



# ROMA AND EDUCATION

**Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre** is a non-governmental organisation committed to the attainment of human rights for Irish Travellers and Roma. The organisation is comprised of Travellers, Roma and members of the majority population, working in partnership to address human rights issues faced by Travellers and Roma as minority groups experiencing exclusion and marginalisation. Pavee Point has been running a Roma Project since the year 2000. The Roma project is working for Roma in Ireland to attain their full human rights and to be actively involved in decisions affecting their lives.

This report was produced by Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre as part of a series of seminars exploring Roma rights in Ireland. It is based on the outcomes of a thematic seminar on the right to education for Roma in Ireland.

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Cover photo: Roma girl completing her homework.  
Photo by James Fraher.

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Walking Home from School.  
Photo by James Fraher

**“EDUCATION RIGHTS CANNOT BE REALISED WITHOUT THE FULFILMENT OF OTHER RIGHTS, WITHOUT THE ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT OF ALL SOCIAL ACTORS IN TAKING UP THEIR RESPONSIBILITIES AND WITHOUT A VISION OF SOCIAL CHANGE.”**

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Full realisation of the right to education is not simply a question of access. A rights-based approach to education must be a holistic one, which takes into account all of the factors in a child's life that will impact on their education outcomes. The right to education encompasses access to education, educational quality and the environment in which education is provided.

Recognising and respecting the human rights of children while they are in school – including respect for their identity, participation and integrity is integral to a rights-based approach to education. Children will continue to be excluded from education unless measures are taken to address their rights to freedom from discrimination, to an adequate standard of living and to meaningful participation.

The right to education for Roma is characterised by serious human rights shortcomings and violations across Europe. According to the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) Roma are one of the most disadvantaged groups in education across the European Union (EU).<sup>01</sup> Roma experience barriers to education, including poverty, racism, discrimination, poor housing and health conditions, and a lack of access to employment and social protection. These factors contribute to poor educational outcomes, such as issues with literacy and numeracy, early school leaving, intermittent school attendance, low educational attainment, and barriers to access further education and training.

Poor educational outcomes, combined with persistent and prohibitive discrimination perpetuate a cycle of educational disadvantage that further marginalises Roma communities and prevents social mobility.

It is evident that barriers to education for Roma children in Ireland reflect not only the historical and contemporary experiences of Roma elsewhere in Europe, but also the experiences of Irish Travellers.

Although Roma in Ireland are a heterogeneous group whose experiences in education vary, this report highlights serious shortcomings on the part of the state in ensuring to fulfil basic needs for food and shelter; and barriers in accessing employment, social protection and health services.

Poverty and poor living conditions are repeatedly identified by both education stakeholders and Roma as a formidable barrier to accessing education. The impact of the Habitual Residency Condition is profound. If parents cannot access social welfare payments or suitable housing, school attendance and participation becomes secondary to providing more basic needs like food and shelter. This can also place educational welfare workers and teachers in a difficult position where they are forced to demand commitments from parents who are under enormous strain.

Education in Ireland remains costly. For parents who cannot afford the costs associated with sending a child to school they are dependant on schools and teachers to provide financial support. Not all schools can provide assistance, leaving parents essentially playing 'school lotto'. This places schools and parents in a difficult position and leaves children's participation precarious and in some cases at the discretion of schools.

Since 2010, English language supports have been significantly cut. Language skills are fundamental for Roma children to ensure that they can successfully access the curriculum. Without sufficient supports children are placed at an increased risk of falling behind and eventually early school leaving.

Schools do not receive an increased capitation grant for Roma children; this means that they have no extra financial assistance with which to support Roma children. As one seminar participant remarked 'we were basically left to our own devices and told to get on with it.'

Currently educational welfare staff including education welfare officers, home school liaison teachers and school completion officers receive no cultural awareness training for working with Roma families. This is of huge concern given their crucial role in ensuring school completion, attendance and inclusion. Many education stakeholders have limited access to interpreters and support staff, which can make engaging with parents who may not speak English particularly difficult.

What is clear from the research is that education stakeholders themselves do not feel that they have sufficient training or supports at their disposal to ensure the inclusion of Roma children given the particular challenges and disadvantage that many Roma families face. The research shows that education stakeholders were universally open to the idea of further training.

The report challenges common misconceptions, illustrating the value placed on education by Roma parents and their eagerness to encourage their children's participation in the education system. However, access and engagement are frequently curtailed by poverty and more basic needs including food and shelter. Roma parents welcomed the fact that their children could attend mainstream education in Ireland rather than the segregated provision that many children faced in their country of origin.

It is clear that teachers, educational welfare staff and education stakeholders require a framework and accessible programme of supports to ensure Roma inclusion within the education system and that there needs to be a cross-sectoral approach to ensure that issues such as poverty do not present a barrier to school attendance or completion.

Ireland has been obligated to develop a National Traveller Roma Integration Strategy under the European Commission's EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020.<sup>02</sup> However, Pavee Point note that the current strategy lacks goals, targets, indicators, timeframes, funding mechanisms and monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, and was developed without the involvement of Travellers and Roma.<sup>03</sup> The Commission has also noted dissatisfaction with Ireland's strategy, giving it a score of 4 out of 22 in its 2013 assessment.<sup>04</sup> The current strategy needs to be revised with the full involvement of Roma and Travellers and include a plan with timelines and deliverables to ensure that Roma children can fully enjoy their right to education.

The absence of mechanisms to monitor and support the inclusion of Roma children in the Irish education system means Roma children are vulnerable to exclusion and marginalisation. There is no comprehensive and very little reliable data on the situation and needs of Roma in the Irish education system, as currently there is no system in place to collect data disaggregated by ethnicity in the education system.<sup>05</sup> As education stakeholders note in the report, Roma children are 'invisible' within the system.

This lack of data combined with the absence of an adequate and comprehensive national framework for Roma inclusion results in policy makers and educational practitioners working in a vacuum. In this way, the state fails to protect the rights of vulnerable Roma children and adhere to its human rights commitments and EU Roma inclusion objectives.<sup>06</sup> This report is intended to provide a starting point for policy makers, education stakeholders and other relevant parties to assist in understanding the complex and intersectoral background of the issues affecting Roma access to education. Ireland has signed up to international treaties protecting the right to education and so has an obligation to ensure that Roma rights to education are respected, protected and fulfilled.

## THE REPORT IS ORGANISED INTO SEVEN SECTIONS:

**SECTION 1** outlines the rationale of the report. This includes outlining its aims, objectives and methodology.

**SECTION 2** gives an overview of the historical and contemporary situation of Roma communities in Europe and Ireland. This provides a context for understanding the socio-economic, cultural, political and legal situation of Roma living in Ireland.

**SECTION 3** outlines the human rights context to the attainment of Roma education in Ireland, as set out in international, regional and national instruments. This is followed by looking at practices and policies in education systems across Europe.

**SECTION 4** examines policy and practice in relation to Roma education across Europe, highlighting significant violations and shortcomings in the right to education for Roma.

**SECTION 5** introduces key findings of the seminar and supplementary research by outlining the barriers and issues experienced by Roma children and parents, and educational practitioners in Ireland.

**SECTION 6** highlights the supports needed for Roma and educational practitioners in the promotion and protection of Roma right to education. It sets out a number of recommendations to guide policy makers and practitioners in the development and implementation of policy and practice.

**SECTION 7** provides an overview of the 4As Framework which can be used to assist policy makers and practitioners in ensuring that the state is realising the right to education for Roma children.

<sup>01</sup> FRA, *The Situation of Roma in 11 EU Member States: Survey Results at a Glance*, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2012.

<sup>02</sup> European Commission, *An EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020*, Brussels, 05 April 2011 COM (2011) 173.

<sup>03</sup> Pavee Point, *Briefing Note on the National Traveller Roma Integration Strategy (NTRIS)*, 2013, <http://www.paveepoint.ie/resources/roma/>

<sup>04</sup> European Commission, *Steps Forward in Implementing National Roma Integration Strategies*, Brussels: 26 June 2013, COM(2013) 454 final.

<sup>05</sup> Lesovitch, L., *Roma Educational Needs in Ireland: Context and Challenges*, Dublin: City of Dublin VEC in association with Pavee Point Travellers Centre and the Roma Support Group, 2005.

<sup>06</sup> For more information, see European Commission, *An EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020*, Brussels: European Commission, 2011.

## SECTION 01: RATIONALE AND BACKGROUND



Mother and daughter completing homework.  
Photo by James Fraher.

**“IN EACH SITUATION WE CONFRONT, A RIGHTS BASED APPROACH REQUIRES US TO ASK: WHAT IS THE CONTENT OF THE RIGHT? WHO ARE THE RIGHTS CLAIM-HOLDERS? WHO ARE THE CORRESPONDING DUTY-BEARERS? ARE CLAIM HOLDERS AND DUTY-BEARERS ABLE TO CLAIM THEIR RIGHTS AND FULFIL THEM? IF NOT HOW CAN WE HELP THEM TO DO SO? THIS IS THE HEART OF A HUMAN RIGHTS BASED APPROACH”** Mary Robinson, Former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

### INTRODUCTION

This report was produced in response to concerns over Roma and education in Ireland. A series of seminars were held in 2012 as part of collaborative work between Pavee Point and the Health Service Executive (HSE). The seminars focused on topical issues identified by Pavee Point and the HSE, and included inputs from a range of participants from statutory and non-statutory organisations and Roma representatives. The learning is documented in order to provide a series of thematic resources for policy makers and practitioners working with Roma communities in Ireland. The report on Roma and Education is the third report in the seminar series.<sup>07</sup>

The seminar on education was organised in response to discussions on barriers to education in previous seminars and ongoing concerns from education stakeholders. The seminar was attended by a range of participants from the National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB), school teachers and principals, education stakeholders, Roma communities and wider civil society. The purpose was to share information in relation to Roma and education, and identify needs, challenges and examples of good practice experienced by Roma and education stakeholders. A number of issues emerged in relation to barriers experienced by Roma and educational stakeholders in ensuring the inclusion of Roma children in education.

The right to education has no age limit however for the purposes of this research the focus has been primarily on the educational rights of children.

In Ireland, data on Roma in education is largely absent due to the lack of official data being disaggregated by ethnicity. There is a specific need to include ethnicity as a category in data collection in order to generate accurate and reliable data and develop responsive and effective policies and services. In the absence of such data, this report can be seen as an exploratory report and a starting point for understanding Roma and education in Ireland.

### AIM AND OBJECTIVES

This report aims to be a first step in exploring the extent to which Roma children's right to education in Ireland is being realised. It highlights key barriers through providing Roma perspectives on accessing and engaging with primary and post-primary education. It also looks at the challenges faced by education stakeholders in ensuring the inclusion of Roma. It contributes to an inclusive, human rights approach to promoting Roma inclusion in education.

The report examines:

- **Barriers and issues, which prevent Roma children from successfully accessing and engaging in the education system.**
- **Challenges faced by educational practitioners in ensuring Roma inclusion.**
- **Gaps in available supports for Roma and educational practitioners.**
- **A possible framework from which to promote and ensure the right to education for Roma in Ireland.**

### METHODOLOGY

The core of the research for this report was generated through a seminar held by Pavee Point on Roma and Education in December 2012. The report is informed by contributions made by seminar speakers, education stakeholders and members of the Roma community. The findings from the seminar were further subsidised by individual interviews and focus group discussions with stakeholders. Research participants included Roma representatives, educational practitioners, academics and other relevant stakeholders. The participants' inputs provided personal, institutional and empirical accounts of the situation of Roma children in the Irish education system. The anonymity of all research participants is protected in the representation of these findings. It is intended that this report will act as a catalyst for further, more in-depth research and greater debate and discussion about Roma and education in Ireland.

<sup>07</sup> The first two reports of the seminar series focused on *Roma & child protection considerations, and Roma & Maternal Health* see Pavee Point and the HSE, Roma Communities and Child Protection Considerations, Dublin: Pavee Point and the Health Service Executive, 2012.

## SECTION 02:

# SITUATION OF ROMA IN EUROPE AND IRELAND



Roma girl with Irish passport.  
Photo by James Fraher.

**“IN MANY EUROPEAN COUNTRIES THE ROMA POPULATION IS STILL DENIED BASIC HUMAN RIGHTS AND MADE VICTIMS OF FLAGRANT RACISM. THEY REMAIN FAR BEHIND OTHERS IN TERMS OF EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT, EMPLOYMENT, HOUSING AND HEALTH STANDARDS AND THEY HAVE VIRTUALLY NO POLITICAL REPRESENTATION. THEIR EXCLUSION FROM SOCIETY FEEDS ISOLATIONISM, WHICH IN TURN ENCOURAGES PREJUDICE AGAINST THE ROMA AMONG XENOPHOBES. MORE EFFORT IS NEEDED TO BREAK THIS VICIOUS CYCLE”** Council of Europe

## INTRODUCTION

This section provides an overview of the historical and contemporary situation of Roma communities in Europe and Ireland. It provides a context for the socio-economic, cultural, political and legal situation of Roma, mapping out persistent experiences of anti-Roma racism, discrimination, violence and hate crime across Europe.

## FACTS AND FIGURES

### ABOUT ROMA

People who identify as Roma are part of a minority ethnic group that originated in Northwest India. EU institutions use ‘Roma’ as an umbrella term for people who self-identify as belonging to Roma, Sinti, Travellers, Ashkali, Manush and other groups - this includes Irish Travellers.<sup>08</sup>

Irish Travellers are an indigenous minority group who have been part of Irish society for centuries. Although Irish Travellers are a distinct ethnic group from other Roma, there are parallels in terms of a history of nomadism, distinct culture and shared history, and strong identity associated with family networks. These factors distinguish Roma and Irish Travellers from majority populations. They also share the experiences of racism and discrimination based on their ethnic background. The nomadic identity of Irish Travellers has been devalued and criminalised through legislation, such as the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 2002. While Roma also have a history of nomadism many were forced to become sedentary under communist regimes. This contrasts with the experience of many Roma now, who have been forced to move and migrate in the face of discrimination and/or violent attacks.<sup>09</sup>

**“IMMEDIATE AND EXTENDED FAMILY IS A CORE PART OF PERSONAL IDENTITY AND ROMA CULTURE. IT IS QUITE USUAL FOR 3 OR 4 GENERATIONS OF THE SAME FAMILY TO LIVE TOGETHER, AND ROMA WHO MIGRATE TEND TO DO SO WITH THEIR EXTENDED FAMILY. THE FAMILY STRUCTURE PLAYS A STRONG ROLE IN EDUCATION ABOUT CULTURE, HISTORY, AND TRADITIONS.”<sup>10</sup>**

Roma means ‘people’ in Romani and is the preferred term used to describe members of Roma communities.<sup>11</sup> Because of the way in which the term ‘Gypsy’ has been used in some countries, this is considered derogatory.<sup>12</sup> Although Roma communities can be said to share similar cultural practices, language, history and experiences, Roma are an extremely diverse group and cannot be seen as a homogenous group.

Roma have been European citizens for centuries and constitute the largest minority group in the EU. The Council of Europe estimates that there are 10-12 million Roma living in Europe. Roma live mainly in Eastern and Central Europe, with the largest Roma communities in Romania (est. 2 million) and Slovakia (est. 600,000). Demographically, the Roma population in these countries is approximately 10% of each of the countries’ overall population.

Roma speak a Sanskrit-based language called Romani that now exists in similar forms across European countries. Romani is the most extensively spoken language with an estimated 60 variants. Generally, Roma speak the language of the country where they reside. However, Roma who have moved and migrated to another country can often experience language barriers. The use of interpreters and translators in these instances in services can be common. However, due to experiences of racism and discrimination in country of origin, a non-Roma interpreter from their country of origin may be unsuitable.

It is important not to over-generalise or stereotype in relation to Roma communities. In fact,

**“...STEREOTYPES AND PREJUDICES AGAINST THE ROMA ARE SO DEEPLY ROOTED IN EUROPEAN CULTURE THAT THEY ARE OFTEN NOT PERCEIVED AS SUCH AND ACCEPTED AS FACT. THE NEGATIVE BEHAVIOUR OF ONE INDIVIDUAL TENDS TO BE AUTOMATICALLY APPLIED TO ALL - WITH NO DISTINCTION EITHER BETWEEN DIFFERENT GROUPS OF ROMA - AND IS ATTRIBUTED TO ROMANI CULTURE INSTEAD OF TO THE INDIVIDUAL”.**<sup>13</sup>

<sup>08</sup> European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, *The Fundamental Rights Position of Roma and Travellers in the European Union*, 2010.

<sup>09</sup> For more information see Pavee Point, *Roma in Ireland - an Initial Needs Analysis*, Pavee Point Traveller Centre, 2002.

<sup>10</sup> Lesovitch, L., *Roma Educational Needs in Ireland: Context and Challenges*, Dublin: City of Dublin VEC in association with Pavee Point Travellers Centre and the Roma Support Group, 2005.

<sup>11</sup> This was agreed at the World Romani Congress in 1971; Council of Europe, Making Human Rights for Roma a Reality, <http://www.coe.int/web/coe-portal/roma>

<sup>12</sup> Lesovitch, L., *Roma Educational Needs in Ireland: Context and Challenge*, Dublin: City of Dublin VEC in association with Pavee Point Travellers Centre & the Roma Support Group, 2005.

<sup>13</sup> European Network Against Racism and European Roma Information Office, *Debunking Myths & Revealing Truths about the Roma*, <http://cms.horus.be/files/99935/MediaArchive/publications/roma%20final%20pdf.pdf>

## ROMA EXCLUSION — HISTORY AND CONTEMPORARY SITUATION

Roma are united by a shared experience of racism and discrimination. The former Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe, Thomas Hammarberg, notes that “Europe has a shameful history of discrimination and severe repression of the Roma. There are still widespread prejudices against them in country after country on our continent”.<sup>14</sup>

Roma have fled violence and persecution for centuries, and this continues to this day. From the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, Roma were subjected to anti-Gypsy laws in Western and Central Europe. In Romania, Roma were enslaved. Efforts to expel Roma were gradually replaced in many countries with forced assimilation policies. For example, Roma were banned from wearing distinctive clothing, speaking Romani, or marrying other Roma. During the Holocaust, the Porajmos, it is estimated that 500,000 were killed.<sup>15</sup> Roma were targeted and exterminated under fascist regimes in both Italy and Romania. Roma have struggled to have their persecution during the Second World War acknowledged.

The experiences and situation of Roma differ from country to country. However, Roma continue to face widespread discrimination and racism across Europe. Openly racist attitudes against Roma are widely tolerated and extreme racism frequently occurs without condemnation. The European Union Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) documented in 2011 that 46% of Roma felt discriminated against in the previous year.<sup>16</sup> Roma have been subjected to house raids, repeated forced evictions, forced sterilisations and police brutality. Anti-Roma rhetoric across Europe is common. In France, the Government has used anti-Roma sentiment to legitimise the policy of expulsion of Roma, by using force if necessary.<sup>17</sup> The Commissioner for Human Rights for the Council of Europe, Nils Muižnieks, has noted that anti-Gypsyism is being exploited by extremist groups in several European countries. For example, the Commissioner has stated deep concerns about patterns of anti-Roma events in the Czech Republic and stated the need for urgent action to protect Roma from racist

extremism.<sup>18</sup> The European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC) reports that violence against Roma communities is rising across Europe. The attacks they have documented include police violence, arson attacks, mob violence and anti-Roma demonstrations, including an attack in Hungary where six Roma were murdered by vigilantes in 2010.<sup>19</sup>

Roma continue to experience discrimination in housing, education, employment, health, access to goods and services, and decision-making. A survey by the FRA covering 11 EU countries shows that one in three Roma is unemployed and 90% live below national poverty lines.<sup>20</sup>

The European Commission notes that **“THE DISCRIMINATION, SOCIAL EXCLUSION AND SEGREGATION WHICH ROMA FACE ARE MUTUALLY REINFORCING. THEY FACE LIMITED ACCESS TO HIGH QUALITY EDUCATION, IN INTEGRATION INTO THE LABOUR MARKET, CORRESPONDINGLY LOW INCOME LEVELS, AND POOR HEALTH WHICH IN TURN RESULTS IN HIGHER MORTALITY RATES AND LOWER LIFE EXPECTANCY COMPARED WITH NON-ROMA.”**<sup>21</sup>

Throughout Europe, the average life expectancy of Roma and Travellers is shorter than that of non-Roma and non-Travellers. Roma and Traveller infant mortality rates are also higher. The Council of Europe states that Roma and Travellers face significant barriers in accessing healthcare. These include lack of resources to pay for insurance or treatment, discrimination in healthcare provision and lack of trust in services. Although in Ireland, the Traveller Primary Health Care Project provides a good example of Traveller involvement in community health, very few Roma or Travellers work in healthcare provision.<sup>22</sup>

Roma experience repeated forced evictions and expulsions.<sup>23</sup> In many cases where people have been evicted, they have not been given notice, their accommodation has been demolished and they have not been provided with alternative accommodation. In some cases, families have been moved to places unfit for human habitation, such as toxic rubbish dumps.

Such actions breach international human rights law. In Italy, a ‘nomad emergency’ led to the forced eviction of Roma without the provision of alternative accommodation or prior notice of the eviction.<sup>24</sup> A mass forced eviction of Roma took place in Serbia in April 2012. Authorities failed to consult with the Roma communities affected, and denied them adequate information, notice and legal remedies.<sup>25</sup> French authorities forcibly evicted more than 21,537 Romani migrants in 2013; this was double the figure from 2012.<sup>26</sup>

Roma children in many European countries remain excluded from quality education. Roma can be segregated in Roma-only classes or schools, and placed in schools for children with intellectual disabilities. The conditions in these schools and classrooms are often overcrowded, under resourced and wholly inadequate, whilst teachers’ expectations can be described as low at best. Roma children face serious challenges in achieving the most basic standard of education. In 2007 the European Court of Human Rights ruled the Czech Government to have discriminated against Roma in education by denying Roma children access to mainstream education through national policy.<sup>27</sup>

Currently educational welfare staff including education welfare officers, home school liaison teachers and school completion officers receive no cultural awareness training for working with Roma families. This is of huge concern given their crucial role in ensuring school completion, attendance and inclusion. They also have very limited access to interpreters and support staff, which can make engaging with parents who may not speak English particularly difficult.

## ROMA IN IRELAND

It is estimated that there are 5,000 Roma currently living in Ireland. Roma in Ireland mostly come from Romania, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Poland and Bulgaria.

There is very little accurate and reliable data available about Roma in Ireland as ethnicity is not included as a category in official data collection, including in the Census. The lack of accurate information about Roma communities makes it difficult to develop and implement effective and appropriate policies and services.

It is important to note that Roma in Ireland constitute a very diverse community. However, similar to the situation elsewhere in Europe, many Roma in Ireland experience disadvantages in accessing education, health, employment and adequate housing, and are subjected to experiences of racism, exclusion and poverty. Roma have been portrayed in a negative light in the Irish media and are often associated with criminal activities and ‘organised begging’.

Roma experience a high level of racism in Ireland. This includes attacks on Roma homes and verbal abuse. Roma women in particular report instances where they are not allowed to enter shops or other services, and are subjected to racist comments by service providers. Roma are also subject to racist comments by high ranking public officials and elected representatives. For instance, in 2013, a Judge was reported as saying,

**“I ASSUME FROM HIS APPEARANCE THAT HE’S FROM THE ROMA COMMUNITY WHO CAME HERE TO DO WHAT ALL OF THEM TEND TO DO, TO USE THE STREETS TO BEG”**<sup>28</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Hammarberg, T., *Forced Evictions of Roma Families Must Stop*, Council of Europe, 2006.

<sup>15</sup> Porajmos means ‘Roma Holocaust’ in Romani, see Huttenbach, H.R., ‘The Romani Porajmos: The Nazi Genocide of Europe’s Gypsies’, in *Nationalities Papers*, Volume 9:3 (1991): pp. 373-394.

<sup>16</sup> European Union Fundamental Rights Agency, *The Situation of Roma in 11 EU Member States: Survey Results at a Glance*, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2012.

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> See Council of Europe, *Czech Republic: Nis Muižnieks says urgent action needed to protect Roma from racist extremism*, 2014, <http://www.humanrightseurope.org/2014/03/czech-republic-nis-muiznieks-says-urgent-action-needed-to-protect-roma-from-racist-extremism/>.

<sup>19</sup> ERRC, *Roma under Attack: Violence Against Roma Surges in Central and Eastern Europe*, 2012, <http://www.errc.org/>.

<sup>20</sup> European Union Fundamental Rights Agency, *The Situation of Roma in 11 EU Member States*, 2012.

<sup>21</sup> European Commission, *The social and economic integration of the Roma in Europe*, 2010.

<sup>22</sup> Council of Europe, *Human Rights of Roma and Travellers in Europe*, Council of Europe Publications, Strasbourg: 2012.

<sup>23</sup> Amnesty International, *Mind the Legal Gap: Roma and the Right to Housing in Romania*, Amnesty International Publications, 2011.

<sup>24</sup> Amnesty International, *Italy: ‘Zero Tolerance for Roma’*, London: Amnesty International Publications, 2011.

<sup>25</sup> Amnesty International, *Serbia: Hundreds of Families Face Uncertainty after Belvil Eviction*, 2012, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/news/serbia-hundreds-families-face-uncertainty-after-belvil-eviction-2012-04-26#.T5l6aGxXjTA>.

<sup>26</sup> European Roma Rights Centre, *Forced Evictions of Roma double in France, as Authorities Pursue Failed*, Expensive Policy, 2014, <http://www.errc.org/article/forced-evictions-of-roma-double-in-france-as-authorities-pursue-failed-expensive-policy/424>.

<sup>27</sup> European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, *The Situation of Roma EU Citizens Moving to and Settling in Other EU Member States*, 2009, Luxembourg: European Communities.

<sup>28</sup> Justice Patrick McCartan, Dublin Circuit Criminal Court, March 2013.

## ROMA AND THE RIGHT TO WORK AND SOCIAL PROTECTION IN IRELAND

Many Roma working in Ireland are employed in low-skilled, low-paid areas of employment. Many find it difficult to gain employment due to factors including racism, discrimination and lack of training and formal education. There is a lack of vocational training options for Roma in Ireland and no clear strategy to facilitate Roma participation in mainstream training programmes.

Many Roma are not meeting the Habitual Residence Condition (HRC) which is a set of criteria that social welfare claimants need to meet to show a connection with the Irish state. Five factors are considered to determine applicants' eligibility for the HRC:

1. **Main centre of interest;**
2. **Length and continuity of presence;**
3. **Length and reason for any absence;**
4. **Nature and pattern of employment and;**
5. **Future intention.**

Roma can face difficulties proving a place of residence in cases where they live with an extended family and do not have a tenant's agreement. Endemic discrimination in education and employment makes it difficult to prove a strong pattern of employment. Low literacy levels and language barriers create difficulties in responding to the Department of Social Protection in a timely manner, and may mean that some do not have all the documentation needed. As a result, many Roma are unable to meet the criteria of the HRC.

There is no safety net for people waiting on a decision with regard to the HRC. Although an urgent needs payment may be issued, this is a discretionary payment. This is unsustainable for people waiting significant periods of time for decisions in relation to their applications. This places Roma in Ireland in very vulnerable positions.

The implementation of this policy has a hugely negative and disproportionate impact on Roma and is a major cause of poverty and subsequent lack of access to adequate accommodation, access to education and healthcare. This is causing huge suffering within the Roma community. It is a cause of hunger, homelessness and poverty.<sup>29</sup>

Concerns about the HRC have been raised by the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights. She states that,

**“THIS REQUIREMENT CAN POSE A SIGNIFICANT THREAT TO THE ACCESS TO ESSENTIAL SERVICES AND THUS ENJOYMENT OF HUMAN RIGHTS BY MEMBERS OF VULNERABLE GROUPS, PARTICULARLY PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS, TRAVELLERS, ASYLUM-SEEKERS, MIGRANT WORKERS AND RETURNING IRISH MIGRANTS. THE SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ENCOURAGES THE GOVERNMENT TO REVIEW THE IMPACT OF THE CONDITION AS A MATTER OF PRIORITY.”<sup>30</sup>**

Ultimately, there is a lack of research and initiatives developed to support Roma inclusion in Ireland. For those who are unable to find employment or access supports, options include reliance on charities or 'voluntary repatriation' to country of origin.

<sup>29</sup> Pavee Point, Position Paper: *The Impact of the HRC on Travellers and Roma*, September 2011.

<sup>30</sup> UN General Assembly, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights*, Magdalena Sepúlveda Carmona, 2012, A/HRC/20/25.

## SECTION 03: ROMA AND THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION



Roma boy completing homework.  
Photo by James Fraher

**“EDUCATION IS BOTH A HUMAN RIGHT IN ITSELF AND AN INDISPENSABLE MEANS OF REALISING OTHER HUMAN RIGHTS. AS AN EMPOWERMENT RIGHT, EDUCATION IS THE PRIMARY VEHICLE BY WHICH ECONOMICALLY AND SOCIALLY MARGINALISED ADULTS AND CHILDREN CAN LIFT THEMSELVES OUT OF POVERTY AND OBTAIN THE MEANS TO PARTICIPATE FULLY IN THEIR COMMUNITIES”** UN Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights.



## INTRODUCTION

The right to education is a fundamental human right. To be a meaningful right, education in all its forms and at all levels should be accessible, adaptable, acceptable and available – otherwise known as the ‘4As’. These criteria were developed by the first UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education, Katarina Tomaševski.

Education is essential for the fulfilment of economic, social, political and civil rights. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), people who do not complete at least compulsory education have limited chances to reach their full potential and face higher risk of living in poverty.<sup>31</sup>

This section outlines the right to education as enshrined in various international, European and Irish human rights instruments and legislation. Having been ratified by the Irish State, these instruments define the state’s obligation to realise Roma children’s right to education in Ireland.

## INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS FRAMEWORK FOR EDUCATION

Education is recognised as a fundamental right in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).<sup>32</sup> The UDHR is a core element of all United Nations (UN) human rights treaties and other international human rights instruments, many of which include provisions on the right to education. Provisions for the right to education are included in the UN Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966);<sup>33</sup> the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989);<sup>34</sup> the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1981);<sup>35</sup> and the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination (1969).<sup>36</sup>

Having been ratified by the Irish state, these treaties establish various obligations for the state to promote and protect equal access and treatment in

education. These obligations include the provision of free and compulsory primary education for all; making all forms of secondary, general, vocational and higher education accessible and available for all; encouraging regular school attendance; and reducing drop-out rates. Under the treaties’ provisions, these commitments are recognised in conjunction with obligations to eliminate discrimination and set minimum standards in education. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) addresses the specific obligation of state parties to ensure equal access for all groups to education. According to article 29, “education of the child shall be directed to...the development of respect for the child’s parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and for civilizations different from his or her own”.<sup>37</sup>

General Comment No.1 by the Committee on the Rights of the Child recognises that the provision of formal education is not in and of itself sufficient to ensure access and availability to education. It emphasises the importance of removing barriers to education, such as poverty and discrimination, and providing quality education in a manner that ensures all children benefit equally. The committee recognises the responsibility of state parties to take measures to enhance and support parents’ capacity to promote the educational development of their children.

The UN Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) addresses the obligations of state parties in relation to primary education and early school leaving. The Convention reiterates the obligation to ensure basic education, “fundamental education shall be encouraged or intensified as far as possible for those persons who have not received or completed the whole period of their primary education”.<sup>38</sup>

The UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD) is a specific instrument aimed at eliminating racial discrimination in all its forms and guaranteeing the right to a range of

rights, including education and training irrespective of race, ethnicity, gender, nationality and so on.<sup>39</sup> Article 10 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) outlines specific obligations for state parties to eliminate discrimination against women in education, and to ensure equal rights and access to education for women at all levels of education and vocational training. This also sets out responsibilities for the reduction of female student drop-out rates and creation of programmes for girls and women who have left school prematurely.

Curiously Ireland has yet to ratify the UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education (1960). This Convention is a core human rights instrument against discrimination in education, asserting that discrimination in education is a violation of rights enunciated in the Declaration of Human Rights. It recognises the duty of nation states to promote equality of opportunity and treatment of all people in education, and ensure equal access and availability of education.<sup>40</sup> The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) has recently reiterated its recommendation for Ireland to ratify the Convention.<sup>41</sup>

## EUROPEAN HUMAN RIGHTS FRAMEWORK FOR THE PROMOTION OF EDUCATION

There are several EU proposals, which relate to the inclusion of Roma, such as Directive 2000/43/EC. The Directive obliges Member States to ensure access to education, training, healthcare, social protection, housing and employment irrespective of racial or ethnic origin.<sup>42</sup> The European Union Charter of Fundamental Rights applies directly to Member States when implementing EU legislation.

Article 14 asserts that;

**“EVERYONE HAS THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION AND TO HAVE ACCESS TO VOCATIONAL AND CONTINUING TRAINING. THIS RIGHT INCLUDES THE POSSIBILITY TO RECEIVE FREE COMPULSORY EDUCATION. THE FREEDOM TO FOUND EDUCATIONAL ESTABLISHMENTS WITH DUE RESPECT FOR DEMOCRATIC PRINCIPLES AND THE RIGHT OF PARENTS TO ENSURE THE EDUCATION AND TEACHING OF THEIR CHILDREN IN CONFORMITY WITH THEIR RELIGIOUS, PHILOSOPHICAL AND PEDAGOGICAL CONVICTIONS SHALL BE RESPECTED, IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE NATIONAL LAWS GOVERNING THE EXERCISE OF SUCH FREEDOM AND RIGHT”.**<sup>43</sup>

Under the Council of Europe, provisions for the right to education are included in the European Convention on Human Rights, the European Social Charter and Revised Charter and the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. The European Convention on Human Rights reaffirms how no one should be denied the right to education in EU Member States.<sup>44</sup> The Social Charter and Revised Charter make provisions to securing a range of economic and social rights, including the right to education, assistance, training, and non-discrimination.

As a member to the treaty of the Revised Social Charter, the Irish state has agreed to provide free, accessible and effective primary and secondary education; encourage regular school attendance; and promote equal access to education for children from vulnerable groups. Equal access to education for vulnerable children should be guaranteed through special measures where necessary.<sup>45</sup>

More specific to the situation of Roma, the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020 aims to target the marginalisation and poor socio-economic conditions experienced by Roma in Europe.<sup>46</sup> This European Commission initiative provides a European structure to guide the development of national Roma inclusion policies in every member state and to mobilise funds to support this work.

<sup>31</sup> UNESCO, *Education for all Global Monitoring Report – Reaching the Marginalized*, Paris: Oxford University Press, 2010.

<sup>32</sup> UN General Assembly, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, Article 26, 1948, 217 A (III).

<sup>33</sup> See Articles 13 and 14, UN General Assembly, *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*, 16 December 1966, Treaty Series, vol. 993, p. 3.

<sup>34</sup> See Article 24, 28 and 29 in UN General Assembly, *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, 20 November 1989, Treaty Series, vol. 1577, p. 3.

<sup>35</sup> UN General Assembly, *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women*, 18 December 1979, Treaty Series, vol. 1249, p.13.

<sup>36</sup> United Nations, *International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination*, 21 December 1965, Treaty Series, vol. 660, p. 195.

<sup>37</sup> The Convention broadens the concept of the right to education through four core principles; non-discrimination, the right to life, devotion to the best interest of the child, survival and development, and respect for the views of the child. These commitments recognise children as active agents, and promote a concept of education based on notions of respect, inclusion, participation and universality.

<sup>38</sup> Article 13, UN General Assembly, *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*.

<sup>39</sup> Article 5, United Nations, *International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination*.

<sup>40</sup> UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, *Convention Against Discrimination in Education*, 14 December 1960.

<sup>41</sup> European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, Ireland: *Information on the Follow-up to the Recommendations in ECRI’s Third Report on Ireland and Information on New Developments*, 2011, European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, ECRI Report on Ireland, Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 2013.

<sup>42</sup> Council of the European Union, *Council Directive 2000/43/EC of 29 June 2000 Implementing the Principle of Equal Treatment between Persons Irrespective of Racial or Ethnic Origin* (OJ L 180, 19.7.2009).

<sup>43</sup> European Union, *Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union*, 26 October 2012, 2012/C 326/02, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b3b70.html>

<sup>44</sup> Article 2 of Protocol 1 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

<sup>45</sup> Council of Europe, *The Right to Education under the European Social Charter*, 2006, [http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/socialcharter/Theme%20factsheets/FactsheetEducation\\_en.pdf](http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/socialcharter/Theme%20factsheets/FactsheetEducation_en.pdf).

<sup>46</sup> European Commission, *An EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020*, 2011.

## LEGISLATIVE AND POLICY FRAMEWORK FOR ROMA EDUCATION IN IRELAND

The European Commission states that:

**“[NATIONAL STRATEGIES SHOULD] BE DESIGNED, IMPLEMENTED AND MONITORED IN CLOSE COOPERATION AND CONTINUOUS DIALOGUE WITH ROMA CIVIL SOCIETY, REGIONAL AND LOCAL AUTHORITIES”.**

The framework develops a targeted approach to Roma inclusion by setting goals in health, education, employment and housing. The target for health is to decrease the gap in health status between Roma and the rest of the population. In December 2013, the European Council adopted a Recommendation on Effective Roma Integration Measures in the Member States, which is the first EU legal instrument to hold Member States to account for Roma inclusion.

Member States are expected to address barriers to access quality early childhood education and care, reduce numbers of early school leaving from secondary education, and encourage young Roma to participate in secondary and third level education. The strategy specifically asserts that Member States should ensure the elimination of discrimination and segregation of Roma and Travellers in education. Members of Roma communities should be directly involved in the development and implementation of education initiatives.<sup>47</sup>

As part of the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies, Ireland has submitted a National Traveller and Roma Integration Strategy to the European Commission. Pavee Point has identified significant shortcomings with this document- it contains no goals, timeframes, funding or monitoring mechanisms; Roma are largely excluded from the document; and there was no consultation or active participation of Roma, Travellers and wider civil society in the development of the strategy. Pavee Point has urged the Government to review the existing Strategy and address these shortcomings.<sup>48</sup> The European Commission has specifically noted that “the specific situation and challenges met by Roma regarding health should be better described.”<sup>49</sup> The most recent assessment (2013) of Ireland’s National Traveller Roma Integration Strategy by the European Commission has been very critical. Out of 22 criteria Ireland is deemed to have met just 4.<sup>50</sup>

Currently, all children who reside in Ireland are entitled to one free preschool year, and primary and post-primary education.

Key legal provisions for education include:

**THE IRISH CONSTITUTION:** under Article 42 family is recognised as the primary and natural educator, while the state shall “as a guardian of common good, require in view of actual conditions that the children receive a certain minimum education, moral, intellectual and social”. The ‘certain minimum’ has not yet been defined in legislation or in official policy. With these provisions, the state agrees to provide free education for children up until the age of 18.

**HIGHER EDUCATION AUTHORITY ACT, 1971:** provides for the promotion of equality of opportunity in higher education.

**UNIVERSITIES ACT, 1997:** provides for socioeconomically disadvantaged people by requiring universities to promote access to universities.

**EDUCATION ACT, 1998:** provides a statutory framework for education at first and second level. It sets out the rights to education, principles underpinning the education system, and roles and responsibilities of educational stakeholders. It emphasises the need to respect a diversity of languages, values and traditions, and requires schools to develop admissions policies that ensure maximum accessibility.

**THE EQUAL STATUS ACT, 2000 AND EQUALITY ACT, 2004:** relates to legislating against discrimination in education on nine specific grounds, including race and membership of the Traveller community. Section 7 of the Equal Status Act specifically legislates against educational establishments discriminating in admission, access to facilities and courses, expulsion or participation. Section 15 of the Equality Act reinforces that educational establishments are allowed to develop positive action on equal opportunities.

**EDUCATION (WELFARE) ACT, 2000:** provides a framework for promoting school attendance and addressing issues with early school leaving. The Act established the National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB) to work with students, parents and schools on attendance issues. The NEWB works to ensure each child receives a certain minimum education and attends a recognised school.

There are a number of national strategies and action plans, which address access and availability to education among Travellers, other minority ethnic groups and socio-economically disadvantaged people.<sup>51</sup> The National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007–2016 identifies Travellers and other minority ethnic groups as one of the most vulnerable groups in Ireland. It emphasises the importance of setting education targets for people from disadvantaged backgrounds, such as Travellers, recognising the importance of income support in tackling child poverty and financial barriers to education. It also emphasises the importance of developing a strategy to integrate new immigrants by providing resources for language supports.<sup>52</sup> The Intercultural Education Strategy, 2010–2015 developed in 2010 by the Department of Education and Skills is specifically designed to promote the inclusion and diversity of children in education. However the strategy and subsequent inclusion practices have been criticised for encouraging an additive approach where the emphasis is on adding on to the existing curriculum rather than changing it. Often intercultural education practices reinforce the majority culture or dominant group by positioning them as the ‘tolerator’ or ‘embracer’ who get to decide the acceptability of other cultures or ethnicities.<sup>53</sup>

The Habitual Residence Condition has a significant effect on the realisation of Roma right to education in Ireland due to the difficulty of many Roma to qualify.<sup>54</sup> The impact of the HRC on access and engagement in education is further outlined in section five of this report.

## CONCLUSION

The international, regional and national human rights and policy instruments illustrate the obligations of the Irish state to realise Roma children’s right to education. Without transferring these principles into evidence based national policy and legislation and ensuring effective implementation and monitoring, the principles remain mere illustrations of what rights-based education in Ireland could be. Political commitment and a system of accountability by all relevant stakeholders are required in trying to achieve a human rights-based approach to Roma inclusion in education.

<sup>47</sup> European Commission, *An EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020*.

<sup>48</sup> Pavee Point, *Briefing Note on the National Traveller Roma Integration Strategy*, 2013.

<sup>49</sup> European Commission, Commission Staff Working Document: Accompanying the document *National Roma Integration Strategies: a first step in the implementation of the EU Framework*, Brussels, 21.5.2012, SWD (2012) 133 final.

<sup>50</sup> European Commission, *Steps Forward in Implementing National Roma Integration Strategies*, 2013.

<sup>51</sup> For a comprehensive picture of these see Department of Education and Skills and the Office of the Minister for Integration, *Intercultural Education Strategy 2010–2015*, 2010, pp:23–25.

<sup>52</sup> Government of Ireland, *National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007–2016*, Dublin: Stationery Office, 2007, <http://www.socialinclusion.ie/documents/NAPinclusionReportPDF.pdf>

<sup>53</sup> Darmody, M., Tyrell, N. & Song, S. (Eds.), *The Changing Faces of Ireland: Exploring the lives of Immigrant and Ethnic Minority Children*, Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2011.

<sup>54</sup> Pavee Point, Position Paper: *The Impact of the HRC on Travellers and Roma*, September 2011, <http://paveepoint.ie/sites/default/files/2011/09/Pavee-Point-Position-Paper-on-Impact-of-Habitual-Residence-Condition-On-Travellers-and-Roma.pdf>

## SECTION 04:

# ROMA RIGHT TO EDUCATION IN EUROPE:

## POLICY AND PRACTICE



Young Roma girl completing her homework.  
Photo by James Fraher.

**“...EDUCATION OF THE CHILD SHALL BE DIRECTED TO...THE DEVELOPMENT OF RESPECT FOR THE CHILD’S PARENTS, HIS OR HER OWN CULTURAL IDENTITY, LANGUAGE AND VALUES, FOR THE NATIONAL VALUES OF THE COUNTRY IN WHICH THE CHILD IS LIVING, THE COUNTRY FROM WHICH HE OR SHE MAY ORIGINATE, AND FOR CIVILIZATIONS DIFFERENT FROM HIS OR HER OWN”**

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

### INTRODUCTION

There is a lack of comprehensive and adequate data on the situation of Roma in education in many European countries due to an absence of data disaggregated by ethnicity and difficulties in ensuring Roma participation in official data collection measures.<sup>55</sup> However, existing research and numerous reports across Europe illustrate serious human rights shortcomings and violations both in Western and Eastern European countries. Experiences of discrimination, racism, poverty, poor health and accommodation conditions, and barriers in accessing social protection and the labour market, curtail the ability of many Roma to access and engage in education.

This section outlines the situation of Roma in education in Europe. It examines the main barriers to access and participation in education, and policies and practices in relation to Roma in the education sector. This is followed by looking at the situation of Roma in the Irish education system, which is examined within the context of Government approaches to Traveller education and outcomes for members of the Traveller community. This is due to the lack of policy and available data on Roma in the education system. This allows for a comparison to be drawn in relation to policies and practices between Roma and Traveller education in Ireland and Europe.

### ROMA AND EDUCATION IN EUROPE

Many Roma in Europe have not had access to any formal schooling or have left school early. Common issues include low literacy and numeracy levels; poor attendance; high levels of early school leaving; repeating of school years; low academic performance and access to further education and training. The rights of Roma children with disabilities are severely curtailed, with many children not attending school at all in several European countries.

A survey covering 11 EU Member States by FRA highlights how Roma continue to have lower levels of educational attainment and experience further barriers to education in comparison to majority populations.<sup>56</sup> Roma children often lack access to early childhood education, with approximately one out of two Roma children attending pre-school or kindergarten. With early childhood education being crucial to reversing educational disadvantage, the European Commission has highlighted how the lack of access and engagement in early childhood education can have a detrimental effect for children and their future opportunities.<sup>57</sup>

An estimated nine out of ten Roma children of compulsory school age in the 11 EU countries surveyed are in school. However, the situation differs widely between member states. In Italy, France, Bulgaria and Romania at least 10% of Roma children aged 7 to 15 are not in school, while in Greece the figure rises above 35%.<sup>58</sup> In Poland, where Roma children either drop out of school early or underachieve in education, more than 50% of school-aged Roma are estimated not to attend school. The Council of Europe reports that 62% of Roma children in Serbia have either dropped out or never attended school, with a mere 9.6% of Roma children having completed post-primary education.<sup>59</sup>

It is evident that Roma participation in education falls significantly after compulsory schooling. Early school leaving remains a significant issue and the number of Roma accessing higher education is very low. The FRA reports 15% of young Roma complete general upper-secondary or vocational education.<sup>60</sup> Fewer than one out of ten Roma are reported to have completed upper-secondary education in France, Portugal, Spain, Romania and Greece. Small gender differences are apparent in most countries, with Roma men being more likely to access vocational and upper-secondary education than Roma women. The low levels of participation in compulsory, vocational and upper secondary education have a detrimental impact on Roma communities both economically and socially and results in their further marginalisation within societies.

<sup>55</sup> Roma often have low levels of trust in authority figures and government measures due to past experiences of racism and discrimination.

<sup>56</sup> FRA, *The Situation of Roma in 11 EU Member States*.

<sup>57</sup> European Commission, *Early Childhood Education and Care: Providing all our Children with the Best Start for the World of Tomorrow*, Brussels: COM, 2011, [http://ec.europa.eu/education/school-education/doc/childhoodcom\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/school-education/doc/childhoodcom_en.pdf).

<sup>58</sup> FRA, *The Situation of Roma in 11 EU Member States*.

<sup>59</sup> Council of Europe, *Human Rights of Roma and Travellers in Europe*.

<sup>60</sup> FRA, *The Situation of Roma in 11 EU Member States*.

## SOCIO-ECONOMIC EXCLUSION

Socioeconomic exclusion and poverty have a major impact on the ability of Roma parents to ensure children's access and participation in education. Poverty curtails the ability to finance additional costs of education, such as books, uniforms and transport. Approximately half of the Roma population in Moldova live in such extreme poverty that they are unable to provide for basic needs, such as clothing, transportation, school materials and lunches. Reportedly 43% of Roma children aged 7-15 do not attend school; less than half of all Roma complete secondary school; and only 4% of Roma attend higher education.<sup>61</sup>

Financing educational needs is particularly difficult for Roma parents who are unemployed, have a high level of job insecurity and discontinuity, and low salary expectations. Some family members or families are forced to resort to seasonal or permanent migration in order to secure income which can result in consistent and meaningful school attendance becoming challenging.

Experiences of poverty, discrimination and marginalisation also contribute to poor health and housing conditions and geographical isolation from public infrastructure. These conditions curtail the ability of many Roma families to ensure their children's access and participation in education. In many countries certain official documentation is required in order to enrol in schools. Roma who have no proof of residence or birth certificates are denied the right to education in those countries.<sup>62</sup>

## DISCRIMINATION AGAINST ROMA IN EDUCATION

The FRA reports persistent direct and indirect discrimination against Roma in education across Europe on grounds of Roma ethnicity.<sup>63</sup> The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) also reports instances of discrimination against Roma in education in several countries, including France, Portugal, Albania and Greece.<sup>64</sup>

- In Portugal, where school dropout rates among Roma children are very high, there are reported instances where parents of non-Roma children pressure schools not to enrol Roma children. In the past, signs reading 'no to Gypsies' have been put up at schools.
- In Albania, lack of vaccinations among Roma children (often difficult to obtain due to lack of access to health services, goods, and knowledge about health related issues) has been used as a reason to refuse Roma children's access to schools.
- In Greece, refusals to register Roma children in schools continue. This is despite a European Court of Human Rights ruling in the case of *Sampanis and Others v. Greece*, which found the refusal to enrol Roma children in a school and segregating 11 Roma children into 'special needs' classes in an annex of the school main building constituted discrimination in education.<sup>65</sup> Similarly to Portugal, non-Roma parents in Greece are known to pressurise schools not to register Roma children.
- In Georgia, low rates of school attendance are explained partly by widespread marginalisation of Roma and anti-Roma prejudice in wider society. Racist bullying has been noted to act as a disincentive to school attendance, resulting in exclusion from school life and early school leaving.
- In Kosovo, there are reports of refusals to enrol Roma children in schools without first taking an examination. Passing examinations is difficult for children who may never have had any formal education.<sup>66</sup>
- In some countries, such as Georgia, there are age limits for the enrolment of children in classes. Older children can be refused enrolment in the appropriate grade level on the grounds of being too old.
- There are reports of some pre-schools in Europe enrolling children with parents in employment over those who are not. Considering that a significant amount of Roma adults are unemployed, this places Roma children at a significant disadvantage in relation to the right to education.

<sup>61</sup> Council of Europe, op.cit.

<sup>62</sup> Arbex, et al., *Guide for Working with Roma Families*; Council of Europe, Human Rights of Roma and Travellers in Europe.

<sup>63</sup> FRA, *The Situation of Roma in 11 EU Member States*.

<sup>64</sup> Council of Europe, *Human Rights of Roma and Travellers in Europe*.

## ROMA GIRLS AND EDUCATION

Marginalisation in education has a specific gender dimension as Roma girls and women often face discrimination on multiple fronts due to their gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status and other factors. As a result, Roma girls can experience additional barriers to education, contributing to poorer educational outcomes when compared with Roma men and non-Roma women.

According to Open Society Foundation, 23% of Roma women and 15% of Roma men in Romania have not received any formal education. The gap in accessing formal education is even wider when compared to women in the majority population, 23% of Roma women have not received any formal education in comparison to 4% of women in the majority population. In Central and Eastern European countries in general, UNICEF reports primary school enrolment rates for Roma girls to be around 64%, whereas the rate for non-Roma in similar socioeconomic conditions is 96%.<sup>67</sup> Relative to contemporary majority European societies, some Roma marry and have families at a young age. There is a wide diversity of views and practices within Roma communities in relation to early marriage. In fact, simple equations between Roma culture and early marriage should be avoided, and it is important to highlight that early marriage among Roma is not a cultural practice per se. Historically, early marriage among Roma is linked to the slavery of Roma in Romania as a way of protecting Roma girls from rape by their owners.<sup>68</sup>

When early marriage occurs, girls' right to education and future employment opportunities are undermined due to early school leaving. The Council of Europe calls for the use of positive measures and awareness-raising among members of these communities in order to improve enrolment and attendance rates of Roma girls in school.<sup>69</sup>

<sup>65</sup> This was found to be in violation of Article 14 and Article 2 of Protocol No. 1 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

<sup>66</sup> Council of Europe, op.cit.

<sup>67</sup> UNICEF, *The Right of Roma children to education*, p. 16.

<sup>68</sup> Oprea, Alexandra, *Child Marriage a Cultural Problem, Educational Access a Race Issue? Deconstructing Uni-Dimensional Understanding of Romani Oppression*. 2005, <http://www.errc.org/cikk.php?cikk=2295>

## SEGREGATION OF ROMA CHILDREN

According to the Council of Europe, segregation of Roma children into separate 'Roma schools', within school facilities, or into special schools is the most widespread violation with respect to Roma right to education in Europe.<sup>70</sup> In mainstream schools Roma children are often placed in separate classes or in specific areas of classrooms. The Council reports a disproportionate practice of placing Roma children in Roma-only classes and special schools in countries such as Germany, Finland and Hungary.

Often Roma children are placed in special schools designed for students with lower academic requirements and particularly for students with intellectual disabilities. In the Czech Republic, an estimated 30% of Roma students are placed in schools designed for children with mild intellectual disabilities, in contrast to 2% of non-Roma children. This still takes place regardless of the enactment of the Schools Act 2004 and a ruling by the ECHR in 2007, which restructured the special needs education provision in the country.<sup>71</sup> The ECHR has also ruled on numerous other cases, where the segregation and discriminatory denial of Roma right to education has been of concern.

Segregation of Roma in education is particularly common in areas where Roma live in isolated urban ghettos or rural slums. Geographic isolation from schools, lack of access to public infrastructure and quality school centres create barriers for the educational development of Roma children in these areas. Where segregation in housing occurs, there is a tendency for Roma children to be segregated into Roma-only schools. The emergence of Roma-only schools often results from non-Roma parents removing their children from schools where Roma children are enrolled. These schools are often inadequately staffed, offer substandard quality education, and have poor infrastructure, such as no running water, toilets or heating.<sup>72</sup>

<sup>69</sup> Council of Europe, *Human Rights of Roma and Travellers in Europe*.

<sup>70</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> The 2007 ruling of the Strasbourg Court in the matter of *D.H. and Others v. the Czech Republic*, see Council of Europe, Human Rights of Roma and Travellers in Europe.

<sup>72</sup> Arbex, et al., *Guide for Working with Roma Families*.

## ATTITUDES AND DEFICIENCIES IN EDUCATION SYSTEMS

Overall, structural deficiencies to deal with diversity in schools are considered to constitute major obstacles in the inclusion of Roma students in education. These include a general lack of consideration for diversity in classrooms; poor knowledge and experience of intercultural education; and an absence of resources outlining actions and programmes to support the inclusion of Roma in education.<sup>74</sup>

Education about Roma culture, history and language in schools is frequently provided for Roma children only. The Council of Europe highlights how this deprives non-Roma students from the right to learn about the contributions Roma have made to European societies. It also means that the opportunity to challenge stereotypes and prejudice among non-Roma students is missed. The Council maintains that underdeveloped curricula in schools hinder the quality of education for Roma and Traveller children. “Improving the quality of education received by Roma and Traveller children necessarily means including Roma and Traveller culture and history in standard curricula”.<sup>75</sup>

Attitudes among educational practitioners and Roma communities are often characterised by prejudice and mutual distrust. Many schools across Europe are reported to have poor relationships with Roma parents. There are reported instances of racism in schools among staff, which can often transfer to racist disposition and acts among non-Roma students.

Poor relations can have a direct and negative impact on parents’ perception of school and education, and result in parents having a limited understanding of the advantages and opportunities associated with education. For many parents with no previous engagement in education themselves, schools can be an unfamiliar territory. This can have an additional negative effect on children’s engagement and progress in education. The lack of an adult role model and someone to help with homework can contribute to a low level of motivation and educational success among Roma children.

Efforts to combat discrimination, exclusion and marginalisation of Roma in education are limited and few. However some projects have illustrated positive outcomes, these include projects based on using sociocultural mediators in Portugal; school mediators in Denmark and Romania to liaise between school and Roma families; and language training programmes for Roma migrants. In higher education, some Council of Europe Member States have engaged in providing financial support for Roma to improve access to higher education. However, despite limited efforts undertaken in some countries there is very little, if any, progress made.

Segregation and exclusion from mainstream schooling is also illustrated by overrepresentation of Roma children in alternative school systems, such as home schooling. At secondary level, Roma are often excluded from secondary schools and instead are overrepresented in vocational training or technical schools. For instance, in the Netherlands, the Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities in 2010 noted that:

**“THERE IS A DISPROPORTIONATELY LARGE ATTENDANCE OF ROMA AND SINTI CHILDREN IN VOCATIONAL TRAINING SCHOOLS...AS OPPOSED TO UPPER SECONDARY SCHOOLS.”<sup>73</sup>**

## ROMA, TRAVELLERS AND THE IRISH EDUCATION SYSTEM

The issue of poor educational outcomes for Travellers has long been recognised and yet there remain stark inequalities between Traveller children and the general population in relation to education. In many respects the experience of Traveller students in Ireland mirrors that of Roma students in Europe.

According to the 2011 census:

- **55% of Travellers complete their full time education by the age of 15.**
- **90% of Travellers complete their full time education by the age of 17.**
- **Currently less than 1% of Travellers progress on to third level education.**

The Report on the First Phase of the Evaluation of DEIS (2011) found that the educational attainment of Travellers remains significantly lower than that of their settled peers in both reading and mathematics. The magnitude of the difference between the scores of the two groups is large in every case.

The withdrawal of a considerable number of Traveller specific education supports following the 2011 budget has had a significant impact on Traveller enrolment, transfer and retention in the education system.<sup>76</sup> These cutbacks were introduced at a time when members of the Traveller community were beginning to remain in the education system, and the benefits of such participation together with positive action initiatives were beginning to be seen.

Racism and discrimination towards Travellers and Roma in wider society is reflected within the education system and continues to present a significant barrier for both Traveller and Roma students. The All Ireland Traveller Health Study (AITHS) found that 62% of Travellers experienced discrimination in schools. Identity based bullying by other student’s poses a significant problem.

Pavee Point is aware of Roma and Traveller children who feel the need to hide their identity in school settings. This is not surprising given that immigrant and Traveller children are more likely to experience bullying in school.<sup>77</sup> There remains an absence of curriculum linked resources which explore Traveller and Roma language and culture which makes it difficult for willing teachers to explore these cultures with their students in the classroom.

Given that the Roma and Traveller populations in Ireland are relatively small, in many schools there may only be one or two Traveller/Roma children. This leaves children particularly vulnerable and isolated when identity based bullying occurs, particularly if the response from the school is inadequate.

The issue of isolation is compounded by the absence of Traveller/Roma culture within the formal curriculum at primary and post primary levels. For many students, the first time that they encounter the Traveller community in the education system is when they study Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE) in post primary school. Traveller students often report feeling ashamed and embarrassed at this point, which is understandable given that they may never have been asked to discuss their culture in front of their peers in an education setting before.

The long term implications of failing to incorporate Traveller/Roma culture across the curriculum are twofold. Firstly, it prevents students from the majority population from understanding and appreciating the contributions made by the Traveller and Roma communities to wider Irish society and European culture, allowing individual prejudices and stereotypes to breed. Secondly, it results in Traveller/Roma students feeling that their culture is neither valued nor welcomed in the education system, contributing to a lower sense of self-worth and isolation within the school community.

<sup>73</sup> Council of Europe, op.cit.

<sup>74</sup> Arbex, et al., *Guide for Working with Roma Families*.

<sup>75</sup> Council of Europe, op.cit.

<sup>76</sup> Harvey, B., *Travelling with Austerity: Impacts of cuts on Travellers*, Traveller Projects and Services. Dublin: Pavee Point Publications, 2013.

<sup>77</sup> Department of Children and Youth Affairs, *State of the Nation’s Children: Ireland 2012*. Dublin: Government Publications, 2012. Available at: www.dcyia.ie

Low expectations on the part of teachers and other educational practitioners continue to be a key issue. A history of early school leaving within the community would appear to have encouraged a misconception that Travellers are not interested in completing or succeeding in the education system. Parents frequently report that their children are not encouraged or supported by teachers because of an assumption that Traveller children are going to leave school early.

Similarly due to the absence of appropriate cultural awareness training teachers are often unaware of the significant internal diversity within Roma culture. This means that issues like early school leaving and early marriage are attributed to Roma culture when they may be specific to a community or influenced by external factors.

Traveller parents like Roma parents are often distrustful of the education system given their own negative experiences in school and in some cases limited literacy. The Our Geels: All Ireland Traveller Health Study<sup>78</sup> found that 38.5% of 30-44 year olds and 25.8% of 45-64 year old Travellers had primary education only. This means that letters and notes from the school may prove challenging to read and understand. It also contributes to feelings of shame and embarrassment when communicating with teachers and educational practitioners. This issue highlights the need to address educational issues right across the community and not just with Travellers of school age. Traveller parents and Roma parents need to be empowered so they see the genuine value of education and can instil this into their children.

The Report and Recommendations for a Traveller Education Strategy highlighted the importance of developing the relationship between Traveller parents and schools and outlined a number of recommendations to increase parent's engagement with the education system. Unfortunately a large number of these recommendations have yet to be implemented.

Historically, school enrolment policies have had a disproportionately negative impact on Traveller students due to selection criteria. A large number of schools give priority in school admissions to children or relatives of past pupils. This poses a significant barrier for Traveller students, as was illustrated in the case of Stokes vs CBS High School Clonmel.<sup>79</sup> This means that for a large number of Traveller children the chances of their parents having attended post-primary school are remote. This policy also poses a significant challenge for Travellers who are nomadic and are therefore unlikely to have had a family member previously attend the school in question. It is also a significant barrier for all immigrant children including Roma as it is very unlikely that their parents would have attended school in Ireland.

Many schools continue to operate enrolment policies, which present 'soft' barriers for Traveller students. The admissions process can also often reveal discriminatory attitudes and practices towards Travellers within the education system.

In March 2011 the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in its concluding observations on Ireland recommended that *"the State Party should ensure that concrete measures are undertaken to improve the livelihoods of the Traveller community by focusing on improving students' enrolment and retention in schools"*.<sup>80</sup>

The Report and Recommendations for a Traveller Education Strategy was produced by the Department of Education and Science in 2006 in collaboration with educational stakeholders and Traveller organisations. This report represents the key stone document in relation to Traveller and Roma education in Ireland and acknowledges the disproportionate disadvantage Travellers face when it comes to achieving academic qualifications. The document outlines a comprehensive, holistic approach to ensuring Traveller inclusion and participation in the education system and would work well as framework for Roma inclusion if it were restructured to do so.

The report is now eight years old and progress with its implementation has been slow. There are a number of chapters where none of the recommendations have been implemented. Many of the recommendations that were implemented have since been dismantled (e.g. Visiting Teachers for Travellers) without being reviewed or evaluated.

The Traveller Education Strategy Advisory and Consultative Forum (TESACF) was established by the Department of Education in 2009 to oversee the development and implementation of a Traveller Education Strategy based on the 'Report and Recommendations for a Traveller Education Strategy. However, the TESACF only meets four times a year; has no resources with which to ensure the implementation of the report; and Roma children are not understood to be included under its terms of reference.

The Irish education system has yet to develop a culturally appropriate response to specific issues relating to Roma. The Intercultural Education Strategy 2010-2015 which was developed by the Department of Education and Skills and the Office of the Minister for Integration aimed to ensure that:

- **All students experience an education that respects the diversity of values, belief, languages and traditions in Irish society and is conducted in a spirit of partnership (Education Act 1998).**
- **All education providers are assisted with ensuring that inclusion and integration within an intercultural learning environment.**<sup>81</sup>

However the implementation of the strategy has been patchy and its impact on Roma children minimal other than a limited amount of English language supports which were significantly cut in 2010.

Training in the area of intercultural education is not compulsory for qualified teachers this means that there is no system in place to challenge the prejudices and bias of practicing teachers. Nor are teachers equipped with the skills to embed Roma/Traveller culture in their own teaching practice.

There is currently no framework or provision within the education system to address underlying issues impacting on Roma children's participation including poverty, the lack of access to social welfare payments and the history of educational disadvantage which many Roma have faced.

A response is required which takes into account the specific needs of Roma children. This point was highlighted by the Irish National Teacher's Organisation (INTO),

**"...IT HAS BEEN A CONTINUOUS STRUGGLE AT INTERNATIONAL LEVEL TO MAINTAIN THE INCLUSION OF TRAVELLERS IN ROMA/GYPSY RESOLUTIONS AND INITIATIVES IN THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE, THE EUROPEAN UNION AND UNITED NATIONS. THAT BATTLE NOW APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN WON AND IT IS THEREFORE, DISAPPOINTING TO NOTE THAT ROMA CHILDREN ARE NOT OFFERED THE SAME SUPPORTS OR BENEFITS AS TRAVELLERS IN THE IRISH EDUCATION SYSTEM."**<sup>82</sup>

As it stands, there is no hard data available on how Travellers and Roma fare in the education system. The collection of disaggregated data has been identified as a key factor in improving education outcomes. Without suitable data it is impossible to monitor and assess the effectiveness of any measures taken to improve Traveller/Roma attainment and participation in the education system.

Best practice in this area stresses the importance of applying a universal question within a human rights framework, which asks people to identify the group in which they belong to – not just minorities. The current situation, where only Travellers are asked to identify, is unacceptable and only serves to make young Travellers feel further singled out, whilst absolutely no attempt is made to collect information on Roma children.

Data disaggregated data is key to developing policy and practice which best meets the needs of the communities and to ensure positive outcomes for both Traveller and Roma children.

In a positive step, the Department of Education and Skills has committed to introducing an ethnic identifier in the near future, which asks all children to identify their ethnicity across the education system.

<sup>78</sup> Pavee Point, *Selected Key Findings and Recommendations from the All-Ireland Traveller Health Study*, 2010.

<sup>79</sup> John Stokes applied to attend the CBS Clonmel in 2009. The school was oversubscribed and Mr. Stokes was refused a place as in the case of oversubscription, students who had previously had a family member attend the school were given first preference. Mr. Stokes claimed the admission policy was discriminatory against Travellers as John's father did not attend secondary school. Many Traveller parents would not have completed or attended post primary education.

<sup>80</sup> UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, Concluding Observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial, Discrimination on Ireland, 2011 [http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cerd/docs/co/Ireland\\_AUV.pdf](http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cerd/docs/co/Ireland_AUV.pdf).

<sup>81</sup> Department of Education and Skills & Office of the Minister for Integration, *Intercultural Education Strategy, 2010-2015*, Dublin: 2010.

<sup>82</sup> Irish National Teachers Organisation, *Traveller Education: INTO policies and proposals updated*, Dublin: INTO, 2010.

## CONCLUSION

Overall, the barriers to accessing and participating in education contribute to low levels of educational and professional qualifications among many Roma and Travellers in Ireland and across Europe. The Council of Europe highlights how the situation of Roma in education has a significant impact on the inclusion of Roma in the labour market. Together with discrimination and lower educational attainments, the employment policies designed for Roma inclusion remain inefficient and levels of unemployment among Roma remain significantly higher than among the general population.<sup>83</sup>

Much remains to be done in relation to developing and implementing policies and practices in relation to the education of Roma in Europe. As the vast majority of working-age Roma lack the education needed to find good jobs, it is crucial to invest in the education of Roma children to ensure the successful inclusion and participation of Roma at all levels of European societies and overcome the persistent marginalisation and poverty experienced by many Roma.

## SECTION 05: ROMA EDUCATION IN IRELAND EXPERIENCES AND PRACTICES



Group of Roma school children.  
Photo by James Fraher.

**“I WAS LUCKY BECAUSE THE SCHOOL HAD MONEY...BUT NOT EVERY ROMA WOULD ASK AND NOT EVERY SCHOOL CAN HELP. SOME ROMA DON’T KNOW THEY CAN GET HELP, SOME DON’T KNOW THEY CAN SEND THEIR CHILDREN TO SCHOOL. MANY ARE CONFUSED ABOUT HOW THEY SEND CHILDREN TO SCHOOL IF THEY HAVE NO INCOME.”** Quote from Seminar Participant

<sup>83</sup> Council of Europe, *Human Rights of Roma and Travellers in Europe*.

## INTRODUCTION

This section highlights the main findings of the seminar, focus group discussions and interviews. It is imperative to keep in mind that these findings do not represent the experiences of all Roma in Ireland. As highlighted by a Roma participant, there are Roma living in Ireland who are educated, in employment or self-employed, “these Roma are doing well but you only hear about the most impoverished Roma”.<sup>84</sup>

The situation of Roma in the Irish education system needs to be examined in the context of historical and persistent experiences of anti-Roma racism, discrimination, marginalisation and exclusion in countries of origin and in Ireland. There is no data on the population profile of Roma in Ireland or the number of Roma children enrolled in schools. Informal reports by educational practitioners suggest that the number of Roma children in schools remains low, with observations of a gradual increase over recent years.

The findings strongly challenge a predominant misconception that the lack of engagement in education among Roma is ‘cultural’. In fact, both Roma and educational practitioners highlight that Roma parents are eager for their children to engage in formal education and that children want to go to school. What strongly emerged from the seminar was that Roma parents were very happy that their children could participate in mainstreaming schooling in Ireland as this had not always been the case in their country of origin. There are also positive indications in relation to the experiences of Roma children in Irish schools. These include reports by a school representative of a gradual and significant improvement in Roma children’s literacy and numeracy skills over the years, and observations of more Roma children progressing onto secondary school.

However, a number of factors act as barriers for Roma in accessing and engaging in education in a consistent and meaningful way. These include structural, external and internal challenges, which have a negative impact on school attendance and completion rates,

educational success, and social inclusion of Roma students in schools. The transition from primary to post primary level appears to present particular difficulties for Roma children.

The main barriers experienced by Roma parents and children are divided and discussed under the following themes:

- **Poverty and lack of social protection**
- **Literacy and English language skills**
- **Experiences in the education system**

These barriers contribute to further difficulties for educational practitioners working with Roma children and their families. It is evident that educational practitioners are currently working in a vacuum without a proper framework and supports to guide their efforts to ensure Roma children’s inclusion in education. The specific challenges experienced by practitioners are introduced under the following themes:

- **Structural supports and framework for inclusion**
- **Housing conditions and homelessness**
- **Contextual understanding and intercultural training**
- **Issues of engagement and attendance**

## ROMA CHILDREN AND PARENTS: BARRIERS TO EDUCATION

### POVERTY AND LACK OF SOCIAL PROTECTION

The main barriers for Roma children to accessing and engaging in education are interconnected with financial barriers and poverty. Many Roma adults face difficulties with accessing permanent and secure employment due to a lack of formal qualifications and experiences of discrimination in employment both in country of origin and in Ireland. In addition, many have no access to social welfare protection, including child benefit and back to school allowance. This results in significant barriers to ensuring children’s attendance and ability to progress with learning, as well as preventing early school leaving.

In fact, financial barriers and lack of access to any social protection are reported by Roma parents as the main barrier to ensuring their children’s access and engagement in education. Many Roma living in Ireland are left outside of the social welfare protection system due to restrictions posed by the Habitual Residence Condition (HRC) - a social welfare restriction which determines access to social welfare payments in Ireland, including child benefit and back to school allowance.<sup>85</sup> Failure to qualify for the HRC has a significant impact on the ability of parents to ensure their children’s engagement in education, particularly for parents who are unable to establish or maintain a permanent source of income.

A Roma participant noted how the importance of the HRC can be difficult to realise, but “for many Roma it means everything”. Income options in these situations can be often limited as families struggle to provide for basic needs, such as food and shelter. Educational practitioners highlighted concerns about how...

**“...SOME ROMA HAVE NOTHING AT HOME...NO FOOD - THEY ARE EATING FROM BINS. HOW CAN WE EXPECT PEOPLE TO SEND KIDS TO SCHOOL WHEN THEY HAVE NOTHING AT HOME?”<sup>86</sup>**

Particular concerns were raised in relation to a family, which had been seen to look for food from a bin of a local shop and reports of the shop putting acid into the food in order to stop this. Roma participants also reported how some parents are forced to resort to begging as a source of income. This highlights how contrary to a common misconception, begging is not part of Roma culture, but directly linked to lack of access to formal income sources.

Additional costs associated with schooling put an extra financial pressure on Roma families. Many are unable to afford to purchase school uniforms, books or lunches. Barnardos ‘School Costs Survey’ 2013 found that on average parents were paying €350 for a child in Senior Infants. This increased up to €785 for children going into first year in secondary school.<sup>87</sup>

Some schools are reported to help Roma families who cannot afford to purchase necessary items. This can often be the only source of financial support for Roma families, but not all schools are in a position to do so. As expressed by a Roma parent;

**“I WAS LUCKY BECAUSE THE SCHOOL HAD MONEY... BUT NOT EVERY ROMA WOULD ASK AND NOT EVERY SCHOOL CAN HELP. SOME ROMA DON’T KNOW THEY CAN GET HELP, SOME DON’T KNOW THEY CAN SEND THEIR CHILDREN TO SCHOOL. MANY ARE CONFUSED ABOUT HOW THEY SEND CHILDREN TO SCHOOL IF THEY HAVE NO INCOME”.<sup>88</sup>**

This parent expressed a sense of embarrassment associated with having to ask for help. She noted how asking for help can raise complex feelings – although she sought help from the school towards providing her son with books and a uniform, she felt ashamed and was unable to tell her son about it.

<sup>84</sup> Quote by an interviewee.

<sup>85</sup> See Pavee Point’s position paper on Habitual Residence Condition- *Pavee Point. Impact of the Habitual Residence Condition (HRC) on Travellers and Roma, Dublin: Pavee Point, 2011.*

<sup>86</sup> A quote by a seminar participant.

<sup>87</sup> Barnardos, *Schools Cost Survey 2013*, Dublin, 2013. <http://www.barnardos.ie/assets/files/Advocacy/2013SchoolCosts/2013%20School%20Costs%20Survey%20Briefing.pdf>

<sup>88</sup> A quote by a seminar participant.



## LITERACY AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE SKILLS

The findings confirm how the impact of past experiences of discrimination and segregation in the education system in country of origin extends to experiences in the Irish education system. Roma participants highlighted how many Roma come from very disadvantaged backgrounds with little or no previous access to education.

As a result, Roma adults and children living in Ireland can have little or no previous engagement in formal schooling and can have low levels of literacy and English language skills. Educational practitioners report many Roma children have difficulties with English language and literacy skills. It is evident that some Roma children as old as 14 have never attended school before.

This creates difficulties for both Roma children and educational practitioners, as the nature of schooling and curriculum are highly unsuitable for children with no previous experience of schooling and low levels of English. The inclusion of older children who have never attended school before is particularly challenging. Due to lack of literacy and language skills many older children are placed in classes with younger peers. A senior education welfare officer reports this to have a negative effect on the level of motivation and attendance among these students, as this is often experienced as uncomfortable and embarrassing by Roma students. In these cases, educational practitioners report it to be very difficult to prevent early school leaving and ensure the inclusion of Roma students.

The lack of supports for children and educational practitioners in these situations makes it challenging to ensure the engagement and progression of Roma students. Improving children’s English language skills is identified as a priority by the majority of participants. However, the lack of resources and supports in schools means that this situation is difficult to address. On the other hand, the importance of promoting the maintenance of Roma children’s native language is seen as an important task for schools to engage in. Both educational practitioners and Roma raised this as an important aspect in an effort to preserve a sense of ‘Roma identity’ among children however teachers currently do not have either the support or capacity to do so.

Low or no literacy and English language skills also contribute to difficulties in terms of communication between parents and schools. Given the lack of access to translation and interpretation services, Roma children are often used as interpreters in these situations. This poses a range of ethical dilemmas and constitutes an inappropriate practice for all involved.

On the other hand, Roma respondents noted that the lack of parents’ ability to communicate in English and education can contribute to a sense of embarrassment and an understandable reluctance to approach and engage with schools.

Parent’s lack of educational background and English language skills also contribute to barriers in the ability to support children’s engagement and progress in school. This means that parents are often unable to help children with homework and practice reading and writing skills. It also appears that the overwhelming majority of Roma students do not speak English at home, resulting in a lack of reinforcement of English language skills at home.

Parent’s lack of positive experiences within the education system can also contribute to a limited understanding of the value of education. Parents who have not gone to school themselves or have had negative experiences of education in their country of origin can have lower expectations in terms of their children’s education. This can affect the rate of early school leaving and educational achievement due to lack of educational support for children at home. Roma participants highlight that in some cases parents may struggle to see the benefits of education beyond learning to read and write. There is also an overall lack of knowledge and understanding of the Irish education system and how it works.

Roma participants expressed a need to change this situation, and propose adult education as a valuable method through which to create positive engagement and experiences of education. The importance of adults’ attitudes towards education is seen as having direct and positive effect on the value that their children place on education.

## EXPERIENCES IN THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

The experiences of Roma children in schools are largely undocumented. This research sheds some light on the experiences of Roma students in primary and post-primary levels. The findings unveil how prejudice, xenophobia and/or racism contribute to shaping experiences of Roma children in local communities and schools.

Both Roma and non-Roma participants report experiences of social exclusion among Roma children in schools and local communities. A questionnaire conducted by a school in Dublin shows that there is very little mixing of Roma with non-Roma students outside of classroom activities.<sup>89</sup> Out of all Roma students who participated, 24 students answered that most or all of

their friends are Roma; another nine students reported to have some Irish friends; two have friends who are from different countries; and one doesn’t have any Irish friends.

Subjective accounts by Roma students and parents unveil experiences of bullying and social exclusion in school. Serious concerns were raised, as Roma participants report bullying to be a very common experience among Roma students and their Roma peers. It is evident that lack of English language skills and the ethnic background of Roma children contribute to these experiences. One Roma student expressed great difficulty in making friends with non-Roma children, and how social isolation from non-Roma peers has contributed to him having negative associations with living in his community and in the country. Talking about his experience particularly during primary school,

**“I WASN’T THE ONLY ROMA BEING BULLIED; ALL MY FRIENDS WHO ARE ROMA WERE ALSO BULLIED”.**

Overcoming exclusion and bullying appears to be dependent on a variety of factors, and experiences differ depending on schools. A Roma participant who had changed schools noted how a strict approach to bullying by his new school and his engagement in school activities have contributed to reduced levels of bullying and prejudice as well as increased inclusion into school life. There is strong evidence that involvement in social activities in school, such as sports, appears helpful in overcoming exclusion and breaking down barriers created by prejudice against Roma. However, there are often financial barriers to taking part in some school activities which require extra financial input from children’s families.

Regardless of positive experiences and reported improvements in school experiences by Roma participants, Roma children continue to face obstacles and internal struggles. As expressed by a Roma participant:

**“IT IS DIFFICULT FOR ME TO TELL A FRIEND THAT I AM ROMA BECAUSE I AM AFRAID HOW THEY REACT. THIS IS A CONSTANT STRUGGLE FOR ME... PEOPLE STILL JUDGE ME WITHOUT KNOWING ME, AND I STILL SOMETIMES HIDE MY IDENTITY AS A ROMA”.**

Educational practitioners report prejudice and negative attitudes towards Roma among practitioners working with Roma students. This is concerning, as children are less likely to engage in education if they face discrimination and bullying from teachers and other students. It is also a challenge for parents where in an effort to protect their children from negative attitudes

or bullying they may feel that they have to withdraw their children from school. Evidence of prejudice also raises serious concerns in the context of national and international evidence of anti-Roma sentiments, prejudice and racism. Educational practitioners who highlighted these concerns called for measures to educate practitioners in order to raise awareness of the socio-economic and political background of Roma in Ireland and Europe, as well as measures to address anti-Roma racism.

## ISSUES ARISING AMONG EDUCATIONAL STAKEHOLDERS STRUCTURAL SUPPORTS AND FRAMEWORK FOR INCLUSION

**“ROMA ARE ONLY SEEN WHEN THEY ARE A PROBLEM, OTHERWISE THEY ARE INVISIBLE”.**<sup>90</sup>

The overwhelming consensus among participants was that there is a need to address the barriers to education experienced by Roma and lack of framework from which to guide and support the work of educational practitioners in ensuring the inclusion of Roma in education.

The lack of framework and supports puts a great stress on schools and leaves practitioners working in a vacuum. Schools, which are already under financial pressure, have little resources and supports for their Roma students. A representative of a school in Dublin argued how this illustrates a failure by the Department of Education to promote and protect the right of Roma children to education, noting how “Roma people are invisible to the Department”.

There is a great sense of frustration about the lack of resources among practitioners, but also confusion about how to access available resources. Schools are largely left to their own devices to fundraise money, and are struggling to generate resources for additional and crucial supports for students. Practitioners highlighted that there is an urgent need to provide additional supports for Roma students and their families, including language and literacy supports, sufficient cultural awareness training for practitioners, home school liaison officers, interpreter services, family support services, and financial support.

Practitioners highlighted how existing strategies and structures designed to promote the inclusion of students were often culturally inappropriate and failed

<sup>89</sup> The questionnaire was initiated and conducted by the school for the purposes of the seminar on Roma Education.

<sup>90</sup> Quote from a seminar participant.

## HOUSING CONDITIONS AND HOMELESSNESS

Findings in relation to accommodation conditions among many Roma families are alarming. Substandard housing conditions are reported to be a major factor affecting Roma children’s level of attendance and engagement in school.

The lack of access to income and social protection forces many Roma families to live in substandard, insecure, temporary, and overcrowded housing conditions in private rented sector. Educational practitioners highlighted how Roma homes are very well kept and clean, but expressed shock and disbelief in relation to the standard of accommodation provided by some landlords. As noted by a participant:

**“I DON’T UNDERSTAND HOW PEOPLE CAN LET THIS HAPPEN...FAMILIES LIVE HERE [UNDER THESE CONDITIONS] AND PAY RENT”.**

The inadequacy and lack of stability of tenure means that accommodation for these families tends to be temporary and families often move from accommodation to accommodation. An education welfare officer noted how “families more or less disappear when landlords sell houses and families move out”. Educational practitioners highlighted how tracking children who are forced to move from home to home with their family is the biggest challenge of working with many Roma families. It becomes difficult to keep track of children’s whereabouts and educational records when Roma children may be forced to change schools.

<sup>91</sup> Quote from a seminar participant.

<sup>92</sup> Quote from a seminar participant.

<sup>93</sup> Quote from a seminar participant.

to address and meet the needs of Roma students. Participants expressed a strong need for specific guidelines, training and supports in relation to the inclusion of Roma students and overcoming challenges experienced by both Roma students and parents.

Within this context, it was highlighted that a structure which could be used to promote the inclusion of Roma students already exists. A few of the participants noted how existing frameworks for Traveller inclusion and Ireland’s National Traveller Roma Integration Strategy could be used as guiding frameworks for practice. However, participants also expressed concerns about the significant shortcomings of existing strategies. The complete absence of adequate and effective funding and clear targets and monitoring mechanisms, were identified as contributing to the inadequacy of the National Traveller Roma Integration Strategy.

The National Traveller Roma Integration Strategy was also criticised for not including or consulting with Roma in its development. Participants felt that there is a need to include Roma as an integral part of developing and implementing policy to ensure its success. The need to challenge and overcome anti-Roma racism alongside with appropriate and effective supports for Roma was emphasised strongly by a participant who expressed how...

**“...THE HORRORS INFLICTED ON ROMA ACROSS THE EU ARE STOMACH TURNING. ON ONE HAND, THE HORRORS NEED TO BE SPOKEN ABOUT, ON THE OTHER; THE RACISM NEEDS TO BE ADDRESSED.”<sup>91</sup>**

Practitioners also emphasised the importance of monitoring and evaluating the inclusion of Roma in education, but the current structure prohibits doing this. Practitioners stressed the importance of applying an ethnic identifier as an administrative category in education, as Roma children currently remain invisible in the system. This “invisibility of Roma and Travellers [in education] is a majority problem, which needs to be addressed.”<sup>92</sup>

## CONTEXTUAL UNDERSTANDING AND INTERCULTURAL TRAINING

The findings unveil that there is a need to educate practitioners about the socio-economic and political context of Roma living in Ireland, and its effect on their ability to access and engage in education. As expressed by a participant;

**“IT IS DIFFICULT TO SEE WHAT ROMA HAVE BEEN EXPOSED TO ACROSS EUROPE ON A DAY-TO-DAY BASIS. WE NEED TO UNDERSTAND IT AND INCREASE AWARENESS OF ROMA AND THEIR HISTORY”.**

It is evident that many educational practitioners are unaware of the restrictions of the Habitual Residence Condition and its impact on Roma families who are unable to qualify as habitually resident in the state. Participants also noted that there was still confusion about who Roma were with many education practitioners still believing that Roma and Romanian signify the same people. This resulted in situations, such as a school requesting a Roma interpreter for a Romanian non-Roma family.

Reports of anti-Roma sentiments and prejudice among educational practitioners are also alarming. Participants felt that there was an urgent need to raise cultural awareness and develop culturally sensitive responses in relation to Roma. A participant expressed a need to “work through your own biases before stepping into a class room”. This was seen by some as a responsibility of each individual staff member, but most importantly a responsibility of the Department of Education to provide adequate, compulsory and comprehensive training.

Many practitioners identified gaps in knowledge in relation to international best practice on Roma inclusion and in provision of intercultural training. The current framework provided by the Department of Education was criticised, as many participants stressed the need for the Department to develop an adequate framework for intercultural education. Within this context Roma ethnicity was seen as a red herring;

**“THE REALITY IS THAT THE CURRICULUM AND TEACHING DOESN’T REFLECT DIVERSITY. THIS IS AN ISSUE OF POLICY AND TEACHER TRAINING. WHERE IS THE ROLE OF INTERCULTURALISM IN EDUCATION?”**

These participants criticised the overall lack of diversity being reflected in all aspects of day-to-day school life. Celebration of ‘multiculturalism’- restricted to taking place once a year- was seen as merely reinforcing the difference of students with an immigrant background, as opposed to making diversity a normal part of every day school. “We shouldn’t make cultures stand out...to break barriers bit by bit, we need to make diversity a normal part of school day” reflected in all aspects of schooling, such as in text books.

## ISSUES OF ENGAGEMENT AND ATTENDANCE

**“ANY OF THE CHILDREN NOT COMING TO SCHOOL, THERE IS AN UNDERLYING REASON BEHIND IT”.**<sup>93</sup>

Main challenges for educational practitioners consist of finding ways in which to engage with Roma parents and address issues of attendance, academic progression and school completion. It is clear that these matters are complex and closely intertwined with experiences of poverty, inadequate living conditions, lack of trust in public figures, and previous and/or persistent experiences of racism and discrimination.

There are mixed experiences in relation to attendance rates of Roma children in schools. For some Roma children once enrolled, the level of attendance tends to remain good others often leave school early or disappear shortly after being enrolled. Both of these experiences tended to be reflective of the stability of the family situation at the time.

The immediacy of fulfilling basic needs, such as the need for shelter, is reported to be a major contributor in cases where practitioners struggle to ensure the attendance of Roma students. This is particularly the case for children in families who have to move from accommodation to accommodation due to insecure and inadequate housing conditions. The school term can also be interrupted for some children if families go back to their country of origin for a few months.

Practitioners report a lack of parental engagement in children’s education to be a major challenge in their work, making it difficult to encourage parents to attend parent-teacher meetings and open nights in schools. Roma participants highlighted how this is directly related to a sense of embarrassment among parents due to having poor or no English language and literacy skills. Parents’ own lack of experience in education also contributes to this sense of embarrassment or inferiority and acts as an obstacle for engaging in meaningful dialogue with schools.

A sense of fear and low level of trust in public figures also dominates the thinking of many Roma parents. Influenced by previous experiences of anti-Roma discrimination, hatred and racism in country of origin and/or in Ireland, many Roma are hesitant to engage in dialogue with formal public figures or trust them. It is important to highlight how difficult it can be to distance oneself from previous negative experiences in education and regain trust.

The findings unveil an evident lack of positive measures or tools, which educational practitioners could utilise in an effort to gain the trust of Roma parents and improve the attendance and engagement rates of Roma children in school.

Some positive effects in terms of Roma students’ level of engagement and attendance are suggested by schools, which have observed how engagement in school activities and clubs, such as homework, breakfast and sports clubs, appear to generate positive effects.

## CONCLUSION

The participants were unanimous in their view that one of the main challenges is to overcome the structural barriers and inequalities experienced by many Roma in Ireland. The level of engagement, participation and school leaving are strongly influenced by issues of poverty, lack of entitlement to social supports and poor housing conditions among Roma. The challenge of gaining trust and ensuring dialogue with Roma parents is closely intertwined with previous and persistent experiences of racism and discrimination, as well as parents' own lack of engagement in formal schooling and language and literacy skills.

It is evident that the challenges and barriers faced by Roma and educational practitioners cannot be overcome without having an adequate framework and funding and monitoring mechanisms. As poverty and poor housing conditions can hinder school attendance and completion rates, the participants highlighted a need for a holistic approach to Roma inclusion. This includes providing structural supports for Roma families, and supports and framework for educational practitioners from which to approach the work of Roma inclusion.

## SECTION 06: IDENTIFIED SUPPORTS FOR ROMA AND EDUCATIONAL PRACTITIONERS



Roma boy on computer.  
Photo by James Fraher.

**“ROMA CONTINUE TO BE DISCRIMINATED AGAINST AND STATES ARE STILL NOT DOING ENOUGH.”** Quote from Seminar Participant

## INTRODUCTION

The findings unveil how Roma children are exposed to significant vulnerability in Ireland. Educational practitioners expressed shock and disbelief, as well as a sense of disillusionment in terms of how the situation can be changed.

This section outlines the most pressing supports and needs among Roma and educational practitioners and formulates a number of recommendations. The identified supports and recommendations are presented in the form of systemic, internal and external supports, and relate directly to the need to develop a comprehensive National Traveller Roma Integration Strategy as well as amend relevant policy and practice to ensure the inclusion of Roma children in education.

## SYSTEMIC SUPPORTS

### HABITUAL RESIDENCE CONDITION

The overwhelming consensus among participants was that there is a need to address the socioeconomic and political barriers to education experienced by Roma. The Habitual Residence Condition, which restricts access to any social welfare protection for many Roma who are living in Ireland, acts as a serious barrier to the attainment of Roma right to education and has a particularly egregious impact on Roma women and children. Access to basic welfare supports, including child benefit and back to school allowance, should be ensured for all children and parents, who experience financial barriers to access and engage in education.

As it stands, the HRC directly contradicts the State's obligation to ensure that education is available, accessible, acceptable and adapted for all people, including marginalised groups such as ethnic minorities.

#### Recommendations

- **The state should monitor and evaluate the impact of the HRC on children and marginalised groups to establish and address its connection with indirect discrimination.**
- **Remove discriminatory barriers that affect access to education, adequate housing, employment, social protection and health. This includes removing eligibility and enrolment criteria that have a disproportionate impact on Roma.**
- **Ensure that parents have basic supports including child benefit and back to school allowance, in order to support Roma children's access to education.**

### NATIONAL TRAVELLER ROMA INTEGRATION STRATEGY

The absence of an adequate national framework for the promotion and protection of Roma right to education is an evident gap in the state's response towards marginalised and vulnerable Roma in Ireland. As recognised by a seminar participant, there is a need for recognition, protection and participation of Roma in all national action plans.

The importance of having an adequate national framework for the promotion and protection of Roma education was highlighted by seminar participants. There are significant shortcomings in the current Irish National Traveller/Roma Integration Strategy, which leaves Roma and educational practitioners outside of support structures. Pavee Point has been strongly critical of the strategy, which almost completely fails to mention Roma and involved no active participation or consultation with Roma or Travellers in its development. A progressive strategy with goals, timeframes, funding mechanisms and monitoring mechanisms is urgently needed.<sup>94</sup>

The strategy should seek to ensure that education stakeholders are provided with an appropriate framework and funding to guide and support Roma inclusion in education. Currently, practitioners are working in vacuum without sufficient supports, training and resources. The recent austerity cuts are putting further pressure on front line education workers and Roma families.

#### Recommendations:

- **Urgently review and develop the existing National Traveller Roma Integration Strategy, with the involvement of Travellers, Roma and civil society organisations.**
- **A steering group with an independent chair to lead the process - consisting of representatives from relevant departments, agencies and civil society organisations.**
- **Include Roma children as an integral part of the strategy's aims and objectives.**
- **Establish clear goals, timeframes, funding and monitoring mechanisms specifically related to Roma inclusion, these are currently completely absent.**
- **Ensure that the specific educational needs of Roma children and parents are adequately addressed and met including provision of language and literacy supports, Roma liaison**

**teachers, home school liaison officers, interpreter services, cultural competency training for teachers and education stakeholders, family support services and financial support.**

- **Recognise and acknowledge anti-Roma racism, discrimination and prejudice in Irish society and include mechanisms to combat and monitor these.**
- **Utilise, adapt and develop existing Traveller education strategies as basis for guiding Roma inclusion in education.**
- **Ensure no further cuts are made to organisations, supports and resources directed towards marginalised and excluded groups in the Irish society and increase funding towards these groups in order to combat exclusion and marginalisation.**
- **Ensure an interagency approach. It is important that cross departmental structures are put in place to ensure that barriers to education can be removed cross departmental structures are put in place to ensure that barriers to education can be removed.**

### ETHNIC IDENTIFIER

Effective policy and practice should be evidence based on reliable and comprehensive data informed by consultation with people who are directly affected. The lack of data disaggregated by ethnicity makes it impossible to effectively evaluate and monitor issues related to Roma access, engagement and attainment in the Irish education system.

Many participants noted that Roma student's and the barriers they faced were rendered invisible in the education system, and emphasised a need to change this situation through the inclusion of ethnic identifier as an administrative category in education. This would allow for the development of responsive and adequate service delivery that would be both cost effective and inclusive. The inclusion of an ethnic identifier would also allow facilitate the monitoring institutional discrimination and racism, and ultimately safeguard equal access to education for Roma children.

#### Recommendations:

- **Include an ethnic identifier in data collection and analysis across the education system to monitor inclusion, progression, outcomes and to inform policy development and service delivery.**
- **Safeguard that all stages of data collection, analysis and presentation adheres to relevant legislation and human rights standards.**

### FULL IMPLEMENTATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS STANDARDS

**"ROMA CONTINUE TO BE DISCRIMINATED AGAINST AND NATION STATES ARE STILL NOT DOING ENOUGH"<sup>95</sup>**

In line with the international and regional human rights treaties Ireland has signed and ratified, there are specific obligations towards the inclusion of members of ethnic minority groups in education which the State currently fails to deliver. These failures are directly related to the attainment of right to education and the principle of non-discrimination.

There is a need to shift focus towards rights-based approach to education where access and engagement in education is available, accessible, acceptable and adaptable to minority groups in society. This requires a holistic approach to Roma inclusion, where the Roma right to education can only be realised in conjunction with removing barriers to other fundamental socioeconomic, political, cultural and civic rights

#### Recommendations:

- **Transfer relevant human rights principles and instruments into evidence based national policy and legislation and ensure effective implementation and monitoring of all policy and legislation.**
- **Consider special measures to ensure that education is both acceptable and accessible for Roma.**
- **Establish a specialised, independent body to monitor and promote anti-Roma discrimination and Roma equality in the education system.**
- **Review and develop national action plans, which address the needs and rights of children and minority ethnic groups in education.**
- **Ensure the active participation of Roma in the development and implementation of policies and strategies.**
- **Allow for the inclusion of ethnic identifier in data collection in line with relevant EU legislation.**
- **Extend the terms of reference and powers of the Traveller Education Strategy Advisory Consultative Forum to include Roma education and inclusion.**

<sup>94</sup> Pavee Point, *Briefing Note on the National Traveller Roma Integration Strategy*, 2013.

<sup>95</sup> Quote from a seminar participant.

## ROMA PARTICIPATION

The involvement of Roma in the development and implementation of policies, strategies and initiatives is widely recognised within the EU institutions. The active participation of Roma in the elaboration and implementation of policies has been recognised as essential in ensuring development of effective and responsive policies and practices and Roma attainment to human rights.<sup>96</sup>

### Recommendations:

- **Ensure active participation of Roma and representative organisations at all stages of planning and implementation of any policy, initiative or strategy.**
- **Support the inclusion of Roma in employment in the education sector.**
- **Provide supports and cultural competency training to all educational welfare services staff.**
- **Include Roma culture in the education curriculum at primary and post primary level.**
- **Provide schools and education services with models of good practice to foster Roma parent's inclusion and participation in the education system.**

## IDENTIFIED SUPPORTS FOR ROMA AND EDUCATIONAL PRACTITIONERS

### ACCESS TO ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERACY SUPPORTS AND ADULT EDUCATION

Both Roma and non-Roma participants agreed that there is a need for additional supports for Roma children, particularly for older children who have no previous engagement in formal schooling, as well as for Roma parents. With adequate and effective supports in relation to language and literacy skills, it is possible to ensure progression in education and access to further education, training and employment. An adult education training programme for Roma was run in Pavee Point but had its funding removed in 2011. The funding of a Roma specific adult education programme was of huge benefit to Roma participants and it is recommended that a new programme is funded and developed in conjunction with Pavee Point.

### Recommendations:

- **Ensure the provision of accessible, culturally and age appropriate education and training in English language and literacy skills for Roma.**
- **Provide educational practitioners and Roma children with additional resources to support the development of language and literacy skills in school.**
- **Use professional and appropriate interpretation and translation services between schools and parents, when needed.**
- **Use international models of good practice to engage older students in education.**
- **Fund the development of an adult education programme in Pavee Point.**

## ESTABLISHING TRUST AND ENSURING ENGAGEMENT

There are specific issues and needs among Roma children and parents, policy makers and practitioners that need to be addressed in order to establish trust and ensure engagement. A subtext of assimilation nationally and internationally was highlighted in approaches and practices to Roma inclusion in education. These approaches tend to ignore short comings in existing curricula and the delivery of education to children who have no or little previous engagement in formal schooling. There is an assumption that children will simply be able to assimilate to majority culture and that teachers in turn will be able to cope. This places undue pressure on both students and teachers, and can lead to negative associations with school participation.

Several participants, particularly Roma, strongly agreed that when trying to implement educational practices it is essential to include members of the Roma community working with educational practitioners. In this context, the participants were interested in exploring international practice, particularly in the area of parental engagement. Individual work with each family was also suggested as a way to approach the issues.

### Recommendations:

- **Provide Roma children and teachers with adequate supports to facilitate learning particularly for older children.**
- **Adjust the nature of schooling and curriculum to include a diversity of approaches and content to better suit a variety of student needs.**
- **Facilitate Roma parents to engage in lifelong learning, including further and higher education.**

- **Establish trust with Roma parents through the use of community work methods. Ensure that contact points within the education system are trained, supported and equipped to respond in a culturally sensitive manner.**
- **Create opportunities for Roma parents to have a voice in defining issues they experience and develop and implement solutions to those issues from within the community.**
- **Support the promotion of children's native language/s and culture in school to preserve a sense of Roma identity.**
- **Remove financial barriers to school activities and clubs to ensure that children from all backgrounds have access to engage in extracurricular activities designed to enhance participation and support inclusion of students.**
- **Provide resources for the employment of specialist education staff in Roma and Traveller organisations.**

## INTERCULTURAL TRAINING AND CONTEXTUAL UNDERSTANDING OF ROMA

**"IT IS DIFFICULT TO SEE WHAT ROMA HAVE BEEN EXPOSED TO ACROSS EUROPE ON A DAY TO DAY BASIS. WE NEED TO UNDERSTAND IT AND INCREASE AWARENESS OF ROMA AND THEIR HISTORY"<sup>97</sup>**

The findings unveil that many educational practitioners are unaware of the socioeconomic, political and historical situation of Roma across Europe, as well as the restrictions of the HRC which apply to many Roma in Ireland. It is evident that there is a need to educate policy makers and practitioners about this context, as well as eradicate anti-Roma racism and prejudice. Roma and Traveller inclusion needs to be named as part of the Department of Educations strategy when it is reviewed next year. Roma participants highlight that service provision, which is based on non-judgemental, respectful and culturally appropriate practices, is key to overcoming poor levels of engagement among Roma.

### Recommendations:

- **Ensure compulsory continuing professional development in relation to intercultural and anti-bias training for educational practitioners.**
- **Anti-racism and cultural awareness training should be included in performance planning and recorded in role profile forms as part of the performance management development system.**

- **Engage in awareness raising activities for policy makers and educational practitioners in relation to the historical and persistent socioeconomic marginalisation of Roma.**
- **Develop appropriate, responsive and effective policies and models of good practice for schools and education settings and remove policies and practices based on cultural assumptions.**
- **Adapt a community development approach to Roma inclusion in education by training and employing Roma as educational practitioners to ensure long-term and sustainable inclusion of Roma in education.**

## INTERAGENCY APPROACH TO ROMA INCLUSION

Due to the complex socio-economic situation of many Roma children and families in Ireland, the key to Roma inclusion in education cannot be resolved by services and practitioners working in isolation from one another. Interagency work is key to ensuring that the needs of Roma are met and parents are able to promote and ensure their children's access and engagement in education.

### Recommendations:

- **Ensure collaboration between statutory and non-statutory sectors as well as cross departmental collaboration in all policy making and practice.**
- **Increase collaboration between all stakeholders across sectors, including community and HSE projects as well as representatives of Roma communities.**
- **Develop an administrative data system to maintain a record of children's educational history to make it easy for practitioners to access information about children's educational records when they move schools or transition from primary to secondary.**
- **Safeguard that all stages of data collection, analysis and presentation adheres to relevant legislation and human rights standards.**

<sup>96</sup> European Union, Vademecum *10 Common Basic Principles of Roma Inclusion*, [http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/youth/Source/Resources/Documents/2011\\_10\\_Common\\_Basic\\_Principles\\_Roma\\_Inclusion.pdf](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/youth/Source/Resources/Documents/2011_10_Common_Basic_Principles_Roma_Inclusion.pdf)

<sup>97</sup> A quote by an educational practitioner.

# A FRAMEWORK FOR REALISING THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION

**“THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION REQUIRES A COMMITMENT TO ENSURING UNIVERSAL ACCESS, INCLUDING TAKING ALL NECESSARY MEASURES TO REACH THE MOST MARGINALIZED CHILDREN.”<sup>98</sup>**

## THE 4AS FRAMEWORK: MONITORING THE REALISATION OF THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION

Human rights indicators can be used as a framework for monitoring the realisation of the right to education. To be a meaningful right, education in all its form and at all levels should be accessible, adaptable, acceptable and available, otherwise known as the ‘4As’.

These criteria were developed by the first UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education, Katarina Tomaševski, and adopted by the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in its General Comment 13 on the right to education (paragraph 6). Underpinning the ‘4As’ is the intrinsic requirement for accountability and participation which are crucial to the fulfilment of all human rights.

The difference between human rights indicators and the more common development indicators is that human rights indicators aim to measure the extent to which states fulfil their human rights obligations.

The 4A framework requires that education be made generally available, that the obstacles to its access be removed, that its content be acceptable and that the education be adapted to specific groups and social needs.<sup>99</sup>

Indicators based on the 4A framework have been developed by the Right to Education Project<sup>106</sup> and have been used to monitor the right to education for Roma children in other European countries.<sup>107</sup>

Core to the successful implementation of this framework and to ensuring the realisation of the right to education is the comprehensive collection of disaggregated data across the education system.

The complete set includes more than 100 indicators therefore for the purposes of illustration a number of key indicators under each of the ‘4As’ is outlined below. This framework was devised by the Right to Education Project in 2010 as a result of consultative workshops on indicators for the right to education.<sup>108</sup>

## ACCEPTABILITY

### HEADING

#### **Tolerance**

### INDICATOR

Does education promote: respect for other nations, racial, ethnic or religious groups and indigenous peoples?  
.....

Are textbooks accurate neutral and fair? Do they speak in good terms of minority groups living in the state?  
.....

Is human rights education included in school curricula? Is there an effort to embed human rights values with all school activities?

### DISCRIMINATION

Age, Gender, Region, Minority, Income

### PARTICIPATION (P) ACCOUNTABILITY (A)

**(P)** Can parent’s children and community leaders contribute to defining school curricula? Can children make a choice between different options?

Is the learning process participatory?

<sup>98</sup> UNESCO, *A Human Rights-Based Approach to Education*, New York: United Nations Children Fund, 2007.

<sup>99</sup> De Beco, G., Hyll-Larsen, P. and Ron Balsera, M., *The Right to Education: Human Rights Indicators and the Right to Education of Roma Children in Slovakia*, Paper commissioned for the EFA Global Monitoring Report 2010, ‘Reaching the marginalised’, UNESCO, 2010.

## AVAILABILITY

HEADING	INDICATOR	DISCRIMINATION	ACCOUNTABILITY
<b>Early Childhood Care and Education</b>	Gross Enrolment Ratio .....	Gender, Minority, Income	Is data disaggregated by ethnicity available to monitor enrolment, retention and attainment in the education system?
	Are measures taken to enhance parents' understanding of their role in their children's early education? .....		
	Do programmes for the development of the child seek to enhance cooperation between parents and professionals?		
<b>Secondary Education</b>	Gross and Net Enrolment Ratios .....	Gender, Minority, Income	
	Transition Rate .....		
	Drop-out Rates .....		
	Gross Completion Rate		

## ACCESSIBILITY

HEADING	INDICATOR	DISCRIMINATION	PARTICIPATION (P) ACCOUNTABILITY (A)
<b>Economic Obstacles</b>	Indirect costs for secondary education: textbooks teaching materials, uniforms, coaching classes, compulsory parental contributions. .....	Gender, Region, Private/Public	<b>(P)</b> Can parents and community leaders contribute to the formulation of strategies to encourage school attendance and reduce the dropout rates of children in low income groups?
	Are subsidies for primary education available for low-income groups? Are free meals provided at primary school? Are free health care services provided at primary school?	Gender, Region, Income, Minority	
<b>Socio-Economic</b>	Are parents given assistance to enrol their children? Are enrolment formalities reduced to the minimum? .....	Gender, Region, Private/Public, Minority	<b>(P)</b> Can parents and community leaders contribute to the formulation of strategies to encourage school attendance and reduce the dropout rates of children in low income groups?
	Are steps taken to ensure that previously out-of-school children remain in school? Are there measures taken to adapt education to their situation to prevent further drop outs?		
			<b>(A)</b> Is there a monitoring body evaluating the direct and indirect costs of primary education? Is there a complaint mechanism for such costs?

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**Roma and Education**

Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre  
Roma Seminar Series: Theme Three





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