



Briefing Paper 2: Traveller and Roma Education

Introduction

Over the coming period the second National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy, an essential tool for progressing key areas of policy important for Travellers and Roma, and the National Traveller and Roma Education Strategy are being developed and seeking views and submissions. In addition, a number of other policy areas relevant for Roma and Travellers are under consideration and implementation of Traveller and Roma policy through targeted and mainstream actions continues to be slow.

This is one of a series of short briefs intended to inform thinking about and engagement with key thematic areas - in this instance Traveller and Roma Education – which are pertinent for those policies and the progress of Traveller and Roma rights and equality which should flow from them. The briefing papers are designed as a work in progress to be reinforced and/or modified as the discussions develop.

Traveller and Roma Education

Our Vision: Equal access, participation, outcomes for Travellers and Roma in the Irish Education System.

Our Ask: To urgently develop, fully resource and implement the National Traveller and Roma Education Strategy to address the needs of Travellers and Roma at all education levels.

Context: Traveller and Roma Education

- **Early years:** Available official data suggests that Traveller and Roma children are availing of early years care and education¹. However, evidence from Traveller and Roma organisations show significant issues with access and engagement with early years services.
- **Primary education:** Virtually all Traveller children aged 3-13 years are enrolled in primary schools. However, attendance and attainment levels are weighted towards the poorer end of the spectrum.
- **Post-primary/secondary education:** Travellers' engagement with post-primary schooling is fragile and needs urgent measures. 33% of Travellers are enrolled in upper secondary education in comparison with over 90% of the State population in the same age band². According to the latest Census, only about 20% of Travellers aged 20-24-years have completed the Senior Cycle³.
- **Higher education:** In 2020, 119 Travellers were enrolled in higher education (less than 1% of the population).

Commitments and Progress Made During NTRIS 2017-Present

NTRIS Objectives

1. Improve access, participation and outcomes for Travellers and Roma in education to achieve outcomes that are equal to those for the majority population.

¹ Pobal, Annual Early Years Sector Profile Report 2020/2021, May 2022

² Central Statistics Office, Census 2016, Profile 8 - Irish Travellers Ethnicity and Religion. Tables E8014 and E8023.

³ ibid



PAVEE POINT

TRAVELLER AND ROMA CENTRE

2. A positive culture of respect and protection for the cultural identity of Travellers and Roma across the education system.
3. Improved opportunities for Traveller and Roma men to engage in culturally appropriate apprenticeships, training, and lifelong learning.

Pavee Point welcomed the explicit targeting of Traveller and Roma participation in the **National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2022-2028**⁴. However, none of the mainstream educational strategies contain targets aimed directly at increasing Traveller or Roma participation at early years, primary or post-primary levels. The inequalities and exclusion faced by Traveller and Roma children in education, early childhood education and care are now exacerbated by the differential effects of COVID-19. The development of a **National Traveller & Roma Education Strategy**, now a Programme for Government commitment, remains an urgent and outstanding priority. There have been recent positive developments with the State issuing an online consultation for the development of this strategy, with focus groups with Travellers and Roma to follow.

We recognise that a number of small initiatives (including a pilot programme which covers four geographical locations) have been introduced but remain concerned at the limitations in terms of their geographical scope, outcomes and sustainability. While Delivering Equality of Opportunity In Schools (DEIS) sets a vision for the State to improve education opportunities for communities at risk of social exclusion and provides funding for DEIS schools, many Travellers do not attend DEIS schools⁵.

Pavee Point has long advocated for ethnic equality monitoring. We appreciate the inclusion of ethnic identifiers in school return forms, however, note that this data is not publicly available or regularly used in informing policy, practice, programming or to monitor outcomes. Ethnic data will be key for the implementation and monitoring of the NTRIS and the National Traveller and Roma Education Strategy. We note that Tusla has included an ethnic identifier in their forms related to the use of reduced hours and that this data will be shortly published. This is to address the growing trend in the use of 'reduced timetables' at primary and secondary level schools whereby Traveller children have been placed on reduced hours during school days but are marked as 'present.' This data needs to be analysed together with representative civil society organisations and use this data to further inform measures to address the use of reduced hours.

Recommendations:

- Urgently implement the Programme for Government commitment and develop a **National Traveller and Roma Education Strategy**. Ensure the Strategy has a robust implementation and monitoring plan with associated dedicated targets, indicators, outcomes, timeframes, and resources as well as a consultative structure to drive its implementation.
- **Publish and monitor ethnic data, including with regards to the use of reduced hours** in schools and provide adequate resources for all schools, pupils, and Tusla Education Support Services to ensure Traveller, Roma and other children receive the supports they need.

⁴ HEA (2022) National Access Plan: A Strategic Action Plan for Equity of Access, Participation and Success in Higher Education 2022-2028 <https://hea.ie/policy/access-policy/national-access-plan-2022-2028/>

⁵ Data released by Department of Education Social Inclusion Unit, NTRIS Committee: Education updates and developments, 27 June 2022