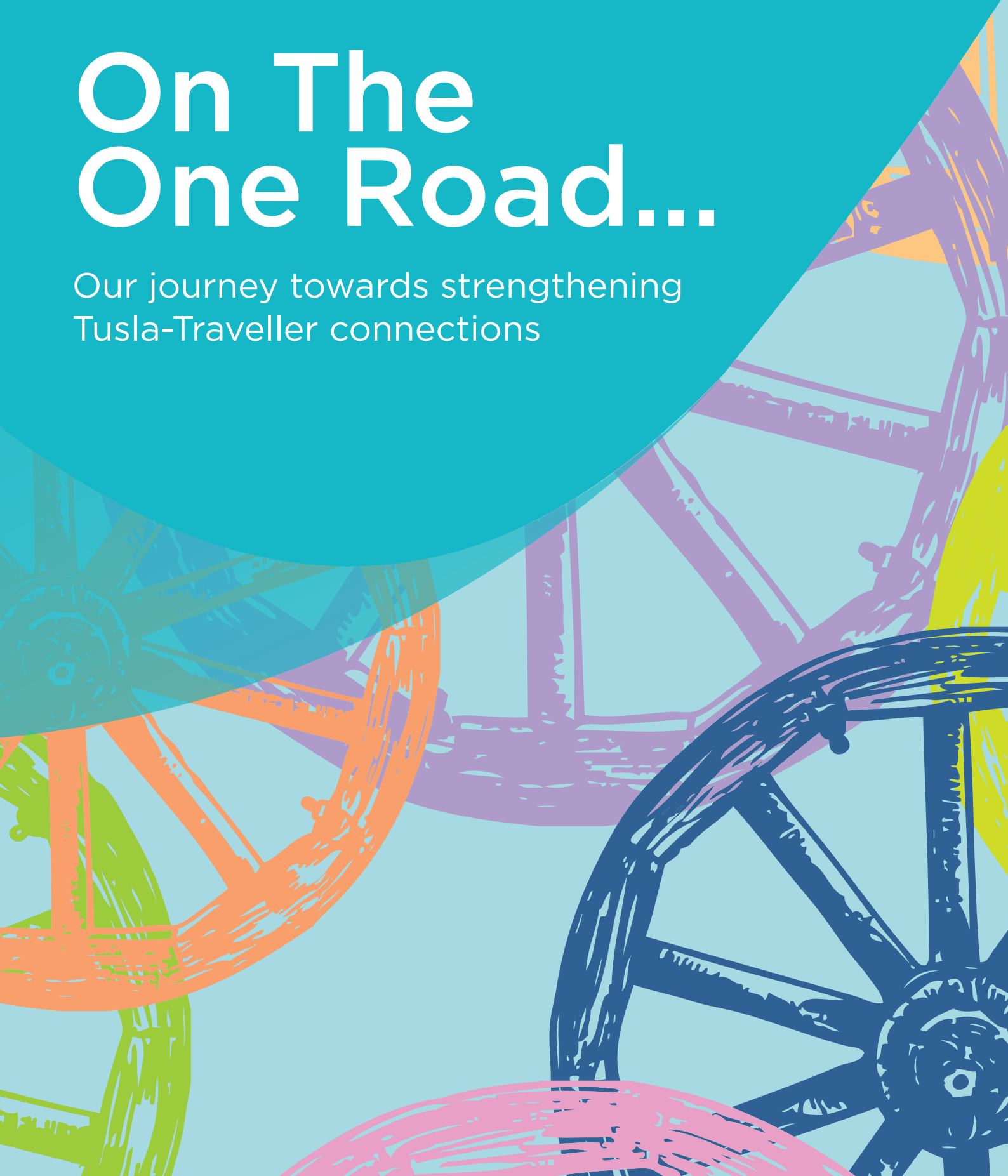


TÚSLA

An Ghníomhaireacht um
Leanaí agus an Teaghlach
Child and Family Agency

On The One Road...

Our journey towards strengthening
Tusla-Traveller connections



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Introduction

The National Working Group for Traveller Children and Families is supporting the national programme of work with representatives from Tusla services and regions and Traveller organisations. As co-chair with Rose Marie Maughan, from the Irish Traveller Movement, I am delighted to see this action plan is published. It is an important milestone and a statement of Tusla and the national Traveller organisations' commitment to this work.

Our partnership approach in the national working group with the Traveller organisations has been a journey since 2022. It has been a very positive experience. We all have the space to listen to each other and to discuss the needs and experiences of the Traveller community for a Traveller needs-led approach, and to discuss Tusla's work and initiatives. Our aim is to improve outcomes for Tusla and for the Traveller Community.

We look forward to continuing our shared journey, to implement this action plan, review and renew our commitment in the coming years.

Caroline Jordan

Tusla Interim Area Manager and co-chair of the National Working Group for Traveller Children and Families

As a Traveller co-chair of the National Working Group for Traveller Children and Families I wish to echo the sentiments expressed above by my co-chair Caroline, those of a positive meaningful partnership between Tusla staff and Traveller organisations working together through a Traveller needs-led approach to meet the distinct cultural needs of Travellers.

It has been an honour to invest our lived experience and expertise as Travellers and Traveller organisations to shape and enhance meaningful connections between Tusla and the wider Traveller Community – connections based on trust, respect and equal partnerships.

It gives me great hope witnessing our partnership to date, that consultation with Community members has been taken on board and is shaping the future direction of the Agency. We look forward to the implementation of the action plan and the continued meaningful participation of Travellers in all stages of our shared journey towards positive outcomes for both Travellers and Tusla.

Rose Marie Maughan

Coordinator National Traveller Youth Programme, Irish Traveller Movement and co-chair of the National Working Group for Traveller Children and Families

Foreword

I am very pleased to publish this first Tusla national programme of work action plan to promote awareness, access, and participation in Tusla and in Tusla-funded services for Traveller children and families. This is very much a Traveller-led programme of work in partnership with the Irish Traveller Movement, Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre, National Traveller Women's Forum, and Exchange House Ireland National Travellers Service. It is a Tusla action for children and young people in the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy (NTRIS II) Action Plan 2024-2026 and a priority for Tusla's Public Sector Duty obligations.

Tusla Child and Family Agency recognises the deep history of marginalisation and legacy of mistrust, that many in the Traveller community have in state services, particularly child protection and welfare services, often linked to what many in the Traveller community recall as a time of the 'cruelty man' or the 'welfare woman'.

As an Agency, we are committed to learning from the Traveller community, and ensuring that our work is grounded in respect, inclusion, and cultural sensitivity. Since our establishment 11 years ago, we continue to develop and expand our services, implementing new approaches and programmes to meet the needs of Traveller children, parents and families.

This national programme of work is a commitment to strengthening Tusla's engagement with Travellers and will only succeed through committed collaboration between Tusla and the Traveller community we are striving to support. A key priority in this collaborative approach is to address fears within the Traveller community of Tusla and to remove the stigma that many Travellers feel when engaging with the Agency's services.

Building trust in Tusla is vital if Travellers are to seek and access the supports available. It is, therefore, a priority of the

Agency to develop Traveller-led cultural awareness, anti-racism, and anti-discrimination training for our staff. It is also important that we collect and use ethnic data to develop and inform our services so that they achieve the desired outcomes.

By doing so we can maximise early intervention and prevention services for Traveller children engaged with early years and family supports, as well as those who are in the care of Tusla. We will do this in a way that supports their Traveller identity and culture.

The development of this national programme of work has been supported by Dormant Accounts Funding since 2023, which has created such initiatives as the Traveller Youth Advisory Group as well as projects that see Tusla and Traveller organisations working together in Tusla areas across the country.

It was with a view to enhancing collaboration that in 2023 Tusla commissioned independent consultants Values Lab to facilitate two regional consultations with key stakeholders, including Traveller organisations and Tusla services. Tusla has accepted this final report and recommendations to enhance awareness, access, and participation of the Traveller community in our services.

Tusla is committed to collaboration and partnership with our stakeholders in service planning and delivery. This Tusla-Traveller action plan highlights our shared commitment to working together to promote better outcomes for children and families.



Kate Duggan

Kate Duggan
Chief Executive Tusla Child and Family Agency

1. Removing Barriers



Values Lab was commissioned by Tusla to undertake a process to support the organisation to understand, address and remove the barriers preventing Travellers from effectively engaging with and deriving good outcomes from Tusla services and supports.

Tusla enables and provides a pathway for Travellers to avail of the services

This project is part of a broader Tusla national work programme (with regional and local implementation) to promote Traveller awareness of, access to, and participation in Tusla services.

Tusla's National Working Group for Traveller Children and Families, which is inclusive of Traveller organisations, identified three priority areas of work for enhancing the Traveller community's engagement with and outcomes from Tusla services and supports:

1. Engagement with Tusla services, with evidence of fear of Tusla services and stigma when engaging in Tusla services, along with the lack of trust in Tusla, among Travellers seeking and accessing Tusla services.
2. Awareness of Traveller culture and awareness of anti-racism and anti-discrimination practices within Tusla along with low levels of ethnic data available in Tusla services working with the Traveller community.
3. Early intervention and prevention services for children and families in the community and, in these, affirmation and support for Traveller identity, in particular, for Traveller children in the care of Tusla.

Tusla identifies the following desired outcomes from its broader national work programme on Traveller engagement:

Desired outcomes for Traveller children and families:

- Improved relationships between Tusla staff and the wider community.
- Traveller children, young people and families are facilitated and feel heard in their experiences of Tusla services.
- Increased knowledge and awareness amongst the Traveller community of the wider range of Tusla supports and services.
- Increased Traveller visibility and representation across the Tusla workforce and more trust between Tusla and Travellers with proactive outreach to vulnerable Travellers.

Desired outcomes for Tusla staff:

- Anti-discriminatory and anti-racist practice underpinned by human rights-based approaches as the norm within Tusla services.
- Increased awareness of the lived experience of Traveller children, young people and families in Ireland today and celebration of Traveller culture.
- Tusla advocates alongside other state agencies and rights based organisations to meet the needs of Traveller children, young people and families.
- Tusla enables and provides a pathway for Travellers to avail of the services Tusla provides and appropriately refer and signpost Traveller families to other services and supports.
- Continued support for Travellers on courses, positive action approaches to upskilling Travellers.
- A census of Traveller involvement in Child and Family Support Networks and Children and Young People's Services Committees with a view to increasing participation.

2. Project process, approach and outputs

The three priority areas for action and desired outcomes, identified by Tusla, served as a framework for the design of the approach to delivering on this project.

The key deliverables identified by Tusla, for this project, were to:

- Facilitate two regional consultation events with Travellers and local Traveller organisations, and prepare a report from each consultation event;
- Facilitate 3 to 5 focus groups, as identified through and arising from the regional consultations, and
- Produce a final report from the consultation and focus group processes with key findings and recommendations.

Tusla identifies the following desired outcomes from its broader national work programme on Traveller engagement:

2.1 Phase one: mapping the current situation:

A mapping exercise was undertaken to establish the starting points for and inform the agenda and approach to the consultation events. This process involved a review of relevant reports and material, and one-to-one online interviews with 11 senior members of staff in Tusla, working across a number of function areas.

This includes Prevention Partnership and Family Support, Education Support Service, Family Support and Social Inclusion, Tusla Traveller Fostering Initiative, Domestic Sexual and Gender-Based Violence, Signs and Safety, Workforce Learning and Development, Foster Care, Traveller Families Care, the STAR Programme, Quality and Regulation.

Key output from phase one: a mapping report scoping out the core challenge, the barriers to Travellers engagement with Tusla services, and potential enablers to support a more positive and effective engagement between the Traveller community and Tusla services.

2.2 Phase two: facilitation of two regional consultation events:

Kerry and the South-East were identified as the locations for the Traveller consultation events. In organising the events and supporting local Travellers to participate, the consultants liaised with:

- The three Tusla leads in Prevention, Partnership and Family Support, for: Kerry; Carlow, Kilkenny and South-Tipperary; and Wexford and Waterford; and Tipperary, and for Wexford and Waterford. They also liaised with Traveller organisations, and organisations that deliver targeted services to the Traveller Community, in two two regions.

The information gathered in the mapping report served to inform the content and approach to the consultation events.

Key outputs from phase two:

- Two Traveller-only consultation events convened, in Kerry and Kilkenny.
- A report of each event developed for consideration by Tusla, regionally and nationally. These reports are contained in the appendices to this report.

2.3 Phase three: focus groups with Tusla staff and Traveller organisations, and production of a final report:

The final phase of the process involved focus group discussions with Tusla staff, at national level and at regional level, and with the Traveller organisations involved in the national working group and the local consultation events. The purpose of the focus groups was to reflect on and discuss the outcome of the consultation events and, in particular, the recommendations for action identified by attendees at the consultation events.

The focus group discussions informed a further development of the proposed programme of action for Tusla.

The final report, presenting the findings and recommendations, draws from the mapping exercise, the consultation events, and the focus group discussions with Tusla staff and Traveller organisations.

Key outputs from phase three:

- Five focus groups facilitated with Tusla staff: two with Tusla staff working at national level, and three with staff working in the regions where the consultation events were held.
- One focus group facilitated with Traveller organisations. The organisations that were involved with Tusla's national working group, and organisations operating in the regions where the local consultation events were hosted.
- Final report.

3. Traveller Engagement with Tusla Services

The core challenge that Tusla is tasked to address, is the high level of distrust in the Traveller community in regard to engaging with Tusla services.

3.1 The core challenge

The core challenge that Tusla is tasked to address, is the high level of distrust in the Traveller community in regard to engaging with Tusla services. This distrust is identified as embedded across the community, rooted in historical and inter-generational trauma, involving past and current negative experiences of engagement with state services, and rooted in Travellers' fears of coming into contact with child protection services and their children being removed into care, that result from these experiences.

Travellers participating in the regional consultation events emphasised this fear of children being taken into care as a central barrier to their community having trust to engage effectively with Tusla services and staff. They identified that the fear of children being taken into care informs a negative reaction to the very name and identity of Tusla as well as to Tusla staff and services. Participants also noted that fear of coming within the radar of Tusla child protection services is informing a reluctance in Travellers engagement with Tusla's wider family support services and with other services, including, domestic violence refuges, and general health and wellbeing services and supports.

One consultee, from Tusla, usefully noted that while the models of state intervention, in areas such as child protection and education welfare, have evolved to become less punitive and more person-centred and consultative, the Traveller community are yet to be convinced that such change has occurred and that it is in their interests to engage with these services.

Issues of Traveller distrust in engaging with state services, including, but not limited to Tusla, must be viewed within the wider situation and experience of the Traveller community in Irish society. The reality of Travellers day-to-day lived experience is one of high levels of racism and discrimination at the individual and institutional levels, and significant equality gaps consequent on this, compared to non-Travellers, across the key domains of health, accommodation, education and employment. This serves cumulatively to undermine Traveller inclusion, voice, and agency, and directly and indirectly impacts on the level and quality of their engagement with mainstream services. In such a harsh context, as one observer has noted, "an important challenge remains for Tusla to take additional responsibility for demonstrating to Travellers that the Agency as a whole is worthy of their trust".¹

3.2 The issues and barriers that underpin the core challenge to Traveller engagement

The mapping exercise undertaken by Values Lab, sought to identify the key barriers and issues that have created and sustained Travellers fear of and reluctance to engage with Tusla and its funded services. This information was identified through a review of relevant reports, and one-to-one interviews with 11 senior staff in Tusla. It was then further discussed and expanded on by Travellers participating in the two regional consultation events. This section presents this information from the composite of these processes.

The barriers and issues identified are grouped according to three areas: organisational process and practice; understanding of Traveller culture and identity; and relationships and trust. Issues identified by Traveller attendees at the consultation events are presented separately to those identified by Tusla, as part of the mapping process.

3.2.1 Organisational barriers and issues identified regarding the systems, processes, and practice within Tusla

Barriers and issues identified, from the Traveller consultations, regarding organisational process and practice within Tusla:

- Mainstream providers within Tusla can lack an understanding of the barriers Travellers experience in accessing their services and can be resistant to engaging in critical self-analysis, and, as a result, can lack capacity and commitment to remove these barriers.

- A lack of accountability from Tusla where Travellers had experienced negative treatment, including racism and discrimination. The power held by the social worker, and a perceived lack of accountability for how this power is exercised, was a particular concern noted.
- Tusla staffing is largely monocultural and staff can hold negative and stereotypical perspectives of Travellers. It was also noted, in one consultation, that there are some Travellers working in Tusla who are not confident to identify as a Traveller.
- Limitations in Tusla's resources, pressure of wide ranging demands, and organisational restructuring can leave little space for a Traveller-specific focus and for sustained and system-wide effort to secure Traveller engagement.
- The high turnover of social workers, resulting in Travellers and Traveller organisations needing to repeatedly rebuild relationships and trust.
- Lack of adequate early intervention initiatives, before crisis develops, and a lack of encouragement for Travellers to take up early intervention services, in a context of the fears held by Travellers of engaging with Tusla.
- A lack of communication from Tusla to families to give them status updates on their situation, for example where a child is in foster or residential care.
- Poor communication, including using inaccessible language, not taking account of literacy barriers or education disadvantage, and failing to check and ensure there has been understanding of the exchange.

¹ Haran, Neil. (2022). Traveller Parent Support Pilot Programme: Report of Process Evaluation

- Failure to appreciate that Traveller families need an advocate in their engagement with Tusla, leading to situations where they agree to outcomes that disadvantage them, doing so due to their vulnerability, in particular at case conferences.
- Traveller link workers/organisations being placed in compromising situations which can undermine their role as advocates for Traveller families and the wider Traveller community.
- A lack of consistency and/or different regulations in regard to how similar services operate in different fields (for example, domestic violence refuges applying child safeguarding procedures differently) or regions, which presents a challenge in dispelling misinformation that might prevent Traveller engagement with those services.

Additional barriers and issues identified from the mapping process:

- There is an absence of a focus on addressing racism (individual and institutional) and anti-racist practice, in the content of staff training, with an organisational reluctance to name racism as an issue that needs to be addressed.
- There are no formal steps taken in relation to ensuring Tusla-funded projects have a standard in relation to their engagement with Travellers in terms of quality, being culturally appropriate and anti-racist.
- The high turnover of staff, in particular in social workers, makes it difficult to build staff competencies.
- Whereas workplace policies and procedures that address staffing are noted (Dignity at Work and TEDI Charter), there is a lack of similar policies and procedures with a focus on equality and non-discrimination for service users.

- Tusla could usefully take a more proactive approach to the employment of Travellers across all areas of Tusla.
- Where Tusla requires the active cooperation of other statutory service providers to deliver its services/programmes, any reluctance by these providers or unwillingness to critically examine their own policies and practice creates an additional obstacle.
- There is a danger in reducing Traveller organisations to being a service provider or a problem solver, rather than playing out its advocacy and representative roles or serving as a bridge to enable access to the mainstream.
- There is a danger of over-dependency on Traveller organisations and consequent risks noted were: burnout of local Traveller organisation with too many demands on it; and statutory agencies standing back and expecting Traveller organisation to do all of the heavy lifting.
- There are examples of innovation and good outcomes across the regions; however, there does not appear to be a strategic, centralised approach to capturing and sharing the learning from this in regard to what is working, so that it might be replicated. The Children and Young People's Services Committees would be well placed to capture this learning.

Limitations in Tusla's resources, pressure of wide-ranging demands

3.2.2 Understanding of Traveller culture and identity

Barriers and issues identified, from the consultation events, regarding Tusla's understanding and recognition of Traveller culture and norms:

- Limited understanding of Traveller culture and of the practical implications of cultural diversity that need to be taken into account to ensure that services are designed and delivered in a manner that ensures they are accessible, inclusive, and capable of delivering good outcomes for the Traveller community. This lack of understanding can, in turn, lead to an over-reliance on more culturally aware targeted Traveller-specific supports and services rather than addressing this barrier in mainstream service provision.
- A lack of understanding of Traveller ways and norms, by Tusla, which can result in negative treatment or stereotyping.
- Travellers feeling blamed for their non-engagement with services, rather than Tusla examining the root causes for this or possible barriers within Tusla.
- Negative experiences of Traveller children taken into residential and foster care, with non-Traveller carers, resulting in their cultural identity being eroded and, on leaving the care system, not fitting in with either their own community or the settled community. Experiences were also noted of non-Traveller foster parents failing to tell Traveller children they are Travellers.
- A lack of understanding of the role and potential of the extended family, and consequent failure of social workers to reach out to the extended family to see if they can care for child who is about to be taken into care.

- Lack of information being provided to the Traveller community to ensure a full understanding of the range and nature of Tusla services, and to enable an effective and empowered engagement. Information on services and what they offer is not always accessible or designed and communicated in an accessible and culturally appropriate manner.
- Inadequate information provided to Travellers as to what is required to become involved in the Traveller fostering initiative and lack of support for Travellers to engage in this initiative.

Additional barriers and issues identified from the mapping process:

- Generic cultural competence training is insufficient: Traveller-specific cultural competency training needed. While some interviewees found the Traveller cultural competency training beneficial, it was also noted that it needed to have an anti-racism element, addressing both individual and institutional levels of racism.
- Cultural competence training needs to be mandatory, including for Tusla management, and needs to be ongoing rather than one-off. In addition, staff in Tusla-funded services should also be required to undertake this training.
- The prevalence of 'settled norms' within the design and delivery of key services are embedded and not easily identifiable by non-Travellers.
- Tusla frontline staff can find it difficult to negotiate the nuances of Traveller culture and what does or doesn't constitute Traveller culture, and, as a consequence, there can be a fear of making mistakes in interventions.

- While targeted programmes involve considerable focus on preparing the Traveller community for engagement with mainstream services and supports, there is a need for a similarly matched effort, by mainstream services, to prepare for engagement with the Traveller community, in a manner that is culturally aware, culturally sensitive and culturally appropriate and anti-racist.
- Specific barriers to engagement relate to intersectional identity across gender, age, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, and family status. Particular barriers to engagement include:
 - Traveller women experiencing domestic violence, where they identify fears in relation to child protection procedures as a barrier affecting their decision to report or take action on domestic violence, and there can be pressure on women to remain in abusive relationships/not to report domestic violence due to the risk of exclusion from their community where violence is reported.²
 - Traveller women in prison who have their children placed in foster care with non-Travellers, voicing concerns in regard to issues of safety, cultural identity, and cultural disconnection for the child/children on returning to live with their birth family;² and
 - The need for parenting programmes to target younger Travellers, where they are marrying and having children at a younger age than their non-Traveller peers.⁴

3.2.3 Relationships and Trust

Barriers and issues identified, from the consultation events, that negatively impact on relationship-building and trust, between Travellers and Tusla:

- Negative treatment: racism, discrimination (individual and institutional), and stereotyping of Travellers. Travellers feel they are “looked down on” by statutory providers, including Tusla.
- Lack of understanding of the positive caring roles played by Traveller men, and stereotyping of them as violent, which can silence Traveller men in regard to their engagement with Tusla.
- Lack of face-to-face engagement, informal contact and relationship-building being initiated by Tusla staff with Travellers and Traveller organisations, outside of issues and crises arising.
- Travellers experiencing differential, less favourable treatment than non-Travellers in similar situations, including in mixed marriage settings.
- Lack of concern for, attention to and supports for the Traveller parents involved in Tusla processes. Examples noted involved lack of support for Traveller parents in vulnerable situations to get their children returned, where children have been taken into care.
- Negative experiences of engagement with social workers.

- A vicious cycle can be created where, for example, a Traveller parent’s reluctance to engage with a social worker, or a service, due to fear of where this might lead, and this being misread as the family trying to hide something, therefore, making it more likely that the family will be drawn into having to engage with social workers.
- Lack of understanding among Travellers in relation to Tusla services and policies, lack of initiatives to build and support such understanding, and levels of misinformation in relation to Tusla services and Tusla policies.
- Traveller fears of personal information being shared. Lack of privacy and respect for confidentiality in the practice of some social workers, for example, discussing matters relating to Traveller service-users in front of other Travellers.

Additional barriers and issues identified from the mapping process:

- Informal, face-to-face engagement to build relationships are important; however, they are resource and time-heavy to sustain.
- Where Travellers are consulted in order to document their issues and concerns, Tusla needs to demonstrate its willingness to faithfully relay these issues in the voice of the community, and to act on addressing the issues.

- Building trust is a fragile process and one bad experience for a Traveller family (with Tusla) can do much more damage than several positive engagement stories.
- The Education Welfare Service moving into Tusla has had a negative impact in increasing Traveller mistrust of the Education and Welfare Officer (EWO), with some Travellers erroneously believe that EWOs have the power to remove children into care.
- The absence of a Traveller organisation in some areas has been shown to inhibit the process of building trust and securing engagement.

² Haran, N. (2022) Evaluation of the Traveller Parent Support Pilot Programme. Mullen, R. (2021) Mid-Way Review of the Traveller Domestic Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Project.

³ Doyle, R. (2017). Travellers in Prison Initiative: Hearing their Voices, Traveller women in prison. HSE.

⁴ Haran, N. (2022). Op cit.



4. A Values-Led Approach to Improving Traveller Engagement with Tusla

Organisational values are central to motivating how an organisation defines itself and how it operates.

Organisational values are central to motivating how an organisation defines itself and how it operates. These values are expressed in the culture of an organisation: what it stands for, its systems and practice, the actions it prioritises, and how it communicates to stakeholders.

Organisational values provide a strong foundation for good practice in enabling Traveller awareness of, access to and participation in Tusla services. Tusla has identified its corporate values as: Respect, Kindness, Empowerment, and Trust.

It was noted in the mapping exercise that the application of Tusla's core values was being pursued more in terms of shaping behaviours rather than also shaping systems and strategies. This was noted in relation to the Signs of Safety programme.

4.1 Values Statement

The following values statement was developed through the two consultation events.

Travellers attending the consultation sessions were invited to define and concretise Tusla's core values: identifying a shared meaning for each value and establishing the implications of each value for the priorities, processes, and practice of Tusla, in engaging with Travellers and enabling outcomes for Travellers from this engagement.



Respect

Respect is about recognition for Traveller culture and identity, equal treatment, and mutual understanding. It involves:

- A valuing of and visibility for Traveller culture and way of life, and flexibility in taking account of this culture;
- Treating Travellers well in an open-minded and non-judgemental manner that is free from discrimination and stereotypes, and
- Travellers having an understanding of Tusla services, and Tusla staff having an understanding of Traveller culture, values, and way of life.



Kindness

Kindness is about listening, empathy, honesty, and a positive welcome. It involves:

- Simple, jargon-free ways of speaking and communicating, talking straight with Travellers, and not talking down to Travellers;
- Concern for what is going on for Traveller service-users, taking time to hear their stories before making reports, and establishing their needs, alongside an interest in helping them to meet these needs;
- Traveller-friendly services where Travellers can hold their identity with pride; and
- Signposting to enable Traveller service-users to know their options, where to go for services and how to access supports they need.



Empowerment

Empowerment is about having a say and being heard. It involves:

- Traveller service-users having someone they trust as a support for them at meetings, having a say on where meetings are held, being informed about options and choices, and having an input into the steps to be taken in their case after any meeting;
- The Traveller community and Traveller organisations having a say and influence in relation to the design and delivery of services, and promoting and supporting Traveller-led initiatives;

Tusla's core values:
Respect
Kindness
Empowerment
Trust

- Traveller organisations being resourced and supported to act as an effective link between the Traveller community and Tusla, contribute to mutual understanding, and enable appropriate access to Tusla services; and
- Enabling the voice of Travellers, with safe spaces within which to raise issues and make complaints.



Trust

Trust is about delivering on promises, good and regular communication, and Traveller involvement. It involves:

- Traveller service-users being enabled to access and get the supports and services they need, in a timely manner and with an emphasis on early intervention;
- Timely and accessible communication with Traveller service-users that gives sufficient information, allows them to prepare for meetings with Tusla staff, ensures they are aware of their options and rights, and takes account of literacy and educational barriers;
- Honesty in Tusla's engagement with Travellers, accountability from Tusla when things go wrong, and effective follow-through on promises made; and
- Traveller involvement and employment at all levels of Tusla and a valuing of Traveller employees.

This values statement could usefully serve as a set of benchmarks to frame and guide Tusla's work to improve Traveller engagement with Tusla and Tusla-funded services, including in staff support and supervision and case management processes.

4.2 Tusla values in action: good practice examples identified

Participants attending the consultation events were invited to identify good practice examples of where they had seen evidence of Tusla's values in action: in its initiatives and services, processes and practice. These good practice examples serve as important starting points for developing and building on initiatives, processes, and practice that are found to be working.

Good practice examples relating to the value of Respect:

- Taking steps to adapt programmes to reflect and respect Traveller culture, identity and way of life, in particular:
 - tailoring the ParentPlus programme to Travellers and successful delivery of the programme.
 - the Traveller fostering initiative.
- Respect for Traveller culture in the practice of some social workers, including seeking to ensure that Traveller children in care were supported to celebrate their cultural identity through engagement with Traveller Pride Week events.
- Tusla managers who were open to hear complaints and where there was a lack of defensiveness in dealing with complaints.

Good practice examples relating to the value of Empowerment:

- Traveller organisations being resourced and supported by Tusla, including:
 - Tusla funding for Traveller link workers to act as a bridge between Tusla and the Traveller community.

- a family learning programme that trained Traveller parents as peer education workers and which has enabled Traveller retention in schools.
- a PATH programme, funded by Tusla through CYPSC, developed a successful equine programme for Traveller children that is serving to enable their retention and participation in school.
- Travellers having a say and influence in the design and delivery of services, including:
 - building Travellers capacity to lead Meitheal processes.
 - Tusla and other local agencies engaging with a Traveller organisation, through the Traveller Interagency Group, to establish a mother and toddler group.
 - support, through ParentPlus programmes and through other channels, to negotiate the application requirements for childcare scheme provision.
- The homework clubs that are part of the STAR pilot, in supporting Traveller children and reducing their anxiety about completing homework.
- Traveller service-users having someone they trust as a support for them, including:
 - Tusla engaging with schools to challenge the overuse of reduced timetables for Traveller pupils.
 - social workers providing support for families with children with special needs to get appropriate housing.

Good practice examples relating to the value of Kindness:

- Positive social worker practice, including listening to the views of a young Traveller who had assumed caring responsibilities for younger siblings.
- Tusla and the local Traveller organisation being able to engage in honest and open, if difficult, conversations about what is going wrong and what needs to be done to get it right.

Good practice examples relating to the value of Trust:

- Taking the time to build Travellers' knowledge and trust in engaging with Meitheal processes, in particular to address misinformation that the process is a precursor to taking children into care.
- Traveller-led initiative, Traveller workers, and Traveller involvement which impact positively on trust and the quality of communication.
- Tusla staff member's informal engagement with one of the Traveller organisation's groups which was positive in building trust.
- Tusla managers that received and dealt effectively with complaints.

4.3 Enablers of good practice

Participants at the consultation events were asked to identify any specific enablers that supported the good practice examples identified.

A core enabler identified, in both consultation events, was where a partnership approach had been developed, between Tusla and the local Traveller organisation(s). The elements of this 'partnership approach' identified were: ensuring that Tusla initiatives targeting the community were Traveller-led; and valuing Travellers as the experts in understanding how to address issues for the community.

A caution was identified in regard to how a 'partnership approach' should be understood and practiced, namely that: the power imbalance in the relationship between the Traveller organisation and Tusla, as a state agency, must be acknowledged; and the Traveller worker/organisation cannot be expected to bear the responsibility for 'solving' the issues and addressing the barriers to their community's engagement with Tusla.

Further enablers to good practice identified from the consultation events:

- The combination of Tusla funding involving, working through a Traveller organisation, and (Tusla) taking a community development approach.
- Adapting programmes to reflect and respect Traveller culture, identity and way of life.
- Tusla and Traveller organisation capacity to engage in honest, open, and sometimes difficult conversations to identify issues and how to address them.
- Knowledge of Traveller culture and identity and/or prior involvement with the Traveller community of some social workers informing their practice.
- Tusla staff participating in Traveller cultural awareness (TCAT) training.

Additional enablers of good practice identified from the mapping process:

- Employing a community development approach, where the process (including to build relationships and trust) is as important as the outcome. Such an approach is evident in the design and delivery of Traveller-specific programmes and, in some regions, in the delivery of Prevention, Partnership and Family Support (PPFS) services.
- Adopting a strengths-based and trauma-informed approaches, in the Traveller fostering initiative, were found to be beneficial.

- Creating safe and inclusive spaces, including such as: hosting group discussions/awareness-raising sessions in Traveller-friendly spaces, and allocating sufficient time to allow participants discuss fears, answer questions and better understand complex issues and concepts.
- Adapting programmes and approaches so that they are culturally appropriate and inclusive, such as:
 - the adapted ParentPlus programme (Traveller Parent Support pilot programme).
 - the development of culturally appropriate material for the Traveller fostering initiative.
 - as part of the STAR pilot, development of an online portal for schools to access a range of resources to increase their knowledge about Traveller and Roma culture as well as tools and resources for working with Traveller and Roma children and their families.
 - Travellers trained as lead practitioners for the Meitheal process with their good practice enabled by experienced coordinators and good supervision.
 - flexibilities in organising initiatives, such as avoiding the summer months to accommodate nomadism.
 - programmes that, while not explicit about issues of cultural diversity and racism, include Traveller-relevant concepts in their design, including such as: the disavowal of paternalism and the emphasis on collaboration, partnership and questioning in the Signs and Safety approach; and the focus on concepts such as anti-oppressive practice in the Diversity in Modern Ireland training programme.
- prioritising prevention and early intervention approaches and initiatives.
- staff who have availed of Traveller cultural awareness training and briefings, from Traveller organisations, have found these beneficial.
- peer support processes, often informal, enable learning on the job. Self-critical practice and willingness to accept when your approach/ process isn't working and making the necessary changes.
- Tusla domestic and gender-based violence-funded services involved a strategic focus (through the service level agreements) to building better engagement between the Traveller community and Tusla services.
- Action underway in Tusla to implement the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty, with a working group in place and an approach to implementation in development.



5. Recommendations: A Tusla Work Programme

The Traveller consultation events involved identification of actions for Tusla to address the key barriers and issues identified.

The set of actions that were proposed were discussed at the six focus group discussions (with Tusla staff and Traveller organisations). Following the focus group discussions, the actions were further developed, including recommendations for implementation of the work programme.

The recommendations for actions are grouped under four interlinked headings:

- **Overarching actions:** actions that create the conditions for a positive engagement with and achieving outcomes for Travellers.
- **Organisational actions:** actions that address the systems to be developed within Tusla for a positive engagement with and achievement of outcomes for Travellers.
- **Actions to build relationships and trust:** interactions to be pursued between Tusla staff and the Traveller community for a positive engagement with and achieving outcomes for Travellers.
- **Specific actions:** actions that address programme-specific initiatives that could contribute to a positive engagement with and achieving outcomes for Travellers.

5.1 Content of the work programme

Overarching Actions

Tusla would:

1. Recognise, in the launch of this work programme, the historical mistreatment of the Traveller community, and issue an apology or acknowledgement to the Traveller community as part of making this commitment to new starting points for Tusla's engagement with Travellers.
2. Continue to convene a programme of regional consultation events with Travellers and Traveller organisations, to establish issues and barriers faced by Travellers in accessing Tusla and Tusla-funded services, and gather proposals for addressing these. In this, it is important to ensure that regional consultations would be action-focused and lead to positive change.
3. Establish county/regional-level steering groups, mirroring the national working group for this initiative, to progress this work programme, allowing for a taking account of and acting on the regional context and issues as established in the regional consultation. In this it is important not to replicate what is already in place, and, where effective (such as the CYPSC or Traveller interagency groups) could serve this purpose.

4. Promote the values statement in all work environments, engage these values in communications, and ensure they are reflected in the priorities, procedures and practices pursued by Tusla and by Tusla-funded services and initiatives. The Tusla values champions initiative could play a role in this.

5. Develop a data strategy which includes a focus on: gathering equality data and the inclusion of an ethnic identifier in Tusla's data collection systems; and data sharing to improve policymaking and service planning.

Organisational Actions

Tusla would:

6. Implement the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty in developing and reviewing plans, strategies, services, procedures and programmes, and internal policies and procedures. This would include undertaking a participative and evidence-based assessment of equality and human rights issues facing the Traveller community and ensuring these issues are addressed at key moments of such development and review. This would serve to 'Traveller-proof' the design and delivery of strategies and services to ensure Traveller culture is recognised and accommodated and that individual and institutional issues of racism are eliminated.

7. Provide mandatory Traveller cultural awareness training for: Tusla managers with relevant responsibilities; Tusla staff that engage with Travellers (in particular Education Welfare Officers and social workers); and staff in Tusla-funded services that engage with Travellers. This would inform an understanding of adapting for cultural difference and eliminating racism, and the skills to respond to and address the issues arising. Local support and encouragement would be provided for staff to apply this learning on completion of the training, through current management and supervision processes. This training should be delivered with the involvement of Traveller organisations.

8. Undertake a rolling review of organisational policies and systems to identify and remove institutional barriers, including discrimination and racism as experienced by Travellers, and failures to take account of cultural diversity.
9. Develop systems to capture, share and institutionalise innovation and good practice across the regions, making use of the national working group and any county/regional-level steering groups established under this initiative, as learning hubs in this regard. Tusla's 'models of practice framework' initiative, with its focus on legislation, policy, services, values, principles, could serve as a resource in this regard, but would need to specifically include a Traveller dimension and an intercultural dimension.

10. Ensure uniformity in the application of child protection policy across the country, and that there is knowledge and awareness of the policy within the Traveller community.
11. Seek to ensure stability and continuity in caseworkers allocated to Travellers.
12. Create and promote safe and accessible systems and processes that allow Traveller service users and Traveller organisations to bring forward complaints and issues, to address these issues and complaints arising for Travellers in their engagement with Tusla services and Tusla-funded services, and to ensure an accountability for these issues and complaints as appropriate. A process of staff appointed advocates, one in every county, who could be approached by a service user could be put in place where this complaints system is considered too daunting. Tusla's 'service experience insights framework', which is currently being developed, could complement such a complaints process.
13. Engage with other agencies at local level to advocate for and ensure a comprehensive and culturally appropriate response to the needs of Travellers, including: with the local authority, in regard to Traveller accommodation; and with schools, in relation to incidents of discrimination, racism and bullying.
14. Sustain and, as possible, increase funding for Traveller-led initiatives and for the employment of Travellers through Traveller organisations, including as peer link workers to help bridge the gap between Tusla and Tusla-funded services and the Traveller community and to contribute to adequate supports for Traveller service-users.

Create the conditions and opportunities for the employment of Travellers within Tusla, and develop the training pathways required to secure such opportunities, including internships. Advocate workers in key areas, such as child protection, could be employed to support Travellers.

Tusla's Traveller employment initiative and initiatives in regard to the Programme for Access to Higher Education for Travellers, could be further built on in this.

Actions to Build Relationships and Trust

Tusla would:

15. Develop, promote and implement a set of principles to shape and govern the relationship between Tusla and Tusla-funded staff and members of the Traveller Community, ensuring an engagement that is culturally appropriate and anti-racist. The values statement developed from the consultation events could be a starting point in this regard.
16. Enable and encourage a broad range of Tusla staff, in particular those working with the Traveller community, to invest time in and engage in face-to-face contact with Travellers and Traveller organisations, outside of crisis interventions, and in informal settings and Traveller-friendly spaces.
17. Ensure spaces considered safe by Travellers are used by Tusla and Tusla-funded staff for their meetings with Travellers, and that Travellers are informed of, and have access to support in, these meetings.
18. Ensure information provision and communication are accessible and culturally appropriate, and characterised by openness, honesty and not making promises that cannot be kept.
19. Identify responsibility at a senior level in each region for sustaining positive relationships and building adequate and appropriate engagement with Travellers and Traveller organisations.
20. Provide supports and develop initiatives for Travellers and Traveller organisations to enable their understanding of Tusla and Tusla-funded services and how these should function, correct any misinformation, and update on developments in these services.

Specific Actions

Tusla would:

21. Target early intervention services on the Traveller community with adequate supports to encourage and enable Travellers to access these without fear, before situations develop into crises.
22. Ensure that Tusla services and Tusla funded services provide culturally appropriate support for Traveller parents whose children are taken into care, including to inform them of their rights and the supports they are entitled to. In this, the particular needs of Traveller parents who are in vulnerable situations for reason of such as mental health, poverty, and issues of literacy/educational disadvantage, should be addressed.
23. Further develop information to and supports for Traveller families to engage in foster care and to identify and remove the barriers they might experience in this. Develop effective and creative approaches for Traveller children in care to retain access to and engagement with their culture and identity, and to retain links with their parents and with their community.
24. Through the TESS, provide adequate and appropriate supports for Traveller children where racism and identity-based bullying emerges as a factor in school attendance and/or expulsions.

5.2 Implementation of the work programme

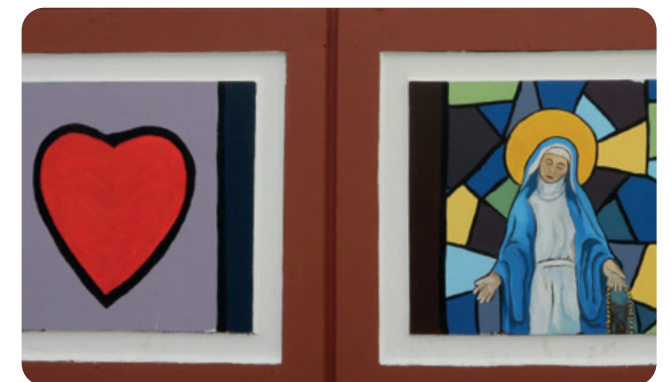
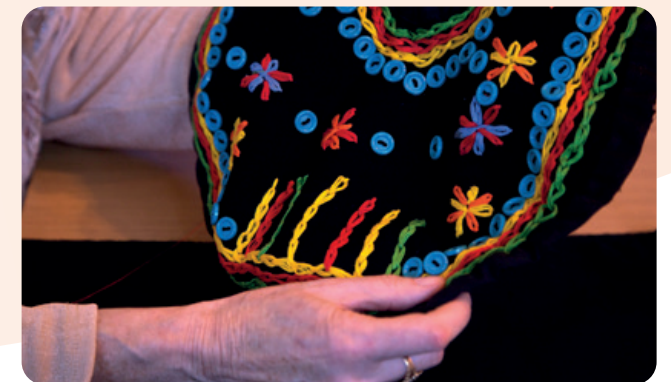
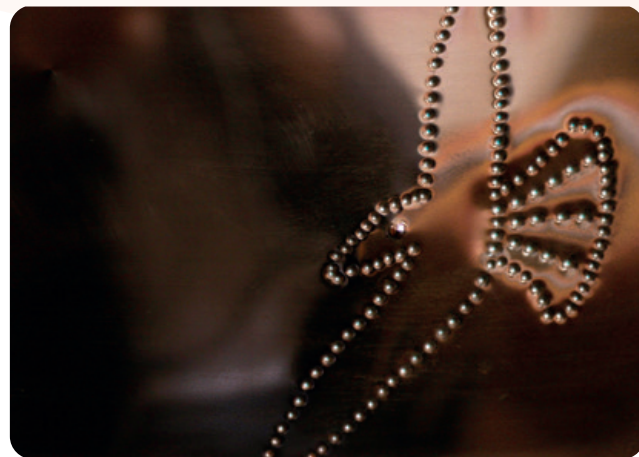
Implementation of the work programme should include steps to:

- Sustain a dual approach of targeting and mainstreaming to ensure that a balance is maintained in: the provision of targeted initiative addressing the particular situation, experience and needs of Travellers; and initiative to adapt mainstream services, programmes, and practice to remove barriers of access, participation and outcome

for Travellers and ensure culturally appropriate and anti-racist provision in this mainstream. As part of this dual approach, care should be taken to avoid long-term reliance on targeted provision or that any segregated form of provision would emerge.

- Develop regular implementation plans for the work programme, including a process of prioritising actions, identifying key targets and milestones, and building on current mainstream and targeted initiatives that are identified as delivering outcomes for Travellers.
- Take account of the current Tusla reform process underway, and ensure that there is no detriment from this reform process for this ambition to secure an effective engagement with and outcomes for Travellers, and link with those responsible for leading on this reform process.
- Identify Prevention Partnership and Family Support leads as having a key role in national and local-level implementation of this work programme, given their role in prevention and early intervention. However, each pillar of Tusla should be involved in delivering on this programme of work, and national-level prioritisation for implementation will be important in driving local-level implementation.
- Reflect that different regions are at different points in this journey: in some regions there are established relationships between Tusla and local Traveller organisations, in other areas there is less engagement, and there are some regions where the Traveller organisation infrastructure is absent or only recently emerging.

Culture and Community



Appendix A

Report from the Kerry regional consultation event.

1. Introduction

The consultation was held in the Rose Hotel, Tralee, on Wednesday 7th February. It was jointly organised by Tusla and the Kerry Travellers Health & Community Development Project.

Ann Moynihan, Senior Manager, Prevention, Partnership and Family Support, Tusla, Kerry, opened the meeting, with an outline of the breadth of Tusla services.

2. Issues for Travellers in engaging with Tusla and Tusla-funded services

The core challenge Tusla seeks to address by this project, is the high degree of distrust among the Traveller community in regard to engaging with Tusla and Tusla-funded services.

Participants emphasised a central barrier, rooted in historical, recent, and current experience, is a fear of children being taken into care which, in turn, leads to a fear of taking up supports available. This informs a negative reaction to the very name and identity of Tusla as well as to Tusla staff and services. Fear and significant mistrust was identified as central to the relationship, past and present.

The mapping undertaken by Values Lab, prior to the consultation, sought to identify the key barriers and issues that have created and sustained Travellers' fear of and reluctance to engage with Tusla and its funded services.

These barriers and issues relate to three areas: organisational issues; understanding of Traveller culture and identity; and relationships and trust.

The consultants opened the session by giving a summary of the identified barriers and issues across these three areas and inviting participants to respond and to add to the issues drawing from their experiences.

Organisational issues:

- Lack of consistency and/or different regulations for how similar services operate in different fields or regions.
- Limitations in resources.
- Tusla staffing largely monocultural and issues of high staff turnover.
- Staff can hold negative and stereotypical perspectives of Travellers.
- Staff can lack an understanding of, and be resistant to engaging in critical self-analysis on the barriers Travellers experience.

Participants added to these issues as follows:

- The power held by the social worker, and a lack of accountability for how this power is exercised.
- A lack of communication from Tusla to families to give them status updates. It was also noted that where a child is taken into care there can be little contact from social workers to give updates about the child, including on health issues.
- High turnover of social workers which can impact negatively on the relationship with the Traveller service-user, due to: lack of continuity; previous investment in relationship-building set at nought; and risk of new social worker being less respectful where the previous relationship had been positive.
- Concern that Tusla is not connecting Traveller families in difficulty with the Traveller project/workers at an early stage and before the situation has reached a crisis point.
- Traveller link workers/organisations being placed in compromising situations which can undermine their role as advocates for Traveller families and the wider Traveller community.
- Failure to appreciate that Traveller families need an advocate in their engagement with Tusla, leading to situations where they agree to outcomes that disadvantage them due to their vulnerability, in particular at case conferences.

- The absence of Traveller employees working in Tusla, at all levels in the organisation, in particular at the higher levels.
- Difficulties facing Traveller employees in Tusla where they speak out and become identified as trouble-makers. It was also noted that there are some Travellers working in Tusla who are not confident to identify as a Traveller.
- The lack of provision for 14- to 16- year-olds who have left formal education, the lack of understanding of their level of maturity and responsibility within the community, and the need to be able to put in place alternative pathways and supports for them.

Understanding of Traveller culture and identity:

- Limited understanding of Traveller culture and of the practical implications of this cultural diversity.
- Over-reliance on more culturally aware targeted Traveller-specific supports and services.
- Information on services and what they offer is not always accessible or designed and communicated in a culturally appropriate manner.



Participants added to these issues as follows:

- Lack of understanding of Traveller culture, with particular mention of: a lack of understanding of the role and potential of the extended family; a lack of appreciation of the nature and level of responsibilities taken on by younger Travellers and by Traveller men within the community and the family.
- Negative experiences of Traveller children taken into residential and foster care with non-Traveller carers, resulting in their cultural identity being eroded and, on leaving the care system, not fitting in with either their own community or the settled community. Experiences were also noted of non-Traveller foster parents failing to tell Traveller children they are Travellers.
- Lack of recognition and valuing of Traveller culture, the values and relationships involved, and their sense of occasion and how occasions should be celebrated, leading to tensions and punishment of parents for being Travellers.
- The failure of social workers to reach out to the extended family to see if they can care for child who is about to be taken into care.
- Inadequate funding for Traveller programmes to meet the needs in the community.
- Lack of information and training being provided to the Traveller community to ensure a full understanding of the range and nature of Tusla services, and to enable an effective and empowered engagement.
- Inadequate information provided to Travellers as to what is required to become involved in the Traveller fostering initiative and lack of support for Travellers to engage in this initiative. On this, participants noted that Traveller families have a lot of misinformation about the initiative, such as that they cannot be living in a trailer to be accepted as foster parents.

Relationships and trust:

- Negative treatment: racism, discrimination (individual and institutional), and stereotyping.
- Traveller fears of personal information being shared.
- Traveller women fears in relation to child protection procedures.
- Parenting programmes needing to target younger Travellers.
- Lack of engagement of Traveller men in specific programmes.
- Traveller women in prison who have their children placed in foster care with non-Travellers.

Participants added to this, identifying further issues related to this relationship:

- Negative stereotypes of Traveller women as stupid and inevitably being subject to male violence. Similar stereotyping of Traveller men as abusers and failing to recognise their caring roles. Issues of patronising Travellers and being racist then arise, based on these stereotypes.
- Travellers feel they are “looked down on” by statutory providers, including Tusla.
- Differential treatment evident for Travellers and settled people, including in mixed marriage settings, where non-Travellers are treated more favourably.
- Lack of privacy and respect for confidentiality in the practice of some social workers, discussing matters relating to Traveller service-users.
- Some domestic violence services automatically giving notice to the social worker, rather than doing so only when the child is at risk, which is a significant barrier to Traveller women using the service.
- The lack of understanding of the positive caring roles played by Traveller men and of their role in engaging with external agencies, and the particular stereotypes of them being violent in this engagement, meaning they cannot complain, cannot use their voice.

- The lack of understanding of Traveller cultural norms on Traveller women's role being forefront when the family engage with services and programmes. This cultural norm can be misunderstood by the settled community, as viewing Traveller men being uncaring about their family or children, due to their seeming lack of engagement with services and programmes.

3. Values to drive Traveller awareness, access and participation

Tusla has identified its corporate values as: Respect; Kindness; Empowerment; and Trust.

Organisational values provide a strong foundation for good practice in enabling Traveller awareness, access and participation in Tusla services.

Participants identified an understanding of these values that would inform and drive a national work programme to promote Traveller awareness, access, and participation in Tusla services.



Respect

Respect is about recognition for Traveller culture and identity, equal treatment, and mutual understanding. It involves:

- a valuing of and visibility for Traveller culture and way of life, and flexibility in taking account of this culture;
- Treating Travellers well in an open-minded and non-judgemental manner that is free from discrimination and stereotypes, and
- Travellers having an understanding of Tusla services, and Tusla staff having an understanding of Traveller culture, values and way of life.



Kindness

Kindness is about listening, empathy, honesty, and a positive welcome. It involves:

- simple, jargon-free ways of speaking and communicating;

- Concern for what is going on for Traveller service-users and their needs, an interest in helping them with these needs;
- Traveller-friendly services where Travellers can hold their identity with pride, and
- Signposting to enable Traveller service-users to know where to go for services and supports they need.



Empowerment

Empowerment is about having a say and being heard. It involves:

- Traveller service-users having a say on where meetings are held and the steps to be taken by the service provider and having someone as a support at meetings;
- The Traveller community having a say in relation to the design and delivery of services, and promoting and supporting Traveller-led initiatives; and
- Enabling the voice of Travellers, with safe spaces within which to raise issues and make complaints.



Trust

Trust is about delivering on promises, good and regular communication, and Traveller involvement. It involves:

- Traveller service-users getting the supports they need, in a timely manner and with an emphasis on early intervention;
- Timely and accessible communication with Traveller service-users that gives sufficient information, allows them to prepare for meetings with Tusla staff, and takes account of literacy barriers, and
- Traveller involvement and employment at all levels of Tusla and a valuing of Traveller employees.

4. Examples of good practice identified by participants

Tusla's core values of Respect; Kindness; Empowerment; and Trust, as defined above, provide a frame through which to establish where there is good practice within Tusla and Tusla-funded services. These values also provide a frame to set benchmarks for improving the situation and experience of Travellers in their engagement with Tusla services. Participants identified a number of areas of good practice where these values were in evidence:

- The funding and work of Traveller link workers.
- The parenting courses for Travellers.
- Traveller foster parents.
- Meitheal processes.
- The practice of some social workers who were identified as having a respectful approach to the community. Positive examples of social worker practice included: listening to the views of a young Traveller who had assumed caring responsibilities for younger siblings; and seeking to ensure that Traveller children in care were supported to celebrate their cultural identity through engagement with Traveller Pride Week events.
- Some managers receiving and dealing effectively with complaints.

This good practice was enabled by:

- Traveller-led initiative, Traveller workers, and Traveller involvement which impacted positively on trust and the quality of communication.
- Links between Tusla staff and Traveller workers to address particular situations.
- Engagement with and contribution from Kerry Travellers Health & Community Development Project as a channel of communication and source of initiative.

- Time taken to build Travellers' knowledge and trust in engaging with Meitheal processes, in particular to address misinformation that the process is a precursor to taking children into care.
- Knowledge of Traveller culture and identity and/or prior involvement with the Traveller community informed the good practice of some social workers.
- Openness of Tusla managers to hear complaints, lack of defensiveness in dealing with these, and trust built with Traveller workers to raise the complaints.
- Increase in requests from Tusla for Traveller cultural awareness training for staff.

5. Towards a national work programme

Participants put forward recommendations for a work programme to promote Traveller awareness of, access to and participation in Tusla services. These can be organised under the headings: organisational; operational; and relationships.

Organisational

- The legacy of the 'cruelty man' or the 'welfare woman' remains burned in the memory of the Traveller community and places a significant barrier in the way of an improved engagement between Tusla and the Traveller community. This past and the wrongs done to Traveller families over this past needs to be acknowledged by way of a public apology and commitment to the new starting points and new standards being developed by Tusla.
- County committees need to be established, mirroring the national working group for this initiative, to progress the promised national work programme to promote Traveller awareness, access, and participation in Tusla services.

- Services and systems need to be 'Traveller-proofed' to ensure that services and programmes are designed and delivered in a manner that recognises Traveller culture, with flexibility to take cultural difference into account, and that this is reflected in staff practice.
- Tusla staff, in particular Education Welfare Officers and social workers, engaging with Travellers need to do mandatory Traveller cultural awareness training.
- Specific steps need to be taken to better understand and respond to the needs of Travellers that are nomadic, with attention to the education remit of Tusla.
- Tusla needs to develop approaches to engage with other agencies at local level to ensure a comprehensive response to the needs of Travellers. Engagement with the local authority, in regard to Traveller accommodation, and engagement with schools, in relation to incidents of discrimination and bullying, were identified as particular areas requiring such an interagency focus.
- Tusla needs to develop effective and creative approaches for Traveller children in care to retain access to and engagement with their culture and identity, and to retain links with their parents and with their community.

Operational

- Information sessions need to be organised for Travellers and Traveller organisations to enable their understanding of Tusla and Tusla-funded services, correct any misinformation, and update on developments in these services.
- Draft minutes of meetings, including Meitheal meetings and case conferences, need to be circulated to all attending before they are agreed.

- An accessible and safe complaints procedure needs to be in place, functional and well-communicated, to enable Traveller service-users and Traveller link workers to raise issues without any negative consequences.
- Tusla needs to increase the number of Traveller counsellors employed. Tusla needs to develop and ensure adequate supports for Traveller children being bullied at school. Tusla needs to provide supports for Traveller parents whose children have been taken into care.
- Tusla needs to fund the employment of more Travellers through Traveller organisations. Tusla funding for Traveller-led initiatives needs to be increased.

Relationships

- Tusla needs to develop and implement a standard to govern the relationship between Tusla staff/ Tusla-funded staff and the Traveller community, with training provided to enable its implementation. This standard would be based on a commitment to: transparency and honesty; professionalism; respect for confidentiality; understand, recognise and take account of Traveller culture and identity; ongoing communication to update Traveller service-users on their situation; timely and accessible means of communicating with Traveller service-users to enable them to understand and prepare for any engagement; explore with Traveller service-users the most appropriate meeting place and way of making contact; and give adequate notice of any change of staff.
- Building relationships between Tusla and Traveller workers needs to be a shared responsibility with sufficient time and effort invested in this. This is to ensure: respect for Traveller identity and the skills and knowledge of the Traveller worker; equal treatment for Traveller and settled workers; and strengthening a shared value base and perspective from which to undertake the work.

Appendix B

Report from the South-East Traveller consultation event.

1. Introduction

The consultation was held in the Springhill Hotel, Kilkenny, on Thursday 7th March.

Twenty-three people participated: Travellers who have engaged with Tusla services, and Traveller and non-Traveller staff working directly with the Traveller community in Kilkenny, Carlow, Waterford, Wexford, and Tipperary.

Sandra Collins, Senior Manager, Prevention, Partnership and Family Support, Tusla Carlow, Kilkenny and South Tipperary, and Tony Kennedy, Senior Manager, Prevention, Partnership and Family Support, Tusla Wexford and Waterford, worked with Values Lab in organising both events.

The following local organisations supported Traveller participation at the event: FDYS Wexford, St Catherine's Carlow, Tipperary Rural Traveller Programme, Waterford CDP, and Kilkenny Leader Partnership.

Sandra and Tony opened the event and gave an overview of the breadth of Tusla and Tusla-funded services.

2. Issues for Travellers in engaging with Tusla and Tusla-funded services

The core challenge Tusla seeks to address, is the high degree of distrust among the Traveller community in engaging with Tusla and Tusla-funded services.

In this regard, participants repeatedly emphasised “fear” as the key undercurrent to the high levels of mistrust and a central

barrier to Traveller engagement with Tusla. Participants noted that:

- The fear is rooted in historical and inter-generational trauma, as well as in current experience, centring on children being taken into care. It presents a barrier to Traveller engagement, not only in Tusla services and supports, but also regarding wider services, such as health services and accommodation supports, as there is a fear that such engagement could lead to child protection services becoming involved with their family. One stark example noted was in regard to Traveller parents whose child, a minor, attempted suicide. The parents told a local organisation that they had been afraid to access mental health supports for their child due to a fear that child protection would be alerted and the child taken into care.
- The mistrust is rooted in experiences, and accounts of false promises made and not lived up to.

A number of current examples of such incidents provoking fear and mistrust were given.

The mapping undertaken by Values Lab, prior to the consultation, sought to identify the key barriers and issues that have created and sustained Travellers fear of and reluctance to engage with Tusla and its funded services.

These barriers and issues relate to three areas: organisational issues; understanding of Traveller culture and identity; and relationships and trust.

The consultants opened the session by giving a summary of these identified barriers and issues and inviting participants to review these and to add to the issues drawing from their experiences.

Organisational issues:

- Lack of consistency and/or different regulations for how similar services operate in different fields or regions.
- Limitations in resources.
- Tusla staffing largely monocultural and issues of high staff turnover.
- Staff can hold negative and stereotypical perspectives of Travellers’.
- Staff can lack an understanding of, and be resistant to engaging in critical self-analysis on the barriers Travellers’ experience.

Participants added to these issues as follows:

- Lack of adequate early intervention initiatives, before crisis develops, and lack of encouragement for Travellers to take up early intervention services, given the fears held by Travellers of engaging with Tusla.

- False promises made, lack of honesty with Traveller clients in difficult circumstances, and lack of follow-through on promises made.
- Traveller families signing forms and/or agreeing to conditions and processes that they may not fully understand and that may disadvantage them, due to a lack of support/knowledge of their options; inadequate communication; literacy issues; and for fear of implications if they don’t comply. Examples of this related not solely to Tusla, but also in regard to education providers. One example noted was a Traveller parent agreeing to sign a form in the school, that her child would be placed on reduced hours. The parent said they were told by the school that this would “get Tusla off your back”.
- Lack of support for Travellers to take on foster care roles, thus avoiding the negative experiences of Traveller children taken into care, with non-Traveller carers, resulting in their cultural identity being diminished. In this, it was noted that Travellers can be fearful of agreeing to become foster parents lest this might draw Tusla into their lives and result in their own parenting being scrutinised.
- Lack of uniformity in the application of child protection policies across the country, for example, in domestic violence services.

- Lack of accountability from Tusla where Travellers have bad experiences of their services, including discrimination and institutional racism;
- Lack of continuity of Tusla case workers and continually having to restart from scratch and build the relationship with new Tusla case worker.
- There is a lack of Traveller employees in Tusla, though it was acknowledged that this would be a difficult employment to take on for a Traveller, in the context of the community's negative perceptions of Tusla.

Understanding of Traveller culture and identity:

- Limited understanding of Traveller culture and of the practical implications of this cultural diversity.
- Over-reliance on more culturally aware targeted Traveller-specific supports and services.
- Information on services and what they offer is not always accessible or designed and communicated in a culturally appropriate manner.

Participants added to these issues as follows:

- Lack of understanding of Traveller culture among Tusla staff, in particular social workers. In this, it was noted that red flags can be raised by social workers due to their lack of understanding of Traveller ways.
- Poor communication with Travellers: not using accessible language, not taking account of literacy barriers and educational disadvantage, and failing to check and ensure there has been understanding of the exchange.
- Tusla staff blaming Travellers for their non-engagement with services, rather than looking at root causes of this or seeing issues within Tusla.

Relationships and trust:

- Negative treatment: racism, discrimination (individual and institutional), and stereotyping.
- Traveller fears of personal information being shared.
- Traveller women fears in relation to child protection procedures.
- Parenting programmes needing to target younger Travellers.
- Lack of engagement of Traveller men in specific programmes.
- Traveller women in prison who have their children placed in foster care with non-Travellers.

Participants added to this, identifying further issues related to this relationship:

- Lack of face-to-face engagement, informal contact and relationship-building being initiated by Tusla staff with Travellers and Traveller organisations, outside of issues and crises arising.
- Lack of concern for, attention to and supports for the Traveller parents involved in Tusla processes. An example noted was a lack of support for Traveller parents to get their children returned, where children have been taken into care.
- Bad experiences with social workers.
- A vicious cycle can be created where, for example, a Traveller parent's reluctance to engage with a social worker/service, due to fear of where this might lead, and this being misread as the family trying to hide something, therefore, making it more likely that the family will be drawn into having to engage with social workers.

- Lack of understanding among Travellers in relation to Tusla services and policies, lack of initiatives to build and support such understanding, and levels of misinformation in relation to Tusla services and Tusla policies.
- Lack of incentives for Traveller men to engage with Tusla and give time to this engagement.

In this discussion, it was emphasised that some of these issues are not experienced solely by Travellers and, that, by improving services for and relationships with Travellers, Tusla would be creating the conditions for a better engagement across a wide diversity of groups.

3. Values to drive Traveller awareness, access and participation

Tusla has identified its corporate values as: Respect; Kindness; Empowerment; and Trust.

Organisational values provide a strong foundation for good practice in enabling Traveller awareness, access and participation in Tusla services.

Participants identified an understanding of these values that would inform and drive a national work programme to promote Traveller awareness, access, and participation in Tusla services. In this they worked from and further developed the text developed in the first Traveller consultation in Kerry. Participants noted an issue with 'kindness' being identified as a Tusla value, in that it was a low ambition value for the organisation and there was a risk for condescending understandings of this label by Tusla and its staff.



Respect

Respect is about recognition for Traveller culture and identity, equal treatment, and mutual understanding. It involves:

- A valuing of and visibility for Traveller culture and way of life, and flexibility in taking account of this culture;
- Treating Travellers well in an open-minded and non-judgemental manner that is free from discrimination and stereotypes, and

- Travellers having an understanding of Tusla services, and Tusla staff having an understanding of Traveller culture, values and way of life.



Kindness

Kindness is about listening, empathy, honesty, and a positive welcome. It involves:

- Simple, jargon-free ways of speaking and communicating, talking straight with Travellers, and not talking down to Travellers;
- Concern for what is going on for Traveller service-users, taking time to hear their stories before making reports, and establishing their needs, alongside an interest in helping them to meet these needs;
- Traveller-friendly services where Travellers can hold their identity with pride, and
- Signposting to enable Traveller service-users to know their options, where to go for services and how to access supports they need.



Empowerment

Empowerment is about having a say and being heard. It involves:

- Traveller service-users having someone they trust as a support for them at meetings, having a say on where meetings are held, being informed about options and choices, and having an input into the steps to be taken in their case after any meeting;
- Traveller community and Traveller organisations having a say and influence in relation to the design and delivery of services, and promoting and supporting Traveller-led initiatives;
- Traveller organisations being resourced and supported to act as an effective link between the Traveller community and Tusla, contribute to mutual understanding, and enable appropriate access to Tusla services; and

- enabling the voice of Travellers, with safe spaces within which to raise issues and make complaints.



Trust

Trust is about delivering on promises, good and regular communication, and Traveller involvement. It involves:

- Traveller service-users being enabled to access and get the supports and services they need, in a timely manner and with an emphasis on early intervention;
- Timely and accessible communication with Traveller service-users that gives sufficient information, allows them to prepare for meetings with Tusla staff, ensures they are aware of their options and rights, and takes account of literacy and educational barriers;
- Honesty in Tusla's engagement with Travellers, accountability from Tusla when things go wrong, and effective follow-through on promises made; and
- Traveller involvement and employment at all levels of Tusla and a valuing of Traveller employees.

4. Examples of good practice identified by participants

Tusla's core values of Respect; Kindness; Empowerment; and Trust, as defined above, provide a frame through which to establish where there is good practice within Tusla and Tusla-funded services. These values also provide a frame to set benchmarks for improving the situation and experience of Travellers in their engagement with Tusla services.

Participants identified a number of areas of good practice where these values were in evidence:

- A successful programme has been developed, in Tipperary, where the Traveller organisation employ a link worker and to act as a bridge between Tusla and the Traveller community.

- A family learning programme in Tipperary trained Traveller parents as peer education workers and this has enabled Traveller retention in schools.

- The PATH programme with FDYS, funded by Tusla through CYPSC, has developed a successful equine programme for Traveller children that is serving to enable their retention and participation in school.

- Successful delivery of the ParentPlus programmes, tailored to Travellers, delivered in Kilkenny and Wexford.

- Support through ParentPlus programmes and through other channels to negotiate the application requirements for childcare scheme provision.

- The homework clubs that are part of the STAR pilot have been very successful in supporting Traveller children and reducing their anxiety about completing homework and going to school without doing so.

- Tusla participation on Traveller interagency groups.

- One organisation noted where a Tusla staff member engaged informally with one of their groups and this was positive in building trust.

- Tusla setting up a taskforce, from the Traveller Interagency Group, with Mincéirí Traveller CDP in Waterford and establishing a mother and toddler group.

- Tusla engaging with schools to challenge the overuse of reduced timetables for Traveller pupils.

- Social workers providing support for families with children with special needs to get appropriate housing.

This good practice was enabled by:

- The combination of Tusla funding, working through a Traveller project, and taking a community development approach.

- Steps taken to adapt programmes to reflect and respect Traveller culture, identity and way of life.
- Partnership working developed with Traveller organisations.
- Tusla and Traveller organisation capacity to engage in honest and open, if difficult, conversations about what is going wrong and what needs to be done to get it right.
- Tusla advocacy for Travellers, including through social worker staff.

5. Towards a national work programme

Participants put forward recommendations for a work programme to promote Traveller awareness of, access to and participation in Tusla services.

As a starting point, it was recommended that Tusla in the South East region would meet with the Traveller organisations involved in this consultation to discuss the report of this meeting and to establish how to action priority recommendations at an early stage.

These recommendations can be organised under the headings: organisational; operational; and relationships.

Organisational

- It was recommended that Tusla would issue an apology to the Traveller community, or at least a recognition of the historical mistreatment of the community, and commitment to the new starting points for Tusla in engaging with Travellers.
- A Traveller steering group needs to be established to inform and ensure implementation of a Tusla work programme in response to this consultation exercise.
- Tusla needs to take steps to ensure uniformity in the application of child protection policies across the country.

- Tusla staff engaging with Travellers should be required to undertake mandatory Traveller Cultural Awareness Training (TCAT) to ensure a capacity to respond to cultural diversity, and to prevent all forms of discrimination, racism and stereotyping.

- Tusla needs to create spaces and processes to engage with Travellers and Traveller organisations to address issues arising and to ensure accountability for issues arising.

- Tusla needs to put in place the conditions, opportunities, and training pathways for Travellers to work in Tusla.

Operational

- Tusla needs to target early intervention services on the Traveller community with adequate supports to encourage and enable Travellers to access these without fear, before situations develop into crises.

- Tusla staff need to ensure spaces considered safe by Travellers for their meetings with Travellers and that Travellers are informed for and supported in these meetings.

- Tusla staff need to ensure protection of, attend to and provide support for Traveller parents in vulnerable situations, including for reason of mental health, poverty, and for literacy/ educational disadvantage issues.

- Tusla needs to resource Traveller organisations to employ peer link workers to help bridge the gap between Tusla services and the Traveller community and to ensure adequate support to Traveller service-users.

- Tusla needs to identify, from within their staff, a Traveller link worker in each region to ensure an adequate and appropriate engagement with Travellers and Traveller organisations.

- Tusla needs to ensure stability and continuity in the caseworkers allocated to Travellers.
- Tusla needs to further develop supports for Traveller families to engage in foster care and to identify and remove the barriers they might experience in this.
- Tusla needs to engage with other agencies at local level, in particular those providing accommodation and education, to ensure adequate conditions for Traveller families.

Relationships

- Tusla staff need to be enabled and encouraged to engage in face-to-face contact with Travellers and Traveller organisations, outside of crisis interventions, and in informal settings and Traveller friendly spaces, in order to build relationships.
- Tusla needs to be take initiatives and provide support to Travellers and Traveller organisations to have a better and more detailed understanding of Tusla services and how these should function.



Action Plan

This plan is informed by consultation and recommendations of the Values Lab report.

2025	National Programme of Work to Promote Awareness, Access and Participation in Tusla sand Tusla Funded Services			
	National Actions	Lead Directorate /Service	Action Plan	Implementation
1	Recognise, in the launch of this work programme, the historical mistreatment of the Traveller community, and an acknowledgement to the Traveller community as part of making this commitment to new starting points for Tusla's engagement with Travellers.	CEO Office, Quality and Regulation Directorate and National Office Director of Services and Integration	Launch the national work programme with reference to NTRIS II Tusla actions, Public Sector Duty, Tusla Integrated Reform Programme	Date agreed for launch – Plan with Communications and national working group, Traveller organisations and Traveller Youth Advisory Group
2	To address issues and barriers faced by Travellers in accessing Tusla and Tusla funded services through regional consultations with Travellers and Traveller organisations 1. Develop, promote and implement a set of principles to shape and govern the relationship between Tusla and Tusla funded staff and members of the Traveller community, ensuring an engagement that is culturally appropriate and anti-racist. The values statement from the Values Lab consultation could be a starting point 2. Create and promote safe and accessible systems and processes that allow Traveller service users and Traveller organisations to bring forward complaints and issues 3. Provide supports and develop initiatives for Travellers and Traveller organisations to enable their understanding of Tusla and Tusla-funded services and how these should function, correct any misinformation, and update on developments in these services. 4. Ensure spaces considered safe by Travellers are used by Tusla and Tusla-funded staff for their meetings with Travellers, and that Travellers are informed for, and have access to support in, these meetings.	National Office Director of Services and Integration Quality and Regulation Directorate	a) Tusla areas continue to work in collaboration with Traveller organisations and services to promote awareness, access and participation in Tusla services. Ring fenced funding provided in 2025 for roundtable discussions. b) A Process Evaluation is commencing in Q2 2025 and will focus on local initiatives which commenced in Tusla areas from 2023 -2025 in collaboration with Traveller organisations and services working with the Traveller community supported by Dormant Accounts Funding c) The national working group and sub group supporting the Tusla Traveller Youth Advisory Group will support this work for the National Office for Services and Integration	National, Regional and local leads provide progress reports to the chair of the national working group. Process Evaluation in 2025 provides independent report with recommendations to support local initiatives. Tusla National Working Group and Sub Group members and Traveller organisations will promote communication of the Tusla National Action Plan within Tusla and the Traveller community.

2025	National Programme of Work to Promote Awareness, Access and Participation in Tusla and Tusla Funded Services			
	National Actions	Lead Directorate /Service	Action Plan	Implementation
	5. Ensure information provision and communication are accessible and culturally appropriate, and characterised by openness, honesty and not making promises that cannot be kept. 6. Enable and encourage a broad range of Tusla staff, in particular those working with the Traveller community, to invest time in and engage in face-to-face contact with Travellers and Traveller organisations, outside of crisis interventions, and in informal settings and Traveller-friendly spaces.			
3	Establish regional or area level steering groups to progress a national programme of work 1. Identify responsibility at a senior level in each region for sustaining positive relationships and building adequate and appropriate engagement with Traveller and Traveller organisations. 2. Engage with other agencies at local level to advocate for a response to the needs of Travellers	National Office Director of Services and Integration	Local area leads from Tusla and Traveller organisations will advise on the steering structures to support and sustain a national programme of work for progress reports to the national working group The Process Evaluation will make recommendations 1. What is the learning from the process evaluation to support the collaborative working relationships between Tusla and Traveller organisations/services for the ongoing implementation of the initiatives and desired outcomes 2. What type and method of data collection is recommended for all initiatives to have a consistent approach for tracking activities and outcomes for progress reports for Tusla and for DCDE for NTRIS II. 3. What are the recommendations for future evaluations and/or research.	Reporting structure established across the regions to input to national working group progress reports
4	Promote the values of Tusla in all work environments and ensure they are reflected in the priorities, procedures and practices pursued by Tusla and Tusla funded services and initiatives	All services	Tusla has committed in its Corporate Plan to continue embedding our values and associated behaviours to ensure that our values are incorporated into our everyday work Values Champions are supporting this work	Tusla national working group members and Traveller organisations will promote communication of the Tusla National Action Plan with the Tusla Values Champions
5	Develop a data strategy which includes a focus on gathering equality data and the inclusion of an ethnic identifier in Tusla's data collection systems and data sharing to improve policy making and service planning	Quality and Regulation Directorate National Office Director of Services and Integration	Tusla has an established Ethnic Data Collection Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Working Group to progress the plan for ethnic data collection in Tusla. It has completed a draft version of a Staff Practice guidance. This will inform the data collection and reporting phase.	To be advised by Senior Management and Public Sector Duty Steering Group for commencement date and plans for publication. Traveller organisations will participate in a stakeholder engagement on ethnic data collection in Tusla.

2026	National Programme of Work to Promote Awareness, Access and Participation in Tusla and Tusla Funded Services			
	National Actions	Lead Directorate /Service	Action Plan	Implementation
1	Sustain and, as possible, increase funding for Traveller-led initiatives and for the employment of Travellers through Traveller organisations, including as peer link workers to help bridge the gap between Tusla and Tusla-funded services and the Traveller community and to contribute to adequate supports for Traveller service-users.	National Office Director of Services and Integration	There are currently seventeen Traveller Family Link Workers in the community in Tusla funded services working with parents and children 0-6 years Traveller-led Peer Support Work Service for the Traveller Youth Advisory Group Dormant Accounts Funding for local initiatives finishes in 2025. Process Evaluation report recommendations to support local initiatives.	Process Evaluation Report learning event to be planned for Q1 2026 by national working group.
2	Create the conditions and opportunities for the employment of Travellers within Tusla	People and Change Directorate	Employment Support Scheme Social Work and Social Care for Traveller and Roma third level students Create opportunities for employment of Travellers in Tusla across Directorates including administration and corporate services Government Action 34 NTRIS II: With the support of Traveller and Roma organisations, promote the provision and uptake by Travellers and Roma of internships, work placement, work experience, apprenticeship and employment opportunities within the public sector.	Chief Social Workers Office ongoing People and Change Directorate to explore and consult with Traveller organisations
3	Ensure uniformity in the application of child protection policy across the country and that the Traveller community have knowledge and awareness of child protection policy Seek to ensure stability and continuity of case workers	National Office Director of Services and Integration	Integrated Reform Programme will include a plan for stakeholder engagement to include Traveller organisations	Assistant National Director for Practice Reform to liaise with the National Working Group and Traveller organisations
4	Target early intervention services on the Traveller community with adequate supports to encourage and enable Travellers to access these without fear, before situations develop into crises.	National Office Director of Services and Integration	Early intervention and family support services provide services in consultation with Traveller children and families in the community Tusla Actions 18 and 20 in NTRIS II	Regional Chief Officers and Network Managers

2026	National Programme of Work to Promote Awareness, Access and Participation in Tusla and Tusla Funded Services			
	National Actions	Lead Directorate /Service	Action Plan	Implementation
5	Provide culturally appropriate support for Traveller parents whose children are taken into care Further develop information and supports for Traveller families to engage in foster care. Develop effective and creative approaches for Traveller children in care to retain access to and engagement with their culture and identity, and to retain links with their parents and with their community	National Office Director of Services and Integration	Tusla Action 20 NTRIS II Appropriate provision of information to empower Traveller and Roma families about available parenting resources and supports Tusla Action 19 in NTRIS II. Encourage and support Traveller and Roma families to become foster carers and enhance the capacity to provide culturally appropriate placements for Traveller and Roma Children. Training modules are in development for Foster carers, Residential Staff and Aftercare Staff	National Leads for Parenting Support, Foster Care, Aftercare, Children's Residential Services and Assistant National Director for Alternative Care
6	Provide mandatory Traveller cultural awareness training delivered with the involvement of Traveller organisations	People and Change Directorate	a) Tusla provides Diversity in Modern Ireland training for staff, which includes a focus on the Traveller Community, developed in collaboration with Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre b) Traveller led Traveller cultural awareness training is being offered to all the Traveller Family Link Workers steering groups and is included in many of the Dormant Accounts Funded local initiatives c) DCDE Action 2 NTRIS II is to agree with Traveller and Roma organisations an agreed standard for cultural awareness training in respect of both communities	People and Change
7	Implement the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty 1. Undertake a rolling review of organisational policies and systems to identify and remove institutional barriers including discrimination and racism as experienced by Travellers, and failures to take account of cultural diversity 2. Capture, share and institutionalise innovation and good practice	Quality and Regulation Directorate	Tusla National Policy Oversight Committee and Tusla actions in the National Action Plan Against Racism	Director of Quality and Regulation
8	Through TESS, provide adequate and appropriate supports for Traveller children where racism and identity-based bullying emerges as a factor in school attendance and/or expulsions	National Office Director of Services and Integration	TESS actions in the Traveller and Roma Education Strategy	Director Tusla Education Support Service

Notes

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Leanaí agus an Teaghlach
Child and Family Agency

