



**PAVEE POINT**  
TRAVELLER AND ROMA CENTRE

# **Travellers and Roma in Education and Training**

## **Overview of Provision and Engagement**

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***Transforming Traveller Education Project***

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## Frequently used acronyms

CSO	Central Statistics Office
DCEDIY	Department of Children Equality Disability, Integration & Youth
DE	Department of Education
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity In Schools
DFHERIS	Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science
ECEC	Early Childhood Education & Care
ELC/SAC	Early learning Centres/School-Age Childcare
ETB	Education and Training Boards
FET	Further Education and Training
HE	Higher Education
HEA	Higher Education Authority
NAPAR	National Action Plan Against Racism
NFQ	National Framework of Qualifications
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
SOLAS	Seirbhís Oideachais Leanúnaigh Agus Scileanna [trans: Further Education & Skills Service]

## Introduction

Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre started out in the early 1980s as the Dublin Travellers Education and Development Group, and it continues to prioritise Travellers and Roma equal access to, participation in and outcomes from education provision, as essential in the process of achieving their human rights and equal status in a diverse Irish society. It is important to closely track progress and challenges, in order to promote education provision that accurately identifies and confronts racism and promotes equality, as noted in the current *National Action Plan Against Racism* (NAPAR):

*Systemic racism is evident in the persistence of poorer outcomes for minority ethnic groups in comparison to the majority population across a range of domains. ... Employment and education in particular are powerful enablers of equality, but can also reproduce systemic racism and exacerbate inequalities<sup>1</sup>.*

This brief overview of Traveller and Roma engagement in education to date draws on the most recent available data for each stage of provision, from Early Childhood Education and Care, to further education and training, apprenticeships and higher education. It is a work in progress, to be updated as further data and information become available

The historical perspective must not be forgotten when comparing Traveller and non-Traveller education participation rates. What it took the non-Traveller population from before the foundation of the state to achieve<sup>2</sup>, began for Travellers only 60 years ago. When state focus on Traveller education emerged in the 1960s, very few Traveller parents enrolling their children had ever been to school themselves. Today, focus on post-primary enrolment is becoming the norm, and a tiny but growing number of Travellers are pursuing postgraduate courses. But Travellers' post-primary enrolment and retention rates, particularly in Senior Cycle, are still far removed from national rates, non-DEIS and DEIS. The education gap is still very wide, and must be closed, but the progress is promising.

New possibilities in the education system are opening up also. Human rights principles of equality, inclusion and diversity inform policy commitment to promoting flexibility and interconnections across education levels – a key one being the development of new pathways from Senior Level school through further and higher education provision<sup>3</sup>. Ireland has also committed to interconnected lifelong guidance services supporting all levels in the system and in the workplace, to support informed career and employment choices. All this is beneficial to the economy (not surprising, given that the OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) is the international umbrella body promoting this support, but it also provides a good structure for anti-racism and recognition and celebration of diverse cultural identities, in policy and practice.

Finally, the need for adequate disaggregated data is foundational to identifying and addressing strengths and challenges, particularly for learners from minorised populations.

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**Footnotes** (for publication details and/or hyperlinks, see bibliography at end of report).

<sup>1</sup> Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) (2023a) *National Action Plan Against Racism*, p. 19.

<sup>2</sup> Walsh, T. (2016). The National System of Education, 1831–2000. Chapter 1 in *Essays in the History of Irish Education* (Ed.: B. Walsh).

O'Donoghue, T. & J. Harford (2016). *Secondary School Education in Ireland: History, Memories and Life Stories, 1922–1962*

O'Brien, C. (2017). Fifty years after free secondary education, what big idea do we need in 2017? – *The Irish Times*, Feb 14 2017 (includes comments on the impact of free second-level education, and what needs to come next, from: John Coolahan, Tom Boland, Áine Hyland, Tom Walshe, and others).

<sup>3</sup> Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS) (2022) *Progressing a Unified Tertiary System*.

DFHERIS/HEA (2022). *National Access Plan. 2022–2028*

OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) (2020). *Education Policy Outlook: Ireland*.

OECD (2023). *Equity and Inclusion in Education: Finding Strength through Diversity*.

## Disaggregated data

Intersections run through all efforts to identify and target learning opportunities and needs and maximise the effectiveness of education provision as experienced by Travellers and Roma, and other minorised ethnic populations. The European Commission (EC) noted that the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission believes there is a legal basis allowing public bodies to process equality data for the purposes of statistical analysis - and that the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty is a statutory obligation for all public bodies<sup>4</sup>.

Government commitment to open data provision across the public services offers a support framework for developing connectivity and registering intersections, in a human rights framework:

*Human rights and ethical principles are a key focus of this Strategy. It is vital that we listen to people's views and embed AI in society in ways that respect and promote diversity, inclusion, equality and non-discrimination.*<sup>5</sup>

Human Rights principles require that equality data must include data on ethnicity:

*Equality data are essential for assessing the situation of ethnic minorities and other racialised groups and so effectively tackling racism and structural inequalities. Data makes the nature and extent of discrimination and inequality visible and provides the substance for evidenced-based policy making. When collected regularly and systematically, equality statistics enable Member States to assess the proper application of anti-discrimination legislation, monitor compliance with human rights obligations, and track progress in achieving goals towards equality*<sup>6</sup>

In general reports on use of digital data, the requirements for truly open data are also specified:

*Data ...must be deployed in an **integrated standardised** platform to empower us, our partners and citizens with accurate information at the right time to enable the co-development of sustainable smart cities, regions and communities*<sup>7</sup>.

*... use [of Open Data] is limited by barriers to its access – when data is hoarded in silos, when access rights are unclear, when it is insufficiently findable or when organisations do not make good use of the data they already have. These barriers reduce the effectiveness of public services and the possibilities for innovation and risk poorer outcomes for all.*<sup>8</sup>

In the field of education also, data collection difficulties such as poor interconnectivity limit progress, as the Department of Education (DE) notes regarding tracking learners at risk:

*... without an alignment of data systems across DE and Tusla to record school enrolment and attendance, referrals to the Education Welfare Service (EWS) ..., it is not possible to readily determine an accurate number of children and young people aged 15 and under who are not receiving any education or who are attending out-of-school settings*<sup>9</sup>.

This lack of alignment runs through the overall system – one indicator of the need for policy and guidelines on data equality collection in Ireland. Pavee Point look forward to the forthcoming publication of the Irish Equality Data Strategy. With regard to data on ethnicity (including, but not limited to, Traveller and Roma ethnicity), the Equality Data Audit conducted by the CSO highlighted difficulties attending choices between documenting nationality, “race”, and/or ethnicity – recording nationality only, for instance, can result in non-recording of racial or anti-ethnic discrimination, and can result in data on Travellers being absorbed into the national data – as has happened with data on

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<sup>4</sup> EC (2021). Guidance Note on the collection and use of equality data based on racial or ethnic origin, p20/21.

<sup>5</sup> Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (2021). *AI - Here for Good* (p.6, 21).

<sup>6</sup> EC (2021). *Guidance Note*, p.10

<sup>7</sup> Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (2021). *Digital Transformation Towards 2030. Data Strategy Foundations Sprint, 2021 – 2024* (p.7).

<sup>8</sup> Department of Public Expenditure NDP Delivery and Reform (2023). *Open Data Strategy 2023-2027* (p.5).

<sup>9</sup> DE (2022). *Review of Out-of-School Education Provision* (p.22).

schools, in the name of integration. We would add that recording citizenship data only can also result in similar masking of issues relating to ethnicity.

Education provision is nested in the wider societal framework, for good or ill:

*... racism is a structurally embedded phenomenon of domination and power, which is reflected through and reproduced by institutional arrangements, and is experienced by groups and individuals. .... Racism is present whether the exclusion is intentional or not. For many people living in Ireland, racism, in one form or another, is part of everyday life. Racial discrimination interacts with other forms of discrimination.<sup>10</sup>*

*Employment and education in particular are powerful enablers of equality, but can also reproduce systemic racism and exacerbate inequalities...<sup>11</sup>.*

At all levels of the education system, strategies are required to monitor for and address systemic racism. Anti-Traveller and Roma racism is part of a range of reflections of racism, and all must be addressed, if tackling a specific one is to be effective. A basic prerequisite for effective targeted action is that it is evidence-based – hence the necessity for disaggregation of data. The grounds of gender, socio-economic status and age are already factored into disaggregated data collection and analysis. Ethnicity must also be factored in, if false correlations and causal attributions are to be avoided, intersectionality is to be registered, and strategies are to be targeted sensitively and effectively.

Pavee Point has urged the use of disaggregated data on Traveller and Roma learners' education careers at every level of the system, starting with Early Childhood Education & Care (ECEC). To monitor engagement, data is required, not just for enrolment, but for attendance, retention, completion, and outcomes, to provide an evidence base for innovations to harness strengths and address challenges. And as far as possible, data collection instruments should be integrated, standardised, and user friendly. The "users" – staff involved in recording and collating data require training in using the data collection instruments, as part of their overall anti-racism training.

In the sections that follow, the available data is mapped. There are already indicators at each level of provision that data disaggregation can be achieved, and be useful for planning and innovation:

- Pobal publishes data on Traveller and Roma enrolments in ECEC.
- TUSLA, which monitors school attendance, commissioned research to develop "an ethically appropriate, legal ethnic data collection system .. that adheres to a human rights framework".<sup>12</sup>
- The DE adopted a policy of not publishing disaggregated data on Travellers and Roma in schools, as an indicator of inclusion. However, it publishes yearly reports<sup>13</sup> on student retention to Leaving Certificate level; these data are disaggregated by gender, socio-economic status, age, and ethnicity, and shed interesting light on growth in retention levels over the years.
- Recent reports from the further education sector<sup>14</sup> suggest that GDPR principles can be respected and useful data disaggregation can be achieved, even as regards the small population of Traveller and Roma engaged in Further Education and Training (FET) programmes.
- The Higher Education Authority (HEA) also monitor enrolments by age group, gender, and ethnicity<sup>15</sup>. The numbers of Travellers engaging at this level is still too small to generate reliable predictors of growth in engagement and retention, but those number being so small highlights the need for interventions. And again, the HEA observe GDPR requirements in conducting this disaggregated analysis.

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<sup>10</sup> Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (2023). *National Action Plan Against Racism* (NAPAR) (p.8).

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. (p.19).

<sup>12</sup> EC (2021) *Guidance notes*, p.21

<sup>13</sup> The latest is DE (2023c). *Retention Rates of Pupils in Second-Level Schools: 2016 Entry Cohort*.

<sup>14</sup> SOLAS annual Reports on Travellers and Roma in FET programmes.

<sup>15</sup> HEA (2020). *Race Equality in the Higher Education Sector*; HEA (2022) *National Access Plan*.

## Early Childhood Education and Care

The proportion of children in the State population is declining. Between 2016 and 2022, the proportion of Travellers aged 0-4 years dropped from 14% to 11.3% of the total Traveller population<sup>16</sup>. This is reflected in declining enrolments of Traveller children in Early Years provision. The age profile of the Roma population in Ireland is not so easy to read, because like any immigrant group profile, it is heavily skewed towards young adult age groups.

Below are Travellers and Roma enrolment data in ELC/SAC (Early learning Centres/School-Age Child-care) and Primary School Infants Classes (data available for Travellers only) for 2015/16—2020/21.

*Table 1. Travellers and Roma: Census data and Early Years enrolments, 2015/16-2020/21<sup>17</sup>*

Enrolment years	Travellers in:			Roma in
	ELC/SAC	Infant Classes	Total	SAC/ELC
2015/16	1,899	2425	4324	475
2018/19	2,601	2164	4765	681
% Change, 2015-2018	+37.0%	-10.8%	+10.2%	+43.4%
2020/21	1,866	2136	4002	507
% Change, 2018-2020	-28.3%	-1.3%	-16.0%	-25.6%

The drops in Traveller enrolments in Infant Classes reflects the decreasing young child population, and the move to placing 4-year-olds in ELC rather than in school. However, the 23.9% growth, 2015-2018 suggests growing community engagement with EY provision.

The huge drops tabulated in the bottom line above reflect the impact of Covid. Due to difficulties in data collection in ELC/SAC services in 2019-20<sup>18</sup>, this comparison must be between 2018 and 2020 enrolments.

These losses in Traveller and Roma enrolments are far higher than the demographics suggest, and at least double the losses in the state Early Years enrolments. Besides the clear implications of this contrast for the health and living conditions of Travellers and Roma, this is a significant loss of engagement with Early Years education, which will impact those children's ongoing school progress.

The wide divergence in the rates for Infant Classes and for ELC/SAC requires more statistical analysis to explain – demographics, shifting placements of children aged 4 years, and the complexity of ELC/SAC compared to Infant Class provision all contribute. But there are other factors. The drop in Traveller enrolments in Infant Classes (1.3%) was one-fifth of the state-wide loss (6.4%)<sup>19</sup> in this sector.

Roma enrolment numbers require comment. The number of Roma aged 0-4 years registered in Census 2022 is lower than the number enrolled in ELC/SAC in 2019. Then, post-Covid, the first enrolment dropped almost to the 2015 level. Some factors possibly contributing to this volatility were:

- Parents may have kept their small children home to protect them from infection, or the pandemic reduced community capacity to stay engaged with the centres.
- New methods of recording ethnic diversity in enrolment forms may have sparked parental reluctance to self-declare Traveller/Roma identity so formally, and/or service providers' reluctance to address this issue. The process may require more communication and training as to what ethnicity means, and how recording their ethnicities would help education for Travellers and Roma.
- Insecure accommodation may have forced families – particularly immigrant Roma -- to move,

<sup>16</sup> CSO, *Census 2022*, Table F5064

<sup>17</sup> Age-bands, *Census 2022*, Table F5097. ELC/SAC enrolments: Pobal, Tables 4.3 & 4.6, in *Annual Early Years Sector Profile Reports, 2016-17 to 2020-21*. Infant Class enrolments: Department of Education [DE] (2023a). *Pupils who are Members of the Traveller Community, 2016-20*, Table 3.

<sup>18</sup> Pobal (2022) p.4. Also: in the Dáil, June 2022, Minister O'Gorman noted difficulties in 2019/21, mainly due to the Covid pandemic, resulted in an only 60% return of survey forms.

<sup>19</sup> DE (2023a) Table 3.

and to transfer their children from one centre to another. This forced mobility, often without advance notice to the families or to ELC Centres or schools can result in overlapping enrolments and unreconciled double-entries in records.

Whatever the cause, this drop in numbers could indicate and provoke weakening engagement between the community and education provision, as Traveller communities and organisations have testified<sup>20</sup>. Reflecting on this issue may surface other factors needing attention.

One key factor is the quality of learning in ECEC programme. Pobal reports that in 2020, ECEC was availed of by 57% of the enrolled Roma children (287 out of 507), and by 42% of the enrolled Traveller children (779 out of 1,866)<sup>21</sup>. The meaning of this as regards education programmes needs to be clarified.

These enrolments are for a range of services, from creche to after-school care for children aged 6-15 years. In 2020/21, the national profile of enrolments by childhood stage was: babies, 1%; toddlers, 16%; pre-schoolers 70%; and school-age, 13%<sup>22</sup>. It seems likely that the Traveller and Roma enrolment profiles are similar. The census data for Travellers and Roma age 0-4 years is a very rough yardstick for estimating the proportion of those populations enrolled in Early Years provision. Census numbers by single year of age would be a much better measure: these are available for Travellers, but not for Roma. And on the other hand, Pobal does not disaggregate ELC/SAC data for Travellers and Roma by service/programme.

The complexity of ECEC provision in Ireland (and in many European countries<sup>23</sup>) also makes assessment of provision and take-up difficult. Current initiatives to regulate this sector are most welcome (Department of Children Equality Disability, Integration & Youth [DCEDIY], 2023). Current commitment to developing a transparent National Data Collection Strategy is a welcome support. Planned development of the sector must include precise tracking of progress for learners from diverse contexts. Enrolment data is now disaggregated by ethnicity; data on attendance, attainment and outcomes must also be disaggregated, to support identification of challenges and strengths, and targeted interventions in response to these.

The presence of racism, structural and interpersonal, in Early Years contexts is well documented<sup>24</sup> and must be addressed. There is curriculum progress in terms of celebrating diversity and respect for personal identities, but foundational change is essential to ensure intercultural, anti-racist ethos, programmes and practice in Early Years settings. Colette Murray highlights the core issues:

*Some excellent policy documents and guidelines to address exclusion have been developed in various government departments. In general, however, their implementation has been inadequate. ... The social imperative for those who hold the power, make the rules, and distribute the funds is to create change through leadership, strategic planning, and resourcing for implementation. ...*

*It is imperative that mandatory diversity and equality training, including a critical pedagogical approach, be mainstreamed in both continuous professional development and pre-service education. ... ECEC educators are in an ideal position to make a positive difference in the lives of all children and their families<sup>25</sup>.*

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<sup>20</sup> Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre and the National Traveller Women's Forum (2020). *The Implications of COVID-19 for Traveller and Roma transfer to and progression within Higher Education*. Report on National Forum, May 2020. Also Pavee Point (2020). *COVID-19 and Irish Travellers: Interim Responses, Reflections and Recommendations*.

<sup>21</sup> Pobal (2022). Annual Early Years Sector Profile Report 2020-2021 p.56/57

<sup>22</sup> Pobal (2022) p. 66.

<sup>23</sup> OECD (2022). Quality assurance and improvement in the early education and care sector.

<sup>24</sup> See for instance DCEDIY (2016) *Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Charter and Guidelines for ECEC*. Also Derman-Sparks (2019), Kenny (2014), Kenny and McLaughlin (2004), Murray & Reilly (2023).

<sup>25</sup> Murray, C. (2020). *The Long Shadow of Discrimination* (pp.64, 66).

## Primary and post-primary provision and engagement

Data across the primary and postprimary sectors<sup>26</sup> indicate that despite the first Covid outbreak and lockdown, Traveller enrolment levels were maintained: at primary level there was a 4.5% increase in Traveller pupils aged 6+; increases at postprimary level will be covered below. Data on Roma are not accessible). There is a close match between Census data on the Traveller school-age population and enrolment data, from Infants on through the legally compulsory school-going period (age 6-16 years/Junior Certificate completion). However, there is strong agreement among Traveller organisations and education providers<sup>27</sup> that attendance and attainment levels have been low and are more so, post-Covid, that community/school engagement has been affected, and that disaggregated data based on ethnicity is essential if effective targeted initiatives to address this are to be devised.

The location of Travellers in the school system is an issue. The proportion of Travellers enrolled in DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity In Schools) schools has been high, and is now up to 60% of total Traveller pupils, due to the refined criteria for classifying schools, in which Traveller enrolments have added weight.

One difficulty with using area-based criteria for DEIS classification is that some Traveller and non-Traveller families who are disadvantaged are not living in areas classified as such, and their children in schools that didn't reach the required criteria for DEIS classification lose out on needed supports.

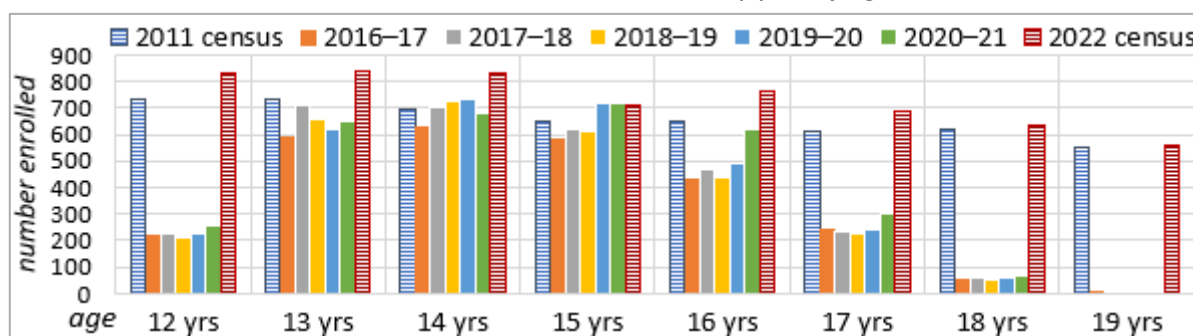
There are also conceptual difficulties that may skew perceptions of Travellers. Pavee Point is concerned that this classification based on living conditions will be misread as equating to identity. Traveller ethnicity is not a category of disadvantage, or of special educational need.

This link to disadvantage and additional education needs, and the distorting effect of this on perceptions of Traveller identity, needs to be addressed in the ethnicity questions on primary and post-primary school enrolment forms, in which Traveller ethnicity is the only ethnicity expressly linked to accessing financial and other supports in the school system. Such texts need rewording, and professional training is needed to accompany that, in order to affirm the equal dignity of Travellers' and others' ethnic identities, and to educate the education providers regarding those identities.

### Growth in post-primary enrolments

In this chart, Census data indicators (striped columns) for 2011 and 2022 bracket Travellers' post-primary enrolments per school year, by year of age:<sup>28</sup>

*Chart 1. Travellers in post-primary schools: Census 2016 and 2022 Population data, and Enrolments, School Years 2016-17 to 2020-21, by year of age*



*Note on the youngest age bands:* the number of 12-year-olds in 2016 (orange column in that age block) is about one-third of the number of 13-year-olds in 2017 (grey column in that age block), and

<sup>26</sup> DE (2023b). Pupils from the Traveller Community, 2016-2020.

<sup>27</sup> Pavee Point (2020). COVID-19 and Irish Travellers.

<sup>28</sup> Populations: Central Statistics Office. *Census 2022* Table F5097.

Enrolments: DE (2023a) Table 10: Travellers in post-primary, by age, 2016 to 2020.



so on for the sequence of columns through neighbouring blocks. Most Travellers aged 12 years and some aged 13 were still in primary school (combined primary and post-primary enrolment numbers are level with census data).

Clearly, concern about Traveller students' retention rates, compared to the 90%+ national rates, is well warranted. However, the progress Travellers have achieved should also be noted.

*Table 2. Growth in Transition Year and Senior Cycle enrolments, by programme, 2016-2022<sup>29</sup>*

	Transition Year	Leaving Certificate (incl repeats)	Leaving Cert Vocational	Leaving Cert Applied	Leaving Cert Total (2 years)
2016–17	114	303	155	269	727
2020–21	198	412	195	306	913
% Increase	74%	36%	26%	14%	26%

The growth in Transition Year enrolments is the most striking, and suggests a broadening engagement with education. A 36% increase in Established Leaving Certificate enrolments in five years (Sept 2016-Sept 2020) is also remarkable. As cohorts move up through the years, the enrolment numbers drop; but a growing number persevere to sit exams.

The latest DE survey of retention<sup>30</sup> found that of the cohort of Travellers entering post-primary in 2016, 72% went on to sit the Junior Certificate, and 31.4% sat the Leaving Certificate by 2022. Of the 2015 cohort, 69% sat the Junior Certificate, and 27% sat the Leaving Certificate by 2020:

*Table 3. Traveller post-primary entry cohort 2016: Retention rates by milestones, gender, and DEIS status<sup>31</sup>*

Milestones	DEIS		Non-DEIS		All schools
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Cohort
Entry cohort, 2016	142	191	191	126	650
Junior Certificate	112	126	143	88	469
<b>Retention (% of entry cohort)</b>	<b>78.9%</b>	<b>66%</b>	<b>74.9%</b>	<b>69.8%</b>	<b>72.2%</b>
Leaving Certificate, 2021 or 2022	47	43	75	39	204
<b>Retention (% of entry Cohort)</b>	<b>33.1%</b>	<b>22.5%</b>	<b>39.3%</b>	<b>31%</b>	<b>31.4%</b>

Enrolment data alone are a weak indicator of gender differences in engagement with education. This table shows how revealing disaggregated retention data can be, highlighting weaknesses and strengths for which targeted strategies can be developed. Data disaggregated by ethnicity as well as gender is needed across the education system, regarding course choices, attendance, and other measures of engagement. There is more detail on this issue of engagement profiles in the next section, on Further Education and Training.

<sup>29</sup> DE (2023a). Table 11 (Travellers in post-primary, by programme).

<sup>30</sup> DE (2023c). Retention Rates of Pupils in Second-Level Schools: 2016 Entry Cohort.

<sup>31</sup> DE (2023c) Table 6.

## Further Education and Training (FET)

SOLAS (Seirbhís Oideachais Leanúnaigh Agus Scileanna [trans: Further Education and Skills Service]) publishes annual reports on FET provision, participation, retention and outcomes, disaggregated by cultural identity on three grounds: nationalities other than Irish, Irish Traveller, and Roma. The most recent were for the year 2020<sup>32</sup>. The following three tables give an overview of Traveller and Roma engagement:

*Table 4. Participation data for Travellers and Roma, 2018--2022*

Year	Travellers					Roma				
	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
<b>Total Enrolments</b>	<b>1,212</b>	<b>1,527</b>	<b>1,139</b>	<b>1,130</b>	<b>1,310</b>	<b>302</b>	<b>382</b>	<b>305</b>	<b>270</b>	<b>332</b>
Male	44%	43%	42%	40%	39.5%	46%	48%	47%	39%	40%
Female	56%	57%	58%	60%	60.5%	54%	52%	53%	61%	60%
Under 25 years old	60%	59%	65%	66%	62%	32%	33%	31%	67%	64%
Full/partial Course Completion	87%	88%	90%	87%	86%	87%	90%	89%	90%	86%
Certified	59.4%	60%	52%	53.1%	58%	57%	57%	59%	50%	47%

*Table 5. Enrolments in top five programme choices: Travellers and Roma, 2018-2022*

Year	Travellers					Roma				
	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
<b>Total FET Enrolments</b>	<b>1,212</b>	<b>1,527</b>	<b>1,139</b>	<b>1,206</b>	<b>1,415</b>	<b>302</b>	<b>382</b>	<b>305</b>	<b>276</b>	<b>345</b>
<b>Main choices enr.:</b>	<b>1074</b>	<b>1204</b>	<b>776</b>	<b>851</b>	<b>1,062</b>	<b>266</b>	<b>257</b>	<b>225</b>	<b>208</b>	<b>239</b>
Youthreach	324	338	294	272	317	39	47	45	43	54
Adult Literacy Groups	350	373	252	203	253	68	61	39	23	28
Community Education	141	192	107	133	221					27
Community TCs	127	154	129	146	162					
BTEI	132	147	101	97	109	43	36	32	29	27
PLC									19	
ESOL						116	113	109	94	103

TCs: Training Centres. BTEI: Back to Education Initiative. PLC: Post-Leaving Certificate. ESOL: English for Speakers of Other Languages.

*Table 6. National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) or equivalent certification levels chosen by over 10% of participants, 2020, 2022*

Enrolled in course leading to	Travellers				Roma			
	2020 (n=1139)		2022 (n=1,104)		2020 (n=305)		2022 (n=332)	
	Nos	%	Nos	%	Nos	%	Nos	%
Level 1 Certificate	9	1.0%	10	0.9%	8	2.6%	22	6.6%
Level 2 Certificate	78	8.6%	82	7.4%	29	9.5%	45	13.6%
Level 3 Certificate	252	27.7%	362	32.8%	60	19.7%	62	18.7%
Level 4 Certificate	302	33.2%	358	32.4%	46	15.1%	61	18.4%
Level 4/5 Certificate	87	9.5%	88	8.0%	7	2.3%	15	4.5%
Level 5 Certificate	147	16.1%	134	12.1%	50	16.4%	54	16.3%
Advanced/Higher Certificate	26	2.9%	28	2.5%	6	2.0%	15	4.5%
Non-NFQ aligned FET	10	1.1%	42	3.8%	4	1.3%	9	2.9%
All Certificate course enrolments	911	100%	1,104	100%	210	68.9%	283	85.2%

<sup>32</sup> SOLAS Annual Reports, for the Traveller the Roma Communities, 2018/19—2022.

The impact of COVID 19 was concerning, but the aftermath shows system learning, and learner resilience:

*Of huge concern ... was the limited reach to priority learners, and the decrease in participation rates from learners with a disability, from the Traveller Community, the Roma Community, Asylum Seekers and Refugees. In 2022 this trend reversed and increases are now evident, as well as a return to numbers similar to 2019 and prior to the onset of the Pandemic.<sup>33</sup>*

The 2022 Census is revealing in relation to gender and choice of post-school education and training. See next page. (Data on Roma in this table may not be reliable, as suggested by the discrepancy between FET enrolment trajectories, 2018—2022, and the gap between 2018 Roma population estimates and the data on Roma in Ireland in this census. The Census 2022 Roma education-levels data, based as they are on the total counts, may also be unreliable.

*Table 7. Travellers and Roma aged 15 years and over: percentage profiles of post-school education and training, by gender and level, 2022<sup>34</sup>*

Education and Training Levels	Travellers		Roma	
	Male (n=10,047)	Female (n=10,922)	Male (n=6,309)	Female (n=5,527)
Technical/vocational	1.4%	2.2%	8.3%	6.3%
Advanced cert/completed apprenticeship	0.7%	0.7%	3.1%	2.3%
Higher certificate	0.5%	0.8%	3.9%	4.1%
Ordinary bachelor degree/prof qual/ both	0.5%	0.6%	4.8%	5.8%
Honours bachelor degree/prof qual/both	0.5%	0.5%	3.8%	4.8%
Postgraduate diploma or degree	0.3%	0.3%	4.1%	5.3%
Doctorate (PhD)	0.1%	0.1%	0.3%	0.4%
At school, university, etc.	3.6%	2.7%	1.3%	1.6%
Enrolments as % of total aged 15 yrs & over	7.6%	8.1%	29.7%	30.6%

The education profile of the Roma is much higher than that of the Travellers. This does not conform to the evidence of exclusion suffered by Roma across Europe, and it could reflect a wide range of issues that need to be explored – equivalence of the qualifications with the National Framework of Qualifications; confusion in classification of Romanian immigrants and Roma during immigration and Census data management, and perhaps the issue of who gets the opportunity to migrate, and has the resources to take it.

Traveller women tend to have attained more advanced education levels than Traveller men; among Roma, it tends to be the opposite, and the differential is not so marked. Traveller women are more likely to enrol in FET and HE (Higher Education), and at a higher level, than men.

<sup>33</sup> SOLAS (2022). Transforming Learning. FET System Outcomes Report 2018-2022 (p.2/3).

<sup>34</sup> Census 2022, Profile 5, Table F5089

## Apprenticeships

Apprenticeships are an allied area of post-school education and training, and one with direct links to the world of work. Pavee Point welcomes the innovative policies and new provision in this area, being developed by DFHERIS<sup>35</sup>. From January 2024, a transformation training plan is being delivered, coordinated by the National Apprenticeship Office in close partnership with SOLAS, HEA, and training providers across further and higher education”<sup>36</sup>

Pavee Point notes the National Apprenticeship Office commitment to establishing “a performance framework for apprenticeship that will include the ability to gather and report on data on apprentice ethnicity, socioeconomic background, retention rates and routine graduate tracking”<sup>37</sup>.

DFHERIS launched a most welcome Traveller Apprenticeship Incentivisation Programme<sup>38</sup>, offering training opportunities and supports to Traveller applicants. This has been advertised on relevant website platforms.<sup>39</sup> Pavee Point is glad to participate in the National Advisory Committee for the Programme which is being co-ordinated and managed by the Irish Traveller Movement.

Regulation to ensure high standards will enhance the status of the trades and occupations that these apprenticeships open up, broadening the options for a population with highly diverse potential. However, to date, as with the education system overall, Travellers and Roma have been experiencing difficulties and discrimination in accessing apprenticeships. Further targeted initiatives will be needed to address this, along with ongoing anti-racism training and education for those involved in delivering this provision.

Pavee Point also welcomes the commitment to opening seamless, lifelong pathways interconnecting schools, FET, apprenticeships, HE and the world of work<sup>40</sup>. Again, in the policy documents relating to this area, the ground of ethnicity is rarely if ever mentioned. Given the prevalence of racism in Irish society, this area needs close attention, innovation and monitoring, to ensure effective supports for apprentices from minority ethnic groups including Travellers and Roma.

Professionals involved in delivering apprenticeship programmes, and professionals in human resources and lifelong support positions, should have mandatory anti-racism training, and employers who take on apprentices should be required to be informed and to have an inclusion policy that includes anti-racism principles and strategies.

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<sup>35</sup> DFHERIS (2021). *National Action Plan for Apprenticeship 2021-2025*

<sup>36</sup> National Apprenticeship Office (n.d.). *Transformation training plan in 2024*

<sup>37</sup> National Apprenticeship Office (2024). *Progress Report 2023 And Plans 2024 February 2024*, p.16

<sup>38</sup> DFHERIS (2022, updated November 2023). Minister Harris announces roll-out of €450,000 in funding for Travellers in Apprenticeships

<sup>39</sup> The programme is currently advertised on Citizens Information [Apprenticeships \(citizensinformation.ie\)](https://www.citizensinformation.ie), and on [travellerapprenticeship | Instagram, Facebook | Linktree](#).

Also on IBEC: [IBEC August 31, 2023 New Bursary to Hire Apprentices from Traveller Community](#).

<sup>40</sup> DE & DFHERIS (2023). *National Strategic Framework for Lifelong Guidance: Strategic Action Plan (2024-2030)*.

## Higher Education (HE)

The history of Traveller engagement in HE is short and slight, as is evident from even the following recent enrolment numbers<sup>41</sup>:

*Table 8. Travellers in Higher education: new and continuing enrolments, 2011/12–2020/21*

Academic Year	2011/12	2017/18	2019/20	2020/21
New Entrants	23	50	48	33
Full- and Part-time Enrolments	77	118	110	119

Pavee Point recognises the commitment of DFHERIS to including, recognising and valuing all sectors in society<sup>42</sup>, and in particular welcomes its ongoing investment in targeted initiatives for Travellers and Roma. DFHERIS, with the HEA, is committed to energising and growing this involvement. In the lifetime of the current HE National Access Plan, the aim is that 0.32% of new enrolments will be Travellers. Targets cannot be set for Roma until the required baseline data are available<sup>43</sup>. Participation and success rates will also be monitored.

As the HEA notes, the numbers available to date are too small to support substantial interpretations or predictions, but some tentative comments can be made, for instance regarding possible impact of Covid on enrolments: the new-entrant numbers dropped by over a quarter in 2020/21, but they had already dropped slightly before the epidemic. And there was an increase in full-and part-time enrolments in 2020/21.

There has been growth in engagement, but it is far from enough, as the 2020/21 figures indicate. Comparisons with the education profile of the state population are not helpful, given differences in age range of new entrants (the proportion of mature students is far greater in the case of Travellers), and in particular the divergent Traveller and non-Traveller histories of involvement in formal education, noted above.

In the HEA survey of mature students in HE<sup>44</sup>, Traveller participants' inputs warrant attention. They voiced strong satisfaction with course content, communications with providers, information provided, connectedness with their institutions. Their strongest reservations focused on two areas:

- Financial and other resource provision
- Employment relevance and accessibility

Experience during Covid lockdowns brought these issues to centre stage, and the need for adequate provision in all its aspects is highlighted. Resources include IT equipment and access to internet, and to physical spaces to use IT. Pavee Point welcome the 2022 increase to €450,000 from the Dormant Accounts Funding allocation for Traveller and Roma Students in HE, and welcome the inclusion of Roma students in this allocation.

The HEA also note that as soon as sufficient baseline data on Roma and HE are available, study of their engagement and how to foster and support that engagement, will be incorporated into the Access Plan<sup>45</sup>.

<sup>41</sup> DFHERIS /HEA (2022). *National Access Plan 2022–2028*. Figure A9: Number of Traveller New Entrants and Enrolments in Higher Education, 2011/2012 To 2020/2021

<sup>42</sup> HEA (2020). *Race Equality in the Higher Education Sector*.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.* (pp. 73 and 102/103).

<sup>44</sup> HEA (2021). *Study of Mature Student Participation in Higher Education*.

<sup>45</sup> HEA (2020) *ibid.* (pp 82, 103).

## Closing comments

### ***Inclusive, equity-informed education provision that is anti-racist and intercultural***

The importance of what education should bring – equal access to life’s opportunities, especially employment – profoundly informs engagement with education, particularly for minorised communities. Racism blocks this access for many Travellers, and that will backfire to frustrate further growth in engagement with education for many Travellers. Where is the point, if the desired and earned outcomes are blocked?

Relevance of education programmes to employment, and post-course access (via apprenticeships or otherwise) to employment opportunities, are crucial to promoting growth in Travellers’ engagement with education provision. It is well documented that Travellers commonly encounter racist exclusion when they try to enter the jobs market, and in the workplace if they do find employment. Evidence and analysis presented in NAPAR strongly indicate that anti-Traveller racism must be confronted, in education provision and in society, if the challenge is to be effective: they are interconnected<sup>46</sup>.

Varied, often flawed understandings of ethnicity and racism can inform the way anti-racist, intercultural, pro-diversity initiatives are valued and actioned in policy and practice. To ensure continued growth and depth in Travellers’ engagement with education provision, the issue of racism must be addressed systemically. The current roll-out of national lifelong guidance services<sup>47</sup> offers an opportunity to strengthen systemic understanding of these issues.

- Initial and ongoing professional education and training in this area must be mandatory
- Inspections and other forms of institutional evaluation must include monitoring informed anti-racism and interculturalism in the ethos, environment, community relations, curricula and pedagogy at all levels of education provision.
- The conceptual framework of the anti-bullying initiative<sup>48</sup> must be expanded to incorporate explicit recognition of structural racism, and racist bullying must not be reduced to the interpersonal/social group level.
- Racism is performed by the dominant group and its members. They need anti-racist education.
- Education institutions cannot tackle racism effectively without societal support. Building connections between the institutions and the students’ communities and local community organisations is essential.

The current *National Action Plan against Racism* identifies these and other elements that must inform the transformation of the education system at all levels. Pavee Point welcomes this solid commitment to an appropriate and effective Traveller and Roma Education Strategy.

### ***Disaggregated data collection from Early Years to FET and HE***

As noted in the first section of this overview, the ground of ethnicity (including Travellers and Roma) needs to be added to the factors included in disaggregation of education data, in order to avoid inaccurate correlations/causal identifications (for instance, assuming that poor performance by a Traveller student indicates special education need, or is due entirely to socio-economic disadvantage).

Ethnicity must be included in all enrolment forms, across the education system. Citizenship is an inadequate criterion for registering the cultural diversity in Ireland today: it can mask diversity within a minority group, create false thinking as to what ethnicity means. Usually, members of ethnic minorities who apply for citizenship are in a position and are equipped to take an active part in Irish

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<sup>46</sup> DCEDIY (2023). *National Action Plan Against Racism* (p.19).

<sup>47</sup> DE and DFHERIS (2023). *National Strategic Framework for Lifelong Guidance (2024-2030) and Strategic Action Plan (2024-2030)*. See also OECD (2023). *Skills Strategy: Ireland, Assessment and Recommendations*.

<sup>48</sup> DE (2022). *Cineáltas: Action Plan on Bullying*.

society; many others are excluded from that position, and can't avail of opportunities to equip themselves. Using the citizenship criterion on its own can create a citizen/non-citizen divide, and feed slippage towards assuming that ethnicity=non-citizenship and personal or group deficit of some kind.

This review of statistics covering enrolments of Travellers and Roma across the education system shows remarkable growth in level of take-up. Disaggregated data are required on this and on other aspects of engagement, in order to precisely map the strengths and weaknesses in this engagement, and then to design targeted programmes to address these. This is essential to monitor engagement with the school system by all ethnic populations, including Travellers and Roma<sup>49</sup>.

The DE's published reports on retention to Leaving Certificate highlight how disaggregated data shed light on Travellers' school engagement and completion, indicated by numbers who sat the Leaving Certificate examinations<sup>50</sup>. This is a promising indicator of the value of data disaggregation by ethnicity, for the learners, their schools, and their communities.

Finally, there is widespread recognition, in the stream of digital change policies<sup>51</sup>, that management of the COVID 19 epidemic revealed the tremendous power of current tools for data analysis, and this inspired all of government to harness this power, for the public good. The speed with which the COVID-related information was released would suggest that in the far more predictable and already well-known field of education provision, given political will, data could be both more finely disaggregated, and could be released in a timely manner, enabling targeted initiatives to be devised and delivered quickly. Thus, learners who need the supports would have access to them before the struggle to progress unaided compounded their difficulties.

The following closing comments highlight some of the key points identified in this overview:

- Ongoing work by relevant bodies on data disaggregation<sup>52</sup> should be resourced and findings implemented without delay.
- Although each level in the education system has its unique record-keeping requirements, use of a common system where possible would greatly help in tracking retention, attainment, and outcomes.
- Data collection frameworks for enrolment should be the same for Early Years, Primary and post-primary provision, or at least the frameworks should be interconnected to ensure reliable viewing of transition numbers etc., both in local and sectoral records and in regional and national overview reports.
- Methods of recording ethnicity and citizenship should be the same at all levels.
- Start-of-year enrolments should be part of a suite of enrolment records. Using the same framework, continued and new enrolment data should be gathered quarterly and at the end of the academic year, and should be included in published reports.
  - Enrolment data should be collected at all levels at the start of the academic year (autumn), at the same quarterly intervals, and the same end-of-year date.
- Resources should be structured so as to release what is needed for quarterly changes in enrolments, transfers etc.
- The DE, in its school censuses, provides a table correlating pupils by year of age and primary-level class position, Junior infants to 6<sup>th</sup>. Learners' year of age and Programme /School Year placement should be correlated in Early Years and postprimary records as well.

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<sup>49</sup> UNICEF (2017) *Is Every Child Counted? Status of data for children in the SDGs*

<sup>50</sup> DE (2023c). *Retention Rates of Pupils in Second-Level Schools: 2016 Entry Cohort.*

<sup>51</sup> For instance, Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (2021). *Civil Service Renewal 2024*. Department of the Taoiseach (2019 and 2024). *Harnessing Digital.*

<sup>52</sup> Rooney & Canavan (2019). *Exploring ethnic data collection for the Child and Family Agency, Galway.*

### **Closing remarks**

Finally, although this overview is focused specifically on Travellers and Roma in education and training, the recommendations regarding education, from the NAPAR 2023 report<sup>53</sup>, are a useful reminder of the wider context in which racism against Travellers and Roma must be addressed:

- *A new intercultural education strategy should be developed and implemented, with full involvement of all cultures in Ireland, building on and reinforcing the previous intercultural education strategy.*
- *The capacity of the Education and Training Boards to offer intensive English language provision to migrants should be strengthened, including with respect to the provision of professional and technical ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) programmes and bridging programmes to support migrant workers seeking to access specialist and skilled employment.*
- *Steps should be taken to ensure that employment across the education sector reflects the ethnic diversity of Ireland, including through the use of recruitment and promotion practices aimed at increasing ethnic diversity.*
- *Partnerships should be established between educators and front-line community organisations to reach out to young people from racialised backgrounds.*
- *In light of ethnic differentials in education, the availability of language and literacy supports and of education financial supports should be reviewed in order to address differentials in minority participation and outcomes in education.*
- *Schools should be supported, including through staff training at all career stages, to develop effective policies and procedures for mitigating racism in the school environment, in consultation with expert bodies and affected groups.*
- *Research should be conducted to assess and recommend mitigation of any inherent bias in curricula.*

Ethnicity and anti-racism policy and strategies must reflect this wider reality of diversity in current Irish society, if they are to be effective.

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<sup>53</sup> DCEDIY (2023) NAPAR (p.32/33)



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