

Policy Report based on the PolRom Project:

“Identifying evidence-based methods to effectively combat discrimination of the Roma in the changing political climate of Europe”

The Case of Irish Travellers in the Republic of Ireland 2019–2021

Anca Minescu, Ashley O'Connor, Anna Kende, Barbara Lášticová & Nóra Anna Lantos

<https://polrom.eu/>

Research

We present policy recommendations concerning the Irish Traveller community in Ireland, based on research conducted between 2019–2021. Three sets of data were analyzed:

- (1) A national representative **survey** with 1000 participants (Figure 1)
- (2) A dataset of **media** discourses from 119 articles published in 2018 taken from the 3 popular publications: The Irish Independent, The Irish Times, The Journal.ie
- (3) Evaluations of **interventions and focus group** discussions with local NGOs tackling anti-Traveller prejudice and discrimination in Ireland (Figure 2)

Figure 1. National Representative Survey Data Breakdown - 2018					
N	Gender (men)	Age (M, SD)	Education	Settlement	Traveller Participants
1000	49%	45 (16) years	Primary+ VET% 10% Secondary: 27% Post-secondary: 25 University: 38%	Village 30% Small town 21% Suburban 21% City: 28%	0%

Figure 2. Clusters/Categories of Irish Interventions	
Category 1: Educational Interventions General Diversity Training	14
Category 2: Interactive, Experiential and Intergroup Interventions	3
Category 3: Public Showcasing Interventions	6
Total	23

Main Findings

Based on **representative surveys** in five countries (Hungary, Slovakia, Romania, France, Ireland), we found that Antigypsyism has 3 dimensions (a) **the endorsement of negative stereotypes** about the Roma/Irish Travellers, (b) the idea that Roma and Irish Traveller people receive **undeserved benefits**, reflecting a denial of both prejudice and structural discrimination, and (c) **the absence of cultural recognition** of the Roma or Irish Travellers as distinct ethnic groups. In this report, Antigypsyism refers to anti-Traveller attitudes.

- Antigypsyism predicted acceptance of political discourses despite and in addition to expected influences of demographic and ideological factors. Positive political discourses supporting Irish Travellers was more acceptable to those who were low on Antigypsyism, and more importantly, it motivated participants to engage in prosocial behaviour. Such intentions to engage in prosocial behaviours included helping, volunteerism and participation in political action for the Irish Traveller community.
- A similar pattern for hostile political discourse was identified, namely: the more people endorse negative discourses, the more prejudiced they already are on Antigypsyism (anti-Traveller prejudice), and this is further connected to intentions to engage in actions that are hostile toward Irish Travellers.
- *The conclusion is that political discourses around Irish Travellers are not only connected and potentially reinforcing people's positive or negative attitudes towards the community, but also influence people's behaviours. There is a social responsibility of politicians to be mindful of their potential negative effect on the public opinion and actions for or against the Irish Travellers in Ireland.*

The analyses of **media discourses** involving political figures who commented or discussed issues related to the Irish Travellers in Irish media (2018), as well as in the broader European project (politicians discussing Roma matters), identified **3 main types of political discourses**:

- **Open hostility** towards the Irish Travellers or Roma legitimizing a rhetoric of control, discipline and intervention by public authorities.
- **An ambivalent form of discourse** contrasting the situation of Irish Travellers or Roma minorities with the situation of immigrants and refugees.
- **A “benevolent” Antigypsyism discourse** communicating a positive and helpful attitude but reinforcing the subordinate position of Irish Travellers and Roma in European societies.

Overall, in Ireland, the media coverage of Irish Traveller matters did not address the structural causes for the respective issues. Even the positive political discourse usually took the form of ‘lip-service’ and did not necessarily promote inclusion or challenged the structural disadvantage that affects Irish Travellers. For journalists, we recommend a more in-depth and comprehensive coverage of the historical, economic or political, systemic discrimination practices that position the Irish Traveller community in the wider context.

The **focus groups and analysis of the existing 23 interventions** that fight prejudice and discrimination against Irish Travellers in Ireland, revealed that **Antigypsyism is an obstacle to achieving sustainable and lasting change** in relations between Irish Travellers and the majority population. Anti-Traveller prejudice sustains identity and community polarization, affects engagement (lack of trust), and undermines solidarity.

Other **structural barriers** that prevent social inclusion were: lack of intercultural competence among support workers, public and funding bodies, short-term projects without a community development approach, high staff turnover and lack of representation of Irish Travellers in decision-making bodies as well as in implementation of interventions.

A toolkit was developed with guidelines on how to use psychological knowledge to design and assess anti-discrimination interventions applied in the context of the Roma or Irish Travellers in Europe: <https://polrom.eu/toolkit/>. Best practice examples from Ireland, such as The Yellow Flag Program and the Traveller Pride Week and Events are analyzed in the toolkit.

We conclude that effective interventions should be built on scientific evidence, should be adapted to the local context and the specific Roma-Irish Traveller-settled population relationships, and should be designed and funded to be sustainable (build capacity), and subject to impact assessment.

Recommendations

• TO PROMOTE EQUALITY:

Fight discrimination as a manifestation of Antigypsyism: Prejudice has cognitive, emotional, and behavioural components. Focusing on increasing empathy for Irish Travellers among the majority population and reducing threat perceptions are the most effective tools to fight Anti-Traveller prejudice.

Combat hate speech and hate crime as manifestations of Antigypsyism: It is necessary to denounce both hostile and benevolent forms of Antigypsyism. Prejudice denial, stigmatization and victim-blaming of Irish Traveller people are conveyed in speech, discourses and discriminatory actions. Giving a voice to Irish Traveller people in formulating the discourse concerning Irish Traveller issues is vital.

Dismantle and prevent structural discrimination experienced by Irish Travellers and fight all types of segregation: Stakeholders need to support systematic interventions that directly address structural problems (e.g., intercultural competence training; representation on decision making bodies). Institutions should support interventions that target discrimination and prejudice against Irish Travellers from multiple perspectives: at personal, group, organization and country-wide levels.

• TO PROMOTE INCLUSION:

Promote positive narratives and increase representation of Irish Travellers as role models.

Increase media presence of actions, initiatives and events that communicate **cultural recognition and Irish Traveller autonomy and empowerment**.

Design and assess interventions with positive demonstrated impact.

• TO INCREASE PARTICIPATION:

Create platforms that promote solidarity with Irish Travellers, and where we can **build trust and communication channels** between the settled Irish, all other ethnic minorities and Irish Travellers in Ireland.

Anca Minescu
Department of Psychology
University of Limerick
Anca.Minescu@ul.ie

Ashley O'Connor
Department of Psychology
University of Limerick
Ashley.OConnor@ul.ie

Grant. No. 808062 — PolRom — REC-AG-2017/REC-RDIS-DISC-AG-2017) EU Justice Programme of the European Union (2014-2020)