

Observations on the draft National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy 2024–2028 and draft Action Plan 2024–2028

Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission
June 2024



Coimisiún na hÉireann um Chearta
an Duine agus Comhionannas
Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission

Published by the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission.

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The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission was established under statute on 1 November 2014 to protect and promote human rights and equality in Ireland, to promote a culture of respect for human rights, equality and intercultural understanding, to promote understanding and awareness of the importance of human rights and equality, and to work towards the elimination of human rights abuses and discrimination.

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Introduction

The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission ('the Commission') is both the 'A' status National Human Rights Institution ('NHRI') and the National Equality Body for Ireland, established under the *Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014*. As well as our broad mandate to protect and promote human rights and equality, we are the Independent Monitoring Mechanism for Ireland under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities ('UNCRPD'),¹ the independent National Rapporteur on the Trafficking of Human Beings,² and we will also be assigned the role of the co-ordinating National Preventive Mechanism ('NPM') under the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture ('OPCAT'), pending ratification.³ We also have a role in working to uphold equality and rights protections on the island of Ireland post Brexit.⁴

Under our Act, we are mandated to keep under review the adequacy and effectiveness of law and practice in the State relating to the protection of human rights and equality; and to make recommendations to the Government in relation to the measures that we consider should be taken to strengthen, protect and uphold human rights and equality in the State.⁵ We welcome the Department's invitation to provide our observations on the draft National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy (NTRIS) 2024–2028 and draft Action Plan 2024–2028. Through our policy, legislative, international reporting and engagement, legal, and awareness raising functions, we have consistently highlighted the need for the State to address and remove the structural barriers Travellers and Roma face in Irish society.⁶

The successor NTRIS and the accompanying Action Plan should be critical resources in delivering an inclusive and equal society for Travellers and Roma. The successor NTRIS and Action Plan

¹ Section 103 of the *Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) (Amendment) Act 2022* amends section 10(2) of the *Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014* to provide that one of our functions is to promote and monitor the implementation in the State of the UNCRPD.

² IHREC, [Commission Takes on New Role as Ireland's National Rapporteur on the Trafficking of Human Beings](#) (2020).

³ To be provided under the *Inspection of Places of Detention Bill*, when enacted.

⁴ In the wake of the UK's withdrawal from the EU, the Commission, along with the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission ('NIHRC') and the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland ('ECNI') comprise the Article 2(1) Working Group of the Dedicated Mechanism. This group is mandated to provide oversight of, and report on, rights and equality issues falling within the scope of the Article 2 [Windsor Framework] commitment that have an island of Ireland dimension.

⁵ Section 10(2) of the *Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014*.

⁶ We have previously provided the Department with a compilation of our commentary, since 2019, on the issues facing Travellers and Roma in Ireland.

should go beyond existing initiatives and current commitments to provide for transformative change guided by the expertise of Traveller and Roma individuals and organisations. Therefore, it is vital that the successor NTRIS and the Action Plan match this ambition by ensuring that the objectives, actions and outcomes are targeted, measurable and resourced across the timeframe of the Strategy. We reiterate our previous call for significant structural changes in the development, implementation and monitoring of national equality strategies.⁷ The successor to NTRIS must ensure clear targets, indicators, outcomes, timeframes and budget lines, as well as cross-Governmental co-operation and independent, accountable monitoring structures.⁸

In this regard, the Department's commissioned research report 'Realising the promise of national equality policy',⁹ by the Centre for Effective Studies ('CES'), is an important resource for clearly identifying good practice in implementing the successor NTRIS. The commissioning of the report is an acknowledgement that there are deficiencies in the process to implement national equality strategies and that there is an appetite within the Government and the Department to change and improve its implementation record. The implementation framework presented in the CES report is evidence informed and has been validated by experts through the consultation process. It is critical that the development, implementation, and monitoring of the successor NTRIS should be guided by the findings and recommendations of CES report. Otherwise, there will be a continuation of the deficiencies that marked the process of the implementation of the expired equality strategies, including NTRIS.¹⁰ The report by Values Lab on the consultation process for the

⁷ IHREC, [Ireland and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: Submission to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on Ireland's fourth periodic report](#) (2024) p. 47.

⁸ We have called for the State to ensure that an ambitious, well-resourced, measurable and time-bound strategy succeeds the expired NTRIS strategy: IHREC, [Submission to the Third Universal Periodic Review Cycle for Ireland](#) (2021) p. 12. See also Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, [Concluding observations on the combined fifth to ninth reports of Ireland, CERD/C/IRL/CO/5-9](#) (23 January 2020) para. 32; European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), [ECRI Report on Ireland \(fifth monitoring cycle\)](#) (2019) para. 82; Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, [Fourth Opinion on Ireland – adopted on 10 October 2018](#) (2019) paras. 43, 86, 95.

⁹ CES, [Realising the promise of national equality policy: An evaluation of the processes of implementation of three national equality strategies](#) (2023). One of the recommendations of the CES is "Actions should be taken to operationalise the evidence-informed and expert-validated framework of implementation approaches and activities developed as part of this evaluation. Doing so should improve the implementation of future equality strategies, helping to realise the promise of equality policy."

¹⁰ We note the CES' recommendation 'Action should be taken to operationalise the evidence-informed and expert-validated framework of implementation approaches and activities developed as part of this evaluation. Doing so should improve the implementation of future national equality strategies, helping to realise the promise of equality policy.': CES, [Realising the promise of national equality policy: An evaluation of the processes of implementation of three national equality strategies](#) (2023) pp. 157–158.

successor NTRIS also provides valuable recommendations to the Department on strategy development, alignment, implementation and monitoring.¹¹ Our observations on the draft NTRIS and Action Plan are guided by these respective reports, international commentary, engagement with civil society, as well as our expertise as the National Equality Body.¹² At this stage in the drafting of the successor NTRIS and Action Plan, we have significant concerns, set out below, with the adherence to and alignment of these documents with ours and others' recommendations in relation to the development and implementation of equality strategies.

While we acknowledge that the previous NTRIS has expired, the EU requirements for a strategy to be in place,¹³ and the long-standing requests for a successor strategy; at this critical stage in the development of the NTRIS and the Action Plan, it is important that sufficient time be given to addressing the feedback received during the consultation process.¹⁴ It is critical that stakeholders, particularly Traveller and Roma organisations, can meaningfully engage in this process as they have the lived expertise to identify the structural barriers they face and the measures needed to remove these barriers.¹⁵ This collaborative and evidence-informed approach reflects the

¹¹ Values Lab, Report on the outcome of the local consultation process with Traveller and Roma organisations, community groups, and individuals to inform the development of the successor strategy to the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy (2023, unpublished).

¹² In our submission to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, we recommended that the State develops a robust framework of national equality strategies targeting specific groups and addressing intersectionality, based on our recommendations, the concluding observations of UN Committees, evaluation outcomes, and resourced civil society input: to raising the same issues in multiple consultations over many years without any discernible changes or improvements: IHREC, [Ireland and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: Submission to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on Ireland's fourth periodic report](#) (2024) p. 48.

¹³ We note that having a national Roma inclusion strategic policy framework in place is an ex ante conditionality of the European Structural and Investment Funds: Annex XI, [9.2 Regulation \(EU\) No 1303/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and repealing Council Regulation \(EC\) No 1083/2006](#).

¹⁴ In the Values Lab report on the outcome of the consultation process, it was noted that an immediate priority for Travellers and Roma was "for local Traveller and Roma organisations to be given sight of the first draft of the NTRIS and to be consulted in further developing and agreeing the final strategy draft." This was an imperative for Traveller and Roma buy-in and ownership of, the successor NTRIS. As set out in the report, this requires the strategy development processes to be slowed down to allow for such consultation. Values Lab, Report on the outcome of the local consultation process with Traveller and Roma organisations, community groups, and individuals to inform the development of the successor strategy to the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy (2023, unpublished) p. 35.

¹⁵ Representatives of civil society have shared concerns with us that their involvement in State consultations do not effectively inform long-term change. They have shared that are experiencing 'consultation fatigue' due to raising the same issues in multiple consultations over many years without any discernible changes or improvements: IHREC, [Ireland and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: Submission to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on Ireland's fourth periodic report](#) (2024) p. 15. We note the recent research

commitments in the ‘Vision and Values’ section of the draft NTRIS and in the ‘Values and Principles for Collaboration and Partnership Working with the Community and Voluntary Sector’¹⁶. We welcome that the draft NTRIS refers to the importance of these Values and Principles, and it is vitally important that these Values and Principles guide this stage of the process in the development of the NTRIS and the Action Plan. We continue to emphasise the importance of ensuring that consultation with and participation of structurally vulnerable groups in policies concerning them is an ongoing rather than a once-off process.

The publication of the successor NTRIS and Action Plan should not be rushed to meet an arbitrary publication date, rather the Department should carefully consider the feedback received and communicate with the members of the Steering Committee to explain in a transparent manner the reasons why revisions could or could not be made to the Strategy. This reflects the CES’ recommendation that “efforts should be made to ensure that key learnings emerging from stakeholder consultations are accurately reflected in national equality strategy texts or, when they are not, there should be transparent communication with stakeholders regarding how and why such decisions were made.”¹⁷ We acknowledge the need for the successor NTRIS to focus on a smaller number of priority objectives and actions to aid the implementation of the new NTRIS,¹⁸ but it is important to ensure transparency around the nature of the objectives and actions included. We would emphasise the importance of prioritising actions which are focused on systemic change and which will have a greater impact on the lives of Travellers and Roma.

Travellers and Roma have faced persistent systemic and structural barriers to full and effective participation in Irish society. The historical and ongoing underperformance of the State in meeting

report which revealed that respondent groups in the community and voluntary sector felt that the effort and resources required in engaging with consultations outweighed the benefits: ICCL, [“That’s Not Your Role”: State Funding and Advocacy in the Irish Community, Voluntary and Non-Profit Sector](#) (2024).

¹⁶ Government of Ireland, [Values and Principles for Collaboration and Partnership Working with the Community and Voluntary Sector](#) (2022).

¹⁷ CES, [Realising the promise of national equality policy: An evaluation of the processes of implementation of three national equality strategies](#) (2023) pp. 149–150.

¹⁸ This reflects the CES’s recommendation: “Large, unfocused strategies are difficult to implement. Future strategic plans should include a limited number of key priority objectives and associated actions.” CES, [Realising the promise of national equality policy: An evaluation of the processes of implementation of three national equality strategies](#) (2023) pp. 151–152. Values Lab also recommended: “The successor NTRIS should contain fewer, more strategic actions, that are specific in identifying outcomes sought for Travellers and/or Roma in key areas.” Values Lab, Report on the outcome of the local consultation process with Traveller and Roma organisations, community groups, and individuals to inform the development of the successor strategy to the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy (2023, unpublished) p. 35.

the needs of Travellers and Roma has required members of these communities to become tireless advocates for their own basic human rights, despite the impact on their mental health.¹⁹ The extremely slow progress that has and continues to be made in fully securing Traveller and Roma rights following decades of deprivation, discrimination and poverty is indicative of a State architecture which does not bestow its obligations with the necessary importance.²⁰ It is critical that the Department takes the time to consider the measures needed to ensure that the focus of the successor NTRIS and Action Plan is on achieving transformative and sustainable changes by addressing and removing the barriers to a more equal and inclusive Irish society.

Alignment of the Strategy and Action Plan with key frameworks

Alignment with relevant policies and strategies

We welcome the acknowledgement of the need to ensure that the successor NTRIS is aligned with other relevant policies and strategies.²¹ We would welcome explicit reference in this text to the need for alignment also with the successors to the LGBTI+ Inclusion Strategy and National Disability Inclusion Strategy due to the particular issues faced by Travellers and Roma who are LGBTI+ and / or disabled. It is important that the successor NTRIS and Action Plan reflect an intersectional perspective and approach. We would also call for an explicit reference to the National Action Plan to Prevent and Combat Human Trafficking 2023–2027 due to the vulnerability of Roma to exploitation.

Alignment with findings and recommendations from national bodies and reports

In the draft NTRIS, there are numerous references to existing recommendations issued to the State in relation to Traveller and Roma and / or strategy implementation.²² It is stated that these

¹⁹ IHREC, [Comments on Ireland's 20th National Report on the Implementation of the European Social Charter](#) (2023) pp. 12–13.

²⁰ IHREC, [Comments on Ireland's 20th National Report on the Implementation of the European Social Charter](#) (2023) pp. 12–13.

²¹ Including the National Action Plan Against Racism, Migrant Integration Strategy, National Strategy for Women and Girls and the National Equality Data Strategy Draft National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy 2024–2028, p. 25.

²² See Section 3 of the draft NTRIS, including our reports, the Ombudsman for Children's reports, CES' report, National Roma Needs Assessment, the Report of the Expert Group on Traveller Accommodation, and the Final Report of the Joint Committee of the Oireachtas on Key Issues Affecting the Traveller Community.

recommendations have been considered in the development of the draft Strategy, but it is difficult in parts of the Action Plan to link the actions identified with the recommendations raised in these reports. We consider that it should be made clearer in the draft Strategy and Action Plan how the actions link with and progress the recommendations in these reports. If the recommendations are not being progressed, due to a need to focus on a priority set of actions,²³ this should be explained in a transparent manner.

Alignment with international standards

We welcome that the draft NTRIS states that is underpinned by international human rights instruments. It is important that this commitment is addressed in practice, and that the successor NTRIS and Action Plan clearly reflect the obligations on the State set out in these human rights instruments.²⁴ The successor NTRIS and Action Plan can be a key means of addressing the findings and recommendations issued to the State through the European Semester process,²⁵ and by United Nations²⁶ and Council of Europe²⁷ treaty monitoring bodies.²⁸ We note that the draft NTRIS refers to the concluding observations issued to the State by the Human Rights Committee and the Committee on the Rights of the Child. We would remind the Department that there is a broader list of recommendations issued to the State by other treaty monitoring bodies, including the

²³ We note the recommendation of the CES ‘Large, unfocused strategies are difficult to implement. Future strategic plans should include a limited number of key priority objectives and associated actions’: CES, [Realising the promise of national equality policy: An evaluation of the processes of implementation of three national equality strategies](#) (2023) pp. 151–152.

²⁴ Including the EU Roma Strategic Framework for Equality, Inclusion and Participation for 2020–2030; Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union; European Convention on Human Rights; Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities; European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance Standards; European Social Charter; Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence; Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings; European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment Standards; Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination; International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women; Convention of the Rights of the Child; Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; and, Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

²⁵ https://commission.europa.eu/business-economy-euro/economic-and-fiscal-policy-coordination/european-semester/european-semester-your-country/european-semester-documents-ireland_en

²⁶ Including from the [Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities Framework](#); the [European Commission against Racism and Intolerance](#); and the [European Social Committee](#).

²⁷ Including the concluding observations of the [Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination](#); [Human Rights Committee](#); [Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#); [Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women](#); and the [Committee on the Rights of the Child](#).

²⁸ We have previously provided the Department with a compilation of international commentary by human rights monitoring mechanisms on issues affecting Travellers and Roma in Ireland.

recent concluding observations of the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights²⁹ and findings of the European Committee of Social Rights in respect of the European Social Charter³⁰.

We consider that the recommendations issued by treaty monitoring bodies which are related to Travellers and Roma should be implemented through the draft Strategy and Action Plan. Further, it should be made clearer in the draft Strategy and Action Plan how the actions link with and progress the recommendations related to Travellers and Roma issued to the State by the treaty monitoring bodies.

Action Plan

We note from the draft NTRIS that it is intended that the Action Plan will include achievable actions, measurable targets, clear Key Performance Indicators ('KPIs'), and responsibilities and timelines for implementation.³¹ While this intention is welcome and reflects the recommendations of IHREC, CES, Values Lab and international treaty monitoring bodies, we are concerned that there is a disconnect between this intention and the commitments within the Action Plan. We are of the view that the Action Plan as currently drafted lacks clear targets, indicators, outcomes, timeframes, and budget lines.

We set out our concerns below on the Action Plan; however, at this stage it is important to emphasise the CES's recommendations in this area:

- Indicator sets should be identified or developed **before equality strategies are launched** rather than retrospectively [emphasis added].
- **For every objective** included in a national equality strategy, **3-5 outcome impact indicators** should be selected; **for every action, one output indicator should be identified**. If no indicator or progress can be identified for an action and **if it is not possible** to develop one, then that action **should not be included** in the strategy text [emphasis added].³²

²⁹ Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, [Concluding observations on the fourth periodic report of Ireland, E/C.12/IRL/CO/4](#) (20 March 2024).

³⁰ European Committee of Social Rights, [Follow-up to decisions on the merits of collective complaints – Findings 2023: Ireland](#) (March 2024).

³¹ Draft National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy 2024–2028, p. 9.

³² CES, [Realising the promise of national equality policy: An evaluation of the processes of implementation of three national equality strategies](#) (2023) pp. 153–154.

We also note that Values Lab recommend that “[e]ach action must be accompanied by **clear targets, progress milestones and measurable KPIS**, and should be properly costed” [emphasis added].³³

We note a number of relevant recommendations from United Nations and Council of Europe treaty bodies to the State on the implementation of the previous NTRIS:

- **Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination:** “State party fully implement the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy 2017–2021, including by **developing concrete action plans with clear targets, indicators, outcomes, time frames and a budget line for that implementation** and by putting in place a mechanism to coordinate and monitor the implementation” [emphasis added].³⁴
- **European Commission against Racism and Intolerance:** “The authorities] update the NTRIS to include actions on housing for Roma, as well as a **clear budget allocation, impact indicators and time-frames for all the actions**. More efforts should be focused on concrete implementation of the strategy” [emphasis added].³⁵
- **Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities:** “Adopt an **implementation plan**, in close cooperation with Traveller and Roma communities, with **clear targets, indicators, timeframe and resources** with respect to all health-related, accommodation-related and other socio-economic measures listed in the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy and implement such measures without delay; ensure that measures taken are monitored and that they address their respective objectives” [emphasis added].³⁶

Finally, we reiterate our recommendation that the successor to NTRIS must ensure clear targets, indicators, outcomes, timeframes and budget lines, as well as cross-Governmental co-operation and independent, accountable monitoring structures.

³³ Values Lab, Report on the outcome of the local consultation process with Traveller and Roma organisations, community groups, and individuals to inform the development of the successor strategy to the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy (2023, unpublished) p. 35.

³⁴ Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, [Concluding observations on the combined fifth to ninth reports of Ireland, CERD/C/IRL/CO/5-9](#) (23 January 2020) para. 32.

³⁵ European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), [ECRI Report on Ireland \(fifth monitoring cycle\)](#) (2019) para. 82.

³⁶ Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, [Fourth Opinion on Ireland – adopted on 10 October 2018](#) (2019) para. 95.

Capacity to Measure Progress: Deliverables v KPIs

We are concerned that most actions contained within the Action Plan are not capable of measurement with sufficient precision. In many cases, deliverables appear to have been conflated with KPIs. Deliverables are process results. KPIs are performance metrics, which allow for measurement. Where deliverables are cited in the comments below it is not that there is necessarily an issue with their content rather they are rendered insufficient by the absence of additional context, activities, indicators and targets and this generates tenuous links between the Action Plan's objectives and actions and calls into question the Action Plan's capacity for impact. In the absence of objective criteria and measures, performance evaluations will be subjective. This is not appropriate for an equality strategy and could be a source of tension at a later point as opinions differ on what delivery looks like when a shared understanding cannot be gleaned from reading the text. It must be reiterated that this is at odds with the CES recommendations cited above. We note the differentiation of process and headline KPIs in the Employment and Education, and we consider that this approach should be reflected throughout the Action Plan.

- **Action 1:** The link between the action and deliverable to the objective is not clear. The objective calls for significant improvements to the mechanisms in place for combatting racism and discrimination. The only action provided is asking the Special Rapporteur to report specifically on Travellers and Roma. The only deliverable provided is said report. The impact of this action on the objective is questionable.
- **Action 6:** It is unclear what the link is between An Garda Síochána ('AGS') and the Department of Justice taking effective measures to address hate speech and hate crime and the objective of planning and delivering culturally competent public services. The accompanying deliverable does not refer to a deliverable; rather it provides a note that AGS have already some measures which have already been rolled out. How this is a deliverable under the successor NTRIS is unclear and there is lack of additional information connecting it clearly to the objective.
- **Action 9:** It is unclear how an action to ensure the Workplace Relations Commission ('WRC') is adequately resourced is met by a single deliverable that the WRC will report on its resources. No targets are set nor is there any attempt to detail what 'adequacy' may entail.

- **Action 10:** The sole deliverable of an action to develop specific rehabilitative and diversion interventions is the development and implementation of specific rehabilitative and diversion interventions. No additional context or information is provided. In the absence of KPIs, the deliverable is the only measure and a measure, which can only describe progress as a binary, fully completed or not yet completed, is not useful on its own.
- **Action 13:** This action commits to supporting the development of counselling and mediation services available to Travellers and Roma. There are no targets set in this column, funding must be increased, more initiatives developed and a campaign held but nothing else is provided to define 'adequate' and what the success of these activities is expected to look like.
- **Actions 14-17:** The objective for this group of actions is to address the overrepresentation of Travellers in the penal system. None of the associated actions seek to address the high levels of Travellers in the system but are solely focused on addressing Traveller experiences once in prison. In the absence of any deliverables to indicate a preventative focus to any of the actions listed, this section is deeply problematic
- **Action 18:** In the absence of any targets, measures or additional info it is not clear how progress will be tracked. Here the Department is only tasked with engagement and consultation. It is not immediately clear how these can be usefully measured nor is it apparent how these activities alone will positively affect the action. Engaging with stakeholders about how to make structures better of itself does not achieve the outcome of improving the structures.
- **Action 19:** Refers to building trust and engagement between Túsla and Traveller and Roma children. There is nothing in the KPI column concerned with measuring trust and engagement between these groups in order to measure if the action is actually being progressed. Instead, once again, a list of process outcomes have been provided and their positive impact is to be assumed.
- **Action 20:** The delivery of a report on its own is not an adequate performance metric for this action. In the absence of additional info, it is not clear how delivering a report equates to support for the development of a sustainable national home visiting service.
- **Action 21:** No targets are provided as to the desired increases for foster carers or placements. It is unclear what success looks like under this action. Do the numbers need to

increase or are the Department's efforts to increase numbers sufficient to evidence the delivery of the action?

- **Action 25:** It is not clear how the delivery of a consultation and a commitment to consider other strategies by the end of next year will have a positive impact on the action to encourage and support Traveller and Roma women's participation in public and political life.
- **Action 26:** It is not clear how exploring the concept of gender quotas for political parties and civil society organisations will allow for the measurement of or have a positive impact on the action to encourage and support Traveller and Roma women's participation in public and political life.
- **Action 27:** An action to raise awareness is not accompanied by any measure of awareness. The completion of associated project is presumed to deliver positive results.
- **Action 28:** It is unclear how the action to address the needs of Roma women experiencing violence is met by the consideration of the extension of an existing project. The lack of any additional information creates a tenuous link between aims and results.
- **Action 34:** Refers to the development of its own objective's KPIs. Progress under this objective cannot be assessed until this action is carried out and there is no timeline provided.
- **Action 55:** Calls for targeted initiatives to offer language and literacy training for Roma parents. The deliverable is the putting in place of such training. There is no regard for take up, numbers engaged in training or their progress over time.
- **Action 61:** An action to address negative stereotyping and perceptions of Travellers and Roma in media. There are no accompanying metrics associated with attitudes or representation. Under the deliverables Coimisiún na Meán are tasked with a range of activities but there is nothing attached to measure whether or not they are successful.

Timelines for delivery

We are of the view that some of the timelines in the Action Plan fall short of the priority and pace of reform required, including:

- Under **Action 8**, the review of the Civil Legal Aid Scheme is to be completed by **Q4 2024**, however the Department has until **Q4 2025**, a full year later, to complete its review of the

report and will not respond to the review's recommendations until **2026**, potentially running close to two years post-publication of the review.

- Under **Action 11**, the successor to the AGS Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Strategy Statement 2019-2021 will not be finalised until the end of **Q4 2025** despite this strategy expiring in 2021.
- Under **Action 23**, it will take the Department until **Q1 2026** to establish the number of Traveller and Roma young people participating in services funded by the Department. Also under **Action 23**, the Department has until **Q1 2026** to establish how many youth work organisations use the STATUS Toolkit. On the surface, these timelines do not appear reasonable for information that should already be in the preserve of the Department
- Under **Action 29**, the Roma Health Action Plan is to be delivered by **Q1 2028**, the final year of the Strategy.
- Under **Action 32**, mental health associated actions in the Joint Committee Report on Key Issues Affecting the Traveller Community will be implemented by **Q4 2028**, the end of the Strategy. Considering these actions were recommended in **2021** this is well short of the pace required. Also under **Action 32**, the period for delivering targeted measures to promote positive mental health and wellbeing and to support and co-produce Traveller health initiatives is by the expiration of the Strategy, **Q4 2028**. Considering the emphasis that has been placed on Traveller and Roma health and mental health this is a concerning pace of planned delivery.
- Under **Action 33**, the development of processes to provide intervention supports for Travellers when suicide occurs in the community is scheduled for delivery by final month of the strategy, **Q4 2028**. Again, considering the severity of this issue³⁷ and the Department being clearly aware as to the seriousness of these issues this timeframe is concerning.
- Under **Action 44**, it will take until **Q4 2025**, for information and interpretation for Roma accessing homeless and housing services to be in place.

³⁷ IHREC, [Ireland and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: Submission to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on Ireland's fourth periodic report](#) (2024) pp. 135–137.

Objectives not Actions

In a substantial number of cases throughout the Action Plan, the actions included grant little to no detail or information as to what activities are involved in their delivery. We are of the view that the Action Plan should be clear on the actions which will be taken.

- **Action 6:** Take effective **measures** to address hate speech...
- **Action 10:** These will include further development of **measures** within...
- **Action 14:** **Take steps** to improve the engagement...
- **Action 28:** **Address** the needs of Roma women...
- **Action 37:** **Take steps** to increase the number...
- **Action 43:** **Address** experiences of homelessness...
- **Action 45:** ...**address** the barriers that impact...include **measures** to ensure meaningful participation...
- **Action 48:** ...**measures** supportive of inclusion and diversity should be included...
- **Action 56:** **Take steps** to build culturally appropriate pathways...
- **Action 61:** **Take steps** to address the negative stereotyping...

Text, which describes outcomes but not the processes to achieve those outcomes, cannot be characterised as an action. There are a number of actions, which due to this ambiguity read like reiterations of their own objective which should be addressed in the revised Strategy, for example:

- **Action 14:** Take steps to improve the engagement in education programmes, work training and/or library services of Traveller and Roma in the prison system and in the Oberstown Children Detention Campus.
- **Action 18:** Participation structures are inclusive, accessible and safe for Traveller and Roma children and young people, including those who need additional supports to engage and participate.
- **Action 27:** Raise awareness around Domestic, Sexual Gender Based Violence (DSGBV) within the Traveller community and facilitate greater access to DSGBV support services for Traveller women and girls.
- **Action 28:** Address the needs of Roma women experiencing violence to enable to them access supports including women's refuges.

- **Action 32:** Coordinated implementation of a range of actions related to Traveller and Roma mental health across the continuum of mental health services and mental health promotion.
- **Action 35:** With the support of Traveller and Roma organisations, promote the provision and uptake by Travellers and Roma of internships, work placement, work experience and apprenticeship opportunities within the public sector.
- **Action 37:** Take steps to increase the number of Travellers and Roma availing of mainstream and targeted employment supports.
- **Action 43:** Address experiences of homelessness and overcrowded accommodation affecting Traveller and Roma families, taking account of the special needs of large Traveller and Roma families, which exceeds the limits of existing local authority standard provision.

Objectives without Actions

There are a number of strategic objectives in the Action Plan which do not include any associated actions. We are of the view that this absence should be addressed by including specific actions for each strategic objective.

The first strategic objective under **Gender Equality** is '**Promote and support Traveller and Roma women and girls' access to education, employment and accommodation**'. This objective has no associated actions, KPIs or Deliverables under the theme of gender equality. It will be difficult to measure this objective's progress in the absence of actions specifically related to gender equality. The related initiatives do not adequately make up for this gap.

- While a laudable target in its own right, it is not immediately clear how **Action 2** to ensure that all departments and agencies providing services funded by the State deliver cultural awareness training to their staff will lead to promoting and support Traveller and Roma women and girls access to education, employment and accommodation.
- Despite related initiative **Action 43** containing explicit reference to the specific housing accommodation needs of Traveller and Roma women there are no associated actions under **Gender Equality**.
- We would question the reference to **Action 77** as a related initiative. It is not automatic that better information gathering, data in this case, will lead to improved outcomes. This action could be claimed as a related initiative under every Action if that was the case.

Despite an objective under **Health and Wellbeing** to ‘**Build safe and inclusive health services**’ there are no associated actions, KPIs or Deliverables within the theme of Health and Wellbeing. It will be difficult to measure the performance of this objective. The related initiatives provided do not make up for this gap. The absence of any associated actions creates a risk of implying that there are no issues that require addressing.

- Again, **Actions 2** and **77** have been provided as catchall initiatives demonstrating this objective is being addressed.

Despite an objective under **Employment and Enterprise** to ‘**Build a positive and inclusive workplace culture**’, there are no associated Employment or Enterprise actions, KPIs or Deliverables. The lack of any associated actions may be read to imply that there are not any labour market-centric reasons that workplace cultures may not be positive or inclusive. The use of related initiatives is insufficient.

- **Action 2** only addresses bodies providing services in receipt of State funds. This leaves cultural competency in the private sector completely untouched.
- **Action 9** to ensure the WRC is correctly resourced to adjudicate complaints of discrimination is only effective insofar as it increases the capacity to adjudicate discrimination, which has already occurred. In the absence of actions to prevent (in the private sector), it cannot be said that this objective is being effectively pursued.
- Once again, **Action 77** has been included as a catchall initiative.

Language of commitment

We are concerned that a number of actions contain non-committal language.³⁸

- **Action 1:** To **ask** the Independent Special Rapporteur...
- **Action 5:** Departments, Agencies and NGOs **should consider** the introduction...
- **Action 7:** An implementation campaign **should be** implemented...
- **Action 8:** A review **should be** undertaken...
- **Action 16:** Prison authorities must **do more** to adequately respond...

³⁸ Values Lab recommend: “Strategy actions should be drafted in language of commitment: “will” rather than “could” or “should”.” Values Lab, Report on the outcome of the local consultation process with Traveller and Roma organisations, community groups, and individuals to inform the development of the successor strategy to the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy (2023, unpublished) p. 36.

- **Action 26** (Deliverable): **Explore** the introduction of...
- **Action 28** (Deliverable): **Consider** extending the...
- **Action 53: Request** the University sector to...
- **Action 57:** The Traveller Apprenticeship Incentivisation Programme...**should be** evaluated...
- **Action 66.** DCEDIY and DRCD **to consider** the recommendations...

Ambiguous actions lack the precision to be measured under a shared understanding. Actions should not be constructed such that they are capable of being interpreted as achieved or progressed when they have not resulted in any tangible or material outcomes, or if they may not happen at all. There is little value to targeted communities of actions to ‘think’ that are not accompanied by actions to ‘do’. We consider that the language within the Action Plan should be reviewed to ensure it is specific and measurable.

Inclusion of current initiatives

There are a number of actions, which seek to include already existing initiatives and Departmental commitments. Given the draft Strategy spends significant time detailing current initiatives that run alongside the successor NTRIS this approach to alignment appears inconsistent. We question the inclusion of pre-existing commitments, initiatives or work that is already or will be carried out regardless of the successor NTRIS as actions and deliverables. Strategies and actions plans should seek to be cognisant of the existing policy landscape, not replicate it. We call for consideration to be given to whether the below actions should be included in the Action Plan as specific actions or whether they are better placed within the Strategy to describe existing and related initiatives.

- **Action 8** relates to a review of existing supports for the provision of legal advice to Travellers and Roma, however when the Deliverables are examined this action does not appear to relate to much more than implementing the recommendations of the Civil Legal Aid Review which has already been ongoing for some time.
 - We note that the implementation of the Equality Acts Review is not referenced in the Action Plan.
- **Action 12** instructs AGS to build on their own Traveller and Roma internship scheme, which has already been introduced.
- **Action 30** refers to working with the pre-existing Sláintecare Healthy Communities Programme.

- **Action 45** is to develop, publish and implement the Traveller and Roma Education Strategy ('TRES'). Given that the strategy is anticipated by June 2024, most if not all of the work developing this strategy occurred before this Action Plan and the publication may also take place before the successor NTRIS is active.
- **Action 46** is to develop, publish and implement the Equal Start model. Considering this model was published in May 2024, we assume this work has occurred independently of the successor NTRIS, which is not yet active.
- **Action 52** seeks to instruct the direction of an ongoing evaluation (PATH) carried out by another Department the work for which is already clearly underway given the projected completion, by end of 2024.
- **Action 63** instructs the Department to continue supporting a number of initiatives it has already committed to supporting multi-annually.

Questionable impact of information gathering actions on targeted groups

There are a significant number of actions that relate to carrying out further research, whether this is in the form of reviews, evaluations, reporting, consultations etc. Many of these can be characterised as the kinds of assessments the Public Sector Duty, which informed this Strategy, calls for to be done in advance. We are of the view that consideration should be given to tangible benefit to Travellers and Roma in the inclusion of a significant number of research actions, close to a quarter of the actions in the Action Plan are research-related, as a means of addressing gaps in awareness of the issues facing Travellers and Roma.

Very few of these actions contain commitments to implement the conclusions, recommendations and/or findings of the research,³⁹ or if they do that commitment is subjectively qualified. Without clear commitment to implement the outcomes of information gathering actions, it cannot be confidently or reasonably assured nor ensured that they will have any impact whatsoever. We call for clear commitments in the Action Plan to implement the conclusions, recommendations and/or findings in the reviews, evaluations, reporting, consultations; listed below:

- Action 4: Commissioning **research** on the Public Sector Duty.
- Action 8: A **review** into existing supports for legal advice.

³⁹ We note that Actions 24, 31, 42 and 69 include clear commitments to implement the findings.

- Action 34: Identify **definitions** and **indicators**.
- Action 36: Prepare a **report** to inform future actions
- Action 53: Request the University sector to carry out **research**.
- Action 57: **Evaluate** the Traveller Apprenticeship Incentivisation Programme
- Action 59: Commission **research** to inform future reactions
- Action 66: Carry out an **audit**.
- Action 67: Commission a **study**.
- Action 68: **Assess needs**.
- Action 74: Prepare a **report**.
- Action 77: **Review** current systems of data collection and identify gaps.
- Action 79: Conduct a programme of **research**.

Observations on the actions

Action 6 calls for effective measures to address hate speech and hate crime. The bodies listed with responsibility are AGS and the Department of Justice. It is important to emphasise that the criminal justice response is only one strand of the legislative and policy measures which the State is required to take to address and prevent the harm caused to victims and society by hate speech. As hate speech has many different manifestations and not all types of offensive speech amount to a criminal offence, there is a broader and more diverse range of measures and remedies available to the State beyond the criminal law approach to combat hate speech including civil and administrative measures, education, training and public condemnation of such speech. These wider measures to tackle the hate speech faced by Travellers and Roma should be reflected in **Action 6**.

It is noted that under a strategic objective to combat stereotypes and misinformation about Travellers and Roma there are actions **(58-65)**, which relate to the public, Traveller and Roma organisations, and the media. However, there are no actions to address political parties, political candidates, and public officials more generally. Given the recent establishment of the Electoral Commission and documented evidence of individuals in politics using their platforms to spread distrust and fear of living near Travellers,⁴⁰ it would be prudent to include this.

⁴⁰ IHREC, [Ireland and the Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination: Submission to the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination on Ireland's Combined 5th to 9th Report](#) (2019) p. 56.

The only deliverable provided under **Action 41** is the 100% drawdown of capital budget for Traveller specific accommodation. As the Department is aware and as we have repeatedly advised, the issue is no longer the full drawdown of the budget.⁴¹ As we highlighted to the Department the issue is that now that the capital budget is pooled between local authorities; this allows some local authorities to draw down little to no funds creating regional variances. In addition, the evidence tells that most of the capital funds drawn down are spent on repairs and maintenance rather than the provision of new sites. When this context is applied to **Action 41**, it becomes clear the sole deliverable provided is inadequate.

Similarly, under **Action 43**, a general action to address homelessness, the only tangible deliverable provided is the increased provision of social houses. As is acknowledged within the Action Plan, Travellers have specific cultural rights regarding their accommodation. It is noted that there are no actions or deliverables related to the provision of new permanent halting sites. We consider that there should be an explicit reference to the need to increase the provision of Traveller-specific accommodation including permanent halting sites.⁴²

Concerning omissions of actions

Considering the extensive human rights and equality assessments that went into the creation of this draft Strategy and the CES recommendation that key learnings from consultations be reflected in the Strategy, we question the exclusion from the draft Action Plan any explicit reference to the **Habitual Residence Condition, Housing Circular 41/2012, legislation governing evictions** or the **Intoxicating Liquor Act**.

We provided the Department with a comprehensive list of all of the Commission's views and comments on human rights and equality issues faced by Travellers and Roma in Ireland since 2019. We also provided the Department with the commentary from international human rights monitoring bodies. There are few issues faced by Travellers and Roma which have been raised more with the State in this context than the **Habitual Residence Conditions ('HRC')**.⁴³ This issue

⁴¹ IHREC, [Comments on Ireland's 20th National Report on the Implementation of the European Social Charter](#) (2023) pp. 7–8.

⁴² IHREC, [Comments on Ireland's 20th National Report on the Implementation of the European Social Charter](#) (2023) pp. 9–11.

⁴³ For example, see: IHREC, [Ireland and the Rights of the Child Submission to the Committee on the Rights of the Child on Ireland's combined fifth and sixth periodic reports](#) (2022) pp. 79–80; IHREC, [Ireland and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women Submission to the Committee on the Elimination of](#)

has been raised by the **UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women**,⁴⁴ the **UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights**,⁴⁵ and the **UN Committee on the Rights of the Child**,⁴⁶ which have all advised the Irish State to address this issue. In a Strategy which purports to have regard for the Public Sector Duty, to have been informed by thorough assessments of human rights and equality issues and explicitly references the HRC as being relevant in this context,⁴⁷ there is no clear reason why actions related to the **HRC** have been omitted.⁴⁸ We call for the Action Plan to address the issues arising with the HRC.

We and Traveller and Roma organisations have similarly reported to the Department issues with **Housing Circular 41/2012**.⁴⁹ There is no clear reason why actions related to the Circular have been omitted, and we call for the Action Plan to address the issues arising with the Housing Circular

The State has been repeatedly found to be in violation of the **European Social Charter** rights of Travellers,⁵⁰ through the use and enforcement of **legislative provisions governing evictions**⁵¹ which disproportionately criminalise their way of life.⁵² Given the State is regularly reminded by the **European Social Committee** that it is violating the rights of Travellers in this regard, we call for the inclusion of actions related to the relevant legislative provisions in the Action Plan.

[Discrimination against Women for the List of Issues Prior to Reporting on Ireland's 8th periodic cycle](#) (2023) p. 81; IHREC, [Ireland and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: Submission to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on Ireland's fourth periodic report](#) (2024) pp. 85–86.

⁴⁴ Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, [Concluding observations on the combined sixth and seventh periodic reports of Ireland](#), CEDAW/C/IRL/CO/6-7 (09 March 2017) para. 47 (b).

⁴⁵ Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, [Concluding observations on the fourth periodic report of Ireland](#), E/C.12/IRL/CO/4 (20 March 2024) para. 35(c).

⁴⁶ Committee on the Rights of the Child, [Concluding observations on the combined fifth and sixth periodic reports of Ireland](#), CRC/C/IRL/CO/5-6 (28 February 2023) para. 35(c).

⁴⁷ "Many Roma are unable to meet the criteria for habitual residence. If they do not satisfy the habitual residence conditions, they and their family are not entitled to social protection including income, healthcare, accommodation, and disability support." Draft National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy 2024–2028, p. 21.

⁴⁸ We note that in the 'Vision and Values' section, it is acknowledged that "[d]esigning services for the majority of the population may have the effect of inadvertently discriminating against certain groups, such as minority ethnic communities, through neglecting to recognise, respond to, or plan for their particular needs and circumstances. While aiming for mainstream services, it may also be necessary to develop additional targeted programmes that address the particular needs of Travellers and Roma." Draft National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy 2024–2028, p. 25.

⁴⁹ IHREC, [Ireland and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women Submission to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women for the List of Issues Prior to Reporting on Ireland's 8th periodic cycle](#) (2023) p. 81; IHREC, [Ireland and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: Submission to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on Ireland's fourth periodic report](#) (2024) pp. 85–86

⁵⁰ Under Article 16 of the European Social Charter.

⁵¹ Criminal Justice (Public Order) Act 1994 and the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1992.

⁵² European Committee of Social Rights, [Follow-up to decisions on the merits of collective complaints: Findings 2023 – Ireland](#) (2024) p. 127.

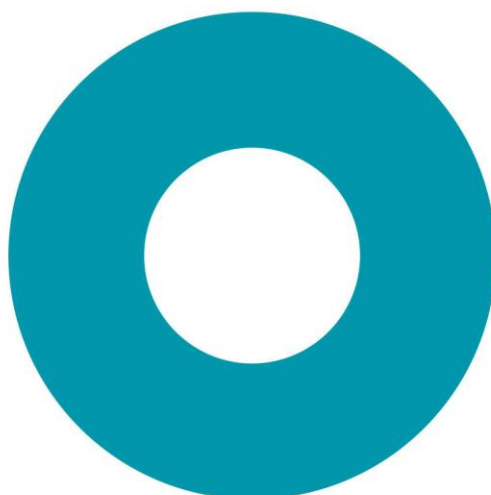
Lastly, a commitment was made in the **National Action Plan Against Racism** to amend the **Intoxicating Liquor Act**.⁵³ The Department has been carrying out the **Equality Acts Review** for some time now and is on full notice as to the human rights and equality issues caused by **Section 19** of the Act.⁵⁴ We call for the inclusion of an action or actions related to amending the Intoxicating Liquor Act in the successor Strategy.

⁵³ Government of Ireland, [National Action Plan Against Racism](#) (2023) p. 34.

⁵⁴ IHREC, [Report of a review of section 19 of the Intoxicating Liquor Act 2003 carried out pursuant to section 30 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014](#) (2022).



Coimisiún na hÉireann um Chearta
an Duine agus Comhionannas
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