

# HelpingKids!

Newsletter Summer 2021



University College Dublin

## Aims & Overview

Expanding on previous international projects, the *HelpingKids!* research team piloted a novel study to explore the attitudes and behaviours of children in Ireland. The aim of this research is to determine when and how Irish children develop an understanding of socially-relevant groups (e.g., Travellers, refugees, children with a diagnosis of Autism) and the impact that this understanding has on their interactions with children from these groups.

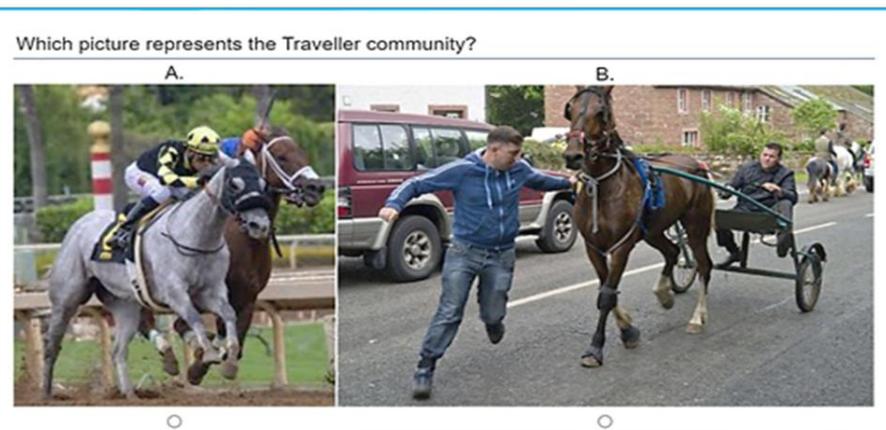
The study focused on primary school children aged six to twelve years old. A total of 148 children participated in remote testing and played a series of games during a 20-minute Zoom session with a trained research assistant. Children were asked about their own preferences and views toward children from other groups, how much social contact they would like to have with them, and how they might categorise different cultural symbols and images.

By investigating age-related trends in children's ethnic awareness, preference, and prejudice; this study has implications for designing developmentally appropriate interventions to promote better intergroup relations among children in Ireland.

## Symbols and Signs

To the best of our knowledge, this is the first study to explore children's awareness of and preference for cultural signs and symbols associated with Traveller and settled communities. The need to broaden existing *HelpingKids!* research to include Travellers is evidenced by the prevalence of negative attitudes towards this group, alongside previous findings that children are seemingly unaware of Travellers' ethnic minority status.

We developed an evidence-based instrument comprising 20 pairs of hypothesised *settled* and *Traveller* images relating to less observable aspects of ethnicity such as language, lifestyle, religion and traditions. These images were further refined and expanded upon as per the recommendations of our local advisory committees, the Southside Travellers Action Group (STAG) and the Irish Traveller Movement (ITM).



## Meet the Team!

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## The Traveller Community

- Travellers are an indigenous ethnic minority with a long shared history, cultural values, language, customs and traditions making them a self-defined group and one which is recognisable and distinct. Traveller culture and way of life, of which nomadism is an essential factor, is distinct from the settled population.
- In 2017, Travellers were formally recognised as a distinct ethnic group by the Irish state.
- Despite this, Travellers face marginalisation, social exclusion, racism and discrimination, evident particularly across the domains of education, health, employment and accommodation.
- Traveller children in primary education are often at greater risk of poor attendance, bullying, low expectations from teachers, and other factors relating to institutional discrimination.



## Awareness of Travellers

Our first game encouraged children to select the image which they believed to best represent the Traveller community. No age differences were found for children’s ability to correctly identify the Traveller images. This suggests that age does not have a large influence on children’s awareness of common signs and symbols associated with Traveller culture and lifestyle.

On average, children were able to correctly identify 60% of the images presented to them. Further analyses on this measure will help us better understand which symbols in particular are more salient markers of Traveller identity.

## Symbol Preference

Similarly, the “preference” game invited children to simply choose their favourite of the two images. In contrast to the “awareness” game, results showed that as children age, they develop a preference for the images which symbolise their Irish background.

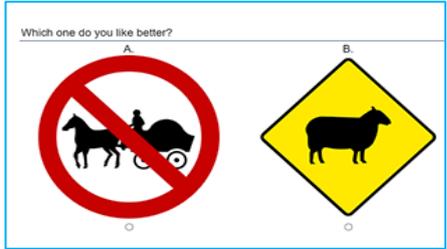
This is consistent with a large body of previous evidence that, by the time they enter formal schooling, majority-group children begin to display both explicit and implicit preferences towards members of their own ethnic group.

## Seating Distance

To explore children’s intended behaviours towards those from different backgrounds, they were shown various social scenarios and asked to indicate where they would sit in proximity to an Irish, Traveller and refugee child. They were shown a chart with a row of eight seats.

In general, children sat closest to the Irish child (average seat = 2.5), followed by the Traveller child (average= 2.68), and sat furthest away from the refugee child (average = 3.18).

Although no significant age difference was found for refugee children, further results showed that as children got older, they opted to sit closer to the Traveller and Irish children.



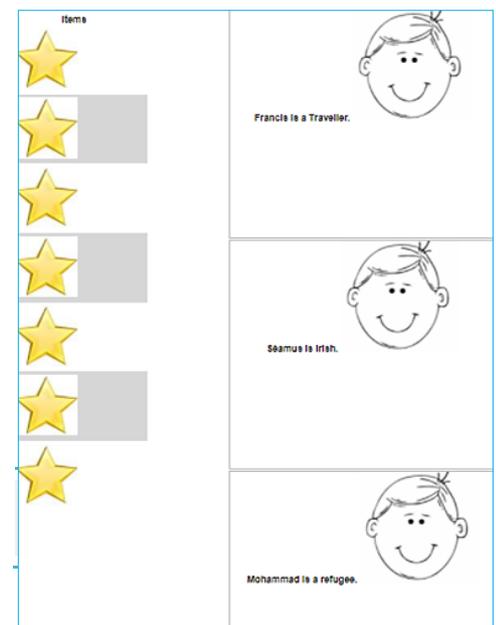
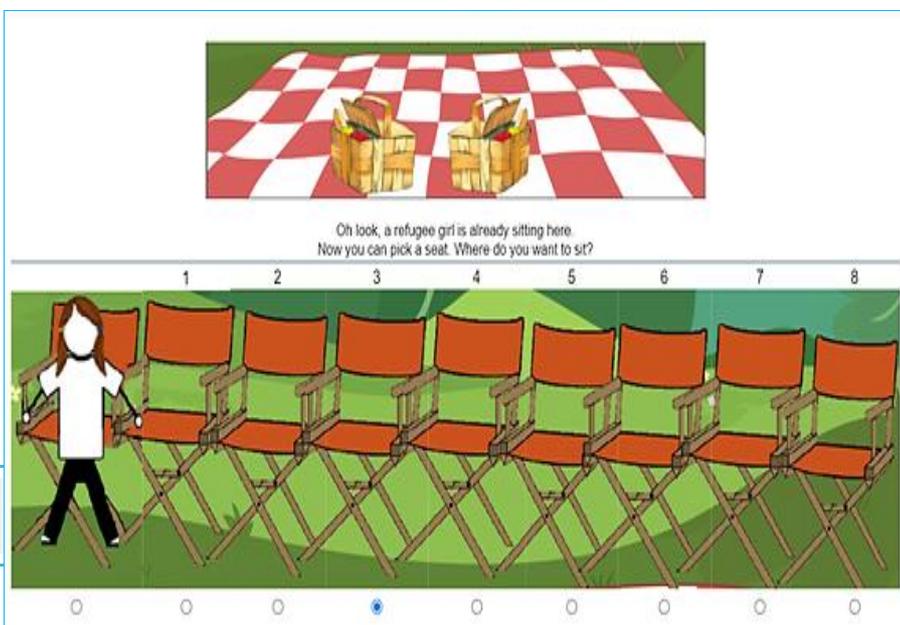
## Sharing

A child-friendly “sticker-giving” game was developed to examine children’s intentions to share with children from different groups.

Each child saw three gender-matched children and were encouraged to distribute seven stickers between them. Children were reminded that they could divide the stickers in whatever way they wanted.

In general, children opted to share the stickers among the three children equally, with each child receiving approximately 2 stickers each.

Findings suggest that age did not influence how children chose to distribute the stickers. This could indicate that a sense of fairness is present by the time children enter primary school.



## THANK YOU!

On behalf of the *Helping Kids!* team and University College Dublin, we would like to thank everyone who supported this project.

We especially would like to thank the parents and children for their cooperation and patience with remote testing. We appreciate your enthusiasm and continued participation in our research.

We would also like to extend our sincerest thank you to the **Southside Travellers Action Group** (STAG) and the **Irish Traveller Movement** (ITM) for their invaluable insight, cooperation and involvement throughout all phases of this project.

Finally, this project would not have been possible without the generous financial support of the UCD Seed Funding Programme.

