



EXCHANGE HOUSE
Travellers Service

Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities

Submission re draft of second report by Ireland

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This submission is on behalf of Exchange House Travellers Service



Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities

Submission re draft of second report by Ireland with specific reference to

Education

On behalf of Exchange House Travellers Service, Dublin

Exchange House Travellers Service has been providing services to the Traveller community in the greater Dublin region since 1980. These services include Family Support and social work services, Youth Work services, Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS) and a range of education services.

Exchange House is making this submission to the second report by Ireland on the basis of its experience in providing the following:

- After-schools programme in Labre Park Site, Ballyfermot
- After-schools programme in Oliver's Park/Bridgeview Site, Clondalkin
- "Learning on the Streets" project with National College of Ireland
- Basic Education programme for Traveller women in the inner city
- Family Health programme for women in Labre Park
- On-site and in-house Basic Adult Education programme for individual Travellers

This submission reflects learning from practice and experience of providing educational services to the Traveller community.

After-schools programmes.

Exchange House has been coordinating after-schools programmes as part of its Youth Service for the past three years. The programmes are run from an inter-agency, community based perspective, which facilitates the engagement of a wide range of service providers, and most importantly, the parents of the Traveller children. The Advisory Group for each of the After-Schools programmes includes teachers from the Visiting Teacher service, community health providers, Barnardos and other community based service providers working with the Traveller community in the specific areas, in addition to Traveller parents. In all, 60 children between the ages of 6-14 are supported in completing their homework and engaging in a range of extra curricular activities designed to enhance their school-based learning and provide positive learning experiences, in addition to involving their parents in the whole educational process. The combination of settled and Traveller staff on the after-schools programmes facilitates a balanced and supportive environment.

Both programmes are funded from different sources, under different conditions, and require significant additional fundraising to deliver a high quality service.

Recently Exchange House has received funding from the Dormant Accounts fund to run a project designed to encourage transfer for boys to post-primary. This takes place on Labre Park site in Ballyfermot and is run in conjunction with National College of Ireland.

The Exchange House experience of delivering an after-school service indicates the following:

- Teachers, health workers and other service providers testify to the positive impact of after-schools programmes in supporting Traveller children to benefit from the education system and to remain longer in school. This is particularly notable in the increased transfer from primary to secondary level among girls.
- The value of on-site provision lies in the engagement of the parents, which is critical to the enhancement of the child's experience of the education system
- Funding for such programmes should be mainstreamed under the brief of the Department of Education and Science. Currently some funding is devolved under the School Completion Programme, however, this is not always satisfactory as the recognition given to community based options does not always appear to be supportive. Community-based organisations do not have the time or resources to seek further funding on an ongoing basis.
- A specific funding stream within the Department of Education and Science for such initiatives would allow for more direct transfer of learning, with transparent systems of monitoring and evaluation to ensure high quality delivery of the service.
- The full integration of the After-schools programmes within the local Schools Completion Programme would ensure a more holistic and supportive environment to Traveller children.

Lifelong Learning.

The Women's programmes and Basic Adult Education provision in Exchange House operate within a model of lifelong learning. Given that education has not been a positive experience for many Travellers, for a variety of reasons, an Equality agenda would assume that specific measures would be put in place, which would attempt to redress that negative experience in a way that is both appropriate and accessible to the Traveller community. Such a policy would involve a cohesive strategy which would link early childhood learning and adult learning within an overall model, with key impact indicators identified and recognised. The National Qualifications Framework facilitates that progression in a realistic and accessible way. However, the experience of Exchange House has been that funding for such programmes has been ad hoc, with a mixture of VEC and FAS funding being the most usual mechanism frequently with support from Partnerships or other bodies.

The difficulty in operating under such arrangements became obvious in the recent past when the Labre Park Women's Family Health pre employment programme, funded by FAS and the VEC, was terminated by FAS due to funding shortfall. This in spite of the fact that the programme had been designed as a Family Health and Child Development programme to enable Traveller women to take advantage of potential employment opportunities emerging now and in the future in after-school programmes, crèche facilities and the broad range of childcare opportunities anticipated through the implementation in the area of the National Development Plan commitments in relation to child care.

We would recommend that:

- Specific funding be ring-fenced for groups such as Travellers, who have experienced significant educational disadvantage, and require support in literacy, numeracy and computer literacy.
- The Department of Education and Science take full responsibility for the running and monitoring of such programmes, working through community based organisations with the experience to deliver programmes on the ground
- Funding of coordination and programme costs be met through the VEC with the Training allowance come through FAS.
- Specific intensive programmes to combat literacy problems be staffed to enable 600 hours per annum to be delivered to identified groups
- Research be carried out into proven successful accelerated learning programmes for adults.
- Models such as Family Literacy Programmes should be promoted within groups such as Travellers, involving Visiting Teacher service and schools
- A Learning Development Fund to which individual Travellers could apply would ensure that an allowance could be paid to Travellers engaging in adult education programmes. This would act as a motivator and is a reasonable entitlement in the same way as Third level grants for mature students
- More outreach programmes with flexible options be made available through Youthreach and Senior Traveller Training Centres

A well funded strategy is needed to break the generational cycle of educational disadvantage to ensure equality of outcome for Traveller children currently in the school system. Overall, the current situation whereby community based organisations are inadequately funded to cope with a range of extremely challenging educational issues is unsatisfactory and needs to be addressed in an equitable and fair manner.

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