



Traveller and Roma Education - Vision, Issues and Actions

Pavee Point March 2024

Introduction:

The consultations currently underway as part of the development of the National Traveller Roma Education Strategy (TRES) announced by the Minister for Education in 2023 provide an opportunity for Roma and Travellers and Traveller organisations to express their views about what the Strategy should be about. Aspects of the vision and issues below which came from Pavee Point's Education work and national fora including the Roundtable of 22/11 and the Overview of Provision may be of use in formulating some responses for the TRES and also for other education developments.

Vision:

An inclusive transformed education system from Early Years to Further and Higher Education where Traveller and Roma education rights are fully realised; Roma and Travellers have equality of access, participation and outcomes at all levels and throughout its workforce; and are respected and included in all curricula in a system which acknowledges and addresses barriers including anti-Traveller and anti-Roma racism and discrimination.

Some Current Key Issues and Actions:

- Approx 26% of Travellers and 90+% non-Travellers complete the senior cycle in second level education. Immediate targets for removing this gap with associated timelines and resources are required with ongoing monitoring to ensure progress and implementation.
- While there has been an improvement regarding Traveller education data there is a big lack of reliable data about Roma education. We call for promptly published disaggregated data collected in line with human rights principles and with European Commission guidance from all pupils throughout the system. This is required for the ethnic equality monitoring essential for realisation of Roma and Travellers education rights. We call also for policy guidelines to support this in the forthcoming National Equality Data Strategy.

- Participation in Early Years initiatives is approx. 70% for Travellers and approx. 93% for the non-Travellers, with reliable data for Roma not available, although indications from stakeholders suggest this is low. Participation targets with timelines for both Traveller and Roma children are required along with outreach to enhance involvement and support for regular attendance as a key part of the Equal Partnership Model currently being developed for Early Years.
- We call for mandatory pre-service and in-service education on racism which in line with the Government National Action Plan on Racism definition addresses systemic racism. It must have a named focus on anti-Traveller and anti-Roma racism and be for all employed in education at all levels including teachers. Inspections at all levels should include monitoring anti-racism and interculturalism.
- Realising Traveller and Roma education rights requires ongoing and reinforced connections and engagement between Traveller and Roma organisations at all levels as well as ongoing engagement with parents and pupils. This must be in ways that facilitate and encourage their participation and acknowledge that their experiences may have been personally discriminatory and organisationally dismissive. Community organisations require ongoing resources to sustain and enhance their essential education work.
- Immediate and urgent steps are needed including in the TRES to address the particular issues faced by Roma children including family poverty, lack of income due to the terms of the Habitual Residence Condition and associated difficulties in getting Child Benefit which have particular consequences for education participation by those affected. Discrimination in schools against Roma girls wearing traditional clothes also needs to be addressed as do the additional language burdens for Roma parents which require appropriate interpreters with sensitivity to the issues.
- Targetted time lined measures to reduce rapidly the Traveller pupils, now 22% of the total on reduced hours, need to be an immediate part of the TRES as well as addressing other associated issues such as grouping Travellers separately for school activities. The Action Plan on bullying needs to be expanded to include explicit recognition of systemic as well interpersonal racism.
- The TRES needs to outline how new Primary School Curriculum to be developed over the next year can provide progress towards the inclusive system of the vision above in which Travellers and Roma are respected and directly included.