Travellers Enterprise & Employment Programme

BRIEFING SHEET | ETHNIC DATA COLLECTION - SEPT 2021

Information on ethnicity is necessary to develop knowledge on discrimination, establish objectives, monitor progress towards equality, evaluate the effectiveness of policy initiatives and to develop initiatives that deliver better outcomes to minority ethnic groups…..in the areas of health, education, accommodation and employment. (Pavee Point, 2016).

Traveller organisations can use this data to hold State bodies to account, and to monitor access, participation and outcomes for Travellers. (Pavee Point, 2017)

A question on ethnicity (an 'ethnic identifier') in data collection systems allows this information to be gathered.

The need to gather data on ethnicity has long been advocated by Pavee Point. In 2006, the government-appointed **High Level Group on Traveller Issues** noted that '*improved data on Travellers is a key requirement for the future development of policy and monitoring of progress*.' The **National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy** recommended that '*data disaggregated by ethnicity and gender should be collected across all Government Departments and statutory agencies to monitor and evaluate the impact of existing policies and strategies and to support evidence-based policymaking*' (p.43).

While there are proposed legal requirements to collect and report data on gender equality (the gender pay gap),[1] there is no specific legal obligation to collect data on ethnicity. However, there are obligations that imply a need to collect such data. The **Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty**[2] cannot be fulfilled unless data on those experiencing inequality (including Travellers and minority ethnic groups) are gathered. In addition, commitments made in the **Programme for Government** (2020) to '*introduce targets to increase the proportion of public and civil servants from ethnic minority backgrounds*' (Reforming and Reimagining our Public Life p.121) will require data on ethnicity to monitor progress.

SSGT's **Traveller Employment and Enterprise Policy Programme** analysed the extent of ethnic data collection in Ireland (below). This reveals that ethnic data collection remains the exception rather than the rule.

Ethnic data collection – how widespread is its use?

SSGT's analysis reports that the government departments and state agencies below all use an ethnic identifier in at least some of their datasets.

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[1] For example, when enacted into legislation, the *Gender Pay Gap Information Bill 2019* will require employers to report pay differences between female and male employees, including any bonuses

[2] The **Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty** obliges all public bodies (and public funded bodies) to promote equality, prevent discrimination and protect the human rights of their employees, customers, service users and everyone affected by their policies and plans (Section 42 of the *Irish Human rights and Equality Commission Act, 2014*)

Central Statistics Office	The Census includes a specific question on ethnicity and cultural background since 2006. This question will change in Census in 2022 with new categories added.[3]
Dept of Education	The Primary Online Database (POD) Post-Primary Online Database (P-POD) are used to collate student data, and both have a question on ethnicity.
Dept of Further & Higher Education, Research, Innovation & Science	The Higher Education Authority (HEA) 'Equal Access Survey' is a student survey and includes a question on ethnicity. SOLAS[4] Further Education and Training level, the PLSS database is used to collate student data.
Dept of Rural & Community Development	The Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme (SICAP) managed by Pobal includes a question on ethnicity in its Integrated Reporting and Information System (IRIS).
Dept of Health/ HIQA / Health Research Board	The Health Research Board's National Drug Treatment Reporting System and the National Psychiatric In-patient Reporting System both use an ethnic identifier based on the census question. Research by University of Limerick found that only 14% of HIQA datasets include ethnicity.[5]
Health Service Executive	The Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC) includes an ethnic identifier in some of its datasets, including those relating to COVID-19. The Rotunda Hospital and Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) use an ethnic identifier.
Department of Justice	Irish Prison Service and the Probation Service both use an ethnic identifier.
Cystic Fibrosis Registry of Ireland (CFRI)[6]	While not a state agency, the registry includes an ethnic identifier in its dataset.

What does the data reveal?

Some data on ethnicity allows us to compare the situation of different ethnicities (including Travellers) with the population as a whole. For example, Census 2016 reported that 80.1% of Travellers were unemployed, compared with 12.9% in the total population. 1 in 8 Travellers are unable to work due to a disability – almost three times the rate in the general population. 13.3% of Traveller females were educated to upper secondary or above compared with 69.1% of the entire population. Nearly 6 in 10 Traveller men (57.2%) were educated to, at most, Primary level. Only 167 Travellers in Ireland held a third level qualification in 2016. However, this also points to the need for ongoing data collection between censuses in order to gather updated information. For example, there is no ethnic identifier with the INTREO and Department of Social Protection datasets to reveal the current unemployment rate among Travellers.

The data allow us to consider disproportionate outcomes. Although only accounting for 0.7% of population in Ireland, Travellers account for an estimated 10% of the entire prison population and 15% of the female prison population (based on a census of Travellers in prison undertaken by the Irish Prison Service in November and December 2018).

The data on ethnicity can be under-reported. In spite of Travellers accounting for approximately 0.7% of the population (and also having a young age profile), they account for less than 0.1% of the school primary school population. This may relate to incomplete data in the primary level datasets. For example, registrations at

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[3] MacFarlane and Hannigan (2021). Other CSO surveys (Quarterly National Household Survey, SILC) do not include an ethnicity question.

[4] SOLAS is the State agency tasked with overseeing the Further Education and Training (FET) sector.

[5] MacFarlane, A and Hannigan, A (2021) *Op Cit*

[6] The CFRI collects and analyses cystic fibrosis data to facilitate research and provide accurate reports to monitor and improve treatments.

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primary level for the year 2016/2017 (latest data), reported a high proportion (29%) of pupils for whom there is either no data, or where consent to disclose ethnicity was not provided. This points to the need for awareness raising among minority ethnic groups about the rationale for collecting information on ethnicity, and how the data will be used.

Trends in reporting can be examined over time. For example, between 2006 and 2011, the population of Travellers as enumerated in the census increased by 32% (from 22,435 in 2006 to 29,573 in 2011). This was attributed to collaboration between Pavee Point and the CSO (in order to support training for staff and to promote disclosure and raise awareness among Travellers) rather than an increase in population.

Even where there is data on ethnicity, this is often not comparable nor comprehensive. For example, the information on second level school registrations for particular courses (e.g. LCVP and LCA) are expressed in absolute figures only, and is not readily compared with total registrations for those courses. Similarly, while the SOLAS data captures information on Travellers' participation in further education and training (FET), these are also published as absolute figures, and not as percentages of (comparable with) the general population of FET participants. When an analysis of the statistics for Travellers and the general population of FET participants is carried out (through analysis of other published reports by SOLAS), we see an inverse relationship between Travellers and the general population in terms of the accreditation level of courses enrolled in. Over three quarters Traveller learners (76%) were enrolled in programmes with a maximum accreditation at NFQ Level 4, compared with 36% for the general population of learners. At the higher end of accreditation, 13% of the general population of learners were enrolled in FET courses accredited to 'advanced or higher certificate level', whereas the corresponding figure for Travellers is 2%.

The Equal Access Survey is an annual survey of first year full-time and part-time undergraduate new entrants to Higher Education Authority (HEA)-funded colleges. Data for 2017/2018 reports that 61 Travellers were first year students surveyed (0.2% of total). However, ethnicity data is not disaggregated for other datasets, such as course participation and surveys on outcomes for graduates.

Data on ethnicity allows us to ensure responses and strategies are targeted to needs. During COVID-19, the use of an ethnic identifier by the Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC) reported the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on Travellers, which enabled targeted responses (including priority access to vaccines for vulnerable groups including Travellers).

Data inform us about whether progress on targets takes place or not. According to the 2020 SICAP report, Travellers account for a low proportion of individuals on the SICAP caseload, and since 2018, the proportion has remained constant at 2% of the total caseload (Pobal, 2021).

Introducing an ethnic identifier

Introducing an ethnic identifier needs to be carefully undertaken, to ensure that individuals are confident about disclosing their identity and ethnicity and that the data generated is robust.

It is well established that individuals may feel uncomfortable in answering questions on ethnicity and staff in agencies may feel uncomfortable asking questions about ethnicity, which can lead to missing data, the question not being asked, or ethnicity being 'ascribed' on the basis of appearances or staff assumptions. As a result, data may not be reliable, and usually result in an under-reporting of ethnicity. (Pavee Point, 2012; Rooney and Canavan, 2019).

According to Pavee Point, it is important to ensure that there is an understanding among staff about the purpose and methods for collecting and analysing ethnic equality data (Pavee Point, 2017). It has worked in partnership with most of the above bodies to ensure that those collecting the data have the necessary skills and confidence to monitor and evaluate ethnic equality data.

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Data should be available and reported in a timely and accessible manner. Fahey et al (2019) maintains that information should be accessible and that the detailed disaggregated data (or microdata) is not always available or free of charge.

Put simply, unless policymakers have information on the extent and causes of inequalities, they will not be able to develop effective interventions and policies and to monitor progress.
Pavee Point (2016)

Good practice and key considerations when introducing an ethnic identifier[7]	
Principle	**Examples**
The use of a universal question	A **universal 'ethnic identifier' question** should be asked of all individuals. This universal question should be comparable with national data sets (e.g. census data).
Identification should be voluntary and self-identified	Individuals must voluntarily self-identify their ethnic identity, and it should not be ascribed to them by others.
A targeted and public campaign informing people why such data is collected	Trust needs to be developed. There may be reluctance to disclose their ethnicity if it is associated with harm[8] (e.g. ethnic identifiers may be associated with ethnic profiling[9]). Clear information about why the question is being asked, and targeted publicity should account for the needs of groups, including literacy, language, etc.
Data collectors are provided with ongoing training and support	Training and support should be provided to those asking the question so that they are skilled and confident in doing so, such as the training delivered by Pavee Point. The HSE has produced an e-learning module for staff in partnership with Pavee Point.
Data should be collected according to data protection legislation.	No individual should be identifiable from data; it should only be used for specific and justifiable purposes (and these reasons should be clearly explained); it should be obtained and processed fairly (and with the consent of the individual).
Safeguards are in place to protect privacy	In addition to safeguarding anonymity, alternatives to asking questions could be considered: for example, in the UK, individuals can complete 'sensitivity cards' which include a unique identifier code (but no name) to enable the information to be inputted anonymously if the individual is not comfortable answering the question in a face-to-face context.
Data should be published	Publication of data should be timely, and accessible. Data can be compared with all groups to establish relative or disproportionate outcomes for different groups.

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[7] This is adapted from a report on introducing ethnic identifiers commissioned by SSGT's *Travellers in Prison Initiative* (Lalor, 2017), available here.

[8] For example, in the UK some employers were reluctant to introduce an ethnic identifier as they believed that employees had suspicions about how the information would be used, although it was noted that some organisations had had more success through proactive encouragement and persistence. In addition, age was a factor in disclosing ethnicity, with younger people more likely to disclose.

[9] Ethnic profiling is the use of racial, ethnic, national, or religious characteristics as a way of singling out people for identity or security checks.

References and further reading

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