



PAVEE POINT
TRAVELLER AND ROMA CENTRE

**Submission to the Special Joint Committee on key issues affecting the
Traveller Community: Education**

November 2019

Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre

Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre ('Pavee Point') have been working to challenge racism and promote Traveller and Roma inclusion in Ireland since 1985. The organisation works from a community development perspective and promotes the realisation of human rights and equality for Travellers and Roma in Ireland. The organisation is comprised of Travellers, Roma and members of the general population, who work together in partnership to address the needs of Travellers and Roma as minority ethnic groups experiencing exclusion, marginalisation and racism. Working for social justice, solidarity and human rights, the central aim of Pavee Point is to contribute to improvement in the quality of life and living circumstances of Irish Travellers and Roma.

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Traveller Education: Recommendations

- Department of Education and Skills to develop an Action Plan for Traveller Education in partnership with national Traveller organisations; a National Traveller Education Advisory group to be established in the Department of Education and Skills to prioritise, give oversight, and secure accountability for the education needs of Travellers.
- The Department of Education and Skills should provide funding to independent Traveller organisations to address Traveller education needs and inequalities.
- The Department of Education and Skills School Inspectorate should undertake an audit of the application of 'limited/reduced timetables' on Traveller children and publish its report. The Inspectorate should also identify a mechanism to capture the use of 'limited/reduced timetables' when carrying out school inspections.
- Department of Education and Skills must consult with national Travellers organisations in the development of Guidelines on Reduced Timetables.
- Publication of disaggregated data on the basis of ethnicity in secondary schools (PPOD) to monitor participation and outcomes of Traveller students.
- Ensure that the inclusion of Traveller culture and history in school curriculum takes place in active consultation with Traveller organisations and acts as a precedent for further inclusion of all the cultures which are part of Ireland.
- Undertake measures to ensure ongoing mandatory training of education personnel on anti-Traveller discrimination and racism, and ensure school inspections and other monitoring and accountability systems include assessment of schools' interculturalism and anti-racism policies, curricula, and practice.
- The Equity of Access Plan for Higher Education, Path one funding for diversification of the teacher profile, should have specific targets for Travellers.

Introduction

Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre ('Pavee Point') welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Special Joint Oireachtas Committee on Key Issues Affecting the Traveller Community with a specific focus on education. For over thirty years, Pavee Point has given central importance to pursuing full and equal participation for Travellers throughout the education system. This was and is based on our understanding of education's key importance for human dignity and rights. Our work more recently expanded to include Roma, and was significantly enhanced our Education Programme which was forced to discontinue our Education Programme in 2017 due to lack of funding. This is in the broader context of a complete decimation to, and dismantling of, (-86.6%) Traveller specific educational supports.

This submission sets out the current challenges to addressing Traveller's equality of access, participation and outcomes in education and provides clear and strategic recommendations to address these challenges.

Addressing inequality of access, participation and outcomes in education

Ireland has been ranked as second in the EU/OECD in reducing educational inequalities, however, as UNICEF¹ points out, Travellers are still falling between the cracks, with the vast majority of Travellers ceasing education before junior certificate level. The entrenched education inequality gap between Traveller children and children from the general population, persists, with levels of educational attainment for Traveller children remaining unacceptably low. Through the 2016 Census we know that there are about five thousand Travellers aged 15-19 years old in Ireland. Traveller enrolments in second-level schools peaked at 2,699 students in 2010 – over twice the 2000/01 enrolment demonstrating the impact of positive targeted measures for Travellers. After austerity cuts, which dismantled educational support services for Travellers, positive outcomes for Travellers were significantly impacted. Traveller enrolments dropped by 10% in DEIS schools, and by 9% in non-DEIS schools

Travellers- Educational Disadvantage

- Only 13% of Travellers complete secondary education in comparison with 92% of the general population²
- The majority of Traveller children (67.3%) live in families where the mother has either no formal education or primary education only³
- Nearly two thirds (62%) of Travellers experience discrimination at school⁴
- 13% of female Travellers are educated to upper secondary level or above, compared with 69% of the general population⁵
- 57% of male Travellers are educated to primary level at most, compared with 13.6% of the g general population⁶
- 28% of Travellers leave school before the age of 13, compared to 1% of general population⁷
- Half of Travellers live outside of DEIS educational areas⁸
- Half of Travellers have poor functional literacy, compared to 9% of the general population⁹

¹<https://www.unicef.ie/2018/10/30/ireland-among-best-at-reducing-educational-inequality-in-eu-oecd-but-fears-children-most-in-need-being-left-behind-unicef-report-card/>

² Central Statistics Office (CSO) Press Statement Census 2016 Results Profile 8 - Irish Travellers, Ethnicity, and Religion. Available: <https://www.cso.ie/en/csolatestnews/pressreleases/2017pressreleases/pressstatementcensus2016resultsprofile8-irishtravellersethnicityandreligion/>.

³ Department of Children and Youth Affairs (2016) *State of the Nation's Children: Ireland 2016*, p.22. Dublin: Government Publications. Available: <https://assets.gov.ie/27118/ee5c3232f60e4e788663bee745e3222c.pdf>.

⁴ Department of Health (2010) *All Ireland Traveller Health Study*. Dublin: Department of Health.

⁵ Central Statistics Office (CSO) Press Statement Census 2016 Results Profile 8 - Irish Travellers, Ethnicity, and Religion. Available: <https://www.cso.ie/en/csolatestnews/pressreleases/2017pressreleases/pressstatementcensus2016resultsprofile8-irishtravellersethnicityandreligion/>.

⁶ Central Statistics Office (CSO) Press Statement Census 2016 Results Profile 8 - Irish Travellers, Ethnicity, and Religion. Available: <https://www.cso.ie/en/csolatestnews/pressreleases/2017pressreleases/pressstatementcensus2016resultsprofile8-irishtravellersethnicityandreligion/>.

⁷ Watson, D., Kenny, O and McGinnity, 2017, *A Social Portrait of Travellers in Ireland*, Dublin, ESRI.

⁸<https://www.unicef.ie/2018/10/30/ireland-among-best-at-reducing-educational-inequality-in-eu-oecd-but-fears-children-most-in-need-being-left-behind-unicef-report-card/>

⁹ Department of Health (2010) *All Ireland Traveller Health Study*. Dublin: Department of Health.

In acknowledging the lived reality for Traveller children in Ireland, in 2016, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child¹⁰ (CRC) echoing recommendations from several UN treaty-monitoring bodies, European institutions, and equality and human rights bodies, urged the State to urgently, “undertake concrete and comprehensive measures to address the structural discrimination against Traveller and Roma children, in particular with regard to access to education, health care and an adequate standard of living.”

Further, in 2017 ESRI report, *A Social Portrait of Irish Travellers*, noted that, “the depth of educational disadvantage experienced by Travellers means that specific, targeted additional supports will be required in order for them to participate in mainstream education on equal terms.”¹¹ Such supports were being provided within the main education system, however, the majority of primary-level educational supports that had been in place for Travellers were withdrawn under the guise of austerity in 2011 and have not been reinstated. For example, between 2008 and 2012, State funding to Traveller-specific educational supports were disproportionately cut by -86.6%.¹² This compares to an overall reduction in government spending, during the same period, of -4.3%.¹³

Cuts to Programmes/Supports for Travellers 2008-2013, in Harvey, B., <i>Travelling with Austerity</i>, 2013.	
Interagency activities	-100%
Education	-86.6%
Accommodation	-85%
Equality	-76.3%
National Traveller Organisations	-63.6%
FAS SIT (employment initiative)	-50%
National Traveller Partnership	-32.1%
SPY youth projects	-29.8%
Health	-5.4%
Overall government cut	-4.3%

Specific supports for Traveller students, including Resource Teachers for Travellers were withdrawn as part of government’s austerity measures. Such measures were undertaken in the name of ‘mainstreaming’ Travellers into the education system. In effect however, while the programme of mainstreaming was carried out aggressively after the breaking of the economic crisis, the supports necessary to assist the process were not provided. As the European Commission pointed out in its review of Ireland National Traveller Roma Inclusion Strategy (NTRIS) in 2016,¹⁴ a mainstreaming approach is only appropriate when outcomes are the same for all groups and in this case, a ‘one size fits all’ further excludes Traveller children, resulting in disproportionate outcomes:

“A mainstreamed approach is only sufficient when outcomes are identical for all components of the target groups; when evidence shows a clear gap between the situation of Roma and Travellers versus the rest of society (e.g. regarding their health and housing situation) policies should be adjusted and specific measures should also be developed.”- **European Commission Assessment of Ireland, 2016**

¹⁰ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2016) Concluding observations on the combined third and fourth periodic reports of Ireland*

¹¹ Watson, D. Kenny, O. and McGinnity, F. (January 2017).

¹² [Harvey, B \(2013\): *Travelling with Austerity: Impacts of Cuts on Travellers, Traveller Projects and Services*. Dublin: Pavee Point.](#)

¹³ Harvey, B (2013). Op cit.

¹⁴ https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/roma_report_2016_web_ok_en.pdf

Moreover, the negative impact of these decisions on educational outcomes for Travellers was flagged in the 2015 review of the school completion programme.¹⁵ While we welcome and acknowledge that some State agencies have taken positive action measures, for example, Tusla, the Child and Family Agency recently implemented a two year education¹⁶ pilot to support the retention of Traveller (and Roma) children in the education system, stronger leadership and investment by the Department of Education and Skills is required to support long-term sustainable initiatives in order to ensure positive outcomes for Travellers.

Urgent need for a National Education Strategy

Towards a Traveller Education Strategy was published in 2006¹⁷ in tandem with the establishment of a National Traveller Education Advisory and Consultative Forum to advise on the implementation of the Strategy.¹⁸ However, implementation of the strategy remains outstanding and the Consultative Forum has not met since 2016, despite calls from Traveller organisations and clear recommendations from the Joint Committee on Education and Skills¹⁹ in 2019 for the Forum to be reconvened. There is an urgent need for such a mechanism within the Department of Education and Skills to prioritise, give oversight, and secure accountability for the education needs of Traveller children. Yet, the Department of Education and Skills have largely ignored these recommendations and instead, formally disbanded the National Traveller Education Advisory Consultative Forum in favour of a NTRIS working group established to advance a specific NTRIS action (17) in December 2017, despite much of the Traveller Education Strategy remaining to be implemented.

In 2019, the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCPNM) highlighted its concerns of this process and urged the State to develop a Traveller (and Roma) education strategy,²⁰ however, the State made no specific reference to the development of such an education strategy, and instead, referred solely to the work of the NTRIS Education Sub-committee. We believe this absolves the Department of Education and Skills of its responsibility to drive the development of a Traveller education strategy as the Department has indicated that they will undertake their broader Traveller education work under the auspices of NTRIS rather than within department tasked with specific responsibility for education and training.

Reduced Timetables

As a result of the cutbacks to targeted supports, there has been a growing trend in the use of 'reduced timetables' at primary and secondary level schools whereby Traveller children are being placed on reduced hours during school days but are marked as 'present'. The use of reduced timetables is disruptive to the delivery of high quality education to Traveller children and we believe this practice serves to reinforce unequal educational outcomes experienced by Traveller children.

Reducing children's school hours is used as a tool to manage behavioural issues related to health, emotional or behavioural issues or conditions, such as ADHD, when schools lack the necessary

¹⁵ [Smyth, E., Banks, J., Whelan, A., Darmody, M., and McCoy, S.](#)

[Review of the School Completion Programme \(October 2015\)](#). Research number 44: Economic and Social Research Institute, Dublin.

¹⁶ In line with Action 17 in NTRIS, this interdepartmental initiative will be rolled out in four pilot locations across the country and focuses on attendance, participation and retention of Traveller and Roma children in Ireland

¹⁷ [Report and Recommendations for a Traveller Education Strategy \(2006\)](#). Department of Education and Skills.

¹⁸ This forum is chaired by the Social Inclusion Unit in the Department of Education and Skills.

¹⁹ https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/committee/dail/32/joint_committee_on_education_and_skills/reports/2019/2019-07-04_interim-report-on-the-committee-s-examination-on-the-current-use-of-reduced-timetables_en.pdf

²⁰ Advisory Committee on the Implementation of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities [Fourth Opinion on Ireland](#). Adopted October 10, 2018. COE ACFC/OP/IV(2018)005.

resources to support children who need additional assistance.²¹ In May 2019, the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Education and Skills echoed Pavee Point's concerns for a lack of data collected by the State on the use of reduced timetables, and called for extra resources to be made available to children at risk or in need of assistance.²² Furthermore, following the publication of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Education and Skills interim report, the Department of Education and Skills undertook an internal consultation²³ on the development of Guidelines for the use of reduced timetables. While we welcome this development, we understand that Traveller organisations were not included in this consultation process.

Ethnic data required for evidence-based policy making

Ethnically disaggregated data is critical to informing policy decisions and promoting Traveller's equality of access, participation and outcomes in the areas of education, health, accommodation and employment. The collection and monitoring of ethnic data can be used to eliminate forms of discrimination in addition to justifying positive and affirmative action to ensure that the specific needs of minority ethnic groups are met, which is permitted under the Equal Status Act 2000-present and under data protection legislation²⁴ once particular conditions are met. It is imperative that ethnic data collection takes place within a human rights framework as endorsed by the Office of the United Nation High Commissioner for Human Rights²⁵ and the European Commission²⁶. This means there must be a universal question, which is answered voluntarily based on self-identification and data is anonymised to avoid identification of specific individuals.

Serious concerns have been raised regarding a lack of available disaggregated data in relation to retention and progression of Traveller students. The Primary Online Database (POD) has replaced the National School Annual Census as the definitive source of statistics on pupils in primary schools (since the 2016/2017 academic year). Figures from POD, for the 2016/17 academic year²⁷, indicate that 7,980 Travellers were enrolled at primary level. This is slightly lower than the data collected in previous years via the National School Annual Census. In the 2015/2016 Census there were 8,000 Traveller pupils in mainstream schools.²⁸ There is no publicly available disaggregated data on secondary (PPOD) school level intake. In addition, data protection concerns are being cited in regard to the lack of disaggregated data on the basis of ethnicity, intake at secondary level, despite the fact that no such concerns are a barrier in terms of the availability of POD disaggregated data for primary level schools.

²¹ Amin, N., R. Fay, L. Kavanagh, K. Lawrence (eds), *Traveller Health Needs Assessment: County Clare*, Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre and Mid West Traveller Health Unit (THU), 2019.

²² Joint Oireachtas Committee on Education and Skills, *Report on the Committee's examination on the Progression of Travellers from primary-, to Secondary- and Third-Level Education*, 2019,

https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/committee/dail/32/joint_committee_on_education_and_skills/reports/2019/2019-05-31_report-on-committee-s-examination-on-the-progression-of-travellers-from-primary-to-secondary-and-third-level-education_en.pdf. In September 2019, the Minister for Education announced draft rules for schools to formally notify Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, when a child's school hours are cut, O'Brien, C., 'Schools to Notify Social Services When Pupils on Reduced Hours', *Irish Times*, 23 Sep 2019, <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/education/schools-to-notify-social-services-when-pupils-on-reduced-hours-1.4026650>.

²³ <https://www.education.ie/en/Press-Events/Press-Releases/2019-press-releases/PR19-09-23.html>

²⁴ In 2018, the Data Protection Act 2018 was signed into law based a European regulation, the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). The Act amends the previous data protection framework, which was established under the Data Protection Acts 1988 and 2003. The enactment of this legislation did not affect data collected for this study as rigorous standards were applied following throughout the research process following the United Nations Human Rights-Based Approach to Data (OHCHR, 2018)

²⁵ <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/HRIndicators/GuidanceNoteonApproachtoData.pdf>

²⁶ https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/final_guidelines_4-10-18_without_date_july.pdf

²⁷ Primary school online data report 2016-17, page 5, accessed October 11, 2018: <https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Statistics/Primary-Online-Database-POD-/POD-Interesting-Facts-First-Look-at-Data-from-POD-2016-2017.pdf>

²⁸ Primary school online data report 2016-17, page 5, accessed October 11, 2018: <https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Statistics/Primary-Online-Database-POD-/POD-Interesting-Facts-First-Look-at-Data-from-POD-2016-2017.pdf>

Inclusion of Traveller culture and history within the curriculum

The failure to include Traveller and culture and history within the formal curriculum at primary and post primary levels has clear implications. Firstly, results in Traveller students feeling that their culture is neither valued nor welcomed in the education system, contributing to a lower sense of self-worth and isolation with the school community. This has a direct impact on Traveller's mental health which is currently at crisis level. In addition, it also prevents students from the general population from understanding and appreciating the contributions made by the Traveller community to wider Irish society, allowing the perpetuation of individual prejudices and stereotypes.

Pavee Point acknowledges the positive developments are taking place in relation to including Traveller culture and history in the school curriculum, and cross-party support for a Traveller Culture Education Bill which holds potential to create a more inclusive school environment for Travellers.²⁹ However, to ensure effective implementation upon their enactment, steps must be taken to ensure that policy and practice in schools are in line with interculturalism, anti-discrimination and anti-racism, and that they explicitly focus on Travellers

Travellers and Higher Education

Educational outcomes, at higher level, for Travellers continue to be extremely low. Census 2016 indicates that less than 1% of Travellers go on to third level education. Pavee Point welcomed that our recommendation to include an explicit target of Traveller participation in higher education was included in the current Equity of Access to Higher Education Access Plan³⁰. The Plan, which sets a target to increase the number of Traveller new entrants to third-level education from 35 to 80,³¹ should be understood as a starting point and that subsequent strategies must significantly increase the targets for Traveller students. As a result, third level institutions should use the lifetime of this strategy to undertake outreach activities and early intervention programmes with a view to ensuring they meet future increased targets.

A progress review of the Plan, indicates that the HEA have met over half of this target, with an increase in the number of Traveller new entrants, from 35 to 61³². While this is to be welcomed, it is clear that more progress is needed; however, this is only possible if Higher Education access is grounded in direct and targeted action at first and second level education, and also incorporates a lifelong learning dimension which explicitly targets and creates opportunities for mature students-Traveller women and men who have been previously denied education opportunities. Currently none of the mainstream educational strategies, including Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools Plan 2017³³ contain actions aimed directly at increasing Traveller participation at early years, primary or post-primary levels³⁴.

²⁹ The Traveller Culture and History in Education Bill 2018 is currently before Seanad Éireann, Fourth Stage, <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/bills/bill/2018/71/>.

³⁰ <https://www.paveepoint.ie/wp-content/uploads/2010/08/Submission-on-HEA-Consultation-Paper.pdf>

³¹ <https://hea.ie/assets/uploads/2017/06/National-Plan-for-Equity-of-Access-to-Higher-Education-2015-2019.pdf>

³² <https://hea.ie/policy/access-policy/access-statistics-summary/>

³³ Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools Plan 2017 merely makes references to a target for increasing Traveller participation in higher education from 35 to 80 Travellers which was already actioned in *National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2015-2019*. Action Plan for Education 2016-2019 contains actions on audit of Traveller culture in curriculum; collaboration with Traveller representative groups, and developing an action to increase Traveller participation in higher education, <https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Corporate-Reports/Strategy-Statement/action-plan-for-education-2019.pdf>.

³⁴ Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools Plan 2017 merely makes references to a target for increasing Traveller participation in higher education from 35 to 80 Travellers which was already actioned in *National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2015-2019*. Action Plan for Education 2016-2019 contains actions on audit of Traveller culture in curriculum; collaboration with Traveller representative groups, and developing an action to increase Traveller participation in higher education, <https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Corporate-Reports/Strategy-Statement/action-plan-for-education-2019.pdf>.

**Appendix: Traveller Key Facts and Figures
(Special Joint Committee on key issues affecting the Traveller Community: Education)**

Education ³⁵	Health ³⁶	Accommodation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 13% of Travellers complete secondary education in comparison with 92% of the general population. ● 57.2% of Traveller males were educated to primary level at most, compared with just 13.6% of the general population ● Less than 1% of Travellers go on to third level education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Only 3% of Travellers over 65 ● 42% of Travellers under 15 years of age compared with 21% of the general population ● 63% of Travellers under 25 years of age compared with 35% of the general population ● Only 8 Travellers found over 85 years of age 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Nearly 40% Traveller households had more persons than rooms compared with less than 6% of non-Traveller households ● Traveller overcrowding 7 times the national rate ● 15% of all Travellers are homeless; the equivalent to 709,632 people in the general population.³⁷ ● Approximately 1,700 Travellers on the roadside without basic facilities³⁸
<p align="center">-86.6% cuts were made to Traveller education during austerity</p>	<p align="center">No new development funding has been allocated to Traveller health since 2008</p>	<p align="center">Almost half of the Traveller accommodation budget given to local authorities by the government was sent back unspent in 2019</p>

³⁵<http://www.cso.ie/en/csolatestnews/pressreleases/2017pressreleases/pressstatementcensus2016resultsprofile8-irishtravellersethnicityandreligion/>

³⁶ https://www.ucd.ie/t4cms/AITHS_SUMMARY.pdf

³⁷ Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (2017) Total Number of Traveller Families in all categories of Accommodation. Dublin: Stationery Office.

³⁸ Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (2017) Total Number of Traveller Families in all categories of Accommodation. Dublin: Stationery Office.