

st.stephen's green trust
Travellers in Prison Initiative

1. Introduction

The Travellers in Prison Initiative (TPI) was developed in 2014 in response to the particular needs and circumstances of Travellers in prisons in the Republic of Ireland. It is a programme of the St Stephen's Green Trust, and is also funded by the Irish Prison Service (IPS), the Probation Service and the HSE (Social Inclusion).

The overall aim of the TPI is to embed changes in policy and practice that have a positive influence on Travellers in prison, their families and communities.

Travellers are significantly over-represented within the prison system. Although only accounting for 0.7% of population in the Republic of Ireland, Travellers account for an estimated 10% of the entire prison population and 15% of the female prison population (based on a census of Travellers in prison undertaken by the Irish Prison Service in November and December 2018).

Census 2016 indicates that 80% of the Traveller community are unemployed compared to a 12.9% unemployment rate in the general population. Travellers with criminal convictions are even further distanced from the labour market.

Evidence indicates that securing employment plays a significant role in reducing recidivism rates and creating safer communities. We welcome the development of 'A New Way Forward' Social Enterprise Strategy 2017-2019 which supports the development of SE within prisons and through community based organisations as well as with new and existing social businesses¹.

The TPI is pleased to contribute to this important process to develop a National Social Enterprise Policy for Ireland 2019-2022. We acknowledge the commitment of the Department of Rural and Community Development and the various studies and stakeholders who have contributed to this work to date.

This submission will respond to the questions raised under the three main policy objective headings:

¹ 'A New Way Forward' Social Enterprise Strategy 2017-2019

[http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/A_New_Way_Forward - Social Enterprise Strategy 2017-2019.pdf/Files/A_New_Way_Forward - Social Enterprise Strategy 2017-2019.pdf](http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/A_New_Way_Forward_-_Social_Enterprise_Strategy_2017-2019.pdf/Files/A_New_Way_Forward_-_Social_Enterprise_Strategy_2017-2019.pdf)

Policy Objective 1 – Creating an awareness of social enterprises

The principles underpinning and driving social economy enterprises are critically important in terms of the outcomes for communities. Those social economy enterprises that are informed by an inclusive ideology can contribute to the empowerment of communities and workers. Community work principles of participation, empowerment, equality/anti-discrimination, collective outcomes and positive social change should underpin all social enterprises. Otherwise, there is a danger that social enterprise development could simply facilitate the privatisation of essential public services and precarious low paid jobs.

Traveller participation - 'The process of participation is fundamental to community development. It is rooted in the self-identification of needs and interests, the formulation of responses by the community or group concerned and is central to their ability to continue to influence outcomes²'. TPI recognises that policies and programmes targeted at Travellers will not be effective without the meaningful participation of Travellers at the design, implementation and monitoring stages.

Relationship building – TPI recognises that effecting change in Travellers' experience of employment and training programmes requires partnership and cooperation between a range of individuals and groups, including Travellers, State bodies, other community and voluntary groups and Traveller representative organisations. There is a need to develop trust across all sectors and relationship-building work should be a core objective of all initiatives. Unless relationships are effectively fostered and developed, change is not likely to be successfully achieved or sustained.

Gender dimension – TPI believes that integrating gender analysis into the design, implementation, evaluation and dissemination of programmes and activities is essential in order to maximise outcomes for men and women.

Marginalised communities with high levels of poverty and social exclusion will require particular supports to engage effectively in social enterprise developments. Successful social enterprises, for example Galway Traveller Movement's recycling and home insulation work should be used to demonstrate good practice in developing the social economy to address Traveller exclusion from the labour market. This could be a blueprint for other Travellers' organisations seeking to address the economic marginalisation that affects Travellers.

² 2 All Ireland Endorsement Body for Community Work Education and Training (2016), All Ireland Standards for Community Work

Policy Objective 2 – Growing and Strengthening Social Enterprise

- Business Supports for social enterprise

Gaps in supports for social enterprises must be adequately addressed. Social enterprise developers should be enabled to identify their own unique support needs. These needs may vary across regions/locations, communities and specific products/services supplied by social enterprise. Supports must be relevant, flexible and not overly bureaucratic. A one size fits all approach will not suffice.

Existing structures such as LEO's, LCDC's, SICAP, LEADER, community organisations etc. need to be resourced and provided with training to ensure that they are equipped to provide the necessary supports to social enterprises.

LEOs should develop specific initiatives which support the development of the Traveller economy and enable social enterprise. And as access, retention and progression of Travellers through SICAP is very low, progress is needed in developing a flexible approach to create specific opportunities that engage Travellers.

Opportunities and supports need to be provided for community workers to 'upskill' in the methodologies and processes of social enterprise development so that they are equipped to influence the development and management of social enterprises and ultimately devise a model of engagement which can deliver sustainable positive outcomes for the communities they serve.

- Access to Finance and Funding

Funding arrangements need to take account of the social targets of social enterprises, such as empowerment and participation as well as the more quantifiable outputs such as jobs created, services provided etc.

Social enterprises require investment/funding streams which are long-term and secure.

- Enabling market opportunities

The State can play a very important role as a consumer of social enterprise services and products. Procurement officers should receive specific training on supporting engagement with social enterprises. Outcomes for social enterprises should be monitored and barriers addressed.

The Government should make full use of provisions for social procurement provisions in the EU Procurement Directives (e.g. reserved contracts and general inclusion of social considerations in assessment criteria), as part of an overall community gain policy. For example, the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty (2014) obliges public bodies to have regard, in the performance of their functions, of the need to eliminate discrimination and promote equality, and protect human rights, in their daily work. This could include

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supporting the work of social enterprises, in particular those that target groups who are particularly disadvantaged in labour market terms, for example, Travellers, ex-prisoners etc.

Policy Objective 3 – Achieving Better Policy Alignment

A wide range of government departments need to be engaged in the development of the sector at national level, in order to identify opportunities within their own policy remit. This will require capacity building at central government level, and will require directives from such departments as the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, around targets for inclusion of social enterprise in infrastructure and other projects.

A structure such as a national social enterprise unit should coordinate these actions, with the involvement of central government departments, state agencies and social enterprises and community organisations.

We welcome the commitment to a collaborative approach to the development and implementation of the plan. It is important that the implementation group charged with responsibility to oversee delivery of the its delivery is representative of particularly marginalised groups such as Travellers and ex-prisoners.

Further research on the Irish situation needs to be carried out and examples of best practice from the UK and elsewhere drawn out with a view to delivering fully on the potential of social enterprise in Ireland.

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