnic minority status, Irish Travellers, discrimination, exclusion*

Introduction

Irish Travellers have existed as a separate population to the general Irish population for around a thousand years (Gilbert et al., 2017, p. 1) and are now considered to be one of the most marginalised groups in society. They have historically been seen as existing outside the social norm, which has led to efforts to absorb and assimilate them into the majority population (O'Connell,

1997, p. 3). Becoming ‘settled’ was the aim as the nomadic lifestyle was seen to impact negatively on education - Travellers’ opposition to assimilation led to exclusion from mainstream education. They faced and continue to face social exclusion, disadvantage and discrimination (McVeigh, 2007) and poor health standards – Traveller children, up to the age of 10, are ten times more likely to die than settled children (Connolly, 2002). Exclusion and discrimination impacts on Traveller children, and their rights are violated in education, poverty, healthcare, housing and family support (Kilkelly et al., 2004, p. xix). 70% of Irish Travellers aged 18-24 are not in further education or training compared to 5% of the general population (FRA, 2020, pp. 4-6). A large proportion (40%) of Irish Travellers live in acute poverty compared to 8% of the general Irish population and Travellers live, on average, eight years less than the settled population. Traveller specific housing schemes are not being provided nor additional halting sites.

The European Union’s concern for Roma and Traveller groups led to a reformed EU Roma strategic framework in 2020 which was intended to promote socio-economic inclusion, equality and participation (European Commission, 2020). It was adopted in 2021 by all member states and the focus of the framework was on Roma and Traveller integration, education, employment, health and housing. A survey by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights - FRA (2020) on six Western European countries (Belgium, France, Ireland, Netherlands, Sweden and the United Kingdom) showed there were discrepancies between countries for Roma and Traveller groups, in terms of discrimination, employment, exclusion, disadvantage and accommodation. Results showed that Irish Travellers experienced more severe material deprivation out of the nine groups - Belgium Roma, Belgium Travellers, French Travellers, Irish Travellers, Netherlands Roma, Netherlands Travellers, Sinti Swedish Roma, Travellers UK, Gypsies and Travellers UK (FRA, 2020, p. 76). They were in the top position

for not having a bank account at 63% compared to the general Irish population of 6% (ibid, 2020, p. 60). They also had the lowest levels of employment at 17% for women and 13% for men – this included self-employment and occasional work or any paid work in the previous four weeks (ibid, 2020, p. 55). Irish Travellers experienced the second highest rate of discrimination out of the nine groups at 64% for men and 61% for women and most of this discrimination occurred when looking for work, entering a restaurant or hotel, or shopping (ibid, 2020, p. 29). They were in second place for experiencing discrimination when trying to rent or buy a house (ibid, 2020, p. 82) and experienced the third highest hate motivated harassment, and those stopped by police and ethnically profiled (ibid, 2020, p. 38). They were also in the third lowest position for having trust in the police (ibid, 2020, p. 40) which concurs with Joyce et al (2022) and they were in third position out of the groups for feeling excluded from society (FRA, 2020, p. 59). One of the positives of the survey showed that Irish Travellers were in second place when asked about awareness of at least one equality organisation (47% of women and 50% of men) which shows that Traveller agencies have increased the level of awareness of legislation, amongst the Traveller community. They were knowledgeable about the laws concerning discrimination regarding skin colour, religion and ethnicity and were placed second out of the groups with 58% for women and 59% for men, and also in second place when asked if they had reported or filed a complaint regarding discrimination - 28% for both men and women (ibid, 2020, pp. 31-32).

Irish Travellers experience major differences between their lifestyles and outcomes and of those of the settled majority. They have lower life expectancy than settled people; the Traveller men's average life expectancy is 71.3 years compared to 79.7 years in the settled community and for Traveller women it is 75.2 years compared to 83.4 years for settled women (ibid, 2020). The Traveller suicide rate is six times higher than that of the settled community and racism

and discrimination are seen as the root causes (European Roma Rights Centre, 2023).

Protection for Traveller Groups

Recent policies have stressed the recognition of Traveller culture and engaging in consultation with Travellers. The 1992 UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons belonging to National, Ethnic or Religious and Linguistic Minorities speaks of the right to participation in cultural, social, religious, economic and public life at national and regional levels, (Article, 2.2, 2.3). The Council of Europe's 1995 Framework Convention on National Minorities provides protection for national minorities for culture and language, and guarantees against assimilation (Rehman, 2002, pp. 320-321). In 2002 the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, Section 24, made it an offence to enter and occupy land (Irish Statute Book, 2002a). This was seen to be aimed mainly at Travellers who were forced to use unauthorised sites or vacant property because of the lack of provision of halting sites for their use. Under the Irish Constitution, article 40.1 guarantees equality before the law (Irish Statute Book, 2002b). When the law came into effect the state promised it would not be used against Travellers living on the roadside and awaiting accommodation but this was not the case (Murray, 2012, p. 572).

Travellers and Traveller children are protected under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 2008). All children have the right to be educated without discrimination and on the basis of equal opportunities (Article 28) and the education of the child should be directed by the development of respect for the child's parents, and his/her own cultural identity (Article 29). Traveller children are a minority within a minority and suffer marginalisation and exclusion which leads to restricted opportunities in society and impacts on self-esteem, physical and mental health, educational

attainment and pride in Traveller culture (Murray, 1997). The Irish Government's official reluctance to accept Travellers as an ethnic minority may have been due to the state wishing to avoid international obligations to take positive action and may be part of an overall dismissive attitude towards Travellers and Traveller culture (O'Connell, 2006).

In March 2017 Irish Travellers were recognised as an ethnic group in Ireland and this acknowledged and valued the uniqueness of Traveller culture and identity (Daly, 2017). Irish Travellers were named as a protected group in Irish equality legislation and included in the range of anti-discriminatory and inter-cultural initiatives. In October 2018 the Irish government announced that a review of school curricula would take place with a view to including Traveller history and culture at primary and post-primary levels. The introduction of the Traveller Culture and History in Education Bill (2018) was part of the equality and education policies including the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy 2017-2021 (Department of Justice and Equality, 2017).

Recommendations of the Committee of Ministers to members states, include the addition of the history of Roma/Traveller in school curricula and teaching materials (Council of Europe, 2020). However the wording of the Bill changed from An Act to provide for the inclusion of Traveller culture and history in the curriculum taught by recognised schools in the State (Oireachtas, July 2018), to An Act to provide for recognised schools to promote a knowledge and understanding of the culture and history of the Traveller community (Oireachtas, October 2019). This change occurred as the Bill passed through the Seanad (Senate) and would have been agreed on by a majority of Senators. Schools now only have to promote a knowledge and understanding of the culture and history of the Traveller Community rather than having to teach it, as the legal requirement has been removed (Kavanagh & Dupont, 2021, p. 564).

The Bill's capacity to promote understanding and challenge institutional and interpersonal racism has been undermined as schools have discretion over their level of engagement. Traditionally schools in Ireland have shown little or no engagement with non-statutory curricular interventions and Travellers continue to be marginalised by state institutions (Kavanagh, 2013).

It is seven years since the granting of Ethnic Minority Status for Irish Travellers and the purpose of this paper is to examine the impact of Irish Travellers Ethnic Minority Status on education. It will also answer the following sub-questions:

- i) to what extent has the 2017 acknowledgement affected educational provision for Irish Travellers?
- ii) has the ruling impacted on increased positive recognition for Irish Travellers and Traveller culture?

Theoretical Framework

In this study Fraser's three-dimensional approach is utilised to consider how interrelated economic, cultural and political injustices, can impact society generally and the Irish Travelling community specifically, in relation to education (Fraser, 2009). Fraser's model is used as it focuses attention on the socio-economic, cultural and political challenges that ethnic minority students/groups face.

Fraser (2009, p. 16) stated that it is both the reality of justice and the frame within which it operates, that must be disputed. She also stated that justice 'requires social arrangements that permit all to participate as peers in social life'. People may not be able to participate freely due to lack of resources and in this case there is maldistribution of resources. Groups may suffer from status inequality when others do not recognise their cultural capital. For justice to

prevail, both of these two inequalities must be addressed as addressing one or the other is insufficient. Political justice is also needed, where it is established who will be included and excluded from the group claiming redistribution and recognition. Political injustice or misrepresentation will occur when political boundaries and decision making prevent some individuals or groups from accessing opportunities to participate in the same way as others, especially in a political sense. Further, misframing will cause non-members to be excluded from consideration of distribution, recognition and political representation. This three-dimensional approach enables the injustices of misframing to be identified and possible remedies to be evaluated (Fraser, 2009, p. 21). The politics of framing includes affirmative politics which accepts the status quo and does not question it. Advocates of the transformative approach question why the system is the way it is, and why some are treated differently to others. Within political justice there may also be meta-political misrepresentation, when those in the process of frame-setting deny a voice to those who may be harmed in the process, and also prevent access to democratic places where claims can be investigated and remedied (Fraser, 2009, p. 26). Irish Travellers suffer from the three dimensions of class inequality, status inequality and face political injustice. Fraser's three-dimensional lens offers an opportunity to examine the experiences of Irish Travellers generally and in relation to education. The following section examines the literature pertaining to Travellers and education and incorporates Fraser's lens.

Literature Review

Historical Background for Travellers in Education

Education for Travellers in the past in Ireland meant separate provision in addition to a lack of recognition of Traveller culture (Boyle et al, 2018, p. 191). Traveller pre-schools were set up in the 1970's and the number of pre-schools increased in the 1980's and 1990's, funded by the Department of Education and

Skills (DES). Senior Traveller Training Centres (STTC's) were set up in 1974 to provide compensatory education for Travellers aged 18 and over (Hourigan & Campbell, 2010). The DES found tensions between efforts at inclusiveness within society and separate educational provision and they recommended that all Travellers should be educated through general provision. Some of these STTC's were mixed centres i.e. there were Traveller learners and settled learners who learned together academically and also learned about each other's lifestyle and culture. The Traveller pre-schools and STTC's were disbanded by 2011, a number of years after the financial crash in Ireland, and it is likely that the cost of these centres played a role in their demise. The Traveller Education budget was cut by 86.66% (from €76.5 million to €10.2 million) in order to promote a more inclusive education system for Travellers (Irish Traveller Movement, n.d.). Resources to promote inclusivity for Travellers were not provided and resources are now allocated based on individual educational need and not ethnic identity. Whilst DES Policy claims to support inclusive and intercultural education, Traveller participation rates and outcomes for Travellers remain poor.

Application of Fraser's Three Dimensional Approach, to Traveller Education – Economic Injustice

Travellers remain one of Ireland's most disadvantaged groups and education is seen as the most important way of addressing marginalisation and social exclusion. In her discussion of justice and injustice Fraser's model stated that:

People can be impeded from full participation by economic structures that deny them the resources they need in order to interact with others as peers; in that case they suffer from distributive injustice or maldistribution. The problem is the class structure of society, which corresponds to the economic dimension of justice. (Fraser, 2008, p. 37)

Currently Travellers in Ireland have access to social welfare measures such as the Job Seekers Allowance, medical cards, Back to School Allowances and extra funding in schools in the form of a Traveller Capitation Grant – this is currently €213.50 per Traveller student (DES, 2020). At a surface level it appears that Irish Travellers are being accommodated economically in accessing education.

Application of Fraser’s Three Dimensional Approach, to Traveller Education – Cultural Injustice

Access to resources also means access to intellectual property which includes a rich curriculum, especially for communities that have been denied in the past.

Fraser asserted that:

People can also be prevented from interacting on terms of parity by institutionalized hierarchies of cultural value that deny them the requisite standing; in that case they suffer from status inequality or misrecognition. The problem is the status order, which corresponds to its cultural dimension. (Fraser, 2008, p. 37).

Individuals and groups such as Irish travellers, have experienced poor quality education which disadvantages them for life. The absence of Traveller culture in the curriculum communicates important messages to students, especially minority students. The curriculum informs students and lets them know if their knowledge has prestige within the educational establishment (Nieto, 2004, p. 102). Including Traveller culture in the school curriculum would foster an ethos in which teachers and students could show respect for the culture of minority groups, and these must be accompanied by robust anti-racism policies and practices (Bhopal, 2011). ‘The exclusion of Travellers’ history and culture from Irish curricula perpetuates cultural racism and related unequal power relations between members of the settled and Traveller communities’ (Kavanagh &

Dupont, 2021, p. 559). The inclusion of Traveller history in the curriculum would acknowledge the contribution of Travellers to activism in the 1916 Rising, to Irish music and folklore (McGuire, 2020). The decision not to include Traveller culture and history in the school curriculum but merely to promote some understanding of it, diminished the importance of the Traveller Culture and History in the Education Bill (2018) and indicated the lack of significance given to the Traveller culture.

Educational systems worldwide have made strides to include other cultures - the educational system in Australia includes equity policy to ensure that all Australians are familiar with indigenous cultures, and in the UK there is recognition of cultural diversity (Keddie, 2012, p. 268). Notwithstanding this Derrington & Kendall's study (2007, p. 127) of Gypsy Travellers in England found that students experienced racism and social and cultural alienation which impacted on their development, and as a result they did not achieve their educational potential. In another UK study, Gypsy and Traveller families felt that schools were arranged to provide safety for the settled community (Bhopal & Myers, 2008). Distributive justice is denied when culturally responsive teaching is seen as opposition to emphasis on academic achievement, and expectations of high achievement of marginalised students are necessary if they are to access future material benefits, and crucial to supporting economic justice (Keddie, 2012, p. 270). Focus on thinking from the space of marginalised students will show the workings of power and inequity (Mohanty, 2003, p. 232).

Irish Travellers suffer from recognition issues, both that of quantitative recognition deficit (not being recognised enough) and misrecognition – how one is recognised (Medina, 2018, p. 3). It is important to see Travellers as a multiple and diverse community rather than as an homogenous group. They may have similar characteristics – high regard for family, preference for self-employment,

unique languages and preference for a nomadic lifestyle and will also have shared values of the settled community. This aligns with Fraser (1996) who objected to identity politics which reduced the complexity of people's lives to one simplified group identity. Travellers suffer from recognition deficiency when dealing with mainstream society, who are quick to point to conflict within and between Traveller families. The recognition deficiency may refer to the speaker of the epistemic interaction or the subject matter. The speaker may suffer from lack of credibility from the audience, or they may be indifferent to the subject matter. Dominant groups may decide and choose their own beliefs, practices and traditions that are seen as superior (Mkwanzani & Cin, 2022, p. 17). There is no recognition from mainstream society that Travellers are dealing with two issues; inter-group conflict (conflict between the settled community and Travellers) and intra-group conflict (conflict between individual Travellers/families). When there is conflict within Traveller families, family members can feel that they have few options available to them due to the poor relationships between the families and the police. 'Travellers are overpoliced as suspects, underpoliced as victims and overrepresented in prisons' (Joyce et al, 2022). Fraser (2000, p. 4) suggested that the status of individual group members needed to be recognised in social interaction rather than group-specific identity. However it is group identity that needs to be recognised for Travellers in Ireland in order for positive change to occur. Travellers have never been recognised by mainstream society and to focus on individual group members solely without a focus also on group identity, will lead to maintenance of the status quo.

Most people in Ireland have never had direct contact with Travellers and get information about Travellers from the media; television, film, radio and newspapers rather than from direct interaction (Kabachnik, 2009). Traveller women have been portrayed in the media as being oppressed, poorly educated, and only interested in getting married young and having children (The Traveller

Movement, 2020). Traveller men have been portrayed as being violent and aggressive and there is no indication that these depictions are stereotypical. They are seen as accurately describing a culture that the settled majority have little knowledge of. Irish newspapers choose to under report information about Irish Travellers in an effort to keep them invisible, and when they do report, they focus on negative aspects (violence, theft, reliance on social welfare) of Travellers which reinforces the images that the settled community hold (Koca-Helvaci, 2016, p. 53). Misrepresentation informs practices and these stereotypes lead to discrimination, exclusion and violence against the minority group. Housing, designated for Traveller families has been burned down in a number of cases, and protests to prevent Traveller families to move into accommodation have taken place (Times, 2003; Beacon, 2020). Marginalised learners need to be heard by others in ways that value this knowledge, especially when one has not been historically valued. Recognition can redress some of the reasons for social and economic exclusion (Dejaeghere, 2020, p. 28).

Application of Fraser's Three Dimensional Approach, to Traveller Education – Political Injustice

Fraser also stated:

The political dimension of justice concerns the scope of the state's jurisdiction and the decision rules by which it structures contestation. It tells us who is included in, and who is excluded from, the circle of those entitled to a just distribution and reciprocal recognition. (Fraser, 2008, p. 38).

In schools marginalised groups may not have a voice and be subject to political injustice as schools have mainly white, middle-class teachers (Keddie, 2012, p. 268). Emphasising otherness may create further inequities, or a focus on one barrier at the expense of others. Fraser (2007, p. 27) views overcoming injustice as dismantling institutional obstacles that prevent some people from fully

participating in society. Traveller parents may not feel welcome in schools and may refrain from getting involved in school activities such as the Parent's Council and Boards of Management. Traveller students may not go forward for Student Council positions and this further reduces Traveller input into decision making regarding education and school. Traveller students and their parents have equal access to social media that everybody can access and use. Fraser's assertion that some people do not have equal voice may have been true some years ago, but the explosion of social media has led to this avenue opening up to everybody who has access to the internet. Whilst social media is not as formal as other types of communication it represents a most important channel of communication, which is used by all genders, races and ages both personally, in business, in politics and in education.

Traveller organisations have concerns about the lack of progress of Irish Travellers economically and in terms of being recognised and valued, and the lack of progress in education. In their 2021 submission The Irish Traveller Movement stated that gaps in participation, progression and achievement between Travellers and their settled counterparts in education, were vast. In 2016 only 13% of Travellers versus 92% of non-Travellers completed senior cycle at second level. In 2017 only 8% of working-age Travellers compared with 73% of non-Travellers had reached Leaving Certificate at second level, and 57% of Traveller boys had only primary education compared with 13% nationally. Only 13% of female Travellers were educated to upper secondary or above, compared with 69.1% of the general population, and of the Travellers who left second level education early, 55% left by the age of 15 years and six months. The number of Travellers in Ireland is low – 32,949 in the 2022 census which represents less than 1% of the overall population (Central Statistics Office, 2023) and with the large numbers leaving education at an early age, this means that there are few Travellers available at later stages to enter Higher Education. Also 4 out of 10

Travellers said they or their children had been bullied in school because of their identity as Travellers. Increasing gaps in education provision existed, and community-based Traveller groups were left without dedicated services when the Visiting Teacher Service for Travellers was closed in 2011. This had been a valuable service as there had been a link between the Traveller families and schools and issues could be resolved quickly, as visiting teachers could liaise between the schools and the families. When the granting of ethnic minority status on Travellers was given in 2017 it appeared to suggest a new era, and the recognition by the government of Travellers was seen as a very positive move forward. Many studies have been carried out on the Irish Travelling community (Hourigan and Campbell, 2010; Koca-Helvaci, 2016; Boyle, Hanafin and Flynn, 2018; Dupont, 2022) but none have examined their experiences under the lens of Nancy Fraser's work. Nor has there been examination of the impact of ethnic status recognition on the community and this paper aims to fill the gap. The next section explains the methodology and methods used in the study.

Methodology

This paper drew on the experiences of Travellers, a community worker, a Traveller support worker and a Traveller education officer in four counties in Ireland, in relation to the impact of the recognition of the ethnic status of Travellers on education. Purposive sampling was used as the sampling method which meant that respondents with particular characteristics were chosen (Bryman, 2012); those who identified as Travellers and those who worked and interacted with Travellers on a day-to-day basis. The study also used a snowballing method whereby respondents who met the criteria were asked if they knew anybody else who might take part, in order to maximise the number of interviewees.

Methods

Individual interviews were carried out with three community workers who had day to day interactions with the Travelling community in their roles within primary health care or third level education. Focus group interviews were carried out with seventeen Travellers; two groups of six Traveller women and one group of five Traveller women, with a community worker in attendance at each focus interview. Interviews with the Traveller support worker and the Traveller education officer were carried out via Zoom and the interview with the community worker was face to face. Focus group interviews were carried out via Zoom. The interviews enabled the researcher to probe further on topics, and also acquire a picture of the respondent's experience (Fox, 2009, pp. 7-8). The paper used phenomenology which explores the lived experiences of participants, and it is a powerful research strategy that is suitable for examining challenging issues such as discrimination (Neubauer et al, 2019, p. 1). The reason why I used this approach is that I believe in the importance of personal perspective and interpretation. The questions asked in the interviews included questions on the impact of the recognition generally on Travellers, on education, social recognition, decision making and opportunities. The interviews, which took between thirty and forty minutes, were recorded on Zoom and on a recording device, and were then transcribed manually by the researcher.

Analysis

Thematic analysis was used as the methodology for identifying, analysing and reporting themes within the data, and interpreting aspects of the research topic (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Codes were allocated to the concepts after considering the data – inductive approach. The process of primary cycle coding (Tracy, 2013) was used, and initial codes were assigned to the data which was examined in the search for themes – feelings which characterise perceptions and experiences. The data was analysed manually in the search for themes and the

recordings were listened to many times, in order to ensure that the themes were reported accurately. Themes were then classified using Owen's (1984) criteria of repetition, forcefulness and recurrence. If participants repeated a word several times, this was noted and forcefulness was shown by participants emphasis such as change of vocal tone. When themes occurred throughout all the interviews this was also noted (recurrence). The results are shown in the next section.

Findings and Discussion

The results of the three individual interviews and three focus group interviews are outlined in Table 1 and discussed further below.

Table 1

Themes Arising from Interviews

Themes	Recognition R	Forcefulness F	Recurrence REC
Theme 1 No real change as a result of the ruling	R	F	REC
Theme 2 Supports needed regarding literacy and more encouragement from teachers	R	F	REC
Theme 3 Culture awareness needed for teachers and students	R	F	REC
Theme 4 Continuous judgement and discrimination from society	R	F	REC

Theme 1 No real change perceived as a result of the ruling

Granting of ethnic minority status to Travellers led to initial feelings of joy, and an acknowledgement that it was time that the ethnic minority status of Travellers was recognised. This euphoria was short lived and there was no further recognition of any real change on the ground as Travellers continue to suffer from lack of redistribution, recognition and representation. Noticeable change as a result of the ethnic status ruling in all three areas was lacking,

though it may be that the recognition will give the community a firmer basis for arguing for the activation of the pre-existing rights of Travellers, who are a named group in equality legislation (Haynes et al, 2021, p. 270). Travellers lack of recognition is seen in the absence of Traveller culture in the school curriculum in both primary and post-primary schools. This lack of inclusion leads Traveller students to believe that their own culture lacks importance (Nieto, 2004) and inclusion of Traveller culture in the curriculum would permit both teachers and students to respect the culture of minority groups (Bhopal, 2011). The exclusion exacerbates the imbalance of power between the settled community and the Traveller community (Kavanagh & Dupont, 2021).

Views of Traveller Women

'I was excited for our community. We were hopeful for the future. I thought it would bring change around; change in the living conditions, accommodation, education and discrimination'.

'I'm glad it was done but it hasn't brought any change for me'.

Views of community workers

The community workers had mixed views:

'I think it helped to demystify a lot of ideas around the ethnicity of Travellers and helped to reinforce that the Traveller community was a valid community, and should be respected and celebrated'.

'There hasn't been much change on the ground'.

Community workers were concerned about the lack of supports in education for Traveller students; economic supports generally and for specific individuals, and felt that when efforts were made to accommodate Traveller needs, these could be very successful. People may not be able to participate freely due to

lack of resources and in this case there is maldistribution of resources (Fraser 2009).

‘There is the Traveller Capitation Grant for schoolsthere is the difficulty that how it is used is up to the schools completely and they are very vague about this’.

‘Funding is needed for private courses...but the biggest problem was finding funding’.

There was lack of clarity as to how Traveller capitation grants were being used by schools and despite requests for further information from schools by one community worker, this was not provided. Ringfenced funds for private courses that would lead to employment/self-employment were needed – this was also suggested by Hourigan & Campbell (2010, 101-102). When Travellers were given targeted funds for the Star programme, this worked very successfully as there were clear outcomes set out for the programme. The programme operates to provide greater opportunities and outcomes for Travellers in the education system and wider society, and promotes access to third-level education (Irish Traveller Movement, 2019). Traveller parents commented that Youthreach payments were encouraging their children to leave school at 16 and this was mentioned as a disincentive by Quinlan (2021, p. 48). She suggested that mentorships and scholarships were needed, with supports following the student, not the school. This was raised by one community worker: ‘you have to see it, to be it’ and a Traveller woman:

‘Travellers need to see more role models in education and employment. We’re seeing young people getting a good education, coming out and ending up doing nothing, getting no job, being nothing’.

Hill (2022) stated that the working class is segmented both horizontally - unemployed/unskilled up to the managerial class, and vertically by race and gender. Travellers are not seen as part of the working class as this indicates that they work for a living. The settled majority see them as the underclass; totally dependent on social welfare and not capable of finding employment and there is no recognition of the extreme racism that prevents them from gaining employment unless they choose to hide their identity. Lack of role models in the Travelling community meant that young Travellers had a self-defeating belief that they would not achieve. cursory supports work up to a point - affirmative approaches work at surface level and there is danger that correcting inequities created by social arrangements do not go far enough to change the social structures that cause them. Transformative approaches will make all the entitlements universal, so that marginalised groups will not be viewed as receiving any special treatment.

Theme 2 Supports needed regarding literacy and more encouragement from teachers

All groups commented on the need for supports for literacy as this was hindering progress both in primary school and when transitioning to post-primary school. Further supports in school in the form of early assessments, and regular homework clubs were necessary both at primary and post-primary levels.

Views of Traveller women

'They (Traveller children) need to be assessed earlier and if there are difficulties there, they (teachers) need to find them'.

'A lot of areas don't have homework clubs or any supports after school'.

A lot of the Travellers spoke about the poor literacy of Traveller students in both primary and post-primary schools and they felt that further regular supports were needed when in school, and after school for Traveller students. There was recognition that immediate help was needed, otherwise Traveller students were just moving from class to class and getting further and further behind. They then experienced extreme difficulties when in post-primary school, if their literacy levels were sub-standard. The response from all groups was that teachers needed to be more supportive of Traveller students, and further encouragement from teachers was needed for both the students and the Traveller families.

'I feel Traveller children aren't being driven enough'.

One Traveller woman commented that she knew of a child who was interested in a particular subject area and she thought the school wasn't doing enough to encourage the child to pursue it as a career. Their expectation was that it was the school's job to encourage students onto the correct career pathway without acknowledging the role that parents have in career promotion.

Both the Traveller women and the community workers expressed concern about the high volume of reduced timetables given to Traveller students in schools, to the extent that it was becoming the norm for Traveller students.

'There are all the special timetables given to kids who are going in and out of education for an hour, and that's not going to help their education. It impacts on their self-esteem if they are treated differently (to settled students).'

The Traveller women believed that there were poor working relationships between school staff and Traveller students and their families, though they acknowledged that it was difficult to establish relationships with teachers,

especially at post-primary level with the large amount of teachers involved. When parents feel unwelcomed at school they believe that what they have to offer is unimportant (Wanat, 1992, pp. 43-48). When parents have negative experiences whilst at school, as is the case with a large number of Traveller parents, they may be more hesitant to approach schools. They are less likely to enquire about being members of Boards of Management or Parents Councils and when minority groups do not have a voice they may be subject to political injustice (Fraser, 2008; Keddie, 2012).

‘Teachers need to make the parents more welcome and build a relationship together with them, so that they’re not afraid to approach the teachers and the teachers are not afraid to approach the parents’.

Views of Community Workers

Community Workers were also concerned about poor literacy rates:

‘Primary and secondary schools need to be completely restructured as there aren’t enough supports. There are poor expectations of Traveller students. Literacy and numeracy levels are very poor and they can’t cope in secondary schools and the dropout rate at Junior Certificate (similar to G.C.S.E. level) is huge’.

‘Trauma informed training is really needed in schools just so they (teachers) can have awareness. Just from being a Traveller means trauma from all the discrimination they can face’. (Trauma-informed teaching considers how trauma impacts learning and behavior – Kaufman, n.d.)

The assumption in schools is that the norm is the majority of settled students, and smaller minority groups and Traveller students are expected to fit in with settled values. Schools are generally organised to provide for majority groups

and provide safety for them (Bhopal & Myers, 2008) and minority groups have to take on the norms of the larger settled group. Community workers were concerned about teachers' expectations of Traveller students.

'I believe personally it's down to poor expectations and that impacts on how you teach a child'.

'I think that schools need to change, to become Traveller friendly environments and there are schools like that who go overboard to welcome Traveller children, but I'd say there are more exceptions to the rule'.

Theme 3 Culture awareness needed for teachers and students

There was a feeling that the settled community had little to no information about the Traveller culture and this was compounding the impact on relationships with the Traveller students and their families. When others do not recognise the cultural capital of minority groups, the minority groups may suffer from status inequality (Fraser, 2009). Irish Travellers have recognition issues of not being recognised enough and how they are recognised (Medina, 2018). To most settled people they have rarely if ever encountered Travellers, and Travellers are also misrecognised as they are seen as an homogenous group with similar characteristics and behaviours, whilst the reality is that they share a lot of the settled community's values. The majority group may refuse to acknowledge this as a way of distancing themselves from Travellers, and decide that their own way of life is superior (Mkwanzani & Cin, 2022).

Views of Traveller women:

'Teachers need Traveller culture training'.

'Some teachers haven't a clue. They've never met a Traveller person in their life'.

'With the different nationalities in schools and different things up on the walls....why is there nothing about Travellers? (Traveller) children see this and question it'.

There was a belief that cultural awareness and training would help to resolve some of the issues involved. Community Workers also recognised that cultural awareness was needed.

'There needs to be intercultural workshops to question our own ideas and knowledge around different cultures, and that will alleviate a lot of problems that currently exist'.

'I am hopeful that the new Bill around history and culture will change the negative views around Travellers.'

'For Travellers, family events aren't just one day events, it's over a few days and if they have college deadlines it can be jarring for students'.

For the community workers it was important that staff looked at their own prejudices prior to offering the Traveller culture as part of the curriculum, in order to identify and question their own beliefs about different cultures and minority groups. There was some confidence that the new Bill would change the curriculum though it was obvious that the change in the wording of the Bill from including Traveller culture and history to promoting knowledge and understanding of it, had reduced the strength of the proposal. This hadn't affected the community workers assumptions on the future impact of the Bill and there was confidence that it would be passed by the government into law, and would be adopted by schools. The current wording of the Bill could lead to a tokenistic approach in schools, with posters promoting Traveller culture as a one-day annual activity.

Theme 4 Continuous judgement and discrimination from society

There was a belief that Travellers were constantly being judged and that discrimination was felt in a lot of areas; education, socially and in employment. This was a long-standing issue for Travellers with continued social exclusion, disadvantage and discrimination (McVeigh, 2007). Traveller children are not immune from the impact of discrimination and their rights are consistently violated in many areas including education (Kilkelly et al, 2004). For Traveller adults, this led to feelings that they had no choice but to hide their identity in order to get/remain in employment.

Views of Traveller women:

'Nobody wants to hide their identity but unfortunately to get on in life you have to'.

'In my lifetime I don't think discrimination will ever go but I hope for my grandchildren it will change'.

The belief was that if they identified as Travellers, this led to a lack of employment opportunities and the only way to access employment was to deny their culture or use a different surname if it identified them as being part of the Traveller community. The Travellers felt that they were judged initially and that nothing could change that. Only by hiding their identity could they hope to progress and find employment.

'We're all painted with one brush'.

Views of Community Workers:

Community Workers were also conscious that discrimination was still present.

'We had hoped that it (Recognition of Ethnic Minority Status) would bring about real change within Irish society but it hasn't eradicated racism and discrimination'.

'Travellers are still afraid to identify as Travellers in jobs, as they are fearful of the repercussions'.

There was lack of visible role models in employment amongst the Traveller community. All the Traveller women involved in the focus group interviews were in employment and worked as health advisers amongst the Travelling community, providing necessary information and advice to Traveller families on a range of medical issues and lifestyles. The nature of their role meant that they were only visible to Traveller families – lack of visibility of Traveller adults at work in the wider community meant that the settled community continued to view Travellers as work-shy and dependent on the social welfare system.

'There isn't enough visibility of members of the Travelling community and you have to see it to be it'.

'What is also missing is the link to employment...for example, at post primary school, students have no clear link. I remember reactions from women's groups and individuals, 'I did so many courses but it took me nowhere''.

Representation is needed in order for citizens to be included and to experience social belonging. It includes being eligible to be counted as a citizen and have access to a polling card and voting in elections, and having the right to participate in decision making locally and nationally. Lack of information and knowledge can mean that individuals do not have sufficient awareness to critique the system that continues to perpetrate acts of injustice against their community. Claiming justice from social structures that harm them can prove difficult, and collective justice claims are generally not initiated by the

Travelling community. There may be individual/individual family claims when they believe their rights are not being recognised, and examples are in the courts of Travellers being denied access to hotel accommodation, bars, etc. The Traveller women interviewed were very vocal in their views regarding discrimination:

'We don't want compensation, we want respect'.

Travellers make up such a small proportion of Irish society that they cannot make a large impact on voting results in local and national elections. A transformative approach would see Irish Travellers and European Roma gypsies/citizens taking a joint class action against all the nations/organisations that have discriminated against them.

Social arrangements must allow participants to operate freely in the three spheres. Lack of economic, cultural and political justice impacts people's abilities to interact as equals. Struggles against misframing will aim to destroy the barriers that prevent marginalised people from facing up to and defying the forces that oppress them. It involves changing the way political space is divided so that excluded groups can challenge mistreatment. When politicians decided to water down proposals for the inclusion of Traveller culture to be taught in schools in Ireland, to it merely being promoted, it showed that they are simply paying lip service to recognising the Traveller culture. In this instance the educational system lost a valuable opportunity to truly include Irish Travellers and their culture. Within Irish political parties, the Irish Communist party mentions working-class people and the problems they encounter but does not mention the Traveller community specifically and the further issues they face (Communist Party of Ireland, 2024).

The most tenacious issue that Travellers described in this study was the persistent discrimination they faced from the settled community. Focused measures on integrating the groups in education, supporting self-employment, and ensuring quotas apply in the public service in all areas for Traveller workers, would lead to more visibility of Travellers. Currently there are some Travellers in quality positions but they are either not self-identifying or there are too few of them to be noticed by the public at large or to impact positively on other Travellers. There needs to be a state led focus with creative measures that take account of Traveller culture and norms, and a focus on removing barriers, put in place by state institutions and mainstream society, that do not serve the needs of this indigenous group.

Overall there was an element of hope that the Traveller Culture and History in Education Bill (2018) would lead to positive change for Travellers. Whilst a variety of measures are in place across the country to help Traveller and Roma students - PATH 5 Programme (Higher Education Authority, 2022), Traveller employability programme (Business in the Community Ireland, n.d.) Traveller graduate network (Munster Technological University, 2012) grinds for Traveller students at Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate, and expansion of the Apprenticeship programme (Regional Skills, 2022), the approaches adopted are not co-ordinated, and without a national approach to developments and supports, it is likely that some geographical areas will make progress, with others stagnating.

Conclusion

This paper examined the impact of the 2017 Recognition of Irish Travellers as an Ethnic Minority through the lens of Fraser's model of justice. The aim was to examine the impact of Irish Travellers Ethnic Minority Status on education provision for Irish Travellers and recognition of Irish Travellers and Traveller

culture. The ethnic minority status which was sought by Travellers and Traveller organisations was finally gained in 2017 and led to a sense of pride, but little else. Conditions have not improved for Travellers in terms of opportunities or recognition. There has been no impact on education and educational opportunities, on Traveller status or voice. Further opportunities need to be offered to Traveller students such as the Royal College of Surgeons access scholarships for Traveller and Roma students which permit these students to study undergraduate programmes in different areas of medicine (Royal College of Surgeons, n.d.). An expansion of these scholarships to all universities would allow Traveller students to study a wide range of areas including teaching at pre-school, primary, post-primary and Higher Education levels. DES policy claims to support the development of a network of peer support and mentoring services for Traveller and Roma students in H.E. and new attempts to attract Traveller and Roma students into teacher training courses (Technological University, 2023, p. 9). Other plans include focus on inclusive education in initial teacher training and ongoing professional development for teachers, increased focus on engaging Traveller and Roma students in apprenticeships and traineeships, and posts for Access and Outreach Project Officers to work with these communities. However the majority of the DES National Access Plan for Higher Education 2022-2028 (2022) focuses on increasing the numbers of Traveller and Roma students in Higher Education. With the focus on the macro side there is little focus on the micro impacts and the targeted measures necessary to support these disadvantaged students.

There have been decades of discussion around Traveller education and the Traveller education budget cuts have led to stagnation of the progress made in supporting Traveller students in secondary schools. Traveller parents and support workers were clear about the supports needed in schools for Traveller students – transparency in the way Traveller capitation grants were being used

in schools, literacy support in primary and post-primary schools, early assessment of students to identify learning needs/difficulties, homework clubs at both levels, removal of reduced timetables for students, better relationships with staff and trauma based training for school staff. They also advocated culture awareness training for all school staff and clear links to employment for Traveller students. Irish Travellers are protected under UN legislation, EU legislation and the Irish Constitution yet continue to experience negativity, racism and exclusion. Travellers experience grave injustices in accessing basic human rights and a strategic approach is required to deal with this. They need to have their culture recognised formally by state institutions and mainstream society, and to be acknowledged as equals.

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