



Waterford Area Partnership Social Inclusion & Community Activation Programme

Evaluation of the Atelier Roma Project's Covid-19 Outreach Project March 2020 – July 2021

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Acronyms

CERD	(United Nations) Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination
CLG	Company Limited by Guarantee
ETB	Education & Training Board
HAP	Housing Assistance Payments
HSE	Health Service Executive
IHH	Intercultural Health Hub
IHREC	Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act, 2014
NTRIS	Department of Justice & Equality, National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy 2017- 2021
PPS	Personal Public Service
SECH	South-East Community Healthcare*
SI	Social Inclusion
SICAP	Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme
TSS	Tenancy Support and Settlement service
WSTCYS	Waterford & South Tipperary Community Youth Service

*HSE Social Inclusion South-East Community Healthcare covers five counties of Carlow, Kilkenny, South Tipperary, Waterford and Wexford.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Waterford Area Partnership is delighted to have carried out this evaluation to capture the learning and outcomes achieved by U-Casadh Atelier Roma Project during the Covid-19 pandemic. This unprecedented pandemic affected all of us as we struggled to come to terms with health guidelines, social isolation and limitations on our day-to-day lives. Roma families experienced significant additional challenges and this evaluation allowed us to explore the impact of Atelier Roma Project's Covid-19 outreach work which, through weekly visits, provision of food parcels, advocacy and health information, developed a new delivery model. When the programme commenced in March 2020 there were 21 families engaged with Atelier Roma Project; however by July 2021 this had increased to 67 families including Czech and Slovak families who had not previously engaged with U-Casadh's Atelier Roma Project.

The evaluation report captures the in-depth approach, engagement and support the Atelier Roma Project provided to Roma families in order to limit the effects of Covid-19 during the period March 2020 to June 2021. The work and this report would not have been possible without the willing cooperation of a number of individuals and organisations namely:

-  Jim Bruton, Atelier Roma Project Training Co-ordinator
-  Peter Cooke, Atelier Roma Project Programme Administrator
-  Tereza Skopova, Roma Health Advocate with Waterford & South Tipperary Community Youth Service Intercultural Health Hub and the Atelier Roma Project
-  Suzanne Nolan, HSE Regional Roma Health Lead, HSE Social Inclusion South-East Community Healthcare
-  U-Casadh Board and staff.

A special thanks is due to all the Roma people who participated in the focus groups and interviews and who willingly shared their experience and insights into the way forward for the Roma Community in Waterford in the future. This report would not be as rich in its content without their participation.

Thanks is also given for the engagement of staff from a wide range of organisations, especially Waterford and South Tipperary Community Youth Services Intercultural Health Hub, which provide services for the Roma Community and whose staff took part in interviews or completed the electronic survey.

To Geraldine Scullion, equality and human rights consultant, a very special thanks in conducting this evaluation and producing this report. Geraldine's research was based on her knowledge and experience of working with Roma communities, and this strengthened the methodology and report content.

Liam Quinn

CEO

Waterford Area Partnership

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

When the Covid-19 pandemic emerged in March 2020 U-Casadh's Atelier Roma Project adapted its Ferrybank-based Atelier men's training programme to respond to the basic needs of Roma families in Waterford City and County. The families were severely impacted by the requirement to stay at home, their inability to work or beg and, for many without any welfare support, feed their families or take preventative action to stop the spread of the virus.

Aware of their vulnerability and their lack of knowledge about the risks to their health, the Atelier Roma Project staff team immediately began devising a Covid-19 response to ensure that the survival, health and wellbeing of the Roma families connected with Atelier was protected. In consultation with the HSE Regional Roma Health Lead, the team devised a completely new work programme as their response to the crisis. With her support, and "*thinking on their feet*" the Atelier training programme was reconfigured as a Covid-19 outreach project.

Working in a rapidly changing environment, the team delivered health information and advice on the families' doorsteps every Thursday, using food parcels from Waterford Foodbank as a platform to inform them of the health crisis and to give them health information as well as connecting them with additional resources. This was critical in ensuring the families were aware of the Covid-19 guidelines as many do not speak English and have literacy difficulties. This health outreach work made a significant contribution to the fact that there were no deaths and no widespread outbreak of Covid-19 among the Roma community in Waterford.

Given that the outreach project was devised as an urgent response to a frightening and changing situation, the work was largely unplanned and it evolved to meet needs the Atelier Roma Project team was aware of; all those known to the team who were in need of food, lifesaving health information and advocacy support were given it.

The team's approach was to engage the families and consult with them on their needs; it applied the HSE's service user involvement and feedback criteria as the project evolved and grew. Their advocacy assisted the community to know more about their rights and, as far as possible, empower them to claim those rights.

As the weeks progressed, the participants grew in numbers and nationalities and many vulnerable families were identified and linked with agencies which could support them. The Atelier Roma Project team made contact with previously unidentified Roma families living in the city; the team started the outreach project with 16 Romanian men from 21 families; by July 2021 the team was engaging with 67 families, including new Czech and Slovak Roma families.

This report was instigated by Waterford Area Partnership, Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) to record the delivery model created by the Atelier Roma Project Covid-19 outreach project and to capture the learning gained during the period March 2020 to June 2021 in order to inform future planning and actions for the Roma Community in Waterford. SICAP'S Invitation to Tender for the *Community Roma Evaluation/Research* outlining the research and evaluation objectives is included at Appendix A.

The report's findings were obtained by means of an electronic survey of connected organisations and in-depth interviews with staff, project participants, funders and organisations involved in the delivery of services to the Roma Community. Two focus groups with Roma women and men in Waterford provided a valuable opportunity to hear the views of the project participants.¹

The Atelier Roma Project team's advocacy service to the Roma Community was hugely important in overcoming some of the deprivation it faced; the team dealt with problems created by poverty and sub-standard housing conditions; outcomes ranged from multiple successful applications for welfare support, school registrations to the permanent rehousing of four Waterford families.

The outreach project's engagement with the Roma Community was made possible by the consistent, weekly contact the team made with the families which made them feel it had not been abandoned when the city and the country was in lockdown. The team's approach was to work in partnership with the Roma; its approach was culturally sensitive and informed by knowledge of, and respect for, Roma values, fears, traditions, customs and history. The team consulted with the families on the service it was providing and adapted it to meet their needs. The team strengthened its working with other agencies in Waterford and the Roma families in turn engaged with a wider network of agencies which were able to support them.

The team took steps to learn about aspects of the history and culture of the Roma Community and its experience of centuries of exclusion and human rights abuses, including exploitation and abuse from health professionals. This knowledge helped it understand, and take steps to overcome, the reluctance of many individuals to engage with service providers or even publicly identify themselves as Roma.

The report makes recommendations on local actions which U-Casadh and the Waterford agencies can take to continue advocacy services to address poverty, improve job-related training and employment opportunities, and develop English language skills through Roma-specific English tuition. Drawing on the outreach project's developing contact with Roma women, it recommends that its Women's Employment Programme is supported as a valuable asset for future community development among the Roma Community.

A growing relationship with younger members of the Roma Community provides an opportunity to engage them in training for employment. To develop such opportunities, basic living conditions must be improved before the cycle of poverty and exclusion can be overcome. The over-reliance on sub-standard, unregulated private tenancies should be addressed; the support of the Tenancy Support and Settlement service could assist Roma tenants to maintain their tenancies. Improved cultural competency training for health workers as well as a fresh focus on addressing mental health and the stigmas regarding mental health and disability within the community is required.

There is a need to address anti-Roma racism and discrimination within Waterford; project participants gave examples of racism they had experienced in the provision of health and retail services, as well as in employment and on the streets. Anti-racist work is needed among the Irish community as it is holding back the integration of the Roma Community. One way forward is to implement the Waterford Migrant Integration Strategy and the Department of Justice and Equality's commitments to create opportunities to promote positive representations of Roma people and celebrate Roma art, culture and traditions. Training for service-delivery organisations

¹ The research for this report was conducted between December 2021 and March 2022.

on Roma culture and traditions and on the implementation of the Section 42 Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act's public sector equality and human rights duty, will also be important.

A strategic approach to addressing the issues highlighted in this report by the Atelier Roma Project, Waterford Area Partnership and all the Waterford agencies is required. Many more Roma live in Waterford than was known when the Atelier Covid-19 outreach project began. More information is needed on the community in order to effectively target resources and build on the opportunities created by the outreach work to support the new families and engage them with services.

Service providers should be aware that the Roma Community in Waterford is not an homogenous group. There are Romanian, Slovak and Czech Roma living in Waterford (and possibly other nationalities) who have different cultural traditions and speak different languages. While many of the older generation speak the Roma language – Romani – not all of the younger generation do so. There are also differences between the national groups in relation to levels of poverty, lifestyle, employment and education. These differences require thought to be given to how best to engage the different groups, involve them in civic society and ensure the effective delivery of services to them. The Atelier Roma Project team has developed strong relationships and overcome barriers of mistrust among the community and this vital connection is of fundamental importance in developing services for them in the future.

The Roma Community in Waterford is a small community of around 350+ people. Effectively tailoring services to meet its particular needs does not require a big input of financial and other resources. This report provides an example of how a service to the community was adapted during the worst of the Covid-19 crisis in order to save lives and promote health. Through the commitment of the small number of staff concerned, the Atelier Covid-19 outreach project has had a significant impact on the lives of the Roma Community and on its engagement with service providers in Waterford.

The Atelier Roma Project team created a model of delivery from which other service providers can learn. The outreach project succeeded in delivering a critical health service to a particularly marginalised group in Waterford City and County during a national emergency. It succeeded in bringing separate Roma families together, empowering them and helping them build a sense of community. Critical to the model was the team's proactive approach; it sought out the families in need, consulted with them and had the flexibility to improvise and adapt its service in response. The team's inclusive approach enabled the Roma families to overcome their mistrust and build their confidence to engage with it, and subsequently, with other service providers.

This model has great potential; it can succeed also with other agencies and act as a springboard to bring more inclusive services to the Roma Community and other similarly marginalised communities in the future. It also provides valuable insights as to how the strategic actions in the Waterford Migrant Integration Strategy can be developed to promote the integration of the Roma Community in Waterford.

The detailed recommendations in this report aim to support the development of opportunities which the Roma Community requires to participate as full and equal members of society. Implementing the recommendations will require the will and the confidence of Waterford Area Partnership and other agencies to move beyond myths and stereotypes and promote action to

overcome the deprivation and exclusion the Roma Community faces and allow it to celebrate the diversity of experience, the rich history, and the wealth of skills and resources the Community brings to Waterford City and County.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This report records an unprecedented period in the history of local communities in Waterford when Covid-19 emerged as a global pandemic. Covid-19 has had a devastating impact on the quality of life, health and mortality of people in Ireland.²

The emergency measures taken by the government to halt the spread of the virus resulted in the disruption of essential services which impacted on the daily lives of everyone but particularly affected vulnerable and marginalised groups such as the Roma Community in Waterford. Among community responses to Covid-19 which made a significantly positive impact in supporting vulnerable communities, was the Atelier Roma Project's Covid-19 outreach project with the Waterford Roma Community.

Mainly living in substandard and overcrowded houses, the Roma Community faced an increased risk of contracting Covid-19, exacerbated by poor health, poverty, limited or no social welfare, lack of English and literacy skills, unemployment and the absence of financial support available to workers in the formal labour market (such as the government's Covid-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment which was payable to employees and self-employed people who lost all their employment due to the pandemic).³

When the Covid-19 pandemic emerged in March 2020, the Atelier Roma Project took immediate steps to adapt its employment training work with the Roma men and start an outreach project. Up to that point, U-Casadh (based on the border of Kilkenny and Waterford) had been delivering the Roma Training, Development and Health Literacy Programme (the Atelier Roma Project) at its Ferrybank premises for Roma men from across the South-East since 2016.

"Covid-19 put a cannon ball through the last two years. The restrictions are keeping progress back" (Intercultural Health Hub worker)

The outreach project aimed to support the Roma families to understand the health risks created by the pandemic and government rules on minimising the spread of infection. Supported by Waterford Area Partnership's Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP), the Atelier Roma Project team delivered vital health information, food and care parcels to Roma families in Waterford City and County. This outreach work was supported by additional funding and led to a stronger collaboration between the agencies in Waterford working to support the Roma Community. It also developed contacts and valuable relationships with a much larger group of Roma families and linked them with other services.

This report was instigated by SICAP to capture the outcomes of the outreach project and the engagement of the Roma Community – which is a key target group for SICAP. The programme decided to record the work of the outreach project in order to utilise and build on these links and learn from its experience of delivering the outreach support service to the Roma families and

²Irish government figures confirm that from January 2020 to June 29, 2022 there have been 1,600,614 Covid-19 confirmed cases; total lives lost (including probable and possible Covid-19 related deaths) was 7,499. See <https://covid19ireland-geohive.hub.arcgis.com/>

³ Pavee Point briefing: Covid-19-support for the Roma Community, April 8, 2020

inform its future planning. SICAP commissioned this evaluation of the outreach project to record its approach and the views of the project participants and staff, and to identify key needs for the Roma Community.⁴

⁴ A copy of the invitation to tender is attached at Appendix A.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

It was agreed that priority would be given to enabling the views of the Roma Community to inform outcomes and actions; a further principle of the research was that its recommendations would be based on equality and human rights approaches with public sector duty responsibilities outlined. A plan for the evaluation/research report was put in place in collaboration with Catherine Power (Waterford Area Partnership's SICAP Community Development Coordinator), Jim Bruton (Atelier Roma Project Training Co-ordinator) and Peter Cooke (Atelier Roma Project Programme Administrator).

The main tasks for the evaluation/research were agreed as follows:

1. To gather and collate data, information and learning on local actions and services available to the Roma Community in Waterford City and County from March 2020 to July 2021 through interviews with Atelier Roma Project staff, and from their work reports, minutes of relevant meetings (Regional Intercultural Health Steering Group, Waterford Roma Interagency Group etc.), emails, and other records and documentation
2. To conduct online and face-to-face interviews with key agencies, projects and services which have a role and remit in supporting the Roma Community
3. To conduct interviews and focus groups (one with women, one with men) with members of the Roma Community
4. To research key strategies relevant to the provision of support for the Roma Community.

2.1 Desk research:

Strategies and policy documents reviewed included:

- Department for Rural and Community Development's [Statement of Strategy 2021-2023](#) (April 2021)
- Department for Rural and Community Development's [Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities A five-year strategy to support the community and voluntary sector in Ireland 2019-2024](#)
- Department of Justice and Equality's [Migrant Integration Strategy 2017](#)
- Department of Justice and Equality's [National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy 2017 - 2021](#) (NTRIS)
- [Waterford Local and Community Development Committee Migrant Integration Strategy, 2021 – 2024](#)
- UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination's concluding observations on the combined fifth to ninth reports of Ireland, 2019⁵
- Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission: Covid-19 and the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty
- Pavee Point's [National Roma Needs Assessment](#) 2018
- EU Fundamental Rights Agency [Roma and Travellers in six countries – Roma and Travellers Survey 2020](#), September 2020

⁵ CERD/C/IRL/CO/5-9; Adopted by the Committee at its 100th session, November 25 – December 13, 2019

A list of other documentation reviewed is included in Appendix B.

2.2 Survey

An electronic QuestionPro survey comprising 15 questions (listed at Appendix C) was designed and piloted in collaboration with Waterford Area Partnership's SICAP staff. The survey was sent on January 17, 2022 to nine organisations which had provided support to the Roma Community in Waterford City & County from March 2020 to July 2021 through their links with the Atelier Roma Project's Covid-19 outreach project. The aim was to explore the organisations' role in supporting the Roma Community and their involvement with the outreach project. It also aimed to explore the organisations' awareness of human rights and equality duties under Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014 and to identify the training or information required to support fulfilment of those duties in relation to the Roma Community in Waterford. Two reminders were sent to the organisations to encourage responses. (A list of the survey respondents is included in Appendix D.)

2.3 Interviews

Fifteen in-depth one-to-one interviews were conducted between December 2021 and March 2022 with key individuals responsible for delivering, managing, administering and funding the Atelier's Covid-19 outreach project in order to record the work done in Waterford City & County between March 2020 – July 2021.

These in-depth one-to-one interviews enabled a record to be made of what happened during the outreach work; those interviewed were Jim Bruton, (Atelier Roma Project Training Co-ordinator), Peter Cooke (Atelier Roma Project Programme Administrator), Suzanne Nolan (HSE Regional Roma Health Lead), and Catherine Power, U-Casadh board member and Waterford Area Partnership's SICAP Community Development Coordinator. Their work reports, emails, documents and recollections enabled the recording of the Atelier Covid-19 outreach response in March 2020 as described at chapter four of this report.

Three one-to-one (face-to-face, Zoom and telephone) interviews were conducted with three Roma workers/participants in the project and included Tereza Skopova (Roma health advocate employed partly at the Intercultural Health Hub (IHH) and 1 day per week by Atelier), Rozalia Adam and Veta Dani (previously employed at U-Casadh).

Six structured interviews were conducted on Zoom between January and March 2022 with eight staff members from U-Casadh and four other organisations which had worked with the Atelier Covid-19 outreach project to learn more about the links they had built, how services to the Roma community could be strengthened in the future, and to elicit recommendations to inform future planning. The individuals interviewed and the questions they responded to are listed at Appendix E.

2.4 Focus groups

Two focus groups with members of the Roma Community took place in St Olaf's Church, Waterford on February 1, 2022. The first was with a group composed of five Czech/Slovak and six Romanian women; the second discussion took place separately with a group of 14 Romanian men.

The time and place of the group discussions coincided with the regular Atelier Roma Project's Women's Employment Programme meeting.

The Atelier Roma Project team invited a number of the outreach project participants as well as some key female and male community leaders to take part in the focus groups. The questions for discussion were sent in advance and the team informed the potential participants of the purpose of the meeting and the questions which would be discussed. A copy of the questions is included at Appendix F.

The team advised against employing an official interpreter and it was agreed that interpretation would be provided by a number of the attendees. The IHH Czech Roma health advocate participated and she provided interpretation for the Czech women; the Romanian group included several women with excellent English and the remainder had sufficient English to enable them to participate.

Communication with the men was less straightforward as the nominated interpreters attending were called away during the discussion; there were two men who had excellent English and who provided assistance.

3.0 BACKGROUND TO THE ATELIER COVID-19 OUTREACH PROJECT

3.1 Background to Atelier Roma Project

Atelier (Romanian for ‘workshop’) is a Roma Men’s Training, Development and Health Literacy Programme which was developed by U-Casadh, a Company Limited by Guarantee and a registered charity,⁶ in 2016 in partnership with the HSE Social Inclusion Community Healthcare Organisation Area 5 (CHO5)⁷, the Integration Support Unit,⁸ Waterford, the Ferns Diocesan Youth Service⁹, the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration & Youth, Kilkenny, Carlow ETB, the Department of Social Protection as well as a number of local development companies.

U-Casadh’s main aim is to support those at risk of offending or who are ex-prisoners through rehabilitation, personal development, training, education and progression to employment. The Atelier Roma Project is one of a number of projects delivered by U-Casadh and was established to support Roma men and women.

In 2016 the Atelier Roma Project engaged unemployed Roma men from Waterford, Wexford, Kilkenny and South Tipperary in a training programme to develop their skills, including English language, awareness of health issues, and vocational skills to support them in the first steps of preparing for work. The programme was delivered one day a week in U-Casadh’s Ferrybank premises and included the development of practical construction skills, woodwork, engineering, Safe Pass, health and safety at work, plus a health awareness and literacy programme. The staff advocated with the relevant agencies on behalf of the participants in order to resolve housing, social welfare and other problems which they were facing and which hindered their regular participation; if deemed in need of same, each of the men received a food voucher/parcel each week.

Funding for the programme is provided by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Core funder); HSE Social Inclusion Southeast Community Healthcare; Kilkenny Carlow ETB, and Waterford Area Partnership’s SICAP Employment Services. An Interagency Steering Committee, including Roma participant representatives, supports the Atelier programme with planning, delivery and evaluation.

In 2019, responding to needs identified by women in the Roma community, funding for a Roma Women’s Employment programme was obtained from the Department of Justice; the programme was to be launched in 2020 but it was delayed due to the Covid-19 pandemic.¹⁰

⁶ U-Casadh is a social inclusion project and registered charity based on the border of Waterford and Kilkenny. Its mission is to be a catalyst for change in attitudes to crime, social exclusion, rehabilitation and justice.

⁷ The HSE Social Inclusion Unit in the Southeast covers 5 counties: Carlow, Kilkenny, Waterford, Wexford and South Tipperary (Community Health Organisation Area 5). Its overarching aim is to improve health outcomes in the Southeast for minority and vulnerable communities.

⁸ The ISU was a humanitarian NGO based in Waterford City; it had ceased operation at the time of research for this report.

⁹ FDYS is a countywide youth organisation that works with young people and adults in County Wexford to support them in realising their full potential and to encourage them to take control over their own lives.

¹⁰ The Roma Women’s Employment programme commenced on October 5, 2021 with 10 to 11 women from Romania, Czech Republic and Slovakia attending on a Tuesday morning weekly; it continued until December 2021 when it was suspended due to a Covid-19 outbreak. The programme recommenced on January 31, 2022. By July 2022, 17 women were attending regularly, taking part in sewing and flower arranging classes.

The Atelier programme is delivered by Jim Bruton (employed two days per week managing the men and women’s Roma programmes, plus 1 day per week on Atelier tutoring) and Peter Cooke, (employed three days per week on the Roma project, and one day on U-Casadh) (the Atelier Roma Project team). In addition, the work is supported by Tess Whelan, Financial Controller, Jim Dempsey, Community Education tutor, plus other tutors as required. Brefini Dunphy and Jean Barden also provide support in their roles as Community Employment Scheme supervisors at U-Casadh.

Since its establishment, and up to March 2020, the Atelier Roma Project has provided training opportunities for approximately 50 men. About 19 men found employment and five engaged in the Community Employment scheme. From the outset, the Atelier Roma Project team demonstrated a human rights-based/community development approach, engaging the Roma participants with dignity and respect. In line with the values of the *HSE: Care, Compassion, Trust and Learning* and the *National Standards for Safer Better Healthcare*¹¹ as well as the 10 Common Basic Principles of Roma Inclusion, the men were encouraged to articulate their needs and influence the design and delivery of the programme in order to meet those needs.¹²

The Atelier programme was delivered as normal until March 12, 2020 when U-Casadh closed due to the outbreak of Covid-19 in line with government advice. At that date, Atelier had 27 men from 21 families on its register; approximately 16 men were attending the weekly Friday training programme at Ferrybank. The Atelier Roma Project team immediately set about re-configuring its work with the Roma men from a training programme into an outreach project.¹³

3.2 CONTEXT

3.2.1 The Roma Community in Waterford

Pavee Point identifies the Roma Community:

*“as one of the most marginalised and disadvantaged groups in Ireland, experiencing structural and systematic discrimination, active prejudice and racism. Roma in Ireland continue to experience poorer health outcomes, including higher rates of chronic health diseases, extreme poverty, poor housing and unemployment; and the lack of access to mainstream health services. This is further compounded by language barriers and lack of engagement with statutory agencies which is linked to experiences of discrimination, lack of trust in the State and fear of the State”.*¹⁴

As there is no official census or other data on how many Roma people live in Ireland, the number

¹¹ The values of the HSE are set out in the following: Care, Compassion, Trust and Learning (as set out in the Corporate Plan 2015–2017); The Second National Intercultural Health Strategy (2018-2023); The South East Community Healthcare (SECH) Intercultural Health Strategy (2019 – 2022); SECH Migrant Health Research 2019; SECH Healthy Ireland Implementation Plan (2019 – 2022), and the Health Information and Quality Authority National Standards for Safer Better Healthcare, Standard 1 – Person Centred care and Support (June 2012).

¹² For more information see the author’s [“Evaluation of the Atelier Roma Project Men’s Training, Diversion and Health Literacy Programme”](#) HSE Community Healthcare Organisation Area 5 Social Inclusion, September 2016

¹³ The Atelier programme’s U-Casadh workshops reopened in May 2021 and, based on individual training needs assessments conducted during the outreach, training on engineering, woodwork and construction skills recommenced. The numbers were small and the start to the programme was delayed as some attendees contracted Covid-19. As most of the participants are unvaccinated, the delivery of the programme presented many challenges. By July 2022, 10 Roma men were regularly attending the weekly training sessions.

¹⁴ Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre: *COVID-19 - Support for Roma Community* April 8, 2020

of Roma individuals living in Waterford is unclear. Published in 2021, the [Waterford Migrant Integration Strategy, 2021 – 2024](#) (the Waterford Strategy) referred to estimates of around 60 – 80 Roma individuals living in Waterford City and County.¹⁵

By July 2021, as a result of the Atelier Covid-19 outreach project’s engagement with the Roma Community, Atelier Roma team estimated¹⁶ that there were 67 Roma families from Romania, the Czech Republic and Slovakia, comprised of approximately 335 people, living in the Waterford area.

In March 2022, the HSE advised that there were approximately 284 Roma people living in Waterford, with the largest national group being Slovakian in origin:¹⁷

	18-65	Under 18	Over 65	Total
Slovakian Roma	61		1	
Czech Roma	47		5	
Romanian Roma	37		0	
Total	145	133	6	284

In addition to U-Casadh’s Atelier Roma Project Training, Development and Health Literacy Programme, a Waterford Roma Health Advocacy Project, managed by Waterford and South Tipperary Community Youth Services as part of the Intercultural Health Hub, has been in place since 2018. The project employs two part-time Roma health advocates funded by HSE Social Inclusion Southeast Community Healthcare.

3.2.2 Anti-Roma racism and discrimination in Waterford

The Waterford Strategy recognises the existence of racism and discrimination in Waterford as in Irish society generally. It refers to Pavee Point’s 2018 [National Roma Needs Assessment](#) which documented the specific and multi-layered challenges Roma people face in achieving economic integration in Ireland with almost 80% reporting that they face discrimination when trying to access work, with many hiding their Roma identity.¹⁸

The Waterford Strategy acknowledges that similar issues exist in Waterford and that “*particular interventions to empower and support the Roma Community*” are needed in Waterford.

As noted by the EU Fundamental Rights’ Agency, the Roma people who participated in the research for this report confirmed that the “*bleak, but familiar, picture of discrimination and deprivation fuelled by anti-Gypsyism*”¹⁹ exists in Waterford City and County. Many examples of discrimination were provided to the researcher such as being dismissed from employment once

¹⁵ It also recognised that this number was unreliable and was “*highly variable and subject to seasonality*”; page 14

¹⁶ While family size varies greatly, the team’s working estimate is that each family unit contains, on average, two adults and three children.

¹⁷ “*Waterford Roma Strengths and Needs Analysis*” drafted by WRIG for planning purposes by the Intercultural Health Hub WSTCYS; Draft 3.3.22

¹⁸ National Roma Needs Assessment 2018, page 81

¹⁹ EU Fundamental Rights’ Agency *Roma and Travellers in six countries – Roma and Travellers Survey 2020*

the worker's Roma ethnicity was known; refusal of services in shops and post offices; or less favourable treatment from GPs. No complaints were made about this treatment and none of these incidents were reported to the authorities.

"Jim always stood up for us. He said, 'try and ignore the racist comments...be grateful for who you are'. When he talks to me like that, I feel my mind and heart open. He gave me the strength to carry on."
(Roma woman)

It was following reports of an anti-Roma incident in Waterford City in 2014 which had culminated in around 200 people gathering outside and intimidating Roma families in their homes that a dedicated Roma advocate post was established in 2015 in the Waterford Roma Health Advocacy Project, followed by the Atelier Roma Project Men's programme in U-Casadh in 2016.

3.2.3 Covid-19 and the Irish Roma community

The Covid-19 pandemic has created particular challenges for the Irish Roma Community. Pavee Point confirmed that as most of the Roma families *"are living in severely overcrowded and unsafe accommodation ... they are unable to adhere to public health measures and/or safely self-isolate, placing them at a higher risk of contracting the virus and requiring acute services. Additionally, a number of Roma are unable access social welfare payments due to the Habitual Residence Condition, these families who would normally rely on begging as a source of income are placed in an extremely vulnerable situation as they are unable access basic necessities such food, water, nappies, etc."*

Pavee Point highlighted particular issues including:

- *Roma being refused treatment by some GPs*
- *1 in 3 Roma do not have a GP and 50% do not have a medical card. Where they do, they do not speak enough English to communicate on the phone to the GP (61% of Roma in Ireland speak Romani, followed by Romanian at 14.3%, Czech at 10.4%, English at 9.7% and Slovakian at 4.5%).*
- *GPs not having access to interpreters when dealing with Roma*
- *Lack of awareness among Health professionals of the vulnerabilities of Roma during Covid-19*
- *Most Roma people live in overcrowded and unsafe accommodation and cannot self-isolate when they have symptoms or if they are diagnosed.*
- *Many Roma people do not have a car and so cannot drive themselves to a testing centre or aren't literate enough in English/familiar with the environment to walk to one.*

A Roma health worker at Pavee Point was the fourth person to die in Ireland in early March 2020 and at one point there were 12 Roma individuals in intensive care in Dublin.

In April 2020, the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on Roma in Ireland was becoming apparent with Pavee Point and the HSE expressing concern about the deteriorating situation given the higher mortality rate for Roma with the virus.²⁰ [SEP]

²⁰ Without an ethnic identifier on health systems it was impossible to provide an accurate assessment of impact of Covid-19 on the Roma Community in Ireland. Pavee Point monitored the suspected and confirmed cases within the community nationally by working in partnership with the HSE, SafetyNet and other NGOs working with Roma and it

The HSE noted: *“Roma communities contract the virus and transmit it very quickly in their tight family circles. There have been a number of clusters of COVID cases in [the] ROMA community documented through NGO and Public Health / Hospital networks. ... HSE National and CHO Social Inclusion offices especially in Dublin region have expressed concern that COVID affects this population to greater extent than expected before.”*²¹

In May 2020, a joint submission by the Covid-19 NGO group noted that the Roma Community experienced an *“overall 7.2% mortality rate, almost double the national mortality rate (3.9%)”*.²²

Against this background and increasingly aware of a need for a strong Roma infrastructure (similar to the Traveller health infrastructure) to strategically respond to the needs of the Roma Community during the crisis, one of the priorities of the HSE’s Emergency Covid-19 taskforce was to identify Roma people across Ireland and limit the spread of the disease among the community.

made estimates accordingly. See <https://www.paveepoint.ie/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/RNA-PDF.pdf> referred to in RE: COVID-19- Support for Roma Community (April 8, 2020)

²¹ Roma COVID-19 Response, Mgt Fitzgerald PH Lead Social Inclusion, April 9, 2020

²² [Marginalised Groups: Promoting Equality, Inclusion and Human Rights in the Covid-19 Crisis. A Joint Submission by the Covid-19 NGO Group, 2020](#)

4.0 ATELIER'S COVID-19 OUTREACH RESPONSE, MARCH 2020

4.1 Reconfiguration of the Atelier training programme

On March 12, 2020 the government announced that schools, colleges and childcare facilities were to close. On March 20 it introduced emergency measures in the Health (Preservation and Protection and other Emergency Measures in the Public Interest) Act 2020 giving the state the power to detain people, restrict travel and keep people in their homes.

On March 24, further government restrictions required the closure of all non-essential retail outlets; gatherings exceeding four people were prohibited and people were told to work from home unless workplace attendance was essential.

U-Casadh closed on March 12 in line with government guidelines.

The Atelier Roma Project team, Jim Bruton and Peter Cook, who were in telephone contact with the Atelier Ferrybank training programme participants passing on the HSE advice about the pandemic immediately began planning a Covid-19 response for the men and their families. The team was conscious of the high risk of infection to the families who had limited awareness of the virus and its impact - a risk exacerbated by overcrowded homes and the proximity of extended family groups, as well as limited English language ability to understand government advice.²³ Aware of their food poverty and lack of financial resources, the team planned to deliver food parcels to the participants instead of the men coming to collect these from U-Casadh.

The team consulted with Suzanne Nolan, HSE Regional Roma Health Lead, who was concerned to ensure that the families were protected and had the right health information, advice and access to health services. The Atelier Roma Project team's approach was: *"if they can't come to us; we can go to them"*. On March 26, in collaboration with Suzanne, the team began a weekly outreach programme with the Roma community.

That week the roads were empty and Gardaí were operating check points to stop cars and control unnecessary travel. The Atelier Roma Project team was given a HSE Section 39 pass to give them permission to move freely.

Within two weeks of the closure of U-Casadh, the Atelier training programme was reconfigured as a weekly outreach programme to the programme participants.

4.2 Health delivery model

The Atelier Roma Project team quickly identified that the delivery of food parcels to the homes of vulnerable families created a platform from which to provide Covid-19 health information and begin discussing public health guidance with the Roma families. while also addressing their food poverty. This enabled the team to give them relevant public health advice and information about vaccinations. The team linked with the HSE Regional Roma Health Lead throughout the pandemic to receive and pass on up-to-date health information in a variety of formats.

²³ The agencies were attempting to deliver Covid-19 information via WhatsApp (for English speakers) but communicating remotely with people with limited/no English was an on-going challenge.

These included:

- videos containing information in a range of languages for Roma with no/poor literacy skills
- translated materials, and
- easy-to-read documents.

The team first went to the homes of the 16 men who had been attending the Atelier training programme and who had been receiving food vouchers. The team also had the names of families connected with the Intercultural Health Hub (IHH) and so began providing support for around 120 individuals. Particular vulnerabilities existed among the families such as:

- single parent families
- disabled children and adults
- Roma individuals presenting for assistance for the first time who required intensive advocacy support.

The Atelier Roma Project team kept in daily contact with the HSE Regional Roma Health Lead who coordinated the advocacy work between the team and the IHH and together they developed effective ways of communicating public health guidance to the Roma community.

Despite the high risk of infection to themselves, the team went every Thursday to talk to the families about how they should protect themselves from the virus, standing on their doorsteps, or in the local park. The team supplied facemasks and hand sanitizers to the families and explained the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic; it advised them of the health risks, the government rules and new Covid-19 concepts as they were being updated; such rules and concepts which needed explanation included:

- lock-down
- symptoms
- under-lying health conditions
- hand-hygiene
- social distancing
- cocooning
- self-isolation
- contact-tracing
- testing (polymerase chain reaction (PCR) and Lateral Flow tests)
- vaccinations etc.

The Atelier Roma Project team provided critical information on preventing the spread of the virus, explaining the importance of regular, thorough hand washing, social distancing and the need to isolate if someone became ill. While there was some indication in March 2020 that some members of the community did not take the situation seriously, by April 2020 the team found that the participants understood the measures required; the family members wore masks and maintained social distancing during the weekly visits.

The team was proactive in ensuring the members' own safety and took all necessary precautions. The members completed Infection Prevention and Control training and Covid-19 related training; the HSE Regional Roma Health Lead ensured it was provided with hand sanitisers and masks etc. as well as up-to-date and accurate information on ensuring staff safety and adhering to public health guidance. In addition, having experienced racist comments from members of the public in

relation to their doorstep food deliveries, the team had on occasions, to engage in a risk assessment of conditions on the street before approaching Roma family homes.

4.3 Food parcels

The food parcels were provided with funding from Waterford Area Partnership, and later Waterford City Council via Waterford Community Forum and Tusla²⁴. Food parcels were obtained from the Waterford Food Bank and delivered to the families' doorsteps; these included a mix of dry goods and fresh food including bread, milk and butter, plus fresh meat for three meals.

The Atelier Roma Project team consulted the families about their food requirements and helped devise a HSE questionnaire in October 2020 to consult the families on its provision of Covid-19 health information and the food in the parcels. This approach was found to be both effective and beneficial and enabled the team to adapt the contents of the parcels appropriately. A copy of the questionnaire responses is included at Appendix G.

In March 2020 approximately 21 families were engaged with the Atelier Roma Project. By July this had increased to 30 families (around 150 individuals). While all the families needed the advocacy support the Atelier Roma Project team provided, not all of them were in food poverty; weekly food delivery was being made to 23 families. By October 2020, the team was sourcing and delivering food for 140 people. By March 2021, the number of Roma individuals engaging with the project totalled approximately 196, comprised of 55 Romanian adults and 81 children, and 27 Czech/Slovak adults and 36 children. By July 2021 the team was engaging with 67 families including Czech and Slovak families, approximately 335 individuals.²⁵

The food delivery continued until July 2021 by which time the programme was targeted at approximately 16 of the most disadvantaged families such as those without any income, or in particularly vulnerable situations.

4.4 Links with the Intercultural Health Hub

In late April, early May 2020 the Atelier Roma Project team re-established its collaboration with the IHH whose staff had been working from home since March 2020. Because of the volume of food parcels required and the number of 'new' Roma families the team had identified, the HSE Regional Roma Health Lead liaised with the IHH and requested its assistance with the delivery of food parcels and health information. Under government guidelines, all community workers were deemed essential workers from March 12, 2020. As a result of this request, the IHH Roma Health Advocates and Intercultural Supervisor were enabled to return to their office base and they developed a system of appointments for service users to enable face-to-face work to resume.

This collaboration commenced on May 2, 2020 with the organisations sharing the delivery of food parcels and health information to approximately 30 families.

4.5 Testing breakthrough

The first known outbreak of Covid-19 among the Roma community occurred in October 2020 among a large extended Roma family (three related families) living in Waterford city centre close to the IHH. The family contacted the Atelier Roma Project team to inform it that a family member

²⁴ Tusla, Child and Family Agency is the dedicated Irish state agency responsible for improving wellbeing and outcomes for children.

²⁵ In July 2022, the Atelier Roma project was engaging with 97 Roma families.

had Covid-19 symptoms. One member, an Atelier participant, was in the Intensive Care Unit in Waterford Regional Hospital and, as there was also a new-born baby in the family, they were frightened.

The Atelier Roma Project team had access to medical staff such as the HSE Social Inclusion GP and regional Public Health Department doctors who provided information and support. The team helped the medical staff with names and addresses to enable them to contact and support the family members (which included nine people living in three homes consisting of five adults and four children).

The team provided a valuable link between the medical staff and the isolating family members, passing on information about their symptoms, and helped them to understand the advice, reassuring them and encouraging them to ask questions.

Along with the IHH, the team provided additional food to the immediate family to enable them to stay at home and isolate for 17 days as was required at that time.

“I was isolating in my room with my baby as the rest of the family were Covid-19 positive. I could text Jim and Peter to tell them what I needed for me and the baby” (Young Roma mother)

There were other Roma families living in the same apartment block who were in close contact and potentially at immediate risk of infection. The Atelier Roma Project team was aware that the Roma families were afraid to go to health centres to get tested and were particularly terrified of ambulances.

The Atelier Roma Project team arranged to have tests for these families carried out at the Waterford and South Tipperary Community Youth Services (WSTCYS)/IHH in Manor Street (instead of at the Waterford Covid-19 test centre). As this was close to their homes, the team agreed to walk with the families to the premises giving them the confidence to participate in testing.

“It took a lot of persuasion to get the families to agree to get tested. When we said that we would accompany them to the test centre they agreed. They trusted us. All the group was tested including the four-day old baby” (Atelier Roma Project team member)

This was a major breakthrough in the families’ participation in testing. It was noted by the HSE Regional Roma Health Lead in November 2020, that testing by the National Ambulance Service at home or, with support at WSTCYS, had resulted in 100% attendance (8 people) at tests in the final week of October while testing done the week before in the Waterford Covid-19 test centre only had an attendance rate of 20% (two people out of 10 were tested).

On October 30, 2020 the Atelier Roma Project team encountered two homeless Roma families who tested positive for Covid-19. In order to help them isolate, with the assistance of the HSE Regional Roma Health Lead, it found them temporary accommodation in Dungarvan and supplied food and medicine while the families were isolating.

4.6 Covid-19 vaccine promotion

The vaccination programme started in February 2021. The Atelier Roma Project team was unique in engaging the Roma Community in vaccine uptake. The team approached this topic in a culturally sensitive²⁶ way during the weekly doorstep discussions with the aim of increasing take-up. It was aware of the strong fear of vaccination among the community, which was compounded by social media messages (many people were checking their information via social media from Romania and the Czech Republic); the reasons given (later) by the community included:

- firmly held religious convictions which expressly forbid vaccination (this message was being given by pastors preaching at churches attended by some of the community)
- fear of electronic tagging via the vaccine
- fear of needles, blood clotting, death or potentially fatal side-effects/ long-term effects to health, including a negative impact on their fertility
- historical distrust of governments based on real experience of medical malpractice such as involuntary sterilization of women in Slovakia and the Czech Republic.

To overcome some of their fears, the Atelier Roma Project team shared their own and their families' experience of being vaccinated, aiming to give them confidence about unwanted side-effects while still confirming that '*vaccination is your choice*'.

By March 2022, 11 Roma individuals (10 Czech/Slovak Roma and one Romanian Roma) had been vaccinated in Waterford.²⁷

4.7 Advocacy

The Atelier Roma Project team responded to the advocacy support needs of the Roma Community throughout the pandemic.

Despite having no access to hand washing or bathroom facilities while doing the outreach work, the team continued the doorstep advocacy with each session lasting about 40 – 60 minutes. In addition, the team supported the Roma families on a daily basis as it was contactable by phone.²⁸

"I don't think I could do it by myself unless Jim and Peter were there to help us" (Roma woman on seeking assistance with welfare and housing)

The Roma Community identified their most pressing issues as:

- Housing (many facing eviction, sub-standard, squalid and overcrowded accommodation)

²⁶ The HSE states that: "Cultural sensitivity relies on a range of interpersonal and communication skills. This can only be achieved if service users/clients are true partners. Thus, the foundation of cultural sensitivity is mutual trust, respect and empathy. It involves knowing that cultural differences as well as similarities exist, without assigning values, i.e., 'better or worse', 'right or wrong', to those cultural differences."

²⁷ *Roma Covid-19 Vaccination Research Project in Southeast Community Healthcare* Final Report by Adriana Quinn, Independent Researcher, March 2022

²⁸ During this period, the team was also undertaking outreach work in New Ross (Co Wexford) and South Tipperary (both Clonmel and Tipperary town) as Atelier participants also lived in these areas. The outreach to South Tipperary was undertaken at the request of HSE and by agreement with U-Casadh.

- Shortage of food as many families were subsidising their rent payments from social welfare which left them with inadequate income
- Difficulties accessing social welfare
- Lack of employment
- Children's schooling/lack of school attendance
- Poor health including stress (many of the Roma men reported being stressed and frustrated at not being able to work or attend Atelier and found the confinement very difficult to deal with, particularly those living in overcrowded accommodation)
- Applications for, renewals of, medical cards and dental health treatment
- Having correct Covid-19 public health information (as opposed to that coming from Romanian social media or YouTube).

The advocacy service provided by the Atelier Roma Project team covered a wide range of issues some of which included:

- Medical card applications
- Registering new participants for the men's and women's programme
- Personal Public Service number applications
- Council housing applications
- Organising housing inspections to determine the condition of substandard dwellings
- Weekly reviews of council properties available for Roma community (choice-based lettings)
- Negotiating and liaising with landlords
- Liaising with Waterford Council Environmental Division working with families to address refuse issues e.g. helping them remove rubbish from homes where the families did not have income to pay for refuse collection
- Emergency needs payment applications
- Habitual residence applications
- Child benefit applications
- Sworn affidavits
- School registrations
- Dealing with a resident's association after one alleged major incident of anti-social behaviour
- Assisting a number of employed men with work-related issues
- Developing contacts with state agencies to advocate more effectively.

A Czech Roma family with four children under the age of six were found living in dangerous slum conditions in private rented accommodation. The Atelier Roma Project team alerted a Housing Inspector who carried out an inspection of the property in September 2020 and subsequently made a report which was sent to the landlord. The team contacted the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) authority in relation to payment of HAP for such conditions. Waterford City & County Council provided the family with permanent tenancy of a house with a garden which they moved into in mid-December 2020.

On June 17, 2021 in response to the high level of need, the team opened a central point in the Waterford and South Tipperary Community Youth Services canteen in the city centre and continued to deliver the advocacy service by operating a drop-in advocacy clinic.

5.0 STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

5.1 National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy

Published in 2017, the Department of Justice and Equality's [National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy 2017 - 2021](#) (NTRIS) refers to the European Union's Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020 which aimed to ensure EU member states addressed inequality faced by Roma people in education, health, accommodation and employment.

NTRIS addresses ten themes:

1. Cultural identity
2. Education
3. Employment and the Traveller economy
4. Children and youth
5. Health
6. Gender equality
7. Anti-discrimination and equality
8. Accommodation
9. Traveller and Roma Communities, and
10. Public services.

It makes many references to the need for group-specific, targeted initiatives to support, among others, Roma engagement with:

- employment and training services
- enterprise or the mainstream labour market
- entrepreneurships and self-employment
- services to improve health and wellbeing
- men's primary health services, and
- A Roma communications initiative to promote positive attributes and actions and *"facilitate counteracting negative mainstream media while engendering an increased sense of pride in the ... Roma communities"*.²⁹

NTRIS commits government departments, local authorities, the Irish Equality and Human Rights Commission and An Garda Síochána to fund and support its 149 recommended actions. ^[L]^[SEP]While the Department of Justice aimed to produce annual reports on progress made under NTRIS, these have not materialised. Pavee Point and other organisations have criticised the slow implementation of NTRIS, government's under-investment in properly delivering the actions and its lack of clear targets, indicators, outcomes and budget lines.³⁰

The accommodation chapter does not mention the Roma community and so the strategy does not recommend any actions to address their experience of homelessness, or their over-reliance on the private rented sector in often sub-standard, overcrowded homes. A new strategy in line with

²⁹ NTRIS Action 7

³⁰ For example see [Pavee Point's submission to the 39th Session of the UN's universal periodic review of Ireland](#) in November 2021.

State's response to the [EU Roma strategic framework for equality, inclusion and participation for 2020 - 2030](#) is expected in 2022.

5.2 The Section 42 Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty

The positive duty imposed on public sector bodies by Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014 (the IHREC Act) requires special consideration by those providing services and support to the Roma Community in Ireland. The Section 42 public sector equality and human rights duty places a legal obligation on all public bodies, in their daily work, to have regard to the need to:

- eliminate discrimination
- promote equality of opportunity and treatment of its staff and the persons to whom it provides services, and
- protect the human rights of its members, staff and the persons to whom it provides services.

The duty applies at every level across all the functions of the organisation. It applies to both staff and service users. It is a positive duty, requiring public bodies to be proactive and to consider human rights and equality issues when developing policies, plans and services. ^[1]_[SEP]

A public body is defined broadly and includes all bodies financed with public money (even partially); the S42 duty therefore applies whether the service is provided directly by the State or through a non-state actor.

In its guidance note on Covid-19 and the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty, the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission states that *"Having due regard for equality and human rights supports better decision making and service delivery and ensures a sustainable and inclusive recovery."* It refers to World Health Organisation³¹ advice that not paying explicit attention to the needs and vulnerabilities faced by certain groups subjects them to a higher risk of infection^[1]_[SEP] and undermines the broader Covid-19 response: *"Special measures are required to be put in place to ensure protection from discrimination and to ensure access to information and services for such groups in Covid-19 response and recovery."*

5.3 Waterford Migrant Integration Strategy

The [Waterford Migrant Integration Strategy, 2021 – 2024](#) launched by Waterford Local Community Development Committee (under Waterford City & County Council)(the Waterford Strategy) aims to offer *"a supportive framework for the integration and inclusion of all migrant communities in Waterford City and County"*. It recognises the increasing diversity of Waterford's population and adopts the human rights approaches of the national, EU and UN frameworks³² as its core principles and values in order to achieve a more integrated and inclusive Waterford.

³¹ World Health Organization (2020) *Addressing human rights as key to the COVID-19: response*, April 21, 2020. <https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/331811>.

³² For example: the Zaragoza Declaration on migrant integration (European Council, 2010); the International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination; the Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities; the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms; the 1948 UN Declaration on Human Rights; the UN Global Compact for Migration; the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families (1990); the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The Waterford Strategy aims to build on the positive contribution migrants make to society; it highlights particular challenges affecting the Roma Community which need to be addressed in order to enable them to make this contribution; these challenges include:

- prejudice and discrimination, making them more vulnerable and susceptible to exploitation and exclusion
- highest levels of poverty of any population
- (where employed) low-paid manual employment or casual work
- over-representation in the 'other' work category, indicating reliance on seasonal work and precarious employment status
- lack of fluency in English and frequent illiteracy in their own language creating significant barriers in accessing employment, understanding communications from schools, or attending health services
- lack of access to reliable and accurate information, particularly around how to access welfare support or accredited training
- major difficulties in opening a bank account due to a lack of official documentation
- failure to address the particular needs of Roma women, including lack of opportunities for them to improve their English and take part in training with childcare support.

The results of a Waterford Strategy survey among the 'host' community which measured their social distance to Roma and others,³³ shows Roma and Travellers at the bottom of the scale in relation to degrees of social distance; these indicate that *"the Roma population merits targeted support, and that the host community needs to be made more aware of Roma culture and experiences"*.

The Waterford Strategy reports on consultations with stakeholders which have highlighted *"the need for particular interventions to empower and support the Roma community"*.

"Stakeholders advise that Roma could be facilitated to have an enhanced role in economic life by continued support for the Atelier (Workshop) Roma Men's Training Development and Health Literacy Programme which is delivered to Roma men from Waterford by the U-Casadh Atelier Roma Project, with support from the HSE. The strengthening of linkages with employers would also support Roma progression. Learning from other counties indicates that increased positive profiling of Roma culture, including responsible media reporting, helps promote understanding of Roma as an ethnic minority group and helps Roma inclusion – sometimes combating discrimination." [page 27/28]

The Waterford Strategy acknowledges the role of the Intercultural Health Hub and U-Casadh's Atelier Roma Project in meeting unmet needs but considers the service to the Roma Community to be fragmented and there is no "one-stop-shop for their queries".

The Strategic Actions

The Waterford Strategy recommends 43 strategic actions (recommendations) around nine themes. The nine themes are:

³³ Figure 4.10: Percentage of Respondents willing to admit selected population cohorts to degrees of social distance (from family / kinship to expulsion from Ireland); Table 4.1: Mean Social Distance (MDS) from a range of population cohorts, as communicated by the 'host' community in Waterford City and County, pages 31 & 32

1. Access to Public Services
2. Education and Lifelong Learning
3. Employment and Pathways to Work
4. Health
5. Integration in the Community and Social Inclusion
6. Political and Civic participation
7. Promoting Intercultural Awareness and Combating Racism and Xenophobia
8. Volunteering, and
9. Sport.

Its core priorities are:

- *“... improving migrants’ access to reliable, accurate and timely information about public and community-based services and opportunities.*
- *development of the Waterford Migrant Integration Forum, and other structures that enhance the ability of migrants to play an active role in civil society.*
- *enhancing migrants’ fluency in the English (and Irish) language, as part of the process of promoting their advancement in the labour market, social networks and decision-making bodies.*
- *enabling migrants to tell their stories as part of a wider celebration of the contributions – historical, contemporary and potential – to Waterford’s economy, heritage and society; and*
- *engaging greater numbers of Irish people in promoting integration and tackling all forms of intolerance, prejudice and racism”.*

While the strategic actions need tailoring to address the specific needs of the Roma Community and to enable them to play their part in civic society, the Waterford Strategy makes some specific points relevant to the community. These include consolidating the Intercultural Health Hub (IHH) as a provider of information and a promoter of community-based and preventative health interventions and support; and mainstreaming the best practices associated with the IHH’s Roma Health Advocacy Project. It also recommends extending:

“... the services that are currently available to resettled refugees and asylum seekers who are granted refugee status and / or work permits and to the Roma population. Services ought to encompass orientation, securing accommodation and accessing employment. The expansion of this approach will necessitate the recruitment of a dedicated worker - possibly based in the ‘hub’.”
[page 42]

It endorses Pavee Point’s research on the merits of undertaking *“periodic research to monitor the situation of Roma in Ireland, using the Roma peer researcher model (working with Roma in partnership with an NGO who engages with Roma); and explore the introduction of stratified sampling to gather statistically significant data on Roma”.*

The experience of the Atelier Covid-19 outreach project confirms that further research on the Roma Community in Waterford (addressing their numbers, nationalities, languages, location, demographic profile etc.) would be helpful in targeting services to meet their needs.

The Waterford Strategy recognises that local community groups representing new communities are critical to ensuring *“the participation of migrants in the implementation of this strategy”* and recommends that they be supported. It highlights the role of the Waterford Migrant Integration

Forum as “*a platform for the engagement and representation of migrants ... [offering] an important mechanism in enabling migrants to engage in local decision-making*”. It recommends that its membership base is broadened and it is further developed and expanded.

The absence of Roma representatives on this Forum needs further exploration, but some obvious reasons include the absence of a Roma Community group representing their needs, barriers of language, and the Roma families’ key priorities of overcoming poverty, insecure housing, finding work etc. which leave little time and energy for community development.

6.0 THE RESEARCH RESULTS

6.1 Results of the survey

Four responses were received to the electronic survey which was distributed to nine organisations on January 17, 2022.

The four organisations assisted the Atelier Roma Project with funding, making referrals, food provision, health promotion, and educational aids such as tablets, school kits and art packs. They identified and confirmed the needs of the Roma Community, such as housing, finances, food poverty, school attendance, which they worked to address with support from Atelier's Covid-19 outreach project.

The need to gain the Roma Community's trust was highlighted by Tusla which indicated its staff had benefited from the additional support its links with Atelier provided. Through these links, families who feared their children would be taken into care and who did not previously engage with Tusla's Prevention, Partnership and Family Support programme, now benefitted by linking with an intercultural worker who could support them.

All four respondents indicated awareness of their responsibilities under Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014 although not all staff had received specific training on the duties arising from it. One individual commented: *"Specific training would benefit staff and Board in their awareness of the Act and responsibility in adapting our policies and procedures."*

Two respondents indicated that training on cultural awareness and the cultural differences specific to the Roma Community would assist their organisation to work more effectively with the community.

Highlighting their recommendations to better address the Roma Community's key needs, one respondent focused on the lack of knowledge the agencies in Waterford have about the numbers of Roma and their living conditions:

"There is a wider group of Roma families who may not be engaging with services that are potentially suffering from food poverty and the scale of this needs to be explored." (Waterford Food Bank)

A second respondent highlighted the importance of knowing the Roma Community better as a way to make their interventions more effective:

"I have learned many cultural traditions from linking in with [Atelier] that would be great to share and highlight to the other communities and services within Waterford." (Tusla)

6.2 Learning highlighted by the interviews

Interviews with those responsible for delivering, managing, administering and funding the Atelier Covid-19 outreach Roma project enabled a record to be made of what happened between March 2020 and July 2021. Learning from the outreach project highlighted during these interviews is set out below.

6.2.1 Approach to service delivery

- The value of the outreach to the Roma Community – the consistent weekly visits at their homes was critical during the worst of the crisis to ensure the health messages were delivered – it also helped to build trust with Atelier staff and the community felt it has not been abandoned.

“Jim and Peter came to our house when the family were ill. No one else would come because of the lockdown even though we phoned people we know to ask for help. They were there for us when we needed them” (Roma woman)

- The value of using food delivery and advocacy as a platform for health information and advice.
- The establishment of an accessible drop-in clinic kept the outreach momentum going.
- Important links were developed between the Roma health advocates at the IHH and the Atelier Roma Project team which has enabled resources to be shared, language barriers overcome and relationships with the Roma Community enhanced.
- There were different approaches by the IHH and the Atelier Roma Project team to the outreach work. The latter was praised for their inclusive, participative and empowering approach to delivering health information or promoting the vaccination programme during the weekly visits.
- The importance of putting into practice a human rights-based approach which prioritises meaningful participation, accountability, non-discrimination and equality, and the empowerment of the Roma participants.

6.2.2 Addressing poverty

- The Roma Community’s basic needs (insecure substandard, often overcrowded, housing, poverty, unemployment, lack of transport to attend work) must be addressed before their health, training and employment opportunities will improve.
- The requirement to meet the habitual residence condition and the “right to reside” test before they are entitled to any means-tested social welfare payments, Child Benefit, a medical card, social housing or any social protection measures causes humanitarian difficulties as a refusal result in them having no income source.³⁴

6.2.3 Employment and training

- The importance of keeping the Roma men on the Atelier programme engaged with the Atelier Roma Project team during the lockdown which ensured they would return to the training programme once permitted to do so.
- As a majority of ETB courses are certified via documentary evidence, this prevents many Roma from engaging in the courses because of their literacy and language problems.
- The importance of gaining practical skills was emphasised by the Romanian men *“I want to do practical work with my hands”*.

6.2.4 English

- Strong desire among the Roma men and women to learn English and find employment.

³⁴ [Pavee Point highlighted this issue in 2014](#): *“Due to low literacy levels and language barriers for Roma, applicants may not have all the documentation needed to prove habitual residency and may face difficulties responding to the Department [of Social Protection].”* Many Roma people who are resident in Ireland struggle to prove their residency as they have been working informally, do not have bank accounts, and may not have tenancies in their own name.

- Current English language training provision is “inaccessible” for the Roma Community. Often lacking literacy skills in their own languages, the Roma participants are not progressing their English fluency in the current courses on offer.

“English language classes aren’t good for us. My father has been attending classes for three years - he still has no English skills. The teacher doesn’t speak our language and he can’t understand when she explains something.” Roma woman

6.2.5 Women

- The outreach work introduced the Atelier Roma Project team to more of the female members of the Roma Community and enabled them to encourage their attendance at the Women’s Employment Programme
- The opportunity for the Roma women to meet within the Women’s Employment Programme in a safe space without the children is creating an opportunity to:
 - *“build women’s voices which are lower than the men’s”*
 - empower them by being listened to and having their opinions valued
 - provide a structured environment to open conversations around important issues such as vaccinations, maternal health, women’s health
 - *“instil a sense of pride which will spread from the women to the Roma Community as a whole”*
 - enhance a sense of community among the Roma families which previously did not know each other
 - share experiences and knowledge with the professional workers which will inform better service provision.
- Within the Women’s Employment Programme, communication between the Czech/Slovak women and the Romanian women is limited by language barriers; while some of the older women can communicate in Romani, the younger women don’t speak the traditional Roma language. There are a few English speakers in the group.

6.2.6 Younger generation

Several research participants emphasised the importance of focusing on the younger Roma generation who have been educated in Ireland and should have a higher standard of English and skills and thus employment potential.

- There is a need to support younger Roma people to engage with the education system in Ireland and support them to achieve their goals and stay at school to gain skills and job opportunities.
- Getting schooling for all the Roma children is critical; some children are lingering on waiting lists waiting for places.
- Examples of bullying and experiencing anti-Roma racism at school were given during the focus groups.
- There is a need for English language support for some school children whose parents do not speak English at home.
- *“The younger generation are getting to know us ... [Atelier] can link them with training services; ideally, we’d like to get the 18-24 years olds into paid training.”*

6.2.7 Housing

- The Roma Community's reliance on private sector rental accommodation means that it can struggle to find housing as many members cannot provide landlords with references from employment or previous tenancies.
- The Roma families are often larger than Irish families with extended families living under one roof which means *"there could be a larger, underground (unseen) problem about real housing need"*.
- Accepting homeless family members or other Roma individuals into their homes is a cultural norm among the community which can result in overcrowding and problems with landlords.
- Support provided by the Atelier Roma Project team on dealing with residents' and/or landlords' complaints about refuse disposal or condition of properties was critical as improper refuse disposal had created and encouraged the anti-Roma sentiment among the Irish community.

6.2.8 Health

- As a result of a history of human rights abuses, including exploitation and abuse from health professionals, the Roma Community has a deep mistrust of government and health systems. Its resistance to vaccinations is a major risk to personal health and is a public health concern.
- The resistance to the Covid-19 vaccine has led to a resistance in child immunisation with some parents opting not to vaccinate their young children, when they largely did so in the past.
- Some GPs and healthcare professionals are unwilling to use the HSE interpretation service for patient appointments. There is a need to promote this service with local healthcare services in Waterford.
- Although disability levels are high among the community, there is a taboo around disability and also around mental health which leads to a lack of support.

6.2.9 Cultural norms

- The Roma Community in Waterford is not a homogenous group. Its members have different nationalities and identities and speak different languages. While many of the older generation speak the Roma language – Romani – not all of the younger generation do so. There are also differences between the national groups in terms of levels of poverty, lifestyle and education.
- The Romanian Roma Community in Waterford are "more traditional"; roles of women and men are often defined by patriarchal values which can mean the women stay at home and look after the family; they generally don't work outside the home and don't drive. The Romanian Roma men are not involved in childcare and their role is to provide for the family. The Czech/Slovak Roma community are more "modern/liberal" and the women tend to have more autonomy.

"Our way of dressing has been the same for thousands of years. I can't, I won't change it. It would shame me as a married woman to wear trousers. If I don't wear a scarf and long dress, I will be viewed as an unmarried girl." (Romanian Roma woman)

- Traditional cultural expectations among the Romanian Roma community can present challenges in respect of maintaining training and employment. For example, when a family

matriarch died in July 2021, the Romanian men attending Atelier went back to Romania to observe traditional mourning rituals and were absent for several months.

- While a core group of Roma families have been resident in Waterford for many years, some families move frequently – within Ireland or Europe – and this has an impact on their engagement with employment, education and training.
- There is a lack of engagement among the community with services which are not deemed “essential”, for example, community groups, sports, community events etc.

6.2.10 Racism and discrimination

- All respondents referred to racism and discrimination from the Irish community. Examples abounded of being refused work, dismissed from work or being offered a poor service because of racist attitudes. Where work is offered it is often unregulated with poor working hours, conditions and pay. Romanian Roma people often face higher levels of discrimination because of the stereotyping about them.
- No complaints were made about these examples; “*Who would I complain to? Who would believe me?*” were the explanations.

“Hostility towards the Roma Community is a big issue. One of the biggest challenges is the perception of Roma in Ireland and particularly in Waterford. The image of Roma needs changing. People in Waterford see them begging and associate them with poverty, begging and crime. They need a positive image.”
(SICAP staff member)

- Reflecting the lack of ethnic diversity in services in Waterford, there is lack of positive models to which Roma or other Black and Minority Ethnic groups could aspire.

6.2.11 Other issues

- Concern was expressed about the Roma Community’s overdependence on the Atelier Roma Project team, and also on the IHH Roma health advocates.

6.3 Results of the focus groups

Focus group discussion on “your vision for the future, goals and what you need to achieve them” raised the following issues:

- Work
- *“Covid-19 is a barrier to getting work; when it is over, we will apply for jobs.”*
- Opportunities for practical work; although several men have learned good practical skills around the construction industry, obstacles to getting work include lack of English language and transport to access work.
- Some ideas for work which the women expressed included packing, cleaning, working in the meat factory, craft work such as jewellery making, baking and sewing.

“The first thing the women want is work. The women don’t want to sit at home and do nothing and just take social welfare. We want to create a good example for the kids to follow, show them what to do.” (Czech Roma woman)

- Education for our children so *“they know English as they grow up”*.
- Transport to get to work or training opportunities.

- Driving skills and driving licences.
- English language to overcome the barriers to integration and to get work; language classes need to be suitable/accessible i.e. free; not based on the written word; include opportunities to practice; and provide childcare to enable attendance.
- Tackling the obstacle of racism.
- Overcoming negative perceptions – *“I am perceived as a Gypsy”; “I am refused help with housing and social welfare because I am Roma.”*

“Racism has to stop so that we get a better life ... but we don’t get accepted at anything because of the way we look ... because of our skin colour and the way we dress.” (Romanian Roma woman)

- Secure housing – addressing homelessness; insecurity in private rented accommodation; inaccessible accommodation for disabled family members.
- Overcome delays in getting social welfare and long delays in obtaining social housing.
- Support (from trusted organisations) to apply for social welfare and social security benefits or obtain passports and other essential documentation.
- Help with health problems from specialists and supportive GPs.

Focus group discussion on “your experience of the lockdown and outreach”; responses included:

- High praise for the Atelier Roma Project staff’s support – they showed an interest in the details of the care and support the families needed.
- They helped when others were too scared to assist.
- A need for trust was a recurring theme in both groups, both within their own communities and with/from the authorities.

Focus group discussion on “celebrating culture, heritage and traditions”: responses included:

- Opportunities to dance and make music
- *“The Czech Roma have a heritage of music and dance and they like to be able to celebrate their culture.”*
- Celebrate national days; cultural days such as Mărțișor (Romania); Christmas, Easter, New Year
- International Roma Day, April 8th, International Women's Day, March 8th
- Multi-cultural celebrations with other Irish and other cultures with music and national food dishes.

Other issues raised by participants included:

- Concerns about change: *“the people don’t look out for each other the way they used to.”*
- *“We would be happy if we had a Romanian church”* with services in the Romanian language in Waterford.
- Generational differences: younger man expressed the need for the older men to change and do more to help themselves.

7.0 EVALUATION: OUTCOMES AND LEARNING FROM THE OUTREACH PROJECT

The Covid-19 outbreak in Ireland and the sudden imposition of the lockdown completely disrupted everything in Waterford. Face-to-face service delivery stopped as all workers were advised to work from home and avoid making contact with people in order to protect everyone's health and stop the spread of the virus. Despite this, the Atelier Roma Project team immediately set about reconfiguring the Atelier Roma Project men's training programme in order to deliver critical knowledge and health information needed to protect the lives of the Roma families it had been working with.

In consultation with the HSE Regional Roma Health Lead, the Atelier Roma Project team devised a completely new work programme as their response to the crisis. With her support, and "*thinking on their feet*" it changed the Atelier training programme into a Covid-19 outreach project. And as the weeks progressed, and improvising the project's responses, the project participants grew in numbers and nationalities and many vulnerable families were identified and linked with agencies which could support them.

Given that the outreach project was devised as an urgent response to a frightening and changing situation, the work was largely unplanned and it evolved to meet needs the Atelier Roma Project team was aware of; all those known to the team who were in need of food, lifesaving health information and advocacy support were given it.

The team's approach was to engage the families and consult with them on their needs; it applied the HSE's service user involvement and feedback criteria as the project evolved and grew. The advocacy assisted the community to know more about their rights and, as far as possible, empower them to claim those rights.

"Consultation is key." (Atelier team)

Measurements of success are hard to define as the work was unprecedented; however, the Atelier Covid-19 outreach project has had a significant positive impact on the lives of the Roma Community in Waterford. The project piloted a model of health delivery for the Covid-19 crisis which contributed to ensuring that there was no widespread outbreak of the disease in Waterford. The advocacy work resulted in a wide range of positive quantifiable and qualitative outcomes (listed below).

In hindsight, a goal was later drawn up by the HSE Regional Roma Health Lead which captured the project's objectives which were:

"In the short term, to work in partnership with Roma communities in Waterford ... to protect Roma from the threat of Covid-19 infection, to limit the spread of the disease and to minimise mortality and morbidity by providing culturally appropriate information, advice, education/awareness, advocacy as well as support to access health services and support to Roma who are in self isolation.

And in the medium term: to work in partnership with Roma communities to improve their health by supporting access to health information and health services whilst still supporting Roma re Covid-19.”

The Atelier Roma outreach project achieved these goals by working in partnership with the Roma community in Waterford, assisting to protect it from Covid-19 infection, limiting the spread of the disease by providing culturally appropriate information and advocacy, as well as supporting the community to access health services and supporting Roma families who were self-isolating.

The EU Fundamental Rights Agency reported in September 2020 that there was evidence that the negative effects of measures (lockdown, restrictions in movement which led to the inability to source income to feed their families, inability to self-isolate etc.) which governments in Europe had implemented to contain the spread of the Covid-19 virus, had disproportionately affected marginalised and socially excluded Roma.³⁵ The feedback from the research undertaken for this report suggests that in Waterford these negative effects were, to a large extent, mitigated by the Atelier outreach project.

7.1 Quantifiable outcomes

- The outreach programme was delivered weekly between March 2020 and July 2021, apart from two weeks in the summer of 2020 and two weeks at Christmas 2020.
- The Roma Community understood the impact of the pandemic and were empowered to act upon the information provided. The Atelier Roma Project team’s weekly visits kept them in touch with rapidly changing health messages and ensured that critical health information was provided on preventing the spread of the Covid-19 virus.
- 67 Roma families were provided with up to date Covid-19 information on a weekly basis; initially these were Romanian Roma families, but they later included Czech and Slovak Roma families.
- There were no deaths and no widespread outbreak of Covid-19 among the Waterford Roma community.

“The work (done by Atelier) over the past two months both in terms of providing Covid-19 information and delivering food has been extremely important and has really supported this community in staying safe. We are all very happy there have been no Covid-19 cases in the greater Waterford area and we are continuing to work together to ensure that this remains the case.”

(HSE Regional Roma Health Lead, May 2020)

- The Atelier Roma Project team was not infected by the Covid-19 virus.
- The Atelier outreach project’s promotion and encouragement of uptake of the Covid-19 vaccines was unique; by March 2022, 11 Roma individuals (10 Czech/Slovak Roma and one Romanian Roma) had been vaccinated in Waterford.³⁶
- 1,696 food parcels were delivered to Roma families in Waterford City and County in this period.

³⁵ [FRA BULLETIN 5](#); September 2020

³⁶ *Roma Covid-19 Vaccination Research Project in Southeast Community Healthcare* Final Report by Adriana Quinn, Independent Researcher, March 2022

- new Czech and Slovak families were identified and became fully engaged with Waterford agencies providing support and services.
- Permanent council housing was secured for five families (two Czech and two Romanian families in Waterford, and one Romanian family in Tipperary).
- 15 women and around 45 – 50 men expressed interest in training opportunities; (training needs assessments are on-going); (11 women attended the Women's Employment Programme when it restarted in October 2021 and 15 were regularly attending in April 2022).
- 30 back-to-school education packs for Roma children were provided with funding secured by the team through Waterford Area Partnership; these consisted of school copies, pencils, school bags and assorted educational materials which were well received.
- Supported school registrations for 15 children.
- 20 successful applications were made for medical cards.
- 15 successful applications made for PPS numbers.
- 37 successful applications were made to the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection between March 2020 and July 2021 for Emergency Needs Payments, Child Benefit, Domiciliary Care and Carer's Allowance.
- 15 Habitual Residence applications completed.
- 24 care packs delivered to Roma families on September 15, 2020; funded by Healthy Ireland Fund and Waterford Area Partnership, these packs consisted of hand sanitizers, hand towels, hygiene swabs, masks and various hygiene products.
- Six comfort packs delivered to Roma families deemed most in need on May 14, 2020.
- Employment secured for two Roma women in U-Casadh/IHH (Tereza S; Veta D.)

7.2 Qualitative outcomes

7.2.1 *Engagement with the Roma Community*

The provision of food was critical to the delivery of Covid-19 health information as it gave the Atelier Roma Project team a platform from which to engage the Roma families. Food delivery, advocacy and health awareness went hand-in hand and developed into a regular weekly door-to-door service every Thursday. The families were always at home to meet the team on Thursdays and they willingly engaged in conversations about health.

The consistent, regular Thursday attendance of the team at the Roma families' homes enabled the development of valuable relationships with them.

The outreach approach built on existing relationships of trust which the HSE Regional Roma Health Lead and the Atelier Roma Project team had developed – the latter having been working with the Roma men at the Atelier training programme in Ferrybank since 2016. The outreach work kept the momentum going with the Atelier participants and enabled the team to expand its relationship with a wider network of families; it assisted to identify key people who were the local leaders and through the team's respectful approach, gained their support.

"Jim and Peter is like a father to me, like brothers to me." (Roma man)

The Roma families were very worried about the pandemic and their security; the outreach helped them to feel that they hadn't been abandoned.

“You engage through building trust. You have to gain the men’s trust first in order to gain the women’s trust and you have to respect this. The progress was down to Jim and Peter. It’s taken two years to gain the trust which has enabled the women’s project to get started” (U-Casadh staff member)

The outreach to the families enabled the Atelier Roma Project team to also work directly with more women. Taking care to maintain both a physical and respectful distance, and aware of the Romanian Roma community’s patriarchal values, the team engaged with the women in a culturally sensitive manner. Aware of the distrust the Romanian men had at the start in relation to women’s engagement outside of the family sphere, the team worked with them to build trust, being careful not to “overstep the line”.

The team informed the women of the proposed Roma Women’s Employment Programme and, as several women expressed interest in starting the programme, completed an analysis of their training needs.

The Atelier Roma Project team’s culturally sensitive approach included making itself knowledgeable about Roma history across Europe which is marked by centuries of violence, persecution, exclusion and discrimination including extermination in the Holocaust (Porrajmos - known as [the Devouring](#)), medical experimentation and compulsory sterilization,³⁷ all of which has led to a widespread fear of state intervention. Aware that this history has led many Roma to experience the state as the enemy (and their reaction of doing the opposite of what the state requests), the team provided the health messages about Covid-19 in a way the families understood, avoiding shock tactics or scaring them by using frightening language, talk of death or dying.

7.2.2 Empowerment and partnership working

The Atelier Roma Project team recognised the importance of working in partnership with the members of the Roma Community. Where appropriate it sought their views and worked with them on addressing the issues they raised. This approach led to the employment of three Roma individuals as part-time workers at U-Casadh and on the Atelier outreach project, including Tereza Skopova, a Czech Roma community leader.

In November 2020, the team called on a Czech family in Parliament Street and made them aware of the Atelier outreach project and training programme, and of the IHH in Manor Street. The team met and introduced themselves to Tereza Skopova who provided them with the names and addresses of more Czech and Slovak Roma families.

Working with Tereza Skopova brought immense benefits to the outreach project as she provided knowledge of and contact with a new range of Czech and Slovak Roma families. Working in partnership with her was key to the project’s success with this particular community.

A sense that there is a more cohesive Romanian Roma community developed through the outreach work which has empowered many of the participants to engage with Waterford’s service providers.

³⁷ The European Roma Rights Centre is currently supporting Roma victims to fight for compensation for involuntary sterilization in instances as recently as 2007 in the Czech Republic; [ERRC support fight for compensation for victims of involuntary sterilization](#)

“We have got to know other Romanian Roma families. They brought the Romanian families together. Before we were ‘racist’ towards other Roma women but now we work together.” (Romanian Roma woman)

As the team’s relationships developed with the project participants, the staff encouraged them to resolve for themselves the problems they brought to the team. Examples included encouraging the father of a disabled child with particular educational needs to attend and speak to the school principal and get the necessary assistance; encouraging householders to sort out domestic problems with the utility companies; or providing numbers and names to enable individuals to obtain doctor’s appointments. The team’s aim was to empower the participants with confidence in their own abilities to address issues they were concerned about.

7.2.3 Increased engagement of new Roma families

Having started with the 21 families on the Atelier register, as word spread in the community, more families in need were identified and the Atelier Roma Project team became aware of Czech and Slovak Roma families who had been living in Waterford city but who were not engaged with any agency, and the existence of which the team and other agencies were unaware.

The contacts with the Czech and Slovak families which Tereza Skopova provided ensured that many more families became engaged with the U-Casadh and the Atelier project and this enabled them to be supported by the relevant agencies including the IHH.

In March 2020 approximately 16 men from 21 families were engaged with the U-Casadh/Atelier Roma Project training programme and, due to the outreach work, this number increased to 23 by July 2020. In July 2021 the number of families engaged with Atelier totalled 67, including Czech and Slovak families. This was a significant increase and the recognition of the number of Roma families residing in Waterford by Atelier and other agencies should be acknowledged as a positive outcome from the Covid-19 outreach project.

7.2.4 Links with other agencies strengthened

The intensive advocacy the Atelier Roma Project team undertook during the outreach work led to the strengthening of their relationships and in turn created links for the Roma families with a wide number of agencies in Waterford. As well as the IHH, the team worked closely with the Waterford and City Council’s Housing Department & Homeless Service, its Environmental Officer and bin collection staff; St Vincent de Paul; the Probation Service, and An Gardaí Síochána. Through the team’s interventions, the Waterford Food Bank was able to reach a marginalised group in the community and provide it with food support.

The team sought support from Citizens Advice and National Roma Network, Dublin which provided assistance on welfare and legal rights. The team gave the National Roma Helpline³⁸ number to all the families, encouraging them to call the helpline for support.

The team worked with Active Connections which supported its “pro social” health promotion work with 10 – 15 adults: in turn Active Connections highlighted Roma families to Atelier.

³⁸ The HSE provided a national dedicated Roma helpline with a Roma worker to answer queries on Covid-19.

The team developed its relationships with Tusla and supported Roma families involved in its voluntary Partnership Prevention and Family Support as well as its participation work with Roma adolescents. It helped the families overcome their fears of engaging with Tusla and this made a very positive contribution to breaking down barriers to their engagement with Tusla's family support work. The team plans to develop these links and a briefing session for Tusla's Social Work and its Partnership Prevention and Family Support Staff is planned.

The links established with St Vincent De Paul will enable the Atelier Roma Project team to refer Roma families in food poverty to the organisation which can help sustain them in the future.

Relationships were built with funders (the HSE, Waterford SICAP, Waterford City Council) which supported the outreach project to purchase food parcels or materials. The SICAP funding was adapted to respond to the challenges the Covid-19 outbreak created and it enabled the provision of food parcels and health/infections materials, as well as family resources such as the school kits, art packs etc.

The Atelier Roma Project team acted as a key link with many of the Covid-19-positive Roma individuals in the city and as a result, these individuals were supported by the health services.

The team participated in HSE training on Covid-19 vaccines on two separate occasions in early 2021 and contributed to the development of the HSE's Strategy for Promoting Awareness of Covid-19 Vaccines in South-East Community Healthcare, participating in approving the final strategy.

7.2.5 Other outcomes

As mentioned above, the Atelier Roma Project team increased its understanding of Roma history which gave the team valuable insights which helped it to respond appropriately to the Roma Community's situation, values and approach to life in Waterford.

8.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations emerging from the research and the account of what happened during the outreach project are set out below.

8.1 Engaging equality and human rights values in service delivery

Value of outreach

The re-organisation of the Atelier Roma Project from a Ferrybank-based training programme to a weekly outreach project where staff met the Roma families on their doorsteps had an immense impact on their lives. The Roma families received health information and advice which stopped the spread of a deadly virus; those in food poverty were able to feed their families; the advocacy support assisted them resolve a host of social welfare, health and housing problems.

Through this outreach, the Atelier Roma Project team strengthened its relationships with the families and building on this, it identified new families which were brought into the project and linked with the agencies which could help meet their needs.

Becoming known to the community and being accessible to the Roma Community in the centre of Waterford has enabled the Atelier Roma Project to better meet the needs of the community and engage them in its activities. Coming to the city centre rather than expecting the Roma families to come to it in the Ferrybank premises enabled the team to meet the female members of the families and engage with new families as word spread among the community.

“There was a queue outside Tesco’s. I saw some people I knew. They told me there was someone who could help me”

(Roma women previously unconnected with U-Casadh or Atelier who encountered the team working in Waterford City centre)

Human rights-based approaches

Understanding the history and culture of the Roma Community is particularly important for agencies aiming to deliver effective services to them. As a result of centuries of exclusion and human rights abuses, including exploitation and abuse from health professionals, the Roma Community often displays a deep mistrust of government and health systems. This has led to a reluctance to engage in such systems as evidenced by resistance to vaccinations or child immunisation programmes. Because of their history of oppression and discrimination, many individuals are fearful of identifying as Roma. An improved knowledge of Roma history and of the communities’ resilience, independence and a way of life adapted for survival, would help service providers respond appropriately to meet their needs.

The Atelier Roma Project team’s success in building trust with the Roma Community was predominately due to its approach to the families. The team worked within the values of the HSE’s Social Inclusion approach for safe health care and person-centred health care; it applied the values of dignity, compassion, inclusion, participation and social justice as set out in the Southeast Community Healthcare’s Social Inclusion Department’s “Equality and Human Rights Statement”³⁹,

³⁹ The values of the HSE: Care, Compassion, Trust and Learning (as set out in the Corporate Plan 2015–2017); HSE SECH’s Social Inclusion Department’s “Equality and Human Rights Statement” - developed in May 2016 & updated in January 2020.

which particularly emphasises working towards equality of health outcomes in partnership with the Roma Community. The team was non-judgmental in its approach; the staff listened to and showed respect for the participants, valued their experience and treated them with compassion and kindness. The team consulted and sought their views on the outreach project and adapted it based on their feedback.

The S42 Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty

A lack of understanding of the S42 IHREC Act public sector equality and human rights duty emerged during the research with a number of the agencies identifying the need for further training on how it impacts on the way they deliver services.

There was a sense from some respondents that because the same rules were being applied equally to all service users, there was no discrimination and this was sufficient to fulfil the duty. It was uncertain whether relevant service providers are clear about the meaning of “equality of health outcomes” and how to achieve them. As true equality requires treating different people differently, as opposed to treating everyone the same, there is a need to explore this further so that programmes and services are inclusive, culturally appropriate, and tailored to the needs of Roma.

Recommendations

- 1.1 Review the provision of advocacy, health and other services to the Roma Community to build in an “outreach approach” which delivers services to the community on the streets, in their homes and/or central accessible points in Waterford City and County; ensure that service provider staff take steps to meet and make themselves and their services known to marginalised Roma community members.
- 1.2 Collaborate with Roma leaders and individuals on tailoring the delivery of outreach services, supporting them to share their expertise and build on their knowledge and community contacts
- 1.3 Ensure participation of the Roma Community in decision-making and develop innovative ways to overcome Roma leaders’ exclusion from full participation in representing Roma in groups such as the Waterford Roma Interagency Group, U-Casadh, Atelier Roma Project, Waterford Roma Interagency Group, the Regional Intercultural Health Steering Group/Migrant Health Research Project, and Waterford Integration Forum.
- 1.4 Ensure that appropriate mentoring and support is embedded in contracts with Roma employees.
- 1.5 Ensure that all service providers in Waterford City and County are trained in and understand the practical implementation of human rights-based approaches which value meaningful participation, equality and empowerment of vulnerable clients.
- 1.6 Provide training to all agencies in Waterford City and County providing services to the Roma Community on implementing the S42 IHREC Act public sector equality and human rights duty, with a particular emphasis on equality of health outcomes.
- 1.7 Provide training to all agencies in Waterford City and County providing services to the Roma Community on Roma history, culture and background, including cultural competency training.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ The HSE’s Second National Intercultural Health Strategy 2018 to 2023 states that: “Cultural competence is that set of behaviours, attitudes and policies that shape the ability of a system to provide effective responses in cross cultural interactions ... This competency must also address power imbalance and institutional discrimination.”

8.2 Addressing poverty

Addressing poverty among the Roma Community involves national as well as local action.

National issues which need to be addressed (as recommended by CERD) include the need for the State to *“adopt effective measures with an adequate level of resources to improve employment ... develop a new strategy on ... Roma education with an adequate budget and concrete action plans; [and] adopt a targeted strategy and plans of action to address the poor health conditions of ... Roma, in particular with regard to mental health”*.⁴¹

Other national measures include the urgent need to:

- review the habitual residency requirement and the right to reside test
- address the dearth of public housing in Ireland,⁴² and
- ensure that the Roma Community has effective access to the Covid-19 vaccination programme.

Local action is also critical and should include continued advocacy support and improved access to training and education opportunities. Building on the relationships developed during the Atelier Covid-19 outreach project, advocacy should be continued on an outreach basis and the Roma Community given the confidence, support and encouragement to know more about their rights and entitlements and how to claim them.

Recommendation

2.1 Maintain and develop a dedicated advocacy service to support Roma families in Waterford City and County and provide them with information on their rights and entitlements in relation to health, housing, education (including assistance with school registration) and social welfare support.

8.3 Employment and training

The Roma individuals, women and men, who gave interviews or attended the focus groups expressed a strong need to obtain paid work – not just as a way to lift them and their families out of poverty, but to set a good example to their children. Obstacles to obtaining work include the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, racist attitudes from employers, lack of transport/driving ability, poor or no English language or literacy skills.

“Although I attended school in Ireland and speak English, it is hard to get a job. They don’t allow us; they won’t let us wear our traditional dress.”
(Roma woman)

⁴¹ CERD/C/IRL/CO/5-9; para 34

⁴² The Irish Council for Civil Liberties: *“The current housing crisis in Ireland creates enormous challenges for vulnerable migrant and minority communities who experience discrimination in accessing private sector housing, and often experience poorer housing conditions and overcrowding”* [Waterford Migrant Integration Strategy page 26]

A cohesive Roma-specific approach to support people into work is required; this will require 'pre-employment development' as well as specific work skills, English language training, and support with finding and maintaining employment.

The Atelier Roma project team has developed a strong relationship with the Roma Community which has been built up since 2016 and strengthened during the 2020/21 Covid-19 outreach project. The Atelier Roma Project team has demonstrated the skills and capacity to build positive relationships with the community and, at Ferrybank, has created a safe space for the Roma men; an additional benefit is the latter's opportunity to build relationships with Irish Traveller men at U-Casadh.

This is an excellent platform upon which to build.

Recommendations

Support Atelier to continue its employment training programmes along with the essential advocacy work required to enable and support attendance at such programmes. Aware of the current labour shortage, match training with job possibilities and develop training programmes accordingly. Training should cover:

- 3.1 Work-related English language skills, work-readiness and work experience opportunities.
- 3.2 Finding employment (e.g. completing application forms, on-line applications, interview skills).
- 3.3 Steps to becoming self-employed (small craft business/entrepreneurial skills and knowledge).
- 3.4 Keeping employment (personal development, timekeeping, workers' rights, managing time, managing change/conflict etc.)
- 3.5 Continue and expand practical skills training related to local job vacancies (truck drivers; delivery drivers; kitchen staff etc.).
- 3.6 Skills needed for specific skilled/semi-skilled jobs (e.g. in retail, catering industries, hairdressing).
- 3.7 Driving instruction classes – theory and practical - and support to obtain driving licences.
- 3.8 Continued development of ETB's adapted modified certification for the Atelier training programme modules to enable Roma students' participation.
- 3.9 Specialised English tuition particularly around the language of work, with opportunities to practice language skills.

"If I was asked to fetch something I wouldn't know what it was" (male Roma jobseeker)

Recommendations for the Atelier training programme

- 3.10 Assess the training and pre-employment/employment needs of the Czech/Slovak Roma men and adapt the training to meet their needs.
- 3.11 Consider different programmes to match different levels of need, skills and confidence e.g. a pre-employment induction programme for men who have little or no work

experience, and an employment, work-readiness programme for those with more advanced skills.

- 3.12 Develop employment opportunities by creating links with employers to fill vacancies and develop apprenticeship opportunities.
- 3.13 Link with recruitment agencies to develop relationships, assess vacancies and assist them place and support Roma workers.
- 3.14 Promote and advertise the Atelier training programme among employer organisations and the local community, highlighting successes through open days and media coverage, focusing on the potential of Roma workers (a community with an ethos of hard work and adaptability, whose members are often fluent in multiple European languages and have international experience and contacts).
- 3.15 Consider option of creating employment opportunities e.g.
 - creating a specialised Roma Community Employment scheme with additional support
 - creating a Roma team of construction/ building trade workers which could take on work supervised by Atelier staff.
- 3.16 Devise and deliver in collaboration with the Roma Community, leadership training for Roma individuals to support Roma community development.
- 3.17 Devise and deliver, in collaboration with the Roma Community, a training programme for Roma individuals to deliver training on Roma culture and history and on effective methods of communication to service delivery organisations.

8.4 English tuition

As the lack of English is such a huge barrier for the Roma Community's progress in all areas, consideration should be given to the delivery of specialised Roma-specific English language training for Roma women and men as the current provision is ineffective.

Recommendations

- 4.1 Review the delivery and operation in Waterford of the "Future FET: Transforming Learning, The National Further Education and Training Strategy" in relation to the provision of adult English language classes.
- 4.2 Provide accessible English language tuition for Roma adults (in addition to the Atelier provision of English work-related language classes) which does not require literacy skills; provide childcare to enable parents to attend and ensure that opportunities to practice English skills are created.

8.5 Women

Service providers should recognise that Roma women and girls face the double burden of racism and gender discrimination. They are often excluded from consultation and decision-making processes on policies and programmes including those specifically designed to address their situation.

Empowering Romanian Roma women to find employment presents challenges. Patriarchal values and the traditional female roles of protecting and raising their families discourage women from working outside the home and create additional mechanisms of exclusion.

Working with the Roma women will help establish good links with the Roma Community and assist develop the community's sense of pride and belonging.

Supporting the Romanian women to engage with other Roma women and the wider community will have a positive influence within the whole community.

Recommendations

- 5.1 Continue to support and develop the Women's Employment Programme and encourage the building of links between the Romanian, Czech and Slovak women through joint activities.
- 5.2 Provide leadership and confidence-building training for Roma women.
- 5.3 Encourage links with other women's groups in Waterford.

8.6 Younger generation

Recommendations

- 6.1 Provide English language support for Roma children attending school.
- 6.2 Develop specific training opportunities for young Roma individuals in areas of employment in which they have an interest.
- 6.3 Support the Roma Community to address school dropouts and early marriages.

8.7 Housing

Despite not being mentioned in NITRS as an issue affecting the Roma Community, this is a critical issue which unless addressed will hinder all aspects of the community's development and integration.

"As my family are facing eviction at the moment, I am stressed. Housing is my immediate priority" (Roma man)

National housing issues which need to be addressed (as recommended by CERD) include the need for the State to *"analyse the impact of the current housing crisis on Roma ... and take effective measures to address it"*; and ensure that access to social housing for Roma is improved and effective measures are taken to address any discrimination against Roma in the private rental sector.⁴³ The forthcoming revised National Traveller Roma Inclusion Strategy should include clear actions to address Roma accommodation with associated implementation plans and adequate resources.

⁴³ CERD/C/IRL/CO/5-9; para 28

An inability to meet the habitual residence conditions creates particular problems for the Roma community. As some will not qualify for Housing Assistance Payments (HAP), they can end up living in slum conditions which do not meet Private Residential Tenancies Board⁴⁴ standards. Where HAP is available, some landlords do not want to confirm that they will accept HAP as part of the rent payment (and thus declare it for tax purposes), and they operate outside the regulated sector. These issues require a particular solution for the Roma Community.

Recommendations

- 7.1 Analyse the availability and standard of private and public sector housing stock in Waterford City and County to assist Roma tenants and those seeking tenancies and inform relevant agencies.
- 7.2 Work with Waterford Homeless Service to adapt Focus Ireland's Tenancy Support and Settlement service⁴⁵ to assist Roma tenants to secure and maintain their tenancies.
- 7.3 Continue to develop supportive relationships between the Waterford and City Council Homeless Services and Atelier e.g. through Atelier staff engagement with the Homeless Action team meetings.

8.8 Health

The need for mental health awareness and access to dedicated services for the Roma Community became clear during the research. As *"there is no word for 'stress' in Romani ... it is a difficult topic to approach even with the support of an interpreter"*.

Recommendations

- 8.1 Provide cultural competency training for general health workers and service providers in GP or hospital settings, including training on Roma culture and background and on debunking myths and stereotypes in particular.
- 8.2 Provide intercultural health training for healthcare providers as an important first step in providing culturally sensitive health services and counteracting discriminatory practices in healthcare settings.
- 8.3 Focus on addressing mental health and the mental health stigma among the Roma Community which raises different issues from indigenous Irish people's mental health.
- 8.4 Develop and extend the model in Atelier's Health Literacy Module (within the Atelier training programme) which successfully engaged male Roma participants in conversations about sexual health, mental health and wellbeing.

⁴⁴ Landlords of Irish properties are legally required by The Residential Tenancies Act 2004 to register private residential tenancies with the Private Residential Tenancies Board. Registration is designed to protect tenants and assist in regulating the sector.

⁴⁵ The TSS service is available to anybody within a tenancy and covers all of Waterford City and County. The service doesn't assist with securing the tenancy but once secured, it can support the tenant with the initial set up; a referral can also be made where tenants are having difficulty in managing their tenancy such as arrears etc. Applications to the TSS service are by application form to cfinn@waterfordcouncil.ie. If deemed a suitable referral the tenant will be contacted directly by the TSS.

8.5 Address the failure among GPs, care workers, Accident & Emergency and other hospital staff etc. to use the HSE's interpreting services and ensure its promotion.

8.9 Racism and discrimination

As acknowledged in the Waterford Strategy and evidenced by the Roma participants in this research, racism exists in Waterford. In addition to the need to challenge civic leaders and for organisations to display signs and symbols to convey support for inter-culturalism, there is a need for Roma-specific action in the city.

The Department of Justice and Equality has undertaken to develop national initiatives to promote positive representations of, and respect for, Roma people.⁴⁶ Such initiatives should be developed in Waterford City and County.

Recommendations

- 9.1 Work with the education authorities and staff in primary and post-primary schools to develop interculturalism, anti-discrimination and anti-racism education programmes which focus on Roma as well as other minority ethnic groups, and which provide Roma students with positive models of their heritage, history, languages and culture.
- 9.2 Ensure service providers and service users are aware of the equality rights of all citizens in relation to service provision in the retail sector, health and employment fields.

8.9.1 Changes needed among Irish population

"They curse you in the street. They think we are refugees and say, 'go back to your country'." (Roma woman)

There is a need for anti-racist work among the Irish population to overcome the barriers to engagement with the Roma Community as highlighted in this report. Accounts were given of Roma families facing racism from some neighbours when they received social housing as they are seen as outsiders benefitting before the Irish public. The Atelier Roma Project team encountered similar attitudes and had to manage potential conflict from neighbours when it was delivering food to the homes of the Roma families during its outreach work.

"Irish people should have more information and training on multicultural issues and awareness." (Roma woman)

⁴⁶ NITRIS para 110: The Department of Justice and Equality will develop national initiatives to promote positive representations of, and respect for, Travellers and Roma. [SEP]2. The Department of Justice and Equality will support International Roma Day. [SEP]

Recommendations

- 9.3 In line with the national objectives set out in NTRIS, develop local initiatives to promote positive representations of, and respect for, the Roma Community among the general population in Waterford.
- 9.4 Develop opportunities to promote knowledge and understanding of Roma history and culture among the wider community in Waterford.
- 9.5 Develop links with other Black and Minority Ethnic and/or local community groups working to tackle racism in Waterford.
- 9.6 Provide Roma-led training on cultural awareness and cultural differences specific to the Roma Community for organisations working with them to ensure more effective delivery of services.

8.10 Promotion and celebration of Roma in Waterford

As well as the Department of Justice and Equality's undertaking to develop support for members of the "Roma communities to develop new and ambitious initiatives exploring ... Roma arts, culture and traditions"⁴⁷, the Waterford Migrant Integration Strategy commits to enabling the Roma Community to "celebrate their own culture, heritage and traditions, and to [pass] these on to the coming generations."⁴⁸ The participants in the Roma focus groups expressed interest in and support for celebrations of Roma culture as well as cultural get-togethers with Irish and other ethnic groups.

"We are proud of being Roma ... it is difficult to express my pride in being Roma if I have no English language ability." (Roma man)

Recommendations

- 10.1 Support the Waterford Migrant Integration Forum to build relationships with the different national groups within the Roma Community.
- 10.2 Provide support to explore and celebrate past and existing links between Roma and Irish craftsmen (such as those which existed in Waterford Crystal).
- 10.3 Develop multi-cultural celebrations in Waterford City and County with Irish and other cultures with opportunities to share music, dancing and national foods.
- 10.4 Celebrate Romanian, Czech and Slovak national days and days special to Roma communities such as:
 - Mărțișor (Romania) March 1st
 - International Roma Day, April 8th
 - International Women's Day, March 8th, and
 - [Roma Genocide Remembrance Day](#), August 2nd

⁴⁷ NTRIS para 110: ^[SEP]3. The Department of Justice and Equality will develop other supports for members of the Traveller and Roma communities to develop new and ambitious initiatives exploring Traveller and Roma arts, culture and traditions.

⁴⁸ The Waterford Strategy, page 47

8.11 Strategy

Some of the challenges which emerged from the research and which need to be addressed are listed below. Critical to supporting the development and integration of the Roma Community in Waterford is the development of a comprehensive strategy across the Waterford agencies to implement this report's recommendations and addresses these challenges.

- Ensuring that the funding stream which is currently is focused on training and education development is expanded and developed.
- The Atelier Roma Project team hugely expanded its advocacy work during the outreach project; a balance between essential advocacy (to maintain attendance) and developing the training programme needs to be struck as the team returns to its Atelier training role. This needs further discussion as meeting the needs of the whole Roma Community in Waterford requires more resources. While enabling the men (and the women) to attend the training programmes will always entail advocacy to ensure their attendance each week, meeting the wider needs of the Roma Community however should be the responsibility of other agencies such as the IHH.
- Another issue is the lack of a 'Roma' community group to engage with Waterford Integration Forum.
- In February 2022 the U-Casadh board agreed to start the process of winding up the company. Discussions on the future management of U-Casadh's projects including the Atelier Roma Project are ongoing. The U-Casadh board and management should be facilitated to work with the Roma team on a strategy to provide the Atelier Roma Project with appropriate organisational support and place it on a sound footing to continue to build on its achievements. While *'thinking on our feet'* and improvising was a suitable response to the Covid-19 health emergency in March 2020, a strategic plan is required for the future in order to strengthen and expand upon the outreach project's successes in engaging with and supporting the Roma Community in Waterford.
- A difference in approach between the Atelier Roma Project team and the IHH staff emerged during the outreach project. Strengthened collaborative approaches between the Atelier Roma Project and the IHH will provide invaluable benefits to the Roma Community.

Recommendations

- 11.1 Undertake peer-led research on the Roma Community in Waterford City and County addressing numbers, nationalities, languages, demographic profile, location, housing conditions, etc. including research on identifying Roma of different national origins (e.g. Polish or Hungarian Roma). This is required in order to plan actions based on evidence of the community's situation and experience and effectively target resources and services to meet their needs.
- 11.2 Undertake research on job market and vacancies in Waterford City and County to be used in creating job training programmes.
- 11.3 Strengthen the Atelier Roma Project through strategic planning, organisational support and adequate resources to create a sustainable future for the project.
- 11.4 SICAP should facilitate the U-Casadh board and management and the Atelier Roma Project team, following consultation, and in collaboration with the Roma Community, to develop a strategy to build on the outreach project's success and continue the Atelier Roma Project Men's Training, Development & Health Literacy Programme and the Women's Employment Programme for the short, medium and long-term.

8.12 CONCLUSION

The Roma Community in Waterford is a small community of around 350+ people. Effectively tailoring services to meet its particular needs does not require a big input of financial and other resources. This report provides an example of how a service to the community was adapted during the worst of the Covid-19 crisis in order to save lives and promote health. Through the commitment of the small number of staff concerned, the Atelier Covid-19 outreach project has had a significant impact on the lives of the Roma Community and on its engagement with service providers in Waterford.

The Atelier Roma Project team created a model of delivery from which other service providers can learn. The outreach project succeeded in delivering a critical health service to a particularly marginalised group in Waterford City and County during a national emergency. It succeeded in bringing separate Roma families together, empowering them and helping them build a sense of community. Critical to the model was the team's proactive approach; it sought out the families in need, consulted with them and had the flexibility to improvise and adapt its service in response. The team's inclusive approach enabled the Roma families to overcome their mistrust and build their confidence to engage with it, and subsequently, with other service providers.

This model has great potential; it can succeed also with other agencies and act as a springboard to bring more inclusive services to the Roma Community and other similarly marginalised communities in the future. It also provides valuable insights as to how the strategic actions in the Waterford Migrant Integration Strategy can be developed to promote the integration of the Roma Community in Waterford.

The detailed recommendations in this report aim to support the development of opportunities which the Roma Community requires to participate as full and equal members of society. Implementing the recommendations will require the will and the confidence of Waterford Area Partnership and other agencies to move beyond myths and stereotypes and promote action to overcome the deprivation and exclusion the Roma Community faces and allow it to celebrate the diversity of experience, the rich history, and the wealth of skills and resources the Community brings to Waterford City and County.

9.0 APPENDICES

List of Appendices

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Waterford Area Partnership CLG



Invitation to Tender for

SICAP Community Roma Evaluation/Research

Waterford Area Partnership CLG is the programme implementer for Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme for Lot 24–1 for Waterford City & County.

This Invitation to Tender

Within the SICAP Programme the Roma Community are a key target group who experienced additional marginalisation and disadvantage during the Covid-19 pandemic. At a local level Waterford Area Partnership works collaboratively with the Roma Inter-agency Group, led by HSE and Atelier Roma Project in providing essential supports to the Roma Community. The Atelier Project is aimed at training and development supports for men with a pre-development project commencing targeted at women with the community

Since March 2020, as the Covid-19 pandemic emerged, the Atelier Roma Project adapted their engagement with the Roma Community to outreach work, supporting families to understand and adhere to government guidelines to minimise the spread of infection. Supported by SICAP, the project delivered food and care parcels to Roma families from April to July 2020 and this led to additional funding from HSE and a stronger collaboration between HSE, Atelier Roma Project and the Intercultural Health Hub (aimed at refugees, asylum seekers and Roma) to maintain this support to date.

In March 2020 approximately 15 families were engaged with the Atelier Roma Project and due to the outreach work increased to 23 by July. In March 2021 the number of families engaged with totalled 67 including Czech Slovak families.

The outreach work conducted by staff within the Atelier Project and HSE strengthened contact, addressed needs and created links for the family with other services including Intercultural Health Hub in Waterford & South Tipperary Youth & Community Services.

Project Outline

As the Atelier Roma Project returns to their core work of training and development SICAP has an opportunity to utilise the links and learning gained in supporting the Roma families to inform future planning for

- a) SICAP National Mid-Year Review has prioritised Roma Community for remainder of programme to December 2023
- b) Roma Interagency Group collaborative actions in 2022
- c) Identify key needs for individuals and families

Key responsibilities / duties will include:

- ✚ Collate data, information and key learning on local actions and services available to the Roma Community from March 2020
- ✚ Engage and conduct interviews with key agencies, projects and services who have a role and remit in supporting the Roma Community
- ✚ Engage and conduct interviews and/or focus groups members of the Roma Community
- ✚ Research key strategies e.g. Dept. of Rural & Community Development Inclusion Strategies, Dept. of Justice & Equality National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy and EU Framework for National Roma Integrated Strategies
- ✚ Engage with Working Sub-group led by SICAP with Atelier Roma Project
- ✚ Present final report with recommendations identifying actions to inform SICAP 2022-23

Outcomes:

- ✚ Roma Community voice is heard, informing outcomes and actions (expectations- how do we manage these?)
- ✚ Recommendations are based on equality and human rights approaches with public sector duty responsibilities outlined
- ✚ Final report will inform local strategies and SICAP actions

Contract requirements:

- ✚ Previous experience in research and strategic development reports
- ✚ Develop engagement methodologies based on community development principles and practices of empowerment, collective action, decision making and equality.
- ✚ To complete the project in a timely manner to presentation of final report.
- ✚ Full report on impact and outcome of the project

Timeframe:

- ✚ November 2021 to February 2022

Contract Quote – submit a proposal outline the following:

- ✚ Methodologies proposed to use in progressing and developing work
- ✚ Cost related to meeting outcomes – exclusive of VAT.
Payment schedule will be included in the sub-contract.

Essential requirements

- ✚ The tender provider must have at least 3 years' experience of working in the community sector.
- ✚ Proven skills and experience working with marginalised communities
- ✚ Awareness of SICAP and community sector
- ✚ Excellent reporting and administration skills
- ✚ Proven interpersonal skills.

Successful Candidate will be contracted by Waterford Area Partnership CLG based on a Specific Contract for the provision of Subcontractor Services i.e. the individual will

- ✚ Be responsible to ensure the outcomes of the contract are met
- ✚ Agree timeframes for reporting and meetings
- ✚ Provision of Tax Clearance Certificate
- ✚ Provision of Professional Indemnity insurance
- ✚ Be responsible for own transport and insurance

Waterford Area Partnership CLG Community Development Team Lead will support the progression of the work. Please submit a proposal outlining approaches and methodologies used in achieving the work outlined above, a relevant CV providing evidence of own working practice and a budget breakdown of costs to:

Catherine Power
SICAP Community Development Team Lead
Email: cpower@wap.ie
Phone: 086 7008002



List of documents reviewed:

- U-Casadh Health Literacy Reports to HSE Social Inclusion SECH, January 2020 – October 2020, April – June 2021; and November 17, 2021 (S39 review meeting),
- U-Casadh Atelier Reports to the Regional Intercultural Health Steering Group, September 9, 2020, November 2020, February 2021, March 2021, May 4, 2021 & November 2, 2021
- Waterford Roma Interagency Group meeting minutes: September 3, 2020, March 2, 2021, May 11, 2021, September 14, 2021 & December 7, 2021.
- Regional Intercultural Health Steering Group, Migrant Health Research Project meeting minutes of May 12, 2020, September 15, 2020, November 3, 2020, & September 15, 2020
- “*Waterford Roma Strengths and Needs Analysis*” drafted by WRIG for planning purposes by the Intercultural Health Hub WSTCYS; Draft 3.3.22
- Copies of emails between Suzanne Nolan and Jim Bruton, plus a range of informal meeting notes, dated between March 18, 2020 and November 17, 2021.

Appendix C

The QuestionPro survey questions:

1. Name of your organisation
2. Contact Information
3. Please outline your organisation's role in providing support to the Roma Community in Waterford:
4. Outline the specific policy objectives, if any, your organisation aims to achieve in supporting the Roma Community in Waterford:
5. Describe how you deliver support to individuals and/or families in the Roma Community:
6. U-Casadh's Atelier Roma Project delivered support to Roma families through an outreach approach during the Covid-19 pandemic. Did your organisation engage with this outreach work in Waterford City and County between March 2020 to July 2021? If yes, please describe your organisation's role/support and give relevant examples:
7. Did your engagement with Atelier Roma Project's outreach work create opportunities for your organisation to work directly with members of the Roma Community? If yes, please explain how and give examples of actions undertaken:
8. What needs have members of the Roma community identified in your engagement with them?
9. Specify the outcomes, if any, your engagement with the outreach work created for 1) your organisation and 2) members of the Roma Community:
10. Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014 (IHREC Act) imposes a duty on public bodies (which includes community groups in receipt of public funds) in performing their functions to have regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, promote equality of opportunity and treatment of its staff and service users, and protect the human rights of its staff and service users. Is your organisation aware of its role and responsibilities under the IHREC Act?
11. What information or training does your organisation require to improve its understanding of Section 42 of the IHREC Act and its impact on its provision of services to the Roma community? Please specify:
12. Does your organisation have particular training needs to assist it work more effectively with the Roma community in Waterford? If yes, please specify:
13. What do you think are the gaps, if any, in your organisation in providing holistic support to the Roma community, including links to other services?
14. The final report of SICAP's research will include recommendations to address key needs within the Roma community. Are there any recommendations your organisation would propose and what role could you potentially play in meeting those needs?

Appendix D

Replies to the QuestionPro survey were received from staff within
Waterford Food Bank
Tusla
Active Connections and
Waterford Area Partnership

Zoom Interviewees:

Six structured interviews were conducted on Zoom between January and March 2022 with eight individuals from five organisations who had worked with Atelier Roma Project to learn more about the links they had built, how services to the Roma community could be strengthened in the future, and to elicit recommendations to inform future planning. The individuals interviewed were:

- Mary Byrne, Waterford Area Partnership Social Inclusion & Community Activation Programme, Employment Services Coordinator.
- Ovidiu Matiut, Intercultural Health supervisor, and Martin Hayes, Manager Intercultural Health Hub, Waterford and Tipperary Youth Services.
- Tess Whelan, U-Casadh Financial Controller and Jim Dempsey, U-Casadh Community Education tutor.
- Siobhan O'Brien, Community Education Facilitator, Kilkenny Carlow ETB.
- Ruth McEvoy, Community Health Worker - Refugees, Roma and International Protection Applicants, Intercultural Health Hub, WSTCYS.
- Emily Kelly, Social care worker, Homeless Services Waterford and City Council.

The interview questions were as follows:

1. Please outline your organisation's role in providing support to the Roma Community?
2. Outline the specific policy objectives, if any, your organisation aims to achieve in supporting the Roma Community in Waterford.
3. Describe how you deliver supports to the Roma Community - individuals and/or families.
4. The Atelier Roma Project delivered support to Roma families through outreach work during the Covid-19 pandemic. Did your organisation engage with this outreach work in Waterford City and County between March 2020 to July 2021?
5. How was your organisation involved? Describe involvement.
6. If yes, please describe your organisation's role/support and give relevant examples:
7. Did your engagement with Atelier Roma Project outreach work create opportunities for your organisation to work directly with members of the Roma Community?
8. If yes, please explain how and give examples:
9. What if any were the outcomes of that opportunity? For your organisation? For the Roma community?
10. S42 IHREC statutory duty: how well did your organisation fulfil its duty? Are staff trained in the duty? Any training needs? What knowledge needed? What changes required?
11. Does your organisation need training on Roma issues/culture/needs? Specify:
12. What are the gaps on the ground? What would you recommend to fill the gaps? What would be the challenges? What practical steps needed?
13. What did you learn from the experience? Describe the important learning you gained from the Atelier outreach work, if any? Any negatives? What didn't work well?
14. Any other comments?

Roma focus group questions:

Questions for the February 1, 2022 focus groups:

Introduction: My task today is to both record the outreach work done by Jim and Peter during the C19 lockdown between March 2020 and July 2021, and to hear from you what you think about how the planners can strengthen services to the Roma community in the future. The reason for the focus groups is to give you the chance to tell your story of what happened during the lockdown and what you got out of the outreach work. I would also like to hear from you about your vision for the future and what you need to achieve your goals - both from the agencies involved, and from within your own community.

1. What was your experience of the lockdown? What stories do you tell of what happened?
2. What did you get out of Jim and Peter's outreach work? Did you know Jim and Peter before the lockdown?
3. What are your goals for the future?
4. What would you like to do in the women's programme?
5. The authorities in Waterford want the Roma to be "encouraged and supported to celebrate their own culture, heritage and traditions and pass these onto the coming generations"; how would you like to do this? What aspects of Roma culture/your culture would you like to celebrate; what celebrations do you observe?

Survey undertaken by combined Roma Team (Atelier Roma Project and the IHH) in October 2020 in relation to food parcels support:

9 of 12 Roma people answered the survey

1 (a): Can we ask you how you found getting food every week?

8 stated that it was useful

1 stated that it was very useful.

1 (b): If you had a choice what food stuffs would you consider most appropriate to you needs?

Chicken /Pasta/ cooking oil –featured high in the survey.

2. Can we ask you how you found getting Covid-19 information?

All replied that the information was useful, with many expressing concerns that the schools would close during Covid-19, and that this would make things very difficult.

3. What was the most useful way of getting Covid information?

8 stated that getting information Face to Face was the preferred way to receive information.

1 Preferred information via WhatsApp.

4. Can we ask you how you found the advocacy work we did while doing our weekly outreach?

7 stated that it was useful

2 stated that it was very useful.

Other points to note from the telephone survey:

- All were happy with the timing of deliveries of food.
- There was a mixed response when we asked if the food deliveries were stopped how that impact on them. About half said that it would impact on them, while the other half said that it would not really impact on them. It was felt that the food deliveries were help to all respondents, however some are more dependent on the deliveries than others.
- The concern about Covid was mainly in not catching it and hoping that their children would not get it. As above they also expressed concern about schools being closed and children out of school.