

The National Roma Needs Assessment:

# EDUCATION BRIEFING



PAVEE POINT  
TRAVELLER AND ROMA CENTRE

## OVERVIEW

The National Roma Needs Assessment was undertaken by Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre in partnership with the Department of Justice and Equality, and published in 2018. It was commissioned by the Department of Justice and Equality in line with recommendation 4.2.3 of the Logan Report, following the removal of two Roma children from their families in 2013. The Roma Needs Assessment aims to provide a better understanding of the experiences of the Roma community in Ireland, and to identify areas requiring further consideration. This is the first participatory research project of its kind with Roma in Ireland, and the research was undertaken with 14 Roma peer researchers. The study adopts a mixed-methods, rights-based approach, including:

- Quantitative analysis in 108 Roma households; (information on 609 household members)
- Collection of qualitative data (30 interviews and 8 focus groups) with service providers and Roma;
- Consultations with other relevant 'experts' in the field.

Many of these respondents viewed education as a positive opportunity for Roma children in Ireland and parents repeatedly stressed the value they placed on their children receiving an education. However, the research highlights significant challenges to the participation, attendance and results of Roma children in the Irish education system. These included a lack of financial resources; living in sub-standard accommodation; parents own experiences of discrimination in school or lack of access to education and lack of English language and literacy.

## KEY ISSUES

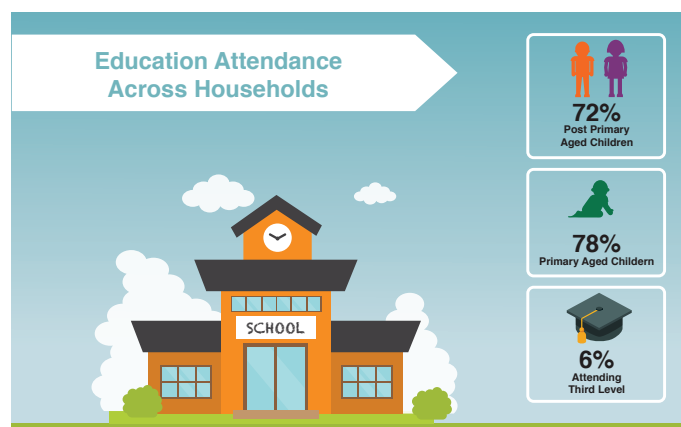
### SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

- 40% of households with children under the age of five reported that children were attending pre-school.
- In 78% of households primary aged children were attending school.
- Post primary aged children were attending school in 72% of households.

The challenges for migrating children also need to be taken into account. 25.9% of children in households were born in Romania, 6.6% in the Czech Republic, 2.7% in Slovakia and 1.6% stated 'other'. Language and literacy were identified by service providers as significant barriers preventing children from fully engaging with the curriculum and parents from participating and engaging with the school community.<sup>1</sup> A number of service providers felt that additional supports and resources were required to facilitate meaningful participation in the education system.

Similarly, Roma children and parents previous education experiences in other countries need to be taken into account as they can directly contribute to the attendance, attainment levels and participation of children in Ireland.

Early marriage was raised as preventing some Roma girls from completing and succeeding in education. Early marriage is not unique to Roma communities and is not necessarily motivated by culture or group. It is important that early marriage is addressed as it undermines the human rights of Roma girls and in this context their right to education. Communities need to be made aware of the legislative and policy provisions in Ireland in relation to the age of marriage. Addressing such issues requires creating future opportunities and alternatives for Roma women. Funding and supports that empower community leaders are also needed.



There is a clear need for further exploration of the experiences of Roma children in education in Ireland. Respondents who had been to school in Ireland reported hiding their identity. It was acknowledged that schools need to recognise cultural diversity and implement inclusive practices in order to ensure the inclusion of Roma children and combat identity based bullying. The 2014 State of the Nations Report found that when compared to other children, Traveller children, immigrant children and children with a disability and/or chronic illness were more likely to report that they were bullied at school.<sup>ii</sup> Respondents stated that identity based bullying continues to be a significant issue for Roma and Traveller children.



## ADULT EDUCATION

Only 18.45% of the respondents had attended education or training in Ireland and Roma who had attended school saw this as a positive opportunity. However, they also spoke about having to hide their identity to prevent or protect themselves against bullying and discrimination.

The research indicates significant levels of educational disadvantage experienced by adult respondents, which should be considered when services are developed and delivered to support Roma inclusion in the Irish education system.

- 6% of households had a member attending third level education.
- 37.8% of respondents reported that they had never been to school. The average duration of school attendance for those that have attended school is 5 years.
- 11.1% of respondents reported completing 12 or more years of education.
- 41.1% of adult Roma women have never been to school, in comparison to 22% of Roma men.

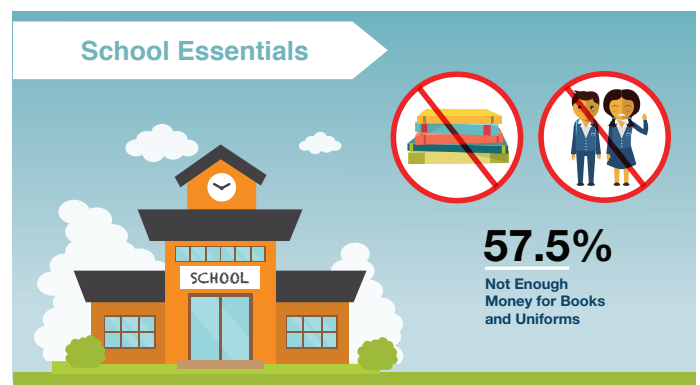
The majority of adult respondents' experiences in education were from education systems outside of Ireland.

Service providers reported that some Roma women who had been taken out of school early expressed a strong desire to return to education once their own children were attending school.

## POVERTY

Poverty and poor living conditions act as formidable barriers to accessing and participating in education. Poverty and poor accommodation has also impacted Roma children's experience of education, and respondents reported facing some or all of the issues below:

- Children gone to school hungry (25%)
- Children gone to school without adequate lunches (35%)
- Not always enough food (49.5%)
- Not always enough fuel (46.2%)
- Not enough money for books and uniforms (57.5%)



These factors significantly impact on children's capacity to concentrate and participate in class.

In 40% of households, respondents reported being in receipt of the back to school clothing and footwear allowance. This payment was developed to support those in greatest need; however several respondents in this study who were experiencing financial hardship and struggling to send children to school were not in receipt of this support. The majority of respondents not in receipt of this payment reported that they could not afford books and

uniforms for children. As is highlighted throughout this research it appears that often the most marginalised families are left without supports and for some this prevented children's participation in education.

The challenges were reiterated by service providers, however they also noted that many parents are very determined that their children complete their education and manage to achieve high levels of attendance despite difficult living conditions. Service providers noted that, in some cases despite families living in one or two rooms, children were still attending school and completing their homework each evening.

## CASE STUDIES



*Despite the evident experiences of educational and economic disadvantage, one service provider commended Roma parents commitment to education: 'The community is doing a sterling job, with so many not having a background in education, that so many kids are going ahead and engaging in education...when you are handling someone over to another authority...if you have no experience of that yourself or the benefits of it, it is quite a thing that so many kids are going to school and are engaging.'*

*'Me and my two children live with my sister. She has five members living with her. My Dad is old and ill. We all live in a house where there is no electricity, no hot water. Nobody cares about us. I don't have social welfare. My two children were taken out of school because they had nothing to eat at school. I am not able to pay for their books or uniforms. They went for a while when I was able to sell Big Issue but I couldn't anymore because I became ill. I live on my Dad's money from social welfare. I am very poor. I have a very hard life. I came to Ireland to have a better life, but instead I am worse.'*

*One respondent noted that moving to Ireland gave her the opportunity to get an education and avoid early marriage: 'If I stayed would not have got an education, I would have been married early with kids'.*

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Ensure that supports to address the costs associated with attending school are available to all Roma children experiencing poverty.
- Support and encourage Roma families to avail of free pre-school education.
- Develop and implement targeted early education intervention initiatives with Roma families.
- Support and enhance the early intervention inter-agency approach to address the cycle of poor attendance, participation, and attainment of Roma children in education.
- Maintain intercultural and anti-racism training as a compulsory component in teacher training at pre-service and in-service levels, along with the requirement for anti-racism policies and initiatives in schools.

These briefings were made possible with the support of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission. To read the full report, please visit <https://www.paveepoint.ie/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/RNA-PDF.pdf>



Coimisiún na hÉireann um Chearta an Duine agus Comhionannas  
Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission

<sup>1</sup> It has previously been highlighted that due to lack of literacy and language skills many older children are placed in classes with younger peers. A senior educational welfare officer reports this is likely 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 students. See Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre, Roma and Education (2014) 32.

<sup>2</sup> Department of Children and Youth Affairs, State of the Nation's Children: Ireland 2014 (2014) 59.