College Connect

A Community Needs Analysis with Traveller and Roma Students on Their Experiences of Higher Education:

A Call to Action for Accountable and Transformative Policy and Practice Throughout the Higher Education System.

Link: https://doi.org/10.48460/vd15-nn04

Programme for Access to Higher Education (PATH)

Research Team

College Connect is a project funded by the Higher Education Authority (HEA) under its Programme for Access to Higher Education – PATH Strand 3. Led by Maynooth University, College Connect supports access and widening participation of groups under-represented in higher education in the MEND cluster, covering the Midlands, East, and North Dublin region (MEND). The cluster is made up of Dublin City University (DCU), Dundalk Institute of Technology (DkIT), Maynooth University (MU) and Technological University of the Shannon (TUS), Athlone Campus. The aim of the project is to empower, and support marginalised groups to access higher education.

PATH Strand 5 is a targeted response to the chronic under-representation of Travellers and Roma in higher education, addressing barriers such as poverty, cultural exclusion, and systemic challenges. First introduced in 2020, PATH Strand 5 initially provided Dormant Accounts funding to support Traveller students' retention and progression, later increasing this fund in 2021 and extending to Roma students. This research has been a collaboration between PATH 3 and PATH 5 across the MEND cluster.

This research was led by a team whose expertise and deep sector knowledge underpin the credibility and impact of this work. Driven by values of meaningful participation, equity of access, and community development, the team prioritised social justice, a strengths-based approach, and student-centred methodologies at every stage. Grounded in a robust and participatory methodology, the peer-led approach reinforced the authenticity and relevance of the findings. This report goes beyond identifying barriers- it is a direct call to action for higher education institutions (HEIs) to move from reflection to systemic change.

Below is an overview of the expertise of each individual who collaboratively led this participatory action research study.

Research Team Bios

Eilís Ní Chorcora

Eilís is the Research Manager of College Connect. An experienced researcher and educator, Eilís holds a primary school teaching qualification from Dublin City University and a postgraduate degree in psychology from Trinity College Dublin (TCD). Eilís is in the final stages of completing her PhD via publication in TCD. Her research focuses on the impact of school-university partnerships and widening participation in higher education. Her research methodology is characterised by a blend of quantitative, qualitative and creative participatory methods, grounded in the belief that research should drive positive change.

Vanessa Paszkowska
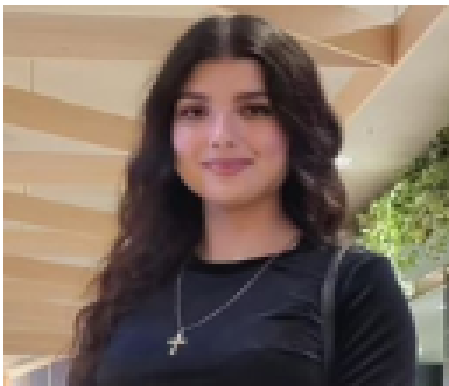
Vanessa Paszkowska works at Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre on the Roma team. Previously, she worked on research in collaboration with Maynooth University as a peer researcher for Roma in Ireland: Access To Fair and Decent Work. She is a past graduate of Maynooth University with BA in Law and Criminology and MA in Social Science Community and Youth Work.

Carmen Mihai

Carmen is a passionate advocate from a Roma background with a strong foundation in law. She has contributed as a researcher and in the Whidden Workshops and Change Makers projects, using her unique perspective and legal expertise to support community-led research and drive meaningful change. Her work focuses on promoting equity, amplifying Roma voices, and challenging systemic barriers through both legal insight and grassroots engagement.

Harry Mallon

Harry holds two degrees from Dublin City University: a BA in English and Human Development, and a Master's in Creative Writing. His undergraduate thesis focused on the experiences of Traveller students in higher education, highlighting his commitment to educational equity. Since April 2023, he has served as the Traveller and Roma Education Officer with the DCU Access Service. In this position, he supports students from these communities through pre-entry outreach and continued engagement. His work combines personal experience, research, and practical application to foster inclusive and supportive pathways into higher education.

Megan Berry

Graduate of Maynooth University with a Master of Social Science Community & Youth Work

Community Worker, working in the community sector for the past 10 years in the area of advocacy, policy and research.

Co-coordinatorr of the Whidden Workshop- Its Kushti to Rokker.

Former Traveller and Roma Education Outreach Officer at Maynooth University's Access Programme, widening participation for Travellers and Roma in HE.

Newly appointed Co-ordinator leading out on the implementation of the National Traveller and Roma Education Strategy with TUSLA.

Mary Treacy

Mary is the Traveller and Roma student support worker with the access office, TUS Athlone since 2023. As part of the student resource centre team, providing a dedicated point of contact and post entry supports to students as they progress through their higher education journey. Mary has 20 years' experience working for a non-profit community organisation that caters for children from early years right through to afterschool care. Mary has also worked in the residential sector supporting individuals with complex needs ensuring their needs are met with a focus on access and inclusion for all. Mary's qualifications range from Early childhood studies, Montessori Education, Disability studies and she is currently undertaking a BA in Community, Youth and Family studies at University of Galway. I believe in putting the individual at the forefront of any decisions and providing encouragement and support where they have a sense of belonging as they pursue their educational endeavours.

David Joyce

David Joyce holds a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology and History and a first-class Professional Master's of Education from Maynooth University. He has experience teaching English as a Second Language in Taiwan (Republic of China) and History and English at Secondary School level in Ireland. This is his second published research report, having been a member of the research team for the Irish Travellers Access to Justice Project conducted by the University of Limerick, published in 2022.

Carmel Hennessy

Carmel Hennessy is the Project Access Officer and a former Community Connector with College Connect for Technological University of the Shannon, Athlone campus. She holds a B.A. in Economic and Social Studies and an M.A. in Community Development.

Carmel has initiated, informed and progressed programmes and policy development related to communities underrepresented in HEIs, including Traveller and Roma, Care –experienced and HEAR students. As the Project Access Officer she develops, co-ordinates and facilitates collaborative approaches to widening participation initiatives, grounded in processes and approach that is values-led, inclusive and strengths based.

Jack Maguire

Jack Maguire is a Research Assistant at College Connect. Jack holds a BA in English Studies from Trinity College Dublin and has a background in communications, administration, and content management, including his role as Media and Content Coordinator for the Psychological Society of Ireland. He holds a First-Class Honours Postgraduate Diploma in Social Policy and Practice, as well as a First-Class Honours MSc in Applied Social Research, both from Trinity College Dublin. His work is driven by a passion for evidence-based policy and a commitment to tackling social inequalities.

Stephanie Joyce

Stephanie Joyce was a Research Assistant at College Connect. She has a Master's degree in both Psychology and Education, along with a Bachelor of Arts in Languages (German and Irish). Stephanie is passionate about enhancing the educational experiences and outcomes for underserved communities. As a trainee educational psychologist, Stephanie focuses on trauma-informed care and cultural competency, striving to ensure that every student receives the support and resources they need to succeed.

Acknowledgements

College Connect wish to extend our sincere thanks to the following individuals and organisations for their invaluable contributions to this project.

First and foremost, we express our deepest gratitude to the Traveller and Roma researchers who led this research. Balancing multiple roles, professional and academic demands, and often being pulled in different directions, you remained committed and passionate throughout. College Connect is honoured and privileged to have worked with such a dedicated and driven team: Vanessa Paszkowska, Carmen Mihai, Harry Mallon, Mary Treacy, Megan Berry, and David Joyce.

A special thanks to Technological University of the Shannon (TUS), the lead institution on this project. In particular, sincere appreciation goes to Carmel Hennessy for her invaluable contribution and unwavering support throughout the project, as well as her steadfast commitment to the robust participatory methodology, clear vision and humour. Together with the research team, we wish to extend our appreciation to the following individuals and organisations for their support and collaboration:

National Traveller Women's Forum
Maria Joyce, Cathrynn Mannion and Edel Cunningham – it has truly been a pleasure partnering, working and learning alongside you.

Pavee Point
Specifically, Vanessa Paszkowska, Rudolf Simonic, Anastasia Crickley and Lynsey Kavanagh – sincere thanks for your contributions, guidance and support.

Interagency Oversight Group

Maria Joyce (NTWF), Cathrynn Mannion (NTWF), Rose Ryan (MU), Jenny Burke (TUS), Deirdre FitzPatrick (CC), David Joyce (CC), Anastasia Crickley (PP), Rudolf Simonic (PP), Megan Berry (MU), Mary Treacy (TUS), Harry Mallon (DCU), Carmel Hennessy (TUS), Vanessa Paszkowska (PP).

Academic Advisory Group
Caroline Coyle (TUS Midlands, Midwest), Ciara Bradley (MU), Paul Keating (TUS), Liam McGlynn (TUD), Thomas McCann (Traveller Counselling Services), Sabina Stan (DCU), Rebekah Brennan (UCC).

We also acknowledge the wider College Connect team for their ongoing support and dedication to this project: specifically, Deirdre FitzPatrick, Karen Brady and Zoryana Pshyk. Special thanks to Declan Markey and to Frank Naughton from Partners Training for Transformation for their insightful discussions and idea-building at the initial stage of the project as well as Martha Brandes (MU) for continued guidance throughout the project. Thank you to artist, Hazel Hurley for providing the illustrations for this report.

Lastly, and most importantly, we extend our heartfelt thanks and deepest respect to the participants who so generously shared their time, expertise, and experiences. We are honoured to have heard your stories and are committed to representing them with integrity, while advocating for meaningful action and change.

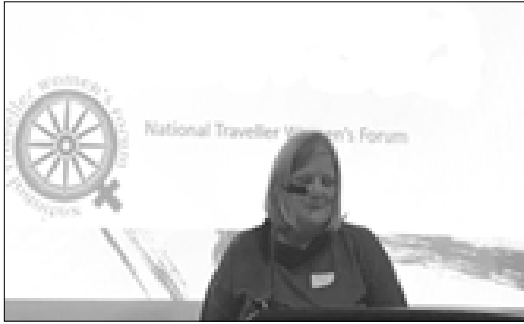Thank you all for your invaluable contributions to this research.

Contents

Foreword:
National Traveller Women's Forum

From 2016, and as Chair since 2023, my involvement with College Connect has seen the publication of three impactful Community Needs Analyses (CNAs) that have influenced third-level education access for marginalised communities. Also, in that time the 2022 National Access Plan marked a significant step forward when it recognised Travellers and Roma as distinct ethnic groups facing social and economic marginalisation in Ireland.

Traveller and Roma communities in Ireland face profound marginalisation and systemic racism. This is starkly evident in key indicators, where positive outcomes in health, employment, and education are significantly lower compared to the general population, while negative outcomes are substantially higher. In higher education, this disparity persists.

"Paulo Freire's quote, "Human existence cannot be silent, nor can it be nourished by false words, but only by true words, with which men and women transform the world. To exist, humanly, is to name the world, to change it," came to mind as I read this report. The report's findings are enriched by the students' "true words," which detail their lived experiences and the barriers they

have overcome. Their experiences offer insights into effective support practices from institutions, organisations, and individuals. They emphasise the need to express their cultural identity within a system that has forced them to hide it. The raw and truthful narratives name the reality of being a Traveller or Roma student in the Irish education system. Through their authenticity, they have given us the means to change it.

The National Traveller Women's Forum (NTWF) welcomes the publication of 'A Community Needs Analysis with Traveller and Roma Students on Their Experiences of Higher Education.' The voices of the participants within this report underscore the need for sustained and increased support and resources within the higher education sector to achieve equitable access and participation for Traveller and Roma students.

The responsibility now lies with The Department for Further and Higher Education, the Higher Education Authority, and the Higher Education Institutions for implementing the recommendations in this report. The alignment of this report's recommendations with the second National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy, the

Traveller and Roma Education Strategy and the upcoming mid-term review of the National Access Plan presents an unprecedented opportunity to develop a nationally coordinated approach focused on enhanced third-level access and participation for Traveller and Roma students. The reports strategic action plan in the appendices of the online report offers a strong foundation for this initiative.

The NTWF would like to extend our warmest congratulations to the research team Eilís Ní Chorcora, Vanessa Paszkowska, Carmen Mihai, Harry Mallon, Mary Treacy, Megan Berry, David Joyce, Carmel Hennessy, Stephanie Joyce, Jack Maguire and to PATH workers in both Strand 5 and 3. We would also like to especially thank the participants of this study, you shared your experiences, often traumatic to affect change for future students; this report would not have been possible without you. It is time for the higher education sector to acknowledge your existence, honour your struggle and drive systemic change to achieve equality and equity of outcomes in education for Traveller and Roma communities.

Maria Joyce
Co-ordinator of the National Travellers Women's Forum and Chairperson of College Connect Regional Steering Group.

Traveller Pride

Foreword:
Midlands East North Dublin Institutions

The Midlands East North Dublin (MEND) Regional Cluster—comprising Dublin City University, Dundalk Institute of Technology, Maynooth University, and the Technological University of the Shannon: Midlands Midwest (TUS)—is committed to advancing equity, inclusion, and access within the higher education sector. Through collaborative initiatives such as College Connect, MEND institutions are actively working to remove systemic barriers to participation and to build a student population that reflects the full diversity of Irish society.

College Connect was established under the Higher Education Authority's Programme for Access to Higher Education (PATH) as part of PATH Strand 3. Since 2019, the project has fostered dialogue between underrepresented communities and higher education institutions. Through evidence-informed and community-embedded approaches, College Connect has supported innovative models to widen access and deepen the sector's understanding of structural disadvantage.

This report, A Community Needs Analysis with Traveller and Roma Students on Their Experiences of Higher Education, marks a significant milestone in that work. While a study with Travellers was initially envisaged as an early priority for College Connect, the resulting research is richer and more timely, informed by the evolving context of recent years. The COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine required higher education institutions to respond swiftly and inclusively to emerging needs. In parallel, the publication of the National Access Plan 2022–2028 and the introduction of PATH Strand 5 have created renewed opportunities to develop more targeted and sustainable supports for students from the Traveller and Roma communities.

This report offers detailed, evidence-based insights into the lived experiences of Traveller and Roma students currently studying in our institutions. Whilst the report reflects the opportunities that Traveller and Roma students aspire to for their higher education journey, it highlights the multiple, intersecting barriers faced by these students—barriers that include systemic racism, discrimination, financial hardship, and intergenerational educational disadvantage. The report's recommendations are both practical and actionable, aligning closely with current national policy and offering a clear framework for institutions seeking to deliver meaningful change.

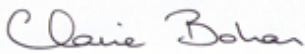What distinguishes this report is not only the depth and range quality of its findings but also the methodology through which it was produced. It is the first study of its kind in Ireland to be led by members of the Traveller and Roma communities who bring both lived experience and professional expertise within the higher education sector. This peer-led, community-centred approach has yielded findings that are not only authentic but also strategically relevant.

The MEND institutions collectively welcome the report's findings and commit to using them as a foundation for institutional reflection and sectoral action. We recognise this research not simply as a study, but as a call to action to realise the ambition of Traveller and Roma students to fully engage in third level education opportunities. Guided by the voices and insights of students, and informed by years of collaborative work, we will work to implement these recommendations in alignment with the National Access Plan and the forthcoming Traveller and Roma Education Strategy.

We extend our sincere thanks to the Higher Education Authority for funding College Connect through PATH 3, and to the many stakeholders, communities, and individuals whose contributions have shaped this work. We would also like sincerely thank TUS, the lead institution, for its guidance and leadership throughout this research. Additionally, we would like to acknowledge the College Connect Regional Steering Group, the Community Needs Analysis Interagency Oversight Group, Academic Advisory Group and the PATH 3 institutional leads across the MEND cluster for their ongoing leadership and commitment.

In particular, we would like to recognise the researchers who led this important work: Vanessa Paszkowska, Carmen Mihai, Harry Mallon, Mary Treacy, Megan Berry, and David Joyce; Research Manager; Eilís Ní Chorcora; TUS Lead; Carmel Hennessy and Research Assistants; Stephanie Joyce and Jack Maguire. We are also grateful for the guidance and support provided by the National Traveller Women's Forum and Pavee Point throughout the life of the project.

This report provides a strategic opportunity for all higher education institutions to deepen their understanding of the experiences of Traveller and Roma students and to collectively respond. The recommendations outlined here offer a roadmap for institutions to build a more inclusive, responsive, and equitable higher education system—one where Traveller and Roma students are not the exception, but an integral part of our academic community.

Dr Claire Bohan
Dean of Students, Dublin City University.

Dr Sheila Flanagan
Vice President for Academic Affairs and Registrar, Dundalk Insititute of Technology.

Dr Rose Ryan
Director of Access, Maynooth University.

Frances O'Connell
Vice President Student Education and Experience, Technological University of the Shannon.

Foreword:
Pavee Point

Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre welcomes this research which we have been happy to support from the early days of discussion about the ideas and methods through to publication and launch of this report. The focus of the research is on the experiences of Traveller and Roma in Higher Education. The research provides a perspective not possible to fully articulate in the needs assessments which continue to be done. The fact that the research was carried out by Traveller and Roma students and graduates further strengthens and validates it. We commend all involved with the research team for the innovative approach adopted, their concern to take each step in line with this and we acknowledge in this regard the associated ongoing commitment of Eilís Ní Chorcora, Research Manager of College Connect.

Since our beginnings forty years ago as Dublin Travellers Education and Development Group, education has been key in our work. For Pavee Point, Traveller and Roma equal access to, participation in, and outcomes from education are essential for the right to education to be respected, protected and fulfilled.

For this to become a reality, we need an inclusive transformed education system, which acknowledges and addresses barriers including anti-Traveller and anti-Roma racism and discrimination, from Early Years to Further and Higher Education.

The education gap for Travellers and Roma continues to be significant across all education levels and must be closed. However, recently there has been some promising progress. The publication of the National Traveller and Roma Education Strategy is a crucial moment for Roma and Traveller education rights. In higher education, the National Action Plan (NAP) for Equity of Access to Higher Education (2022–2028), and the previous NAP the naming of Travellers and the setting of Traveller targets and commitments to Roma participation have been ground breakers for advancing ambition and ensuring additional resources were made available but the targets are low and remain to be met.

In order to ensure that these policy developments result in meaningful change, monitoring the experiences of Traveller and Roma students, through the implementation of ethnic equality monitoring across all higher education data collection systems, in line with a human rights based approach is essential. The availability of accurate and timely data will contribute to increased awareness of inequality and the identification of appropriate targeted policies and interventions to eliminate identified disparities. It will also allow the State to identify where progress is being made and to further build on this going forward.

Pavee Points partnership with Maynooth University extends back to 1985 when we supported the first Traveller to participate in a recognised MU programme through support of many other Traveller and more recently Roma students, inputs to MU programmes, outreach initiatives in particular but not only with Dept Applied Social Studies. We look forward to working with our MEND colleagues in using the research and its recommendations to secure parity of access participation and outcomes from Higher Education for Travellers and Roma and we also commit to using it in our ongoing work on Traveller and Roma education rights in policy and practice.

Lynsey Kavanagh
Co-Director of Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre

Executive Summary

"I think lecturers and teachers in primary and secondary schools need to be trained and familiar with the Traveller and Roma community's culture and ways of living. Without this understanding, stereotypes persist, and people rely on hearsay instead of getting to know Travellers and their culture firsthand."

This report details a Community Needs Analysis (CNA) which was conducted with 22 Traveller and 10 Roma higher education students and graduates, aimed at putting forward recommendations for a Traveller and Roma Higher Education Inclusion Strategy. The CNA was a collaborative effort led by College Connect in partnership with the National Traveller's Women's Forum (NTWF) and supported by Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre (Pavee Point).

This report represents a critical and urgent step in understanding and addressing the persistent challenges faced by Traveller and Roma students in higher education. What makes this research particularly valuable is that it speaks directly to current and recent Traveller and Roma higher education students and graduates, ensuring its relevance to today's context. Grounded in a robust and participatory methodology, the strength of the research team, with its peer-led methodology and deep sector expertise, reinforces the credibility and value of this work for the HE sector. The report aims to highlight an in-depth understanding of the needs of Travellers and Roma into, through, and beyond higher education.

The research is not just an exploration of needs – it is a direct call to action. It aims to hold higher education institutions (HEIs) accountable for meaningful, systemic change rather than passive reflection. The research contributes significantly to the existing knowledge base while simultaneously carving out a distinct approach that prioritises action, accountability, implementation, and transformation.

The primary goal of this report is to highlight the unique challenges faced by Traveller and Roma communities in accessing, progressing through, and succeeding in higher education. By focusing upon systemic racism and discrimination, and how they create barriers for marginalised students, the report challenges the "cultural deficit lens" often used to explain low educational participation among Traveller and Roma, and instead seeks to understand low participation rates in the context of the long history of systemic racism and discrimination experienced by Travellers and Roma in Ireland and Europe.

The research uses a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach to answer three key questions:

1. What works? (to support Traveller/Roma students in higher education).
2. What does not work? (to support Traveller/Roma students in higher education).
3. What do colleges/universities need to do? (to better support Traveller/Roma students).

Drawing on the peer-led methodology and the team's expertise, the report presents actionable recommendations for creating a more inclusive and supportive higher education environment for Traveller and Roma students. This is not just another report, but a roadmap for transformative change. HEIs must take concrete steps toward equity, ensuring that Traveller and Roma students receive the support they are entitled to.

Key Findings from Roma Higher Education Students/ Graduates

Racism and Discrimination

Some Roma participants faced persistent racism, low expectations from educators, and systemic barriers throughout their education.

"I was treated quite fairly up until I came out as Roma towards sixth year. And then there was a low expectation from the teachers of me, that I might marry young and all that."

Intergenerational Trauma

Intergenerational trauma, rooted in systemic racism and exclusion, continues to impact Roma students, leading to feelings of isolation and mental health challenges.

Hidden Identity

Due to anti-Roma racism, many Roma students conceal their identity to avoid discrimination, leading to feelings of shame, isolation, and exclusion.

"Throughout my educational journey, I hid my identity. Yeah. And who I am as a person mainly because it's a defence mechanism to have equal treatment."

Family and Community Support

Family and community support play a crucial role in Roma students' educational aspirations, but being the first in a family to pursue higher education can create additional pressure; participants emphasised the need for systemic change, including accessible educational pathways and stronger institutional support for Roma families.

"And I couldn't have done it without my mom. She's amazing. And yeah, I'm really proud to be called her daughter. Now she's back in education."

Financial Support

Roma students face significant financial barriers to higher education, from meeting basic survival needs to navigating complex and often inadequate financial aid systems; participants stressed the need for accessible funding, early outreach, and culturally sensitive support to ensure equitable access and success.

Language and Digital Literacy Support

Some Roma students, particularly mature applicants, face significant language and digital literacy barriers in higher education; participants emphasised the need for pre-entry English language and digital skills support as well as academic writing support to improve access and academic success.

Outreach Guidance and Support

Early, community-led outreach and sustained university support are essential for Roma students' success; participants highlighted the need for culturally sensitive mentoring, dedicated Roma Access Officers, and long-term institutional commitment to inclusion beyond short-term programmes.

"Having the information and having the awareness is power in itself, support into, but then what do you do when you get in the door, it is that sustained support throughout."

Entry Routes and Access to Higher Education

Participants discussed the complexity of documentation requirements and emphasised the need to simplify application processes like CAO, HEAR, and DARE, while providing clear guidance on required documentation.

Visibility, Representation and Celebration

A significant issue identified by participants was the widespread lack of knowledge about Roma culture and history within university curricula, including the Roma Genocide. Participants called for universities to integrate Roma culture, history, and contributions into curricula and campus activities—celebrating Roma heritage through cultural events while ensuring Roma students are not burdened with educating others about their identity.

Postgraduate and Employment Opportunities

Roma participants shared the challenges they face in gaining relevant experience during their time at university, particularly the fear of not securing employment after graduation due to racism and discrimination. To address this, universities must strengthen connections and partnerships with employers to provide Roma students with access to internships and job opportunities.

"It's up to the university to help the students into internships in industry or government jobs, and not leave the students after they graduate."

Key Findings from Traveller Higher Education Students/ Graduates

Racism and Discrimination

Participants spoke about the stark racism and discrimination experienced throughout their educational journey from primary school through to higher education.

"But as I got into sixth class in primary school, that's when I started to get bullied for being an Irish Traveller, and not just by the students, but by the teachers as well….and then I went out to secondary school, and that continued happening, except that escalated."

Identity and Belonging

Participants faced significant challenges in expressing their Traveller identity within educational settings due to systemic racism, discrimination, and fear of prejudice, often leading to isolation and mental health struggles.

"I have gone to college twice and the first time around, I hated who I was. I hated being a Traveller in college and then throughout the years and realised I started having mental health problems. Right, and why I was having mental health problems because I was lying to myself about who I was myself, and that kind of core part of your identity."

One Good Person

Many participants highlighted the impact of one person who supported and encouraged them at different points of their educational journey. This included a mentor, community worker, teacher, guidance counsellor, lecturer or access worker.

Family Support

Family support played a crucial role in many participants' educational journeys, with many highlighting the encouragement of relatives and the ripple effect of one family member pursuing higher education on others.

"And so really, when I qualify, I will be just handing my (degree) certificate to him (participant's father), because I wouldn't be here without him."

Financial Support

Participants highlighted financial challenges, including poverty, overcrowded housing, caregiving responsibilities, and travel costs, stressing the need for financial support to enable Traveller access to higher education.

Visibility, Celebration and Representation

Participants stressed the need for visibility, celebration, and authentic representation of Traveller culture in higher education to ensure a sense of belonging, combat isolation, and create a welcoming environment.

"I saw the wagon on campus. There was something special about that. I stood there for 20 minutes—I just felt like I belonged there. Even seeing the country people there looking at our culture—it felt good."

Cultural Awareness Training

Participants highlighted the need for mandatory Traveller-led cultural awareness training for staff and students.

"All teachers need cultural awareness training. It should be brought into primary schools and made a mandatory module in all areas of education."

Flexibility of Options and Culturally Appropriate Supports

Participants noted the ongoing challenges with rigid HEI structures and limited accommodations, and recommended the expansion of part-time courses, culturally sensitive teaching, and flexible pathways to better support students balancing education with caregiving and work.

"You shouldn't have to go through a big rigmarole for an extension for assignment for that carry on."

Employment and Post Graduate Opportunities

Participants voiced concerns about post-graduation job opportunities, fearing that racism and discrimination would undermine their efforts in higher education and limit their employment prospects.

"Other people who didn't have the same qualifications as I did got the job, but I didn't – because of my surname."

Recommendations

Eleven recommendations are proposed based upon this Community Needs Analysis with Traveller and Roma higher education students. These recommendations are based upon participants' experiences, participant's own recommendations and supported through the research team's review of literature and policy. They include:

1. Implement a National, Coordinated Approach to Supporting Traveller and Roma Higher Education Students

Establish a unified national framework to deliver consistent, targeted support for Traveller and Roma students across all higher education institutions.

2. Provide Ring-fenced, Long-term Funding to Support Traveller and Roma Higher Education Students

Secure long-term, dedicated funding to eliminate systemic barriers and guarantee sustainable support for Traveller and Roma students.

3. Mandate Institution-Wide Anti-Racism and Cultural Awareness Training for Staff and Students

Require all staff and students in HEIs to undergo mandatory anti-racism and cultural awareness training.

4. Embed Traveller and Roma Culture and History into University Practices and Curricula

Fully integrate Traveller and Roma culture and history across all academic disciplines and increase Traveller and Roma representation in all roles, including leadership positions.

5. Collect and Report on Ethnicity Data

Mandate all HEIs to collect and report ethnicity data ethically and in line with good practice, holding institutions accountable for tracking and improving Traveller and Roma student experiences.

6. Provide Pre-Entry Targeted Outreach and Information for Traveller and Roma Students

Actively engage Traveller and Roma students well before they enter higher education by implementing targeted outreach programmes in primary and secondary schools. Partner with parents and community organisations to provide clear, accessible information about entry routes, funding opportunities, and available support.

7. Establish Flexible Access Routes

Create adaptable access routes to higher education that acknowledge the diverse pathways Traveller and Roma students take. Introduce tailored skills and access programmes that support students in developing essential academic skills, while removing unnecessary documentation requirements for entry.

8. Provide Traveller and Roma Financial Scholarships

Offer comprehensive financial scholarships that fully support Traveller and Roma students in higher education.

9. Implement Comprehensive Mental Health, Wellbeing Support, and Post-Entry Support for Traveller and Roma Students

Prioritise the mental health and wellbeing of Traveller and Roma students by providing long-term, culturally sensitive counselling and support services. Appoint dedicated support workers and establish mentorship programmes led by Traveller and Roma students to ensure targeted support throughout their academic journey.

10. Develop Employment Pathways and Post-Graduate Outcomes

Forge strong partnerships with employers to create paid internships, job placements, and career development programmes specifically tailored to Traveller and Roma students. Address workplace discrimination and promote cultural awareness within work placements and employment.

11. Roma-Specific Recommendations

- Implement tailored pre-access programmes for Roma mature students, with English language support.
- Conduct further participatory research with Roma further and higher education students and strengthen data collection on Roma students, setting clear targets in the National Access Plan.
- Integrate Roma history, including the Roma Genocide, into educational curricula.
- Clarify the Habitual Residence Condition (HRC) and Personal Public Service (PPS) number requirements for Roma individuals in Ireland in relation to accessing financial supports and education.

Allowing Students to reach their... Full Potential

Adapting

Listening

POSITIVE SUPPORT

List of Abbreviations

CAO	Central Applications Office
CC	College Connect
CNA	Community Needs Analysis
DARE	Disability Access Route to Education
DCU	Dublin City University
DFHERIS	Department of Further & Higher Education, Research, Innovation & Science
DkIT	Dundalk Institute of Technology
FET	Further Education and Training
HE	Higher Education
HEA	Higher Education Authority
HEAR	Higher Education Access Route
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HRC	Habitual Residence Condition
HSE	Health Service Executive
IOG	Interagency Oversight Group
MEND	Midlands, East, and North Dublin region
MU	Maynooth University
NAP	National Access Plan
NAPAR	National Access Plan Against Racism
NTRIS	National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy 2024–2030
NTWF	National Traveller's Women's Forum
PAR	Participatory Action Research
PP	Pavee Point
PATH	Programme for Access to Higher Education
QQI	Quality and Qualifications Ireland
SAF	Student Assistance Fund
SUSI	Student Universal Support Ireland
TRES	Traveller and Roma Education Strategy
TUD	Technological University Dublin
TUS	Technical University of the Shannon
UCC	University College Cork
WWKR	Whidden Workshops: It's Kushti to Rokker

Context

The research team carried out a Community Needs Analysis (CNA) with Traveller and Roma higher education students and graduates to put forward recommendations for a Traveller and Roma Higher Education Inclusion Strategy. The Community Needs Analysis was carried out in partnership with the National Traveller's Women's Forum (NTWF) and supported by Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre ('Pavee Point').

College Connect initially planned to conduct a Community Needs Analysis (CNA) with Irish Travellers in 2019, but this was delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2023, plans for a CNA with Travellers were revived and expanded to include the Roma community following their inclusion in the National Access Plan (NAP) 2022–2028. This required a full rethink of the project and building a collaboration with Roma community groups. At this point, Pavee Point (National Traveller and Roma community organisation), who had a long standing partnership with Maynooth University, joined the Interagency Oversight Group (IOG). The NTWF and Pavee Point bring valuable expertise on research, policy and practice in addition to strong relationships to Traveller organisations and groups working with Roma. They supported an overall direct engagement with Travellers and Roma and ensured that the project remained rooted within the community and with human rights and community development principles and values.

The Traveller and Roma researchers had already built strong relationships across the region before re-establishing the CNA. Many had previously collaborated on the Traveller and Roma widening participation programme Whidden Workshops: It's Kushti to Rokker (WWKR),

making this project a unique and valuable opportunity to bring together an expert research team. The ongoing foundational work done through Whidden Workshops was integral to the project's success, strengthening community connections and ensuring that the research remained community-led. The professional expertise of the research team who have worked/ are working in the higher education/ community work sector brings unique value and strength to this piece of research, not only because of their lived experience of navigating the education system themselves but as they have worked and supported so many Traveller and Roma into, through and beyond the higher education sector, allowing them to have both an insider and outsider perspective and expertise.

Introduction

Armstrong and Cairnduff (2011) highlight key considerations for universities in fostering inclusion, which are particularly relevant to this Community Needs Analysis with Traveller and Roma higher education students. Their core message implores universities to critically reflect on their own cultures and practices that perpetuate exclusion, and to co-develop strategies collaboratively with communities rather than imposing strategies without proper consultation with the communities.

Traveller and Roma communities' lower educational engagement is frequently misinterpreted as a cultural issue or blamed on the communities themselves. This report rejects the 'cultural deficit lens' (Bhopal, 2011) and instead seeks to understand low participation rates in the context of the long history of systemic racism and discrimination experienced by Travellers and Roma in Ireland and Europe.

HEIs must go beyond superficial rhetoric to engage deeply with issues of social and educational equity. This involves providing robust financial, social, and academic support systems that enable the participation and success of all students, including those from marginalised groups. However, this also requires universities to examine how their teaching practices, knowledge production, and structural roles as gatekeepers of privilege might reinforce inequality.

This research is grounded in Participatory Action Research (PAR), a collaborative approach that emphasises shared ownership and active participant involvement throughout the project. The research team combined with their professional expertise, skills and knowledge base ensures the participants voices are integral to shaping the research outcomes. The research team created a process guided by principles of respect, inclusion, social justice, and meaningful participation. The research prioritises the dignity and voices of all participants. These values shape decision-making and ensure the research is conducted in an equitable and inclusive manner.

Aims and Objectives

This Community Needs Analysis (CNA) represents a critical and urgent step in understanding and addressing the persistent challenges faced by Traveller and Roma students in higher education. What makes this research particularly valuable is that it speaks directly to current and recent Traveller and Roma higher education students and graduates, ensuring its relevance to today's context. Grounded in a robust and participatory methodology, the strength of the research team, with its peer-led methodology and deep sector expertise, reinforces the credibility and value of this work for the HE sector. The report aims to highlight an in-depth understanding of the needs of Travellers and Roma into, through, and beyond higher education. The research is not just an exploration of needs-it is a direct call to action. It holds higher education institutions (HEIs) accountable for meaningful, systemic change rather than passive reflection. The research contributes significantly to the existing knowledge base while simultaneously carving out a distinct approach that prioritises action, accountability, implementation, and transformation.

In line with these aims, the research sought to answer the following questions through a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach:

1. What works? (to support Traveller/Roma students in higher education).
2. What does not work? (to support Traveller/Roma students in higher education).
3. What do colleges/universities need to do? (to better support Traveller/Roma students).

Through the peer-led methodology and unique expertise of the research team, the project puts forward actionable recommendations for a higher education inclusion strategy that fosters meaningful change and creates a more inclusive and supportive higher education environment for Travellers and Roma. This is not just another report, it is a roadmap for transformation. HEIs must move to take measurable steps toward equity, ensuring Traveller and Roma students receive the support they deserve and have a right to.

Layout and Structure of Report

It was noted from the outset of this research consultation that Travellers and Roma are two groups with unique culture, heritage, language and religion. While there are many similarities between the barriers faced by Travellers and Roma in education, each group are subjected to their own distinct barriers. It was also emphasised that within each community, neither the Traveller or Roma communities are homogenous groups in themselves as there is huge diversity within the communities.

Throughout the process, the research team and participants emphasised the need for policymakers to clearly recognise Travellers and Roma in Ireland as distinct groups. In response, and following extensive

consultation with the research team and the Interagency Oversight Group, a decision was made to conduct the research in parallel with both communities, given the absence of resources to conduct two completely separate research projects and reports.

While both communities stressed the need for policy makers to clearly acknowledge Travellers and Roma in Ireland as distinct groups, they also highlighted the importance of some of their shared experiences and of uniting fronts to lobby for change for both communities in Ireland.

Traveller and Roma researchers collaborated closely throughout the conceptual design and data gathering process, providing mutual support and sharing insights. However, the research team went beyond collaboration by ensuring that each community's unique needs and perspectives were fully respected and prioritised. While maintaining a strong sense of solidarity, research design and data collection methods were developed separately for each group, guided by community-led decision-making and tailored to their distinct experiences and challenges. This approach ensured that the research was both inclusive and reflective of the specific realities faced by Travellers and Roma in Ireland.

This research report is structured in a way to reflect this. The recommendations made show what would benefit both communities, as well as the distinct

recommendations that are needed to support Travellers in higher education and to specifically support Roma in higher education too. As was acknowledged throughout the research process, the report is structured in a way that recognises that while there are many similarities between the barriers faced by Travellers and Roma in education, they are two separate groups with distinct and unique cultures.

A participatory action research project, such as this, is of itself a form of action and activism. Therefore, we see this publication not as an end, but as a beginning—a starting point to guide next steps toward action and implementation in HEIs, and to advocate for change and support improved access and successful progression to and through higher education in Ireland.

Unlocking opportunities for the next generation

Chapter 1

Literature Review

Literature Review

This literature review explores research on Roma in Ireland and within a broader European context, followed by a separate discussion on Irish Travellers (hereby referred to as 'Travellers'), an indigenous ethnic group in Ireland. Each section examines the intersectional factors influencing educational outcomes. The chapter then analyses the barriers to higher education access for Travellers and Roma in Ireland and concludes with an overview of widening participation policies and programme developments in Irish higher education institutions.

Roma in Europe and in Ireland

Roma are the largest ethnic minority in Europe. Of the estimated 10 to 12 million Roma living across the continent, around 6 million are EU citizens or residents (European Commission, 2020). According to the European Commission, the term 'Roma' is broad and includes various groups such as Roma, Sinti, Kale, Romanichels, Boyash/ Rudari, Ashkali, Yenish, Dom, Lom, Rom, Abdal, and some Traveller communities (European Commission, 2020).

The Roma are a historically marginalised ethnic group, with origins dating back to the 11th century. Over the centuries, the Roma migrated westwards, establishing communities across Europe. Despite their widespread presence, the Roma have endured a long history of persecution, forced assimilation, and discrimination. Notably, in parts of Romania, Roma were enslaved until the mid-19th century, and during the Holocaust, up to 500,000 Roma were murdered in what was referred to as the hidden holocaust, and is now recognised as a genocide. These historical injustices have resulted in continued disenfranchisement, and the impacts of this

legacy are still felt by Roma communities today (Pavee Point & Department of Justice and Equality, 2018; ESRI 2024).

Official data is likely underreported, as many Roma communities remain uncounted or misrepresented in statistical records. Roma communities are diverse, with distinct groups rooted in various countries and regions across Europe. Despite legal protections against discrimination in EU Member States, many Roma continue to face prejudice and social exclusion. Forced assimilation policies, adopted by several European countries in the 20th century, have contributed towards their ongoing exclusion and discrimination (Pavee Point & Department of Justice and Equality, 2018).

Anti-Roma racism continues to affect many aspects of these communities' lives, including housing, education, employment, and healthcare (ESRI, 2024). The rise of extremist racist groups in recent years has exacerbated the situation, leading to anti-Roma hate speech, marches, and violent attacks, resulting in several deaths (Pavee Point & Department of Justice and Equality, 2018).

The social determinants of health are the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work, and age that can influence their health outcomes (WHO, 2021). The health and well-being of Roma communities are shaped by intersectional factors, including economic status, living conditions, and access to essential services. These determinants intersect with systemic discrimination and exclusion, further deepening health and education inequalities. The statistics below highlight some of the key indicators of disadvantage that impact Roma individuals across multiple aspects of life. (Pavee Point & Department of Justice and Equality, 2018).

Discrimination	One in four Roma reported experiencing discrimination in the previous year, and 41% reported discrimination at least once in the past five years.[1]
Poverty	80% of Roma in EU countries live below the national poverty line.[1]
Child Hunger	30% of Roma children experience hunger within their households.[1]
Social Welfare Access	Up to 20% of Roma in Ireland received no social welfare support, including child benefit, housing or homelessness assistance, or employment support.[2]
Healthcare Access	50% of Roma respondents in Ireland lacked access to healthcare.[2]
Housing Discrimination	77% of Roma lived in private rental housing, with 93% experiencing discrimination from landlords who refused to rent to them.[2]
Workplace Discrimination	Roma in Ireland experience racism, bad working conditions, insecure work, underemployment, and exploitation. Some hide their identity at work due to these conditions.[3]

1 Second European Union and Minorities Survey: Roma Selected Findings, 2016 (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights).

2 *The Roma in Ireland – A National Needs Assessment, 2018 (Pavee Point & Department of Justice and Equality).*

3 *The Roma in Ireland: Access to Fair and Decent Work, 2023* (Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre & Applied Social Studies, Maynooth University).

Irish Travellers: An Indigenous Irish Community

Irish Travellers are a traditionally nomadic ethnic group indigenous to Ireland. Travellers have been part of Irish society for centuries. They have a distinct history, unique language, and long-standing customs and traditions, including storytelling, poetry, and musical and oral traditions. The All-Ireland Traveller Health Study (2010), henceforth referred to as AITHS (2010), estimated that 40,129 Travellers were living across the island of Ireland, with 36,224 (90.3%) in the Republic of Ireland and 3,905 (9.7%) in Northern Ireland. More recent data from the 2022 Census recorded 32,949 Travellers in Ireland, making up 0.64% of the total population of over 5 million. However, these figures are based on self-identification, meaning the actual Traveller population is likely a lot higher, highlighting a gap in the data. One key aspect of Traveller identity is their nomadic heritage which differentiates them from the settled population. In 2017, a joint study by the University of Edinburgh and the Royal College of Surgeons Ireland found that Travellers were genetically distinct from the Irish settled population for at least 360 years. In 1963, the "Commission on Itinerancy Report, 1963" was published. It was the first policy document developed by the state that specifically looked at Travellers. The report opens by outlining the terms of reference, which include; 'to enquire into the problem arising from the presence in the country of itinerants in considerable numbers' and to consider what steps might be taken 'to promote their absorption into the general community'. Some activists feel that many settled people still operate from a mindset set in the Commission Report in 1963 (ITM, 2017).

Traveller culture is continuously evolving through a blend of tradition and new influences. However, laws such as the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act (2002), more commonly known as the Trespass Act, have criminalised nomadism, making it nearly impossible to practice traditional aspects of Traveller life (ITM, 2017). Despite these restrictions, Travellers continue to take pride in their identity and heritage. On March 1, 2017, after a decades-long campaign, the Irish state recognised Travellers as an ethnic group.

As individuals and as a community, Travellers continue to face significant marginalisation, racism, and discrimination in Ireland (Carron Kee et. al, 2024). A 2024 ERSI study found that public attitudes toward Travellers remains starkly negative compared to other diversity groups (ESRI, 2024). The social determinants of health, such as employment, housing, education, and access to healthcare, play a crucial role in shaping health outcomes. For Travellers in Ireland, these determinants are further impacted by systemic discrimination, social exclusion, and economic marginalisation. These intersecting factors contribute to significant disparities in health, well-being, education and overall quality of life (AITHS, 2010). The statistics below highlight key indicators of disadvantage that affect the Traveller community across multiple areas.

Unemployment	61% of Travellers in Ireland are unemployed, with discrimination during hiring and in the workplace identified as major barriers.[1]
Housing Deprivation	24% of Travellers in Ireland experience severe housing deprivation and overcrowding, often lacking basic necessities like sanitation, water, and electricity.[2]
Life Expectancy	Traveller men live 15 years less than settled men, and Traveller women have a life expectancy 11.5 years lower than their settled counterparts.[3]
Infant Mortality	The infant mortality rate among Travellers is 3.5 times higher than that of the general population.[3]
Suicide Rates	Traveller men have a suicide rate seven times higher than the general population.[3] Traveller women have a suicide rate five times higher than the national average.[3]
Discrimination in Daily Life	■ 62% of Travellers in Ireland experienced discrimination in school.[3] ■ 61% faced discrimination in shops, pubs, or restaurants.[3] ■ 55% encountered discrimination when trying to secure employment.[3]

1 *Carron Kee, Evan, McGinnity Frances and Alamir, Anousheh (2024) Understanding Attitudes to Travellers and Roma in Ireland. The Economic and Social Research Institute.* https://www.esri.ie/system/files/publications/JR9 Travellers and Roma_signed off 28 Nov 2024.pdf

2 *European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2020), Roma and Travellers in Six Countries: Roma and Travellers Survey. European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights.* https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2020-roma-travellers-six-countries_en.pdf

3 School of Public Health, Physiotherapy and Population Science, University College Dublin (2010). *All Ireland Traveller Health Study (AITHS): Summary of Findings.* https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/18859/d5237d611916463189ecc1f9ea83279d.pdf - page=null
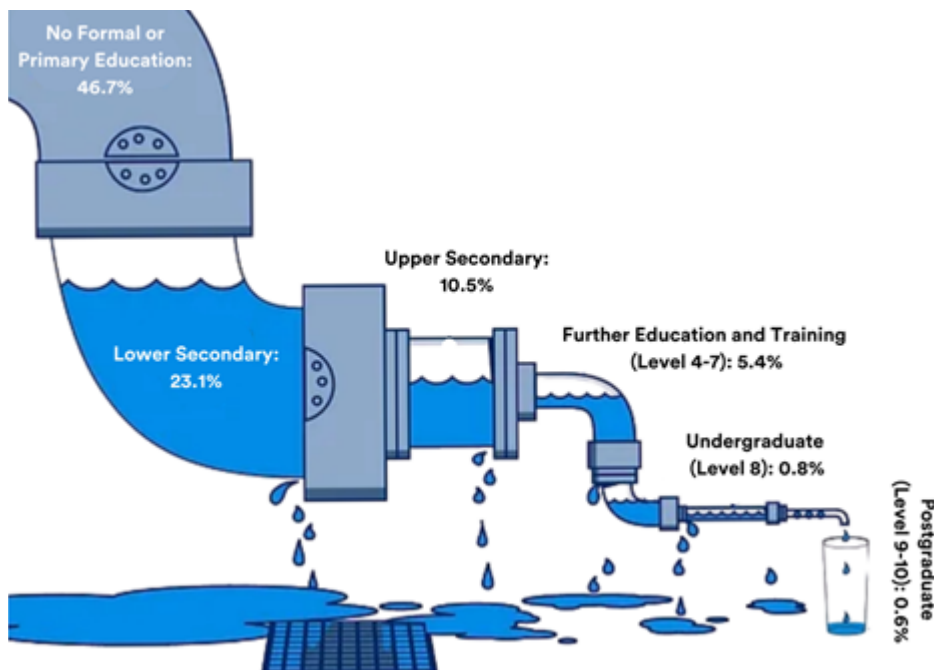
Educational Outcomes

Education is recognised as a fundamental right in the universal declaration for human rights. The Irish state has an obligation to promote and protect equal access and treatment in education (Children's Rights Alliance, 2010), yet Travellers and Roma are disproportionately underrepresented across the education system. The authors of this report argue that human rights are not negotiable even if their protection comes at a high price. This section looks at the barriers to education through the available literature and data on Travellers and Roma. It highlights the distinct differences between Travellers and Roma and emphasises the disparity and gaps in the data.

Traveller and Roma communities' lower educational engagement is frequently dismissed as a cultural issue or blamed on the communities themselves.

This research seeks to understand low participation rates in the context of the long history of systemic racism and discrimination experienced by both Travellers and Roma (Bhopal, 2011). Travellers and Roma experience racism and discrimination, bullying, irrelevance of the curriculum as well as low expectations and exclusion within educational settings (McGinley, 2024; Bhopal and Myers, 2008; 2016; Bhopal, 2011). These factors lead to disengagement and early school departure (Dupont, 2022; Derrington and Kendall, 2007).

The graphic below depicts the educational attainment of the Traveller population over the age of 15 years as reported in the Census 2022 (CSO, 2022).

Image adapted from NCES Digest of Education Statistics; Science and Engineering Indicators 2008

The statistics in the following table underscores the challenges faced by Travellers and Roma in accessing and completing higher education, with significant attrition at each stage of the educational journey.

	Traveller	Roma
Primary School Enrolment in 2022/23 (TRES, 2024)	8,309 students.	2,629 students.
Post-Primary School Enrolment in 2022/23 (TRES, 2024)	3,370 students.	775 students.
Transition to Post Primary in 2023/4 (TRES, 2024)	82.7% transfer rate for Traveller students compared to national 95.6%.	89.1% transfer rate for Roma students compared to national 95.6%.
Junior Certificate Completion Rates (TRES, 2024)	72% of Traveller students entering post primary in 2016.	Not available.
Leaving Certificate Completion Rates (TRES, 2024)	31.4% of Traveller students compared to 91.7% for the total student cohort.	Not available.
Third Level Qualifications (Census 2022)	115 (0.8%) have an undergraduate degree, compared to 13.7% of the white Irish population. 83 (0.6%) have a postgraduate degree, compared to 11.9% of the white Irish population.*	508 (6.9%) have an undergraduate degree, compared to 13.7% of the white Irish population. 588 (8%) have a postgraduate degree, compared to 11.9% of the white Irish population.*
Third Level Completion Rate	4.7% compared to 47.7% of the general population. (TRES, 2024)	Limited data available, with accuracy concerns. (HEA & DFHERIS, 2022)

*It is important to note that the data relies on self-identification and the actual numbers are likely to be different. Traveller and Roma community organisations have raised concerns about the accuracy of census data, citing the undercounting of Travellers and the inclusion of Roma for the first time in 2022. The Roma population appears to have a significantly higher education profile than Travellers, which contradicts documented patterns of exclusion faced by Roma across Europe. This discrepancy may stem from various factors, including the comparability of their qualifications with the National Framework of Qualifications, potential misclassification of Romanian immigrants and Roma in immigration and census records, and broader issues such as access to migration opportunities and resources (Pavee Point, 2024). Ongoing ethnic equality monitoring is required.

Barriers to Higher Education

Despite increased policy efforts to address educational disadvantage, research reveals that the education system continues to reinforce and rationalise inequality. This sustains intergenerational advantages for dominant social groups and underscores the strong connections between education, inequality, and social class (Fleming & Harford, 2023). Inequality in higher education remains a significant and complex issue (Chancel and Piketty, 2021), with many barriers to advancement rooted in earlier educational and social experiences. These experiences often marginalise both parents and students, creating obstacles such as financial hardship, insufficient information, and limited educational guidance (Spacey & Sanderson, 2021; Hoxby & Turner, 2015; Smyth & Banks, 2012; McCoy, Smyth, Watson and Darmody, 2014). These systemic failures contribute to lower academic performance, strained student-teacher relationships, high rates of early school leaving, and negative perceptions of higher education (Chowdry et al., 2013; Byrne & Smyth, 2011; Keane, 2016; Bray et al., 2021). Such systemic failures disproportionately affect Travellers and Roma, who face additional challenges including acute poverty, overcrowded living conditions, racism and discrimination (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2020).

Although there is limited research on Roma and barriers to higher education in Ireland, barriers to education and consequently higher education have been well documented for Travellers in Ireland. To the extent that the 1995 Report on the Task Force on the Travelling Community put forward many practical recommendations to support Travellers to access to higher education. The report calls for special access measures or affirmative action measures in the short term to secure the direct entry of Travellers into third level education and to support their successful conclusion of such studies.

Despite the publication of this report thirty years ago, limited progress has been made (Department of Environment, Government of Ireland, 1995). In May 2020, Pavee Point and the NTWF conducted a National Forum on the implications of COVID-19 for Traveller and Roma transfer to and progression within higher education. Traveller and Roma educational disadvantage and discrimination pre-dates the COVID-19 pandemic, however, the pandemic has further exacerbated these barriers including the impact on financial hardship, mental health, access to resources and IT equipment, interview and physical study spaces (Pavee Point and the NTWF, 2020; Pavee Point 2024). The forum highlighted the importance of engagement and collaboration with Traveller organisations nationally and locally and the need for ring-fenced and targeted resourcing of Traveller and Roma education (Pavee Point and the NTWF, 2020).

Racism and Discrimination

Racism, discrimination, and bullying are significant barriers to education for Traveller and Roma students, creating hostile environments that undermine their sense of belonging and connection within schools (TRES, 2024). Traveller and Roma students frequently report racial bullying and discriminatory treatment by peers, often rooted in prejudices against their cultural background (TRES, 2024). This form of marginalisation often leaves Traveller and Roma students feeling isolated and disconnected from their settled classmates (Boyle, Hannafin, & Flynn, 2018; Quinlan, 2021).

The issue is further exacerbated by the failure of some educators to acknowledge or adequately address incidents of racism. Research shows that teachers may downplay reports of racial bullying (Raby, 2004) or fail to recognise the inherent racism in certain actions, such as non-Traveller parents

requesting their children be moved away from Traveller peers (Kavanagh, 2013). Additionally, in the UK, Bhopal (2011) and Lloyd & Stead (2001) found that educators sometimes disbelieve Traveller and Roma students when they report racist bullying, reflecting a broader minimisation of the systemic racism faced by these groups. Many Travellers hesitate to declare their ethnic identity in educational settings due to fear of discrimination and exclusion (Bhopal and Myers, 2008). This apprehension stems from an early awareness of being perceived as "other," leading some Travellers to conceal their identity (Brennan et al., 2024).

Furthermore, the National Roma Needs Assessment highlighted that Roma students who attended school in Ireland reported feeling the need to hide their identity to avoid bullying and discrimination (Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre & Department of Justice and Equality, 2018). Manfred Max-Kneef (1989) builds on Maslow's Hierarchy of Need and refers to identity as a fundamental need of human development. The impact of racism and discrimination on the sense of identity of Travellers and Roma in higher education remains relatively undocumented in the literature.

Intergenerational Educational Trauma

In Ireland, research has shown that Traveller and Roma parents and students are highly committed to their children's education (Boyle, Flynn, and Hanafin, 2020; Quinlan, 2021; Dupont, 2022), despite their own negative school experiences (Hourigan and Campbell, 2010; Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre & Department of Justice and Equality, 2018). Doyle and Keane (2018) examined parents' views on early school leaving and found that, although parents recognised the value of education, they believed that teachers had very low expectations of their children and treated them with disrespect and a lack of support.

Bhopal and Myers (2008) and Derrington and Kendall (2007) highlight that trust is a key concern for Traveller and Roma families in education, as many parents, having faced racism and discrimination in their own schooling, do not want their children to endure the same negative treatment.

Educators Attitudes and Expectations

The Traveller and Roma Education Strategy (TRES) 2024–2030 emphasises the need to challenge the low expectations often held for Traveller and Roma children and young people, which hinders their educational progress. Educators' attitudes and expectations play a critical role in shaping the educational experiences of Traveller and Roma students, often perpetuating barriers to their engagement and success. Research within Ireland, though limited, indicates that educators frequently view Traveller and Roma students through a "deficit lens", attributing poor educational outcomes to cultural or familial shortcomings rather than systemic inequities (McGinley, 2020; Quinlan, 2021; Smyth et al., 2019). This cultural deficit perspective shifts responsibility for educational inequalities onto the students themselves, further entrenching barriers (McGinley & Keane, 2021).

Brennan and colleagues (2024) found that participants in their research reported that some school staff lacked confidence in the potential and abilities of Traveller children to succeed and progress within the education system. Similarly, Roma students often face particularly negative perceptions from educators regarding their behaviour and academic abilities, both in Ireland and internationally (Devine, 2005; Fine-David & Faas, 2014). Such views are frequently linked to assumptions about language proficiency and the perceived need for additional support, even when these assumptions are unfounded (Darmody, Byrne, & McGinnity,

2014; Nowlan, 2008). This institutionalised underestimation reinforces negative outcomes and limits aspirations.

Lack of Visibility and Representation

A sense of belonging is critical for student engagement, yet many Traveller and Roma students experience exclusion due to the absence of their culture and history in school curricula. For Traveller students, schools have systematically failed to reflect their culture and way of life, leaving them invisible within the educational environment. In recognition of this, the Traveller Culture and History in Education Act (2019) was passed with the aim to promote a knowledge and understanding of the culture and history of the Traveller community in schools. There is a lack of representation of Traveller teachers in the education system (NAP, 2015–2019, Burns, Colum and O'Neill, 2023) and research also notes that some Traveller teachers face racism and discrimination within the school system which can lead to Traveller Teachers leaving the profession (Travellers, Teachers and T(h)inkers, 2024). This lack of representation alienates Traveller students, denying them the opportunity to see their heritage valued and contributing to feelings of isolation. For non-Traveller students, the absence of positive portrayals of Traveller culture increases the likelihood that their perceptions will be shaped by persistent societal stereotypes rather than informed understanding (McGinley, 2020, 2024; ITM, 2021).

Similarly, Roma students face a lack of cultural recognition in schools. According to a national needs assessment, service providers have highlighted the absence of Roma culture and history in the formal curriculum (eg. Roma genocide is rarely referenced in WW2 history), and the scarcity of appropriate curriculum-linked resources to facilitate its inclusion (Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre & Department of Justice and Equality, 2018). The Traveller and Roma Education Strategy (TRES) 2024–2030 emphasises the need for greater awareness and understanding of Traveller and Roma cultures across the education sector. Brennan and colleagues (2024) highlight the need to avoid tokenistic approaches when designing programmes which aim to support Traveller and Roma students. In their research, some Travellers perceive some of these types of programmes as tokenistic, fulfilling quotas rather than offering genuine opportunities. Participants in recent studies expressed concerns that these measures were sometimes experienced as negative rather than empowering (Brennan et al., 2024).

Widening Participation to Higher Education: Policy Context

The issue of educational disadvantage is universally acknowledged within the global policy framework. The United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) strives to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all." In particular, Target 4.5 highlights the importance of providing every individual with equal access to high-quality education, ensuring that all can achieve similar outcomes and benefit equally from education. Although higher education participation rates have increased significantly over the last few decades, there is a persistent pattern of stark inequality of access for Traveller and Roma students (Guerin, 2014; HEA & DFHERIS, 2022). Much of the literature around widening participation identifies individuals within the target groups as 'disadvantaged', 'under-represented' and/ or 'non- traditional'. This type of language, although well intentioned for targets and funding, suggests that students and their families are the problem, rather than problematic societal structures

and systemic issues that have likely resulted in the student being unable to attend a higher education institution.

In Ireland, thanks to the newly reestablished National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy 2024–2030 (NTRIS. 2024) and associated Traveller and Roma Education Strategy 2024–2030 (TRES, 2024), the significant underrepresentation of Travellers and Roma in education in Ireland has been placed squarely at the front of the Irish government's higher education agenda. The National Access Plan specifically names Traveller and Roma as two key priority groups which Higher Education Institutions must focus on increasing access, participation and success for. Key priorities in the National Access Plan include promoting outreach activities to increase awareness of higher education opportunities among Traveller and Roma communities, enhancing financial supports such as scholarships and grants,

and fostering a more inclusive learning environment that respects and values cultural diversity. Moreover, the plan stresses the importance of building strong partnerships between higher education institutions, schools, and community organisations to create pathways that support Traveller and Roma students from early education through to higher education.

Despite these welcome policy targets, there is limited knowledge on how to achieve them and what practical steps higher education institutions can take to effect real change. This research aims to address this gap by engaging current and recent Traveller and Roma higher education graduates in participatory research to inform what changes are needed. This report examines effective strategies and identifies actionable steps that can better support Traveller and Roma students in gaining access to, succeeding in, and thriving within and beyond higher education.

Opportunities and Programmatic Efforts

The access to higher education landscape in Ireland is continually evolving (Quinn, 2020), with ongoing developments in grant schemes, access pathways, government strategies, and funding initiatives aimed at addressing inequities in participation.

National Strategy for Higher Education

The National Strategy for Higher Education articulates a vision for the sector, positioning higher education as a driver for addressing Ireland's social, economic, and cultural challenges.

National Access Plan

Since 2005, the National Access Plan (NAP) has undergone three iterations (HEA 2005; 2014; 2018; 2022), each aiming to expand and improve access, participation, and success for under-represented groups. The most recent iteration in 2022 broadened the criteria for socioeconomic disadvantage, introducing new student cohorts with unique needs to the policy framework, as well as prioritising the support of Traveller and Roma students.

Race Equality in the Higher Education Sector

The National Action Plan Against Racism (NAPAR), launched on 21 March 2023, aims to eliminate racism across Ireland. In higher education, the HEA's Race Equality in the Higher Education Sector Implementation Plan (2022-2024) promotes race equality through national and institutional measures. A key initiative is the Race Equality Charter, which defines racism and holds institutional leaders accountable.

HEIs are encouraged to sign the Charter, acknowledging racial inequality and committing to proactive change.

Access Routes

Access routes such as the Higher Education Access Route (HEAR) and the Disability Access Route to Education (DARE) were introduced in 2009 to support students facing structural barriers to higher education (Byrne, Doris, Sweetman, Casey & Raffe, 2014). HEAR assists students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, while DARE provides opportunities for students with disabilities. The Mature Student Entry Route offers access opportunities to individuals over 23 years of age, recognising the value of life experience and supporting those returning to education later in life. The Further Education and Training (FET) route allows students with FET qualifications to progress to higher education. Some higher education institutions also provide Foundation Certificates or Access Courses. These alternative pathways acknowledges diverse learning journeys of all students

Financial Grants and Bursaries

Financial support for students has been a cornerstone of access to education in Ireland for decades. Local authorities and Vocational Education Committees (VECs) initially administered grants, but this was centralised with the establishment of the Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI) system in 2012. Additional supports, such as the PATH 2 1916 Bursary Fund, University Scholarship and the Student Assistance Fund (SAF) further alleviate financial barriers, targeting students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

In November 2023, DFHERIS received Dormant Accounts Funding to launch a pilot programme aimed at reducing accommodation costs as a barrier to higher education for Traveller and Roma students, as well as individuals with experience in the care system. In the initial funding round, 60 Traveller and/or Roma students received the support, however specific data on the breakdown of Travellers and specifics number of Roma students who received the funding was not available. A second round of funding became available in January 2025 and funding has been approved for the 2025/2026 academic year (Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, 2025).

The Programme for Access to Higher Education (PATH)

The Programme for Access to Higher Education (PATH), administered by the Higher Education Authority (HEA), aims to address inequalities in higher education by targeting under-represented groups, including Travellers and Roma. PATH funding provides a structured framework to tackle systemic barriers and foster inclusive practices across higher education institutions (HEIs).

PATH encompasses five key strands:

- **PATH 1** supports increased diversity in Initial Teacher Education.
- **PATH 2** provides 1916 Bursaries to students from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- **PATH 3** funds the development of regional and community partnership strategies for increasing access to higher education by specified groups.
- **PATH 4** promotes universal design and accessibility in higher education.
- **PATH 5** focuses explicitly on supporting Traveller and Roma students.

PATH Strand 5 is a targeted response to the chronic under-representation of Travellers and Roma in higher education, addressing barriers such as poverty, cultural exclusion, and systemic challenges. First introduced in 2020, PATH 5 initially provided €300,000 in Dormant Accounts funding to support Traveller students' retention and progression, later increasing to €450,000 in 2021 and extending to Roma students. Despite this positive funding, concerns remain about the sustainability of this funding. The short-term and precarious nature of these funding streams risks undermining the progress made. Without sustained funding, critical initiatives and relationships with Traveller and Roma communities could be lost, jeopardising the long-term impact of these efforts (Brennan, McGovern, Leane and Ó Súilleabháin, 2024). Several universities have used PATH funding to hire Traveller and Roma Outreach/Access/Education/Support Officers. Their responsibilities include engaging with Traveller and Roma communities, assisting students with higher education access, and supporting their academic progress. These officers play a role in establishing connections, offering specific guidance, and coordinating inclusion initiatives. In addition, higher education institutions have introduced community-focused projects aimed at addressing access barriers and developing community-driven outreach programmes (Appendix 1).

Targeted Initiatives in HEIs in Ireland

As part of the literature review, a scoping exercise was carried out to explore what types of programmes HEIs are offering already for Traveller and Roma students. A list of initiatives, scholarships and programmes found are collated in Appendix 1 which is available in the online version of this report. This list has been collated into a table which represents some of the specific targeted measures which are being implemented by some higher education institutions in Ireland.

Please note this is not an exhaustive list but is derived from searching of Irish HEI websites for initiatives or programmes which specifically mention targeting either the Traveller or Roma community in Ireland. This may act as a reference point for stakeholders who want to strengthen their engagement with Traveller and Roma communities however it must be noted that many of the interventions mentioned are not evaluated and therefore the impact of which cannot be determined by the authors (see full list in Appendix 1 of the online version of this report).

Chapter 2

Methodology

Introduction

No single chapter can fully capture the depth and complexity of the methodological process undertaken in this research. The community-driven and values-led approach adopted by the research team was instrumental to the success of the methodology, making it not just a means to an end but a significant contribution to the field in its own right. Recognising this, the research team is committed to publishing a dedicated paper on the methodology itself. As such, this chapter serves as an overview, offering insight into key aspects of the process.

To explore the experiences of Traveller and Roma students in higher education, the research employed participatory methods, including Photovoice and World Café-style focus groups. These methods were implemented during a day-long consultation event for Traveller participants and a separate day-long consultation with Roma participants. In addition to the consultation event, one-to-one interviews were conducted with participants who were unable to attend the consultation on the day, but wished to contribute. The PAR methodology as well as the participatory methods are discussed below.

Participatory Action Research Framework

This research is rooted in the principles of Participatory Action Research (PAR), a framework that prioritises collaboration, shared ownership, and the active involvement of those most affected by the issues being explored. The methodology took a peer-led approach and was designed and led by Traveller and Roma researchers within the team, ensuring that community voices were not only represented but central to every phase of the study. Developed in partnership with the National Traveller Women's Forum (NTWF) and in collaboration with Pavee Point, two national Traveller and Roma organisations, the approach was firmly grounded in human rights and community development values.

The research has been guided by the values of meaningful participation, equitable access, and community development. The team prioritised social justice, a strengths-based approach, and student-centred methodologies at every stage. Their expertise and dedication have been central to the project's success. Many members of the research team were juggling university studies, professional roles, and other responsibilities, requiring them to navigate competing commitments while leading out on the research.

This often meant being pulled in different directions, which presented logistical difficulties but the ability to balance these roles added to the depth of expertise within the team. Members brought their own personal experience, professional knowledge, and research skills into the project. This unique blend of professional and personal understanding of systemic and structural barriers and enablers in higher education strengthens the project's credibility and trustworthiness within the community.

Biographies of the research team are available at the beginning of this report. The team includes individuals working and studying across three HEIs in the MEND region (DCU, MU and TUS). The research team received training in ethics and confidentiality, informed consent, researcher skills and methods as well as interview techniques. All members of the research team have worked collaboratively in every stage of the research process, from design, data collection, analysis, write up and editing as well as consulting with a graphic designer for the report.

The research process itself was deeply personal for many involved, as the themes explored in the study resonated with their own lived experiences. Engaging in discussions that reflected their past or mirrored the experiences of others within the Traveller and Roma communities often evoked strong emotions. This was not only a methodological challenge but also a necessary and meaningful part of the process. Hearing similar stories repeatedly reinforced the importance of the research but also required time for emotional processing and reflection. Acknowledging and addressing these emotions was essential to ensuring the well-being of the team and the integrity of the research.

Development of Two Distinct Research Processes

The team maintained a reflective and adaptive approach throughout the process, which began in December 2023 and continued until April 2025, with dissemination extending beyond this period. While the Traveller and Roma researchers each took the lead on the research process with their distinct communities, both teams worked together and provided collaborative support to each other throughout their respective processes. Traveller and Roma researchers collaborated closely throughout the conceptual design and data gathering process, providing mutual support and sharing insights. However, the research team went beyond collaboration by ensuring that each community's unique needs and perspectives were fully respected and prioritised. While maintaining a strong sense of solidarity, research design and data collection methods were developed separately for each group, guided by community-led decision-making and tailored to their distinct experiences and challenges. This approach ensured that the research was both inclusive and reflective of the specific realities faced by Travellers and Roma in Ireland.

The iterative nature of the PAR methodology was evident throughout the research. Initial plans for a two-day consultation with a total of 12 Traveller and Roma higher education students were revised following reflective discussions among the research team and community partners. Practical considerations such as travel, caring responsibilities, cultural sensitivities such as travelling alone, and participants needing to take time off work led to the decision to host separate one-day consultation events: one for Traveller students at TUS Athlone and another for Roma students at Maynooth University.

These changes by the research team enabled recruitment of more students and a better understanding of students' needs.

Recruitment challenges for Roma higher education students and graduates meant further adjustments were required. Recruitment was extended outside of just the MEND region to Roma higher education students in the wider Leinster area. Recognising that most Roma students were based in Dublin or Kildare, the team decided to host the Roma consultation at MU to improve accessibility. This iterative decision-making ensured the consultations were inclusive and respectful of participants' needs.

Originally, the plan was to invite guest speakers to the consultation to engage in discussion with the participants. However, the team determined that there was a need to create a supportive environment for each group to share their personal stories, build trust, and collaboratively develop recommendations. The researchers highlighted the importance of allowing time to discuss barriers alongside solutions, acknowledging that sharing these experiences was crucial for participants' storytelling. For these reasons the Photovoice and World Café methods were used which are discussed later in this chapter. The Roma researchers noted a gap in research specifically addressing barriers to higher education for Roma students in Ireland. To address this, they included time in the consultation to explore these barriers, ensuring the research was both comprehensive and grounded in the community's experiences.

To enhance engagement, a graphic harvester (Hazel Hurley) with expertise in equality, diversity, and inclusion, was invited to visually document the discussions during the Traveller consultation. Hazel's work, which often focuses on Travellers, provided an engaging and creative way to capture participants' stories and issues.

However, for the Roma consultation, the research team recognised the potential discomfort of having an artist in the room documenting sensitive stories, particularly as this was likely the first dedicated space for the Roma higher education students to share their experiences. Instead, the graphic harvester collaborated with the Roma researchers after the consultation to create illustrations based on key themes and insights discussed during the event.

The resulting illustrations from both consultations were compiled into two digital posters and also make up the graphics seen throughout this report. The team collaborated with the graphic harvester through an iterative feedback loop on different drafts of the imagery to ensure the graphics were culturally appropriate and relevant to the findings.

Photovoice

Photovoice, introduced by Caroline Wang (2003), is a participatory research method that empowers individuals by positioning them as experts in their own lives. It fosters reflection and dialogue, making it ideal for community-based research. This aligns with Connolly's (2008) principle of adult education, which emphasises the importance of starting with participants' experiences, fostering trust and active participation.

Participants in this study were invited to take part in a Photovoice activity before the consultation. The instructions were as follows:

Take a Photograph:
Capture an image representing any aspect of their higher education journey, whether literal or abstract.

Focus on Personal Representation:
Choose images reflecting their individual experiences, both positive and negative.

Respect Privacy:
Avoid making individuals identifiable, and ensure faces are not visible if present.

Ensure Ownership:
Only use self-taken photos to ensure full permission for use.

Prioritise Safety:
Avoid photos that could cause harm, discomfort, or ill will.

Creating a comfortable, trusting space was essential for participants to share openly, especially given the potential for trauma and barriers in their educational journeys. Photovoice provided time for participants to reflect on their experiences and engage deeply with their narratives before moving to solution-focused discussions in the World Café-style focus group.

This process allowed participants to acknowledge struggles, share common experiences, and build collective support. It also facilitated personal storytelling and solidarity, fostering deeper connections and providing a platform for under-represented voices to be heard and valued. For many, it was their first time engaging in such reflective work or exploring their identity in this way.

"I picked up the megaphone for our communities. And I think there are very similar struggles for them, (for the Travellers as well). We never really have a say. And it's always someone outside our community, that tells us what we need to be and who we need to be, and the way we should act and how far we can go. Which is incorrect. And it shouldn't be the case."

World Café

The World Café, a participatory methodology, was used during the consultation to foster collaborative dialogue and gather diverse perspectives in a relaxed, café-like environment. This approach enabled open-ended discussions where participants could share experiences, identify challenges, and co-create actionable recommendations (IUA and IRC, 2017).

Creating welcoming and inclusive spaces was central to the methodology. Venues were chosen for accessibility, and rooms were arranged with round tables to promote a relaxed atmosphere. Thoughtful touches, such as flowers, biscuits, and culturally inclusive food and decorations, enhanced the setting, including items from an Eastern European shop for the Roma consultation.

The World Café featured three discussion rounds, each focused on a key research question:

1. What doesn't work to support Traveller/ Roma students in higher education?
2. What works to support Traveller/ Roma students in higher education?
3. What do colleges/universities need to do to better support Traveller/ Roma students in higher education?

Participants, seated in small groups, engaged in discussions facilitated by Traveller or Roma researchers. The format was as follows:

1. **Introduction**
   Facilitators introduced the question.
2. **Focused Discussion**
   Groups discussed the question in depth.
3. **Visualisation**
   One group member documented key points on flipchart paper.
4. **Summarising and Sharing**
   A representative shared the group's discussion with the wider group.

Data collected through notes, sketches, or symbols on flipcharts was anonymous and analysed using qualitative thematic analysis (Kohlbacher, 2006).

At the end of the café, participants used sticky dots to identify the most impactful ideas. This visual coding process highlighted consensus on priorities for improving higher education access and experiences for Traveller and Roma students.

The day concluded with a reflective activity asking participants: *"If you had a magic wand, what one change would you make for Traveller/Roma students in higher education?"* This final question encouraged creative thinking and the sharing of aspirational ideas for systemic change.

Debriefing

Throughout the consultation, the research team remained mindful that some participants might find sharing their experiences challenging. A student-centred approach was followed to ensure support at every stage. Before, during, and after the consultation days and interviews, students were reminded of available support services, including mental health and counselling resources through their university's access office. A quiet room was provided for participants to take a break at any time.

College Connect collaborated with the Traveller Counselling Service and Dr Thomas McCann to offer free counselling for those needing additional support after the consultations. At the end of the sessions, students received a debrief sheet with details on how to access support services. Follow-up emails and calls were made to check in and offer further assistance if required.

All participants had their food and travel expenses covered, with overnight accommodation provided for those travelling long distances. Additionally, participants received One4All vouchers as a token of appreciation for their time, expertise, and valuable contributions.

Data Analysis

Data analysis took place over several months, following a collaborative and iterative approach. The research team engaged in multiple rounds of review and refinement to ensure a rigorous and ethical analysis process.

The Photovoice section of the consultation was recorded, transcribed and de-identified after the Traveller and the Roma consultations. A thematic analysis was then conducted by the research team. The analysis process was structured yet flexible, allowing for continuous reflection and refinement. Roma researchers led the analysis of data collected from Roma higher education students, while Traveller researchers focused on data from Traveller students. These narratives offered deeply personal accounts, often highlighting the extreme levels of racism and discrimination encountered throughout their educational journeys. The stories were described as raw, honest, and profoundly powerful, making the analysis process both emotive and complex. Given the personal relationships some team members had with participants, they were particularly mindful of ethical considerations, maintaining a balance between empathy and objectivity throughout the process. Their expertise allowed them to handle sensitive narratives with care, ensuring that participants' voices were represented accurately while upholding rigorous research standards.

Data from the two separate World Café sessions was already anonymised as students were not asked to put their names to any notes, doodles or drawings that they made during the World Café sessions. Data was organised and thematically analysed in alignment with the key research questions. Participants used sticky dots, to mark the notes or concepts they considered most significant. This visual coding process allowed clear themes to emerge and prioritise the points that were most important to the participants.

Additionally, three individual interviews were conducted, transcribed, and anonymised before analysis. A thematic analysis was then carried out in line with the research questions, ensuring consistency across all data sources.

The iterative nature of the analysis—conducted over many months—ensured that the findings were not rushed or based on a single interpretation. Instead, the research team engaged in a continuous process of review, discussion, and refinement, strengthening the credibility and depth of the analysis.

Feedback and Dissemination

After the consultation events, participants were regularly updated on the research process and available supports through email and by research team members. Feedback on the preliminary findings and draft report was provided by participants, the Interagency Oversight Group, and the Academic Advisory Group. This feedback was essential in improving the report and strengthening its recommendations. Ensuring participants could review the findings was important to verify that their voices were accurately represented and they were comfortable with the quotes being published.

The research team also used opportunities during HEI stakeholder meetings and College Connect Regional Steering Group meetings to disseminate findings and advocate for the recommendations. These meetings, attended by senior leaders from MEND HEIs and national community organisations, ensured the recommendations reached key decision-makers.

A crucial aspect of this research is its foundation in participatory action research, which means actioning recommendations and sharing findings as the project progresses.

This ensures the report does not simply sit on a shelf but leads to meaningful change. This approach is a key strength of the project, supported by a dedicated research team working within HEIs to drive this agenda forward and ensure tangible impact.

Positionality

The analysis of higher education needs for Traveller and Roma students used the insider-outsider theory to examine the research team's positionality. Traveller and Roma researchers in the study held dual roles as insiders and outsiders. As both professionals in higher education and community members, they built trust with participants through shared lived experiences, while also contributing professional expertise in student support and institutional structures.

Navigating these roles required strategic balancing of professional responsibilities, and academic commitments, while collaboratively leading the research project. This ability to bridge these spaces ensured the study was both academically rigorous and grounded in real-world impact. The researchers' strong relationships with participants underscored their commitment to producing tangible outcomes, rather than the research remaining purely theoretical. This dynamic highlights that insider and outsider roles exist on a spectrum, as noted in the literature (Boulton, 2000; McKinley Brayboy &

Deyhle, 2000; Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999). The researchers' navigation between these roles enriched the study by combining deep community understanding with broader HEI systems knowledge. As Breen (2007) suggests, viewing positionality as a continuum allows researchers to leverage both insider and outsider perspectives, minimising their limitations. This approach enabled the research team to produce a robust and impactful analysis of the higher education needs of Traveller and Roma students.

Recruitment of Research Participants

Overall, data was gathered from 10 Roma students/graduates and 22 Traveller students/graduates. All Traveller participants were recruited from MEND institutions (DCU, DkIT, MU and TUS Midlands) as well as some students from TUS Midwest. Recruitment for Roma participants was extended to HEIs in the Leinster region to increase participation and therefore also included representation from Trinity College Dublin, University College Dublin and Technological University of Dublin.

Research participants were recruited through the student networks of the research team across the higher education and community organisation sector. Posters were also used in the HEIs to promote the study and shared on the social media accounts of College Connect, MEND HEIs, the NTWF, and Pavee Point. National and local community groups were also informed via direct mail and given a digital copy of the poster to share with their communities.

Profile of Research Participants who Participated in the Traveller Consultation

The Traveller consultation involved a total of 22 participants, consisting of 18 students and 4 members of the research team. Below is a breakdown of participants' demographics. To avoid unintentionally identifying any participant, we have categorised the types of degrees by the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) international broad categories.

Graph 1: *Sex of Research Participants who Took Part in Traveller Consultation*

Sex of Research Participants who Took Part in Traveller Consultation

Male
7

Female
15
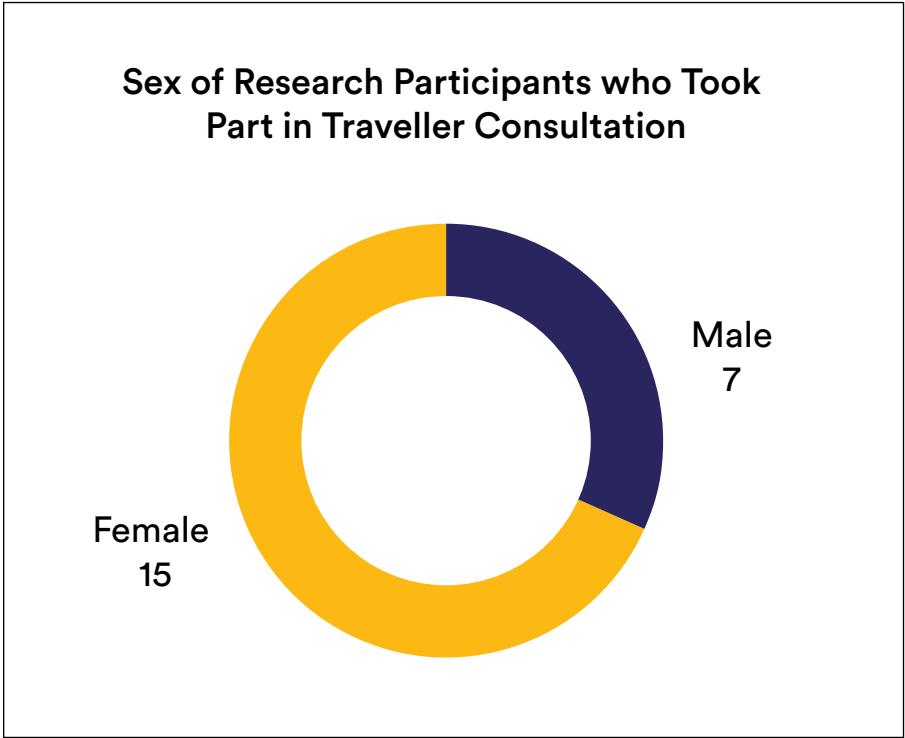
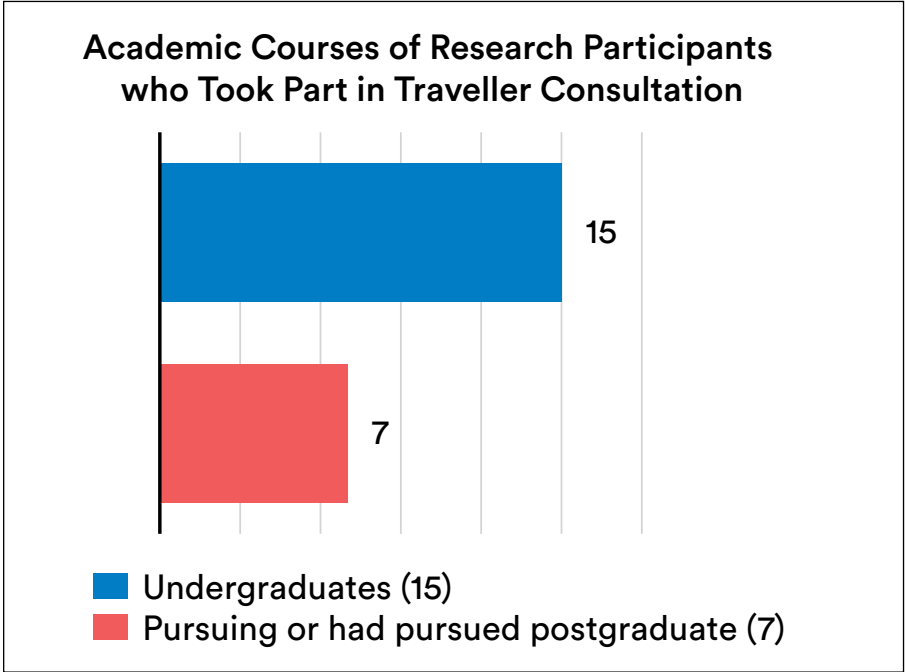**Graph 2:** *Student Status of Research Participants who Took Part in Traveller Consultation*

Student Status of Research Participants who Took Part in Traveller Consultation

Recent Graduates
4

Current Students
18
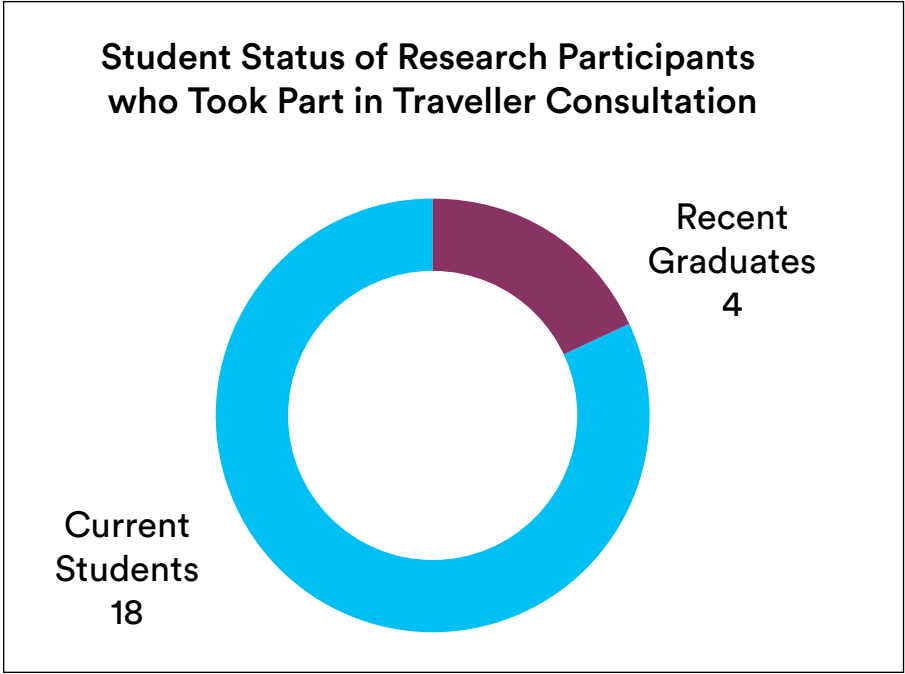
Graph 3: Academic Courses of Research Participants who Took Part in Traveller Consultation

Academic Courses of Research Participants who Took Part in Traveller Consultation

- Undergraduates (15) — 15
- Pursuing or had pursued postgraduate (7) — 7

Graph 4: Entry Route into Higher Education taken by Research Participants in Traveller Consultation

Entry Route into Higher Education taken by Research Participants in Traveller Consultation

- Mature Student Entry 12
- Access Course 1
- Leaving Certificate 5
- QQI/FET Entry 4
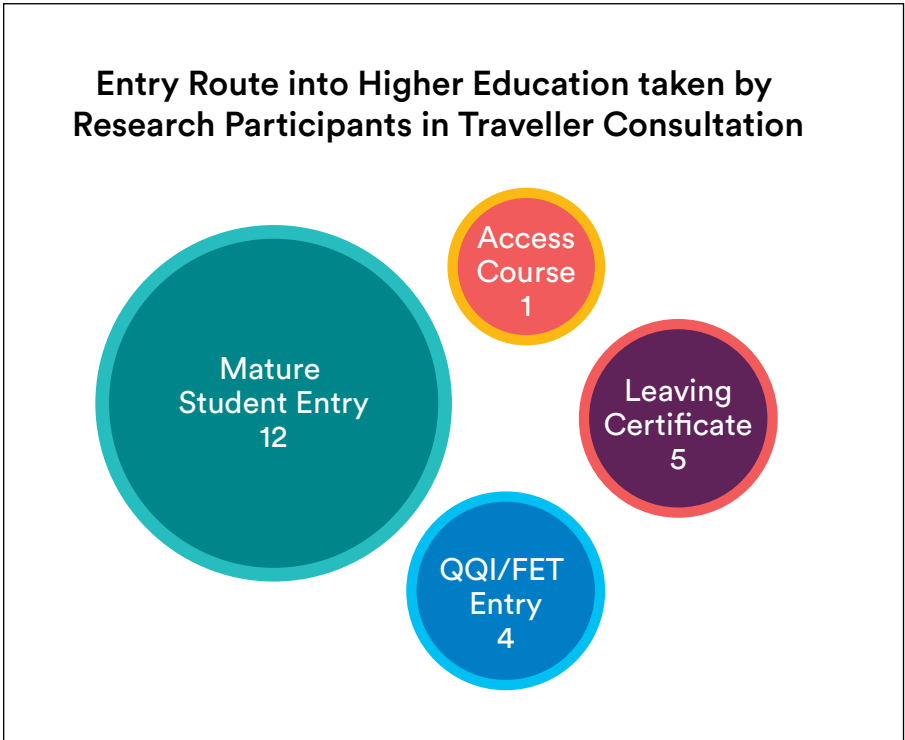
Graph 5: HEIs Attended by Research Participants who Took Part in Traveller Consultation

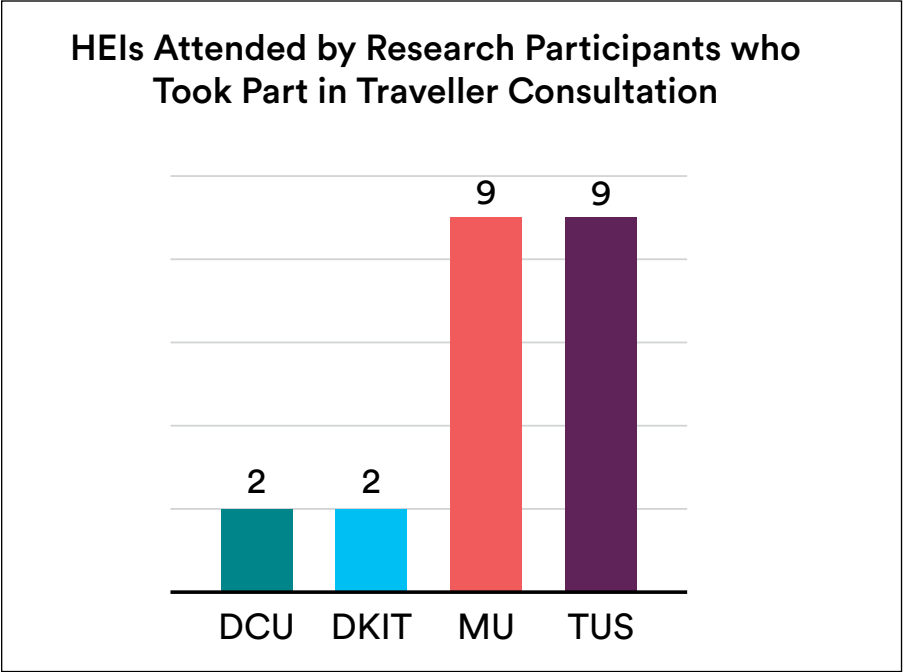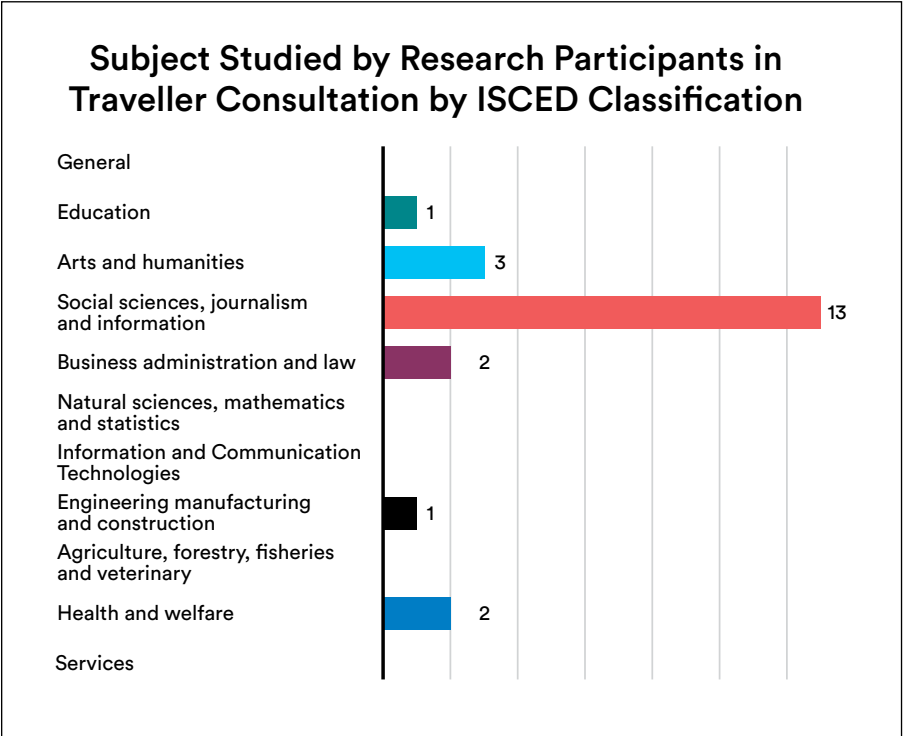## HEIs Attended by Research Participants who Took Part in Traveller Consultation

DCU	DKIT	MU	TUS
2	2	9	9

Graph 6: Subject Studied by Research Participants in Traveller Consultation by ISCED Classification

Subject Studied by Research Participants in Traveller Consultation by ISCED Classification

| Category	Value
General	
Education	1
Arts and humanities	3
Social sciences, journalism and information	13
Business administration and law	2
Natural sciences, mathematics and statistics	
Information and Communication Technologies	
Engineering manufacturing and construction	1
Agriculture, forestry, fisheries and veterinary	
Health and welfare	2
Services	

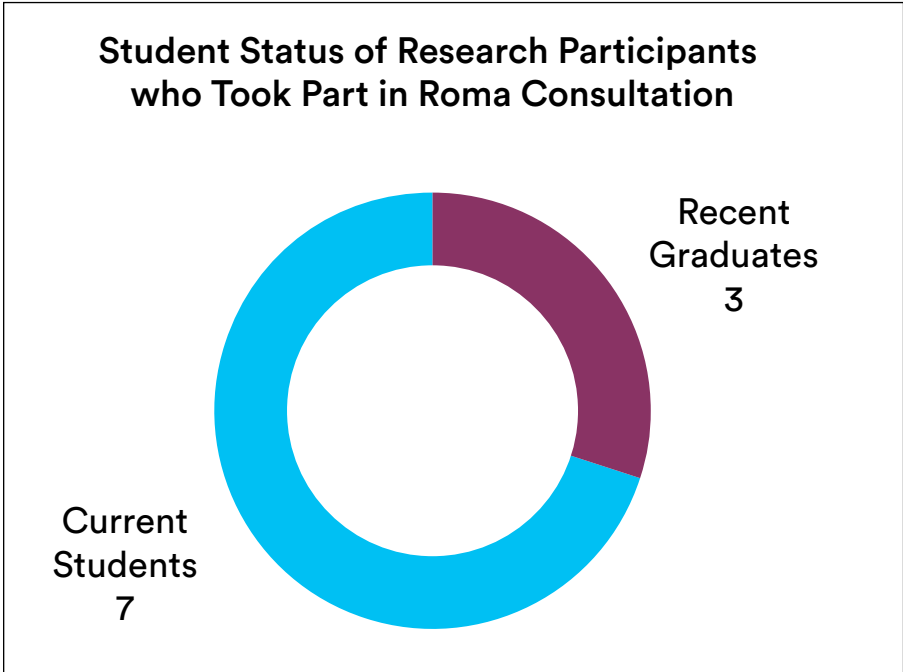# Profile of Research Participants who Participated in the Roma Consultation

The Roma consultation involved a total of 10 participants, consisting of eight students/graduates and two members of the research team. Below is a breakdown of participants' demographics.

To avoid unintentionally identifying any participant, we have categorised the types of degrees by the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) international broad categories.
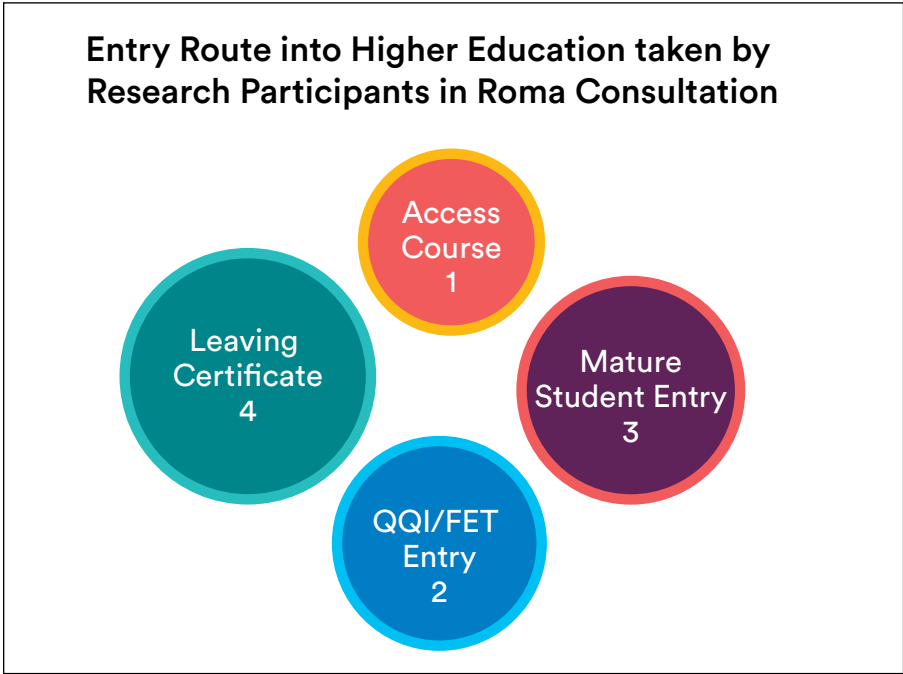
Graph 7: *Sex of Research Participants who Took Part in Roma Consultation*

Sex of Research Participants who Took Part in Roma Consultation

Female 6

Male 4
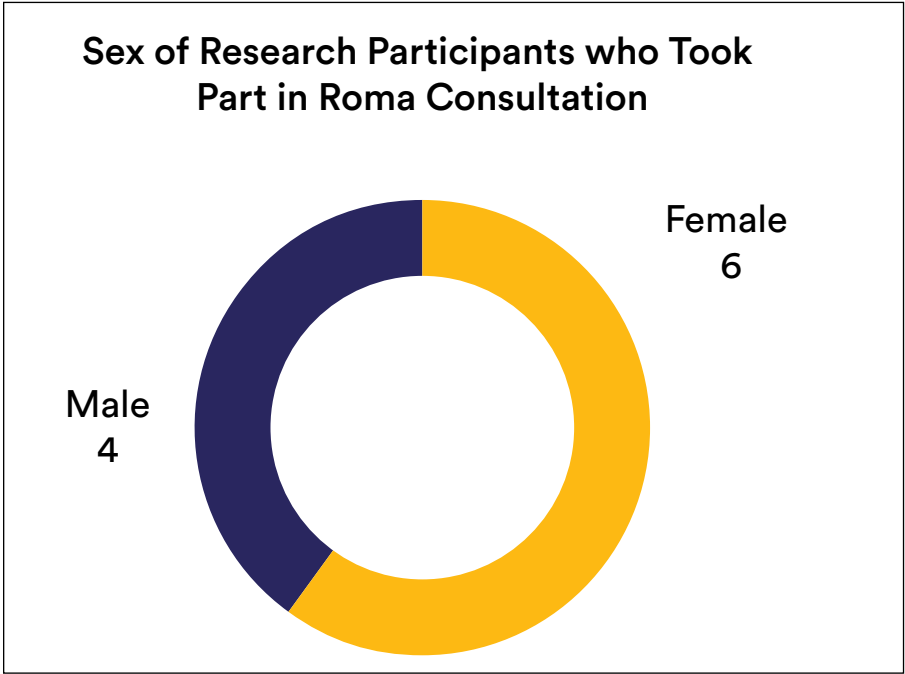
Graph 8: *Student Status of Research Participants who Took Part in Roma Consultation*

Student Status of Research Participants who Took Part in Roma Consultation

Recent Graduates
3

Current Students
7

Graph 9: Entry Route into Higher Education taken by Research Participants in Roma Consultation

Entry Route into Higher Education taken by Research Participants in Roma Consultation

Access Course
1

Leaving Certificate
4

Mature Student Entry
3

QQI/FET Entry
2

Graph 10: HEIs Attended by Research Participants whoTook Part in Roma Consultation
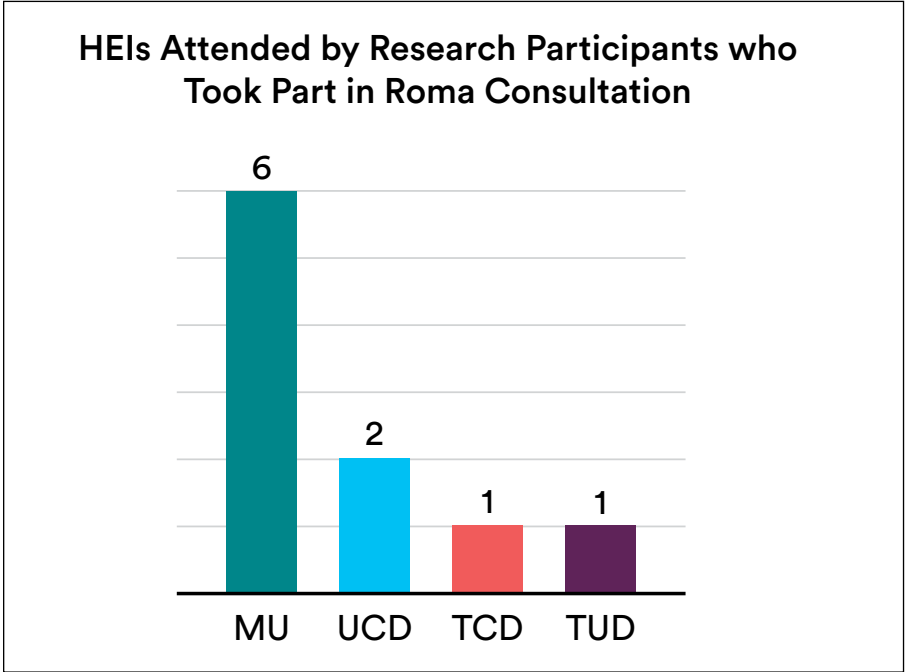
Graph 11: Subject Studied by Research Participants in Roma Consultation by ISCED Classication
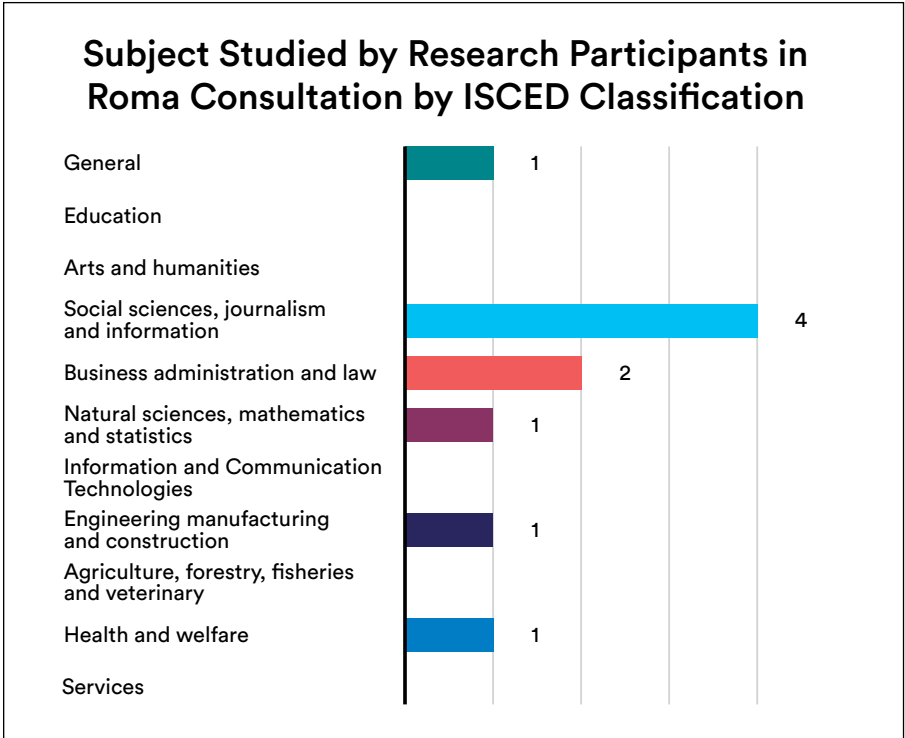
Higher Education Access Route (HEAR) Scheme

Following the consultations, the Interagency Oversight Group (IOG) suggested it would be valuable to gather additional data on whether the participants had accessed university through the Higher Education Access Route (HEAR) scheme. The research team agreed that this information would add value to the study and returned to the participants to collect the data retrospectively. Of the nine Traveller participants eligible to apply to the HEAR scheme (Leaving Certificate/FET/QQI or Access Entry route), just three had accessed higher education through this route. Out of the five Roma participants who were eligible to apply for HEAR, only one had used the scheme to gain access to higher education.

Limitations

It is important to note that this research only spoke with Traveller and Roma higher education students and graduates. The research did not include students who did not attend higher education, those who wanted to attend or could not, or those who did not complete higher education. These insights would be hugely valuable in ensuring higher education would be inclusive for all. Additionally, all the research participants were based in the MEND or Leinster region, meaning this is not a national picture. While the sample size means that the findings are not fully generalisable, this research nonetheless represents a valuable and significant contribution to the sector and national access policy. Given the lower number of Travellers and Roma in higher education, these insights provide an important evidence base that can inform and drive more inclusive policy and practice. In reality, these numbers present a significant proportion of Traveller and Roma higher education students in Ireland.

Chapter 3

Findings from the Roma Consultation

Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings from the consultation with 10 Roma higher education students. While the number of participants may initially seem small, this study acts as the first in Ireland to focus specifically on the experiences of Roma students and recent graduates in higher education. With no existing data on the number of Roma students in higher education, this research provides valuable insights into this community and its findings will provide a contribution to the education sector.

The absence of data and research on Roma in higher education has created a significant gap in understanding how institutions and policymakers can better support this group. In particular, little is known about the challenges and opportunities faced by Roma students currently or previously enrolled in higher education. This report begins to address these gaps, offering a crucial starting point to highlight barriers and explore strategies for greater inclusion and success. It is hoped that this report will contribute to a broader discourse on educational equity and inform a targeted Roma Higher Education Inclusion Strategy.

Racism and Discrimination

The majority of participants shared their experiences of racism and discrimination throughout their educational journey. Racism and discrimination emerged as the dominant theme, recurring consistently across various discussions during the consultation day. These accounts revealed that such issues often began during early childhood and persisted through primary school, secondary school, and higher education.

Anecdotal evidence in Ireland indicates a high rate of Roma children leaving full time education before reaching third level, but the reasons for this remain under researched. Participants spoke of the need for more research in this area, highlighting a significant lack of cultural awareness and understanding among some teachers during their time in school. Many shared stories of encountering prejudices and biases, with educators holding stereotypical, low expectations of Roma students. For example, one individual recounted:

"I was treated quite fairly up until I came out as Roma towards sixth year. And then there was a low expectation from the teachers of me, that I might marry young and all that."

These negative experiences were compounded by systemic issues, including limited access to culturally relevant resources and the absence of proactive measures to support Roma students. For many, this created an environment where they felt they could not openly identify or celebrate their Roma identity.

To address these pervasive issues, participants emphasised the need for comprehensive anti-racism training for higher education staff and students. This training should directly combat anti-Roma racism and discrimination, moving beyond generic or superficial "tick-box" exercises. A critical component of this training should explicitly address anti-Roma biases and foster greater cultural awareness.

Such training would aim to dismantle prejudices and equip educators and institutions with the tools to create more inclusive and supportive environments for Roma students.

By implementing these measures, educational institutions can begin to address the systemic barriers and biases that have long hindered the educational participation and success of Roma communities.

"We are human. We are children of God. We deserve to be equal, like everybody else. It is so heavy for people who don't understand that we are human. We have feelings. We have children, we don't want to hide, we want to be educated."

The Roma community's lower engagement in education is often misinterpreted as a cultural issue or unjustly attributed to the community itself.

Such narratives perpetuate a harmful "cultural deficit lens" (Bhopal, 2011) that obscures the systemic roots of this disparity. This finding rejects that perspective and instead situates low participation rates within the context of the long history of systemic racism and discrimination faced by Roma communities. These entrenched inequities have profoundly shaped the educational experiences of Roma students, manifesting as recurring barriers across all levels of education.

Intergenerational Trauma

Intergenerational trauma refers to the psychological and emotional effects of oppression and discrimination experienced by previous generations, which continue to influence subsequent generations (APA, 2023). For the Roma community, these effects are deeply rooted in a history of systemic racism, exclusion, and marginalisation. Throughout the consultation day, participants identified intergenerational trauma as a consistent and significant theme, highlighting how these generational legacies shape their lives and educational journeys.
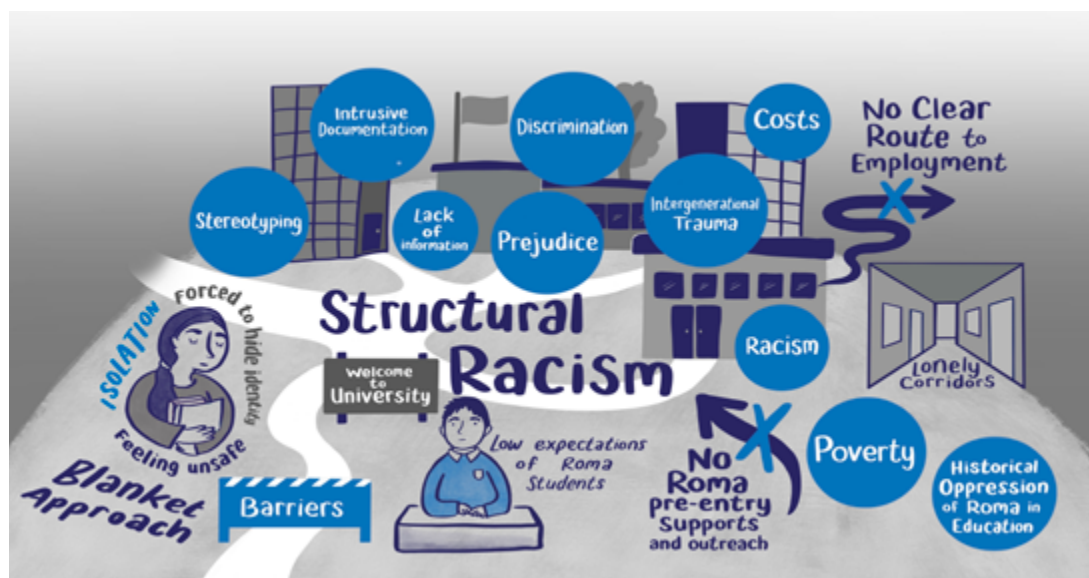
Participants recognised and named intergenerational trauma as a consistent theme throughout the day. Community members shared personal stories that illustrated how the trauma endured by their parents and grandparents continues to impact their lives. One participant shared:

"My mom knew exactly what I was talking about, because there was an exact conversation she had with her grandmother. So that generation of trauma is very much quite there."

Another participant reflected on their sense of accomplishment despite the barriers encountered by their ancestors.

"This new perspective makes me realise that like where I am right now is actually like, amazing considering a lot of my ancestors wouldn't have been in the same place. And considering the barriers that like were in my primary school, my high school, the way I was treated, and just seeing a new perspective."

This sense of trauma also led some students to hide their ethnicity during their school years. One individual recounted:

"And so I really did hide my ethnicity throughout secondary school. And it felt as if I was alone in this world, I always knew there was something wrong that there was some type of injustice but, I couldn't really pinpoint what it was."

Participants named the enduring impact of intergenerational trauma as contributing to feelings of exclusion, isolation, and a lack of belonging. Some emphasised how these emotional burdens significantly affect theirs and others' mental health and make it challenging to navigate educational environments that fail to acknowledge or address these issues. Participants stressed that the cumulative weight of historical and ongoing discrimination underscores the urgent need for targeted mental health support.

To address these challenges, participants recommended the provision of culturally trained counsellors who are equipped to understand and respond to the unique experiences of Roma students. They expressed the importance of having professionals who offer support that is sensitive to the effects of intergenerational trauma and create safe spaces for students to share their stories and seek help. By ensuring access to such resources, universities can play a pivotal role in supporting the well-being and empowerment of Roma students.

Hidden Identity

Many participants spoke about the challenges of concealing their Roma identity during their educational journeys. Anti-Roma racism and discrimination often forces Roma students to hide their identities as a strategy to avoid further discrimination, to ensure their safety, and the safety of their families. This may stem from a fear of exclusion and reinforces feelings of not belonging in higher education spaces.

Participants shared how hiding their Roma identity, for instance by not wearing certain clothing items such as long skirts, was a defence mechanism against racism and discrimination. These accounts underscore the emotional toll of concealing one's identity, which often leads to feelings of shame and isolation, particularly during one's primary school years.

"I always have to hide my ethnicity. And I am so ashamed of this."

"Throughout my educational journey, I hid my identity. Yeah. And who I am as a person mainly because it's a defence mechanism to have equal treatment."

Some participants shared particularly painful memories of the repercussions of revealing their ethnicity. One person recounted a childhood memory:

"One of the days, a girl's mom found out that my mom is Roma, and she told her daughter to tell all the friends not to be friends with me because I'm a Cigan. You know, so I lost—in a day—I lost all my friends."

Experiences like these highlight the severe social consequences for this participant of being open about Roma identity and its impact on the students' sense of belonging, social interactions, and ability to form meaningful friendships.

Participants also noted variations in their comfort levels with expressing their identity during their time in higher education, depending on the courses or departments they were part of. Fields like social sciences or adult and community education were seen as more welcoming spaces, while other disciplines posed greater barriers to open expression.

Despite these struggles, many participants expressed a desire to reclaim and celebrate their Roma identity. One student shared their determination to embrace their heritage:

"And I will proudly represent my ethnicity, stop hiding. And I will celebrate all my life Roma in Culture Day. And wherever I will go, I will say to young people, 'Don't hide because the future is in your hands. If you will hide our ethnicity, [we will] never succeed.'"

To support Roma students navigating these challenges, participants emphasised the importance of culturally trained mental health counsellors who can provide support and understanding. These professionals should be equipped to address the unique impacts of racism and the pressures of hiding one's identity. Additionally, participants called for institution-wide inclusivity initiatives to actively welcome and celebrate Roma identity and culture. By integrating Roma history, contributions, and achievements into curricula and university activities, and providing robust training for staff and students, educational institutions can foster environments where Roma students feel empowered to express their identities confidently.

Pause for Reflection:
Imagine being forced to hide a core part of who you are every single day, changing your clothes and appearance just to feel safe. For many Roma students, this isn't a hypothetical scenario—it's a painful reality.
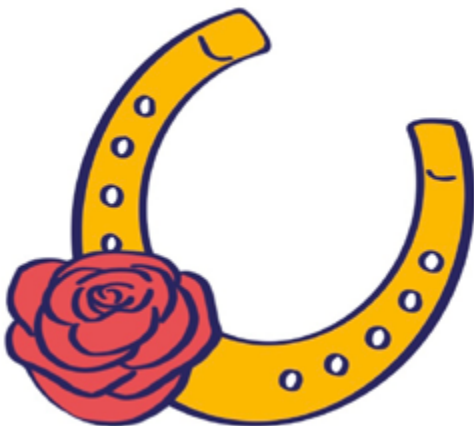
Family and Community Support

Family and community play a pivotal role in shaping the educational aspirations and progression of Roma students. This theme discusses the transformative impact of familial encouragement and the broader community benefits of intergenerational change driven by education.

Participants highlighted the strong value of education within their community and the support received by family in pursuing higher education. Participants mentioned how the family unit plays a crucial role in supporting their educational aspirations and progression.

"But as I, as many people said, it's just the next generation of Roma, it's in their hands, and they can make the big change for the whole Roma community. Because that can show the other youngsters, you can do it. And the older generation can push that. And as my parents pushed me into education, the most important thing, if the parents push you and talk to you, since you go into school, that can make a big change."

Many Roma participants shared their experiences of being the first in their families to pursue education, with some also mentioning that sometimes this can feel like an extra pressure to succeed and to provide for their families.

Whilst participants complemented the work of College Connect in encouraging Roma education, and creating a sense of belonging for Roma students, they said that institutions must take responsibility for continuing these accessible pathways and support structures. Efforts should include providing Roma families and young people in schools with accessible information about educational pathways, as often they are unaware of available supports.

Participants recommended that educational initiatives focus on fostering family involvement, strengthening engagement, and continuing to build trust in the educational system. Parental encouragement is often a key motivator which inspires confidence. However, a 'ripple effect' can happen when any one person in a family attends higher education, as conversations, guidance and discussions can lead to others in the family being interested in engaging further in education themselves.

"And I couldn't have done it without my mom. She's amazing. And yeah, I'm really proud to be called her daughter. Now she's back in education."

"We have feelings. We have children, we don't want to hide, we want to be educated. But people don't do that. People don't see that. They don't want to even see that. So I said I will come back to the education for my children. And I will proudly represent my ethnicity, stop hiding."

However, participants also highlighted the pressure of being the first in their families to succeed, pointing to the need for systemic change. Participants spoke about how this responsibility should not fall solely on individuals but must be shared by governments, policymakers, and institutions. Efforts should include providing clear, accessible pathways and resources for Roma families while fostering trust in the education system.

Financial Support

This theme explores the significant financial challenges that Roma students face in accessing and succeeding in higher education. It highlights the importance of comprehensive financial aid to ensure equity and inclusion.

The stark poverty and systemic barriers faced by Roma communities create immense challenges in accessing and succeeding in higher education. Participants discussed that for Roma students, the basic needs of survival—such as adequate housing, food, and transportation—must be met before they can even begin to focus on their academic pursuits. Without addressing these fundamental issues, it is unfair to expect Roma individuals to consider or succeed in higher education. Participants in the study consistently highlighted the overwhelming financial challenges that many Roma face, often due to regulatory barriers, such as the Habitual Residence Condition, that exclude them/their families from accessing basic social protections, housing supports and healthcare. Participants highlighted the crucial need for financial support to enable them to pursue and persist in higher education.

The participants emphasised the importance of funding schemes like SUSI (Student Universal Support Ireland), the 1916 Bursary, and the Student Assistance Fund (SAF), all of which they credited with

enabling them to access and progress through their education. Without these supports, many students indicated that attending university would have been impossible. However, while these schemes are invaluable, significant gaps remain in terms of accessibility and adequacy, highlighting how Roma are often overlooked by targeted financial supports.

Many students reported that they only discovered funding options after enrolling in university, highlighting the foundational need of community-led outreach initiatives to inform Roma communities about financial assistance well in advance of university entry. They discussed that this intervention should begin during the secondary senior cycle to guide students into third level. In addition to this, students expressed frustration with the complicated application processes for these funding schemes. The documentation requirements are difficult to navigate, especially for individuals who face systemic barriers or lack experience with bureaucratic procedures. Participants emphasised the need for more accessible, step-by-step guidance and direct assistance with application procedures to ensure that Roma students are not excluded due to administrative hurdles.

Participants noted that even when financial support is obtained, the amounts provided are often not enough to cover the full range of costs associated with attending university. Students face challenges affording food, books, travel expenses, and accommodation, particularly those experiencing high levels of poverty. The 1916 Bursary, was highly praised by one student for providing much-needed financial assistance, however students noted issues around the competitive nature and not all students were able to avail of the scheme.

"I (felt) like it was dropping me (into) the water and then telling me to swim, I have no financial supports, there was nothing for me."

This highlights not only the financial burden, but also the emotional strain of navigating higher education without adequate resources. Finally, the stigma attached to seeking financial assistance was another barrier identified by one participant. The fear of being perceived as begging can discourage students from pursuing the help they desperately need, exacerbating the financial difficulties they face. One student shared:

"Every time I asked for help (before), I got shut down, like you are begging and there's that stigma you know!"

In conclusion, Roma students face significant financial challenges in higher education, often beginning with foundational issues such as securing basic needs like housing, food, and transportation. While funding schemes such as SUSI, the 1916 Bursary, and the Student Assistance Fund (SAF) exist, gaps in outreach, accessibility, and application processes hinder their effectiveness. Even for those who receive financial aid, the support is often insufficient to cover the full costs of higher education, leading to persistent financial stress. Compounding these issues, stigma and a lack of cultural sensitivity can deter students from seeking the assistance they need. This theme underscores the necessity of a more inclusive, accessible, and adequately resourced financial support system.

Pause for Reflection:
The *Habitual Residence Condition* can prevent Roma from getting a PPS number. Think about how often you're asked for yours when filling out forms or applications. Reflect on the huge impact this peoples' lives.

Language and Digital Literacy Support

The need for language and IT support emerged as a significant theme in the findings, with participants identifying both language and digital literacy as critical barriers to accessing and succeeding in higher education. Roma students, particularly those who do not speak English as their first language, face compounded challenges in navigating the university system. The lack of adequate language support services, including English language assistance before university entry, leaves some students struggling to keep up with their studies. Participants flagged that university facilities such as 'writing centres' often fail to meet students' demands. They recommended accessible drop-in centres instead. This may be particularly acute for mature students, for whom English proficiency can be an additional hurdle that limits their ability to fully engage with academic content, impacting their sense of empowerment and overall confidence in higher education.

One mature student shared their personal experience, highlighting the confusion and frustration they faced due to a lack of support in understanding the application process. The quote below illustrates not only the academic hurdles, but also the emotional and psychological toll of navigating higher education without the confidence and support to understand key processes.

"I was struggling with English because I am still not able to understand everything, and my English is not really correct – so they probably said when the CAO application will expire, but I didn't understand. I went to apply for CAO and they said to me, 'it's gone.' I sat there and cried and I said – How is it gone? Nobody explained to me, nobody told me, so after that, I wanted to go to university but no, sorry, it's too late."

The findings highlight the critical need for targeted language and digital skills support to address barriers faced by Roma students, particularly mature applicants. Participants emphasised the need for English language assistance before university entry to help applicants navigate complex processes like applications and deadlines, as well as ongoing academic writing support during university to build confidence and enable full engagement with their studies. Without these measures, many Roma students face confusion and frustration, which can deter them from pursuing or succeeding in higher education.

Outreach, Guidance and Support

Participants emphasised the importance of Roma-specific outreach starting in primary and secondary school, ensuring families are well-informed about available opportunities and resources. Participants mentioned that community-led outreach programmes can be instrumental in providing the Roma community with the resources needed to access education. Online and in-person, community-led information and guidance

sessions were seen as important from a young age as well as pre-university, community-led mentoring programmes, campus tours and workshops. The PATH 5 Whidden Workshops were noted as a specific example of good practice where one participant attended these workshops and is now attending university and working on various PATH 3 and PATH 5 projects.

> **"When you don't know what university (is), if your parents don't know, and you don't have anyone to guide you, even if you want to go, you don't know what route to take."**

Roma students also highlighted the significant support provided by PATH 5 Traveller and Roma Outreach workers, who help to build trust and create welcoming environments within universities. This support is crucial for making Roma students feel valued and empowered to succeed academically. Outreach programmes that employ workers from the Roma community were seen as especially beneficial, as they ensure that students receive culturally sensitive guidance, fostering a deeper sense of belonging and connection.

While these outreach initiatives were recognised as effective, some participants noted challenges in their sustainability. Many programmes rely on external funding and short-term staff contracts, leading to turnover and potential disruption to the established community relationships. In addition, students emphasised the importance of sustained support throughout their university journey, suggesting that responsibility for Roma student success should not rest solely on outreach initiatives or individual outreach workers. Instead, universities must embed accountability

for Roma student support across all departments, creating a unified, long-term approach to fostering Roma participation and success in higher education.

> **"Having the information and having the awareness is power in itself, support into, but then what do you do when you get in the door, it is that sustained support throughout."**

Furthermore, participants highlighted the critical role of dedicated staff members in supporting Roma students. Access Officers provide both academic and emotional support during challenging times. However, some students expressed reluctance to seek help, fearing that their unique challenges may not be understood.

> **"…and in the middle (of her degree) she was struggling and I told her to ask for help but she said no, I don't want them to feel I am not capable."**

This underscores the need for staff to undergo mandatory cultural awareness and anti-racism training to ensure they are equipped to meet the needs of Roma students. Participants suggested that a dedicated Roma Access Officer could help bridge gaps in support, offering culturally sensitive guidance and connecting families with available resources. Ideally, this officer would come from the Roma community, further enhancing trust and understanding.

"The Access office was there for me when I got sick and fell behind, they were there for me and helped me sort out extensions and following up."

Finally, the employment of Roma staff across all levels of the institution was seen as crucial for empowering Roma students and promoting a sense of belonging. Roma initiatives should be community- and student-led to ensure ownership and avoid tokenism, with collaboration between HEIs and Traveller and Roma organisations. It is important that Roma students are not pressured to take on roles as "community representatives" unless they choose to, with the focus on protecting their authenticity and ensuring their participation is comfortable and voluntary.

Entry Routes and Access to Higher Education

Simplified and equitable access to higher education is essential for Roma students in Ireland. This theme explores these challenges, alongside the complexity of existing entry schemes, ethical data collection, and the importance of flexible pathways to accommodate diverse student needs.

Participants shared valuable insights into the challenges that Roma students face when navigating current university entry routes, offering a number of suggestions for improvement. They identified areas where the process could be made more accessible and supportive, especially regarding the CAO (Central Applications Office), the HEAR (Higher Education Access Route), and DARE (Disability Access Route to Education) schemes.

A key point raised was the complexity of the documentation required for the HEAR and DARE schemes. Some participants suggested that the paperwork and forms could be made more straightforward, with clearer instructions and guidance on how to complete them. Simplifying these processes would help Roma students feel more confident in applying for these supports, ensuring they can access the opportunities available to them without unnecessary barriers.

One participant also highlighted concerns around data collection, specifically some schemes or grants which require them to prove their identity and ethnicity. While there was recognition of the importance of collecting ethnicity data in an ethical and transparent manner, participants emphasised that students should not be required to "prove" their ethnicity. They stressed that ethnicity should be self-declared and that students must be fully informed about why this data is being collected. This would ensure that the process was both ethical and respectful, allowing Roma students to feel empowered and in control of their identity without fear of judgement or unnecessary verification.

Access courses and return-to-learning programmes were recognised as valuable opportunities for Roma students, particularly mature learners who may have been away from formal education for an extended period. These programmes provide a crucial pathway back into education.

However, some barriers were identified, such as fees, age requirements and other eligibility restrictions. One participant reflected on how they would have greatly benefited from enrolling in such a programme but were ineligible because it was restricted to mature student applicants only.

Tailored guidance and resources designed to meet the specific needs of Roma students could support this group to better navigate the application process and achieve their academic goals. Some participants felt Roma were excluded or included as an afterthought when Travellers alone are mentioned as the target groups in widening access initiatives. Additionally, several participants, particularly those with caregiving duties or part-time work, emphasised the importance of offering more part-time and flexible course options to accommodate their personal responsibilities. One mature student reflected on the opportunity to return to education.

"I think it's very important for me to have a second chance and to be able to take your second chance because sometimes we have [a] second chance but we just pass them and we don't look at them. You know, but just to take the second chances and be proud that we are from the Roma community and be proud that we are who we are."

In conclusion, by simplifying entry route documentation, providing clearer guidance on documentation, and offering flexible course options, universities can create a more accessible and supportive system for Roma students. Tailoring support services to meet the needs of mature learners, and ensuring that language and literacy challenges are addressed, would empower Roma students to fully engage with higher education and succeed in their academic endeavours.

Visibility, Representation and Celebration

This theme emphasises the importance of Roma visibility, representation, and celebration as part of anti-racism measures in higher education. It advocates for integrating Roma culture into curricula, ensuring that Roma history, contributions, and identity are acknowledged and valued. By fostering inclusivity and raising cultural awareness, we can create a more diverse and enriching educational environment. Celebrating Roma heritage within academic institutions not only empowers Roma individuals but also promotes a broader understanding of cultural diversity, encouraging a positive and inclusive atmosphere for all students. These initiatives play a crucial role in challenging stereotypes and promoting respect for Roma identity.

A significant issue identified by participants was the widespread lack of knowledge about Roma culture and history within university curricula, including the Roma Genocide. Roma students often find themselves in the position of having to educate others about their community and culture. Participants highlighted the urgent need for more comprehensive materials on Roma communities in university libraries and curricula, integrated across departments and programmes.

Many students expressed frustration with the lack of awareness among peers and staff about the Roma community. They described the pressure and emotional toll of frequently being the sole voice representing their community. This burden, participants explained, adversely affects their sense of belonging within the university:

"I feel like it's hard to fit in as a Roma person... because every time someone asks me, like, where are you from? They don't even know what a Roma person is... It's like I have to explain what a Roma person is."

Participants emphasised the importance of fostering an inclusive university environment where both students and staff are educated about Roma culture. This would shift the responsibility of cultural education away from Roma students, creating a space where they feel a genuine sense of belonging and acceptance:

"If anything happens to the community, I am expected to speak on behalf of the entire community, and that's not fair."

Participants highlighted Roma celebration days, such as Roma Culture Days and Annual Celebration Days (International Roma Day, Roma Genocide Memorial Day), as examples of good practice across universities. These events offer valuable opportunities for staff and students to engage with and learn about Roma culture, helping to foster a more inclusive and informed academic community. Additional initiatives like Traveller and Roma college societies, monthly coffee mornings for the Roma community and cultural celebrations could strengthen connections and create a welcoming environment for Roma students. However, participants stressed that these efforts must go beyond tokenism. Co-designing events with the Roma community is crucial to ensuring authenticity and meaningful impact. Moreover, Roma students should not be expected to serve as role models unless

they choose to do so. Offering paid positions for Roma individuals to plan and lead these initiatives would acknowledge their contributions and value their time.

"And I will proudly represent my ethnicity, stop hiding. And I will celebrate all my life Roma in Culture Day. And wherever I will go, I will say to young people, 'Don't hide because the future is in your hands. If you will hide our ethnicity, [we will] never succeed."

A couple of participants suggested establishing a Roma Community Studies Department to promote advocacy and deeper understanding of Roma culture. Such a department could empower Roma and non-Roma individuals to conduct research and facilitate education on Roma history and experiences. Enhancing library resources, incorporating Roma authors into reading lists, and hosting cultural exhibitions, talks, and workshops were also proposed as ways to increase awareness and celebrate Roma culture.

The presence of culturally informed staff was identified as a critical factor in creating supportive environments for Roma students. Participants advocated for Roma-specific spaces where students feel welcomed and empowered to express their identities without fear of racism or judgement. Ensuring that university staff and support workers are aware of the challenges and stigma faced by Roma communities is essential. Mandatory cultural awareness training, designed and delivered by Roma community members, was recommended to address these issues.

Participants emphasised the need for university departments to actively contribute to the creation of inclusive

spaces that enable Roma students to access the support they need in a welcoming and understanding manner.

Additionally, participants recommended that higher education institutions take the lead in integrating cultural awareness training into initial teacher education as well as professional development and postgraduate courses for teaching professionals. Teachers, guidance counsellors, and school leaders should also engage in mandatory cultural awareness training and reflective, critical discussions on race, creating inclusive classrooms and schools, and tackling racism and discrimination in the education system:

"It's not up to me to educate everyone."

"The responsibility should not fall on the individual from a minority ethnic group to constantly explain or justify their existence."

Despite the challenges, participants expressed pride in their community and optimism about the potential for universities to become more inclusive spaces. One participant remarked:

"I think I'm very proud of my community in general because we are nice people, very hardworking people. But the outside world doesn't see us like that. And I think being in this space here today, it's very important."

In conclusion, this theme highlights the lack of Roma representation in curricula and the emotional toll for some participants of educating others about Roma identity. Participants advocate for mandatory cultural awareness training for staff and students, co-designed with the Roma community as well as embedding Roma culture, visibility and representation throughout higher education institutions.

Pause for Reflection:
Think about the classes and materials you've encountered throughout your own education—how many of them included Roma history or culture?
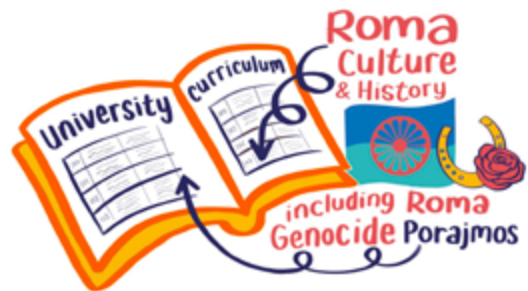
Postgraduate and Employment Opportunities

This theme examines the need for tailored career guidance, employer partnerships, and financial support to enable Roma students to progress to postgraduate employment and careers.

Roma participants shared the challenges they face in gaining relevant experience during their time at university, particularly the fear of not securing employment after graduation due to racism and discrimination. To address this, universities must strengthen connections

and partnerships with employers to provide Roma students with access to internships and job opportunities. This support will help students feel more confident in embracing their Roma identity in the workplace.

Participants highlighted the need for targeted measures such as mentoring and tailored programmes to support Roma students as they transition into employment. These initiatives can be facilitated through university career services and employment offices, ensuring that Roma students receive the guidance and resources they need to succeed in their careers. For example, utilising existing services like the university Careers Office and strengthening connections with employers could help Roma students secure employment opportunities while maintaining their cultural identity:

"Universities need to promote the students."

"It's up to the university to help the students into internships in industry or government jobs, and not leave the students after they graduate."

Career guidance specifically aimed at Roma students was also identified as a crucial area for development. Universities should create tailored career counselling programmes that address the unique challenges that Roma students face. Participants emphasised that policymakers and the government should expand funding pathways for internships and employment opportunities to better support the Roma community. This would ensure equal access to employment opportunities across diverse sectors for Roma students.

Additionally, funding for postgraduate courses was identified as a critical need to support Roma students in furthering their education and career aspirations.

"We have to show them we are here, and our voice needs to be heard. We are allowed to do it, and we are not going anywhere."

In conclusion, the systemic barriers, racism, and discrimination that Roma students face throughout their educational journeys highlight the urgent need for universities to play an active role in supporting their transition from education to employment. Given these challenges, it is essential that universities not only focus on helping Roma students graduate, but also ensure they are prepared for successful careers. This can be achieved through strategic partnerships with employers, offering internships, job opportunities, and targeted career guidance that acknowledges and supports the unique needs of Roma students. Universities must go beyond graduation, providing mentoring, tailored programmes, and financial support, particularly for postgraduate education. By doing so, they will help Roma students overcome the barriers they face, ensuring they are not met with racism or discrimination in accessing the workplace. Postgraduate education and career pathways are essential for long-term success, and universities must be fully committed to setting Roma students up for both academic and professional achievements.

Chapter Reflections

This chapter underscores how systemic racism and discrimination profoundly affect the Roma community, shaping their educational experiences. In order to create meaningful change, higher education institutions must lead efforts to combat anti-Roma racism and create inclusive environments where Roma students feel a strong sense of belonging.

HEIs must implement comprehensive anti-racism training and cultural awareness programmes while offering tailored financial, personal, and academic supports to address the unique barriers that Roma students face. Prioritising representation is critical, with strategies to increase Roma visibility across staff, leadership, and departments, as well as integrating Roma culture and contributions into curricula, outreach, and institutional celebrations. Additionally, HEIs have a vital role in teacher training, equipping educators with the skills to address systemic inequities, and in building partnerships with employers to ensure Roma graduates are supported in transitioning to meaningful employment.

True inclusion requires HEIs to move beyond symbolic gestures, engaging deeply with social and educational equity. This means not only providing robust supports for Roma students but also critically examining institutional practices that may perpetuate inequality. By embracing their responsibility as engines of social equity, HEIs can play a transformative role in creating a fairer and more inclusive society.

Chapter 4

Findings from the Traveller Consultation

Racism and Discrimination

Racism and discrimination emerged as a predominant theme in the challenges faced by Traveller students in the education system. Participants consistently reported experiences of racism and prejudicial attitudes from teachers, staff and peers. As you read through this chapter, you will find that historic and systemic racism and discrimination have a significant impact on all aspects of Travellers' educational experience and underpin all of the findings outlined below.

A significant proportion of participants reported experiencing racism and discrimination from teachers, non-teaching staff, and peers, resulting in bullying and exclusion throughout their education. Their primary and secondary school experiences revealed hostile environments characterised by deeply ingrained stereotypes and microaggressions that challenged their sense of belonging and participation. Consistent with previous research and findings from the Traveller Roma Education Strategy consultations, the research findings emphasise that Traveller students often face low or no expectations in schools, creating barriers to higher education. Moreover, many Traveller children are placed on reduced timetables, which parents perceive as disruptive to their access to quality education, perpetuating unequal outcomes for Traveller children (TRES, 2024). In addition to the discriminatory behaviour from teachers, participants recounted experiences of racism from non-teaching staff and peers. Bullying and exclusion were prevalent experiences that undermined self-confidence and limited opportunities for Traveller students to excel academically. These systemic barriers significantly impact their ability to view higher education as a viable or welcoming pathway.

> **"Primary, which should have been a good experience, turned out to be very bad from junior infants actually, five years old being singled out in front of everybody in the class and segregated and made feel like you're scraping off the bottom of the barrel."**

For many students, these negative interactions extended into higher education, where microaggressions and biases challenged their sense of belonging. Students continued to report a lack of cultural awareness and experiences of racism and discrimination from both staff and students during their time in higher education.

> **"A Lecturer said: 'I look like a k*****r' (about himself). I loved this lecturer, he's great. I had to go back to him and ask for a meeting and speak with him…… I don't need to be here explaining to a lecturer how to do better. It is on him to get to know the words he uses."**

Pause for Reflection:
What steps could you take if you heard a colleague or peer use offensive or discriminatory language, whether intentionally or unintentionally?

It is imperative to highlight that the word 'k*****r' is a racist term commonly used by people in Ireland and is highly offensive to the Traveller community (Joyce et al., 2022). The authors note that this word is never okay to use, even when not directly targeted at Travellers. Acknowledging the unacceptable nature of this racist slur, the authors have chosen not to reproduce it in full, instead referring to it as indicated above.

The quote below highlights that racism and discrimination against Travellers are entrenched and socially acceptable in Irish society. When a participant spoke about trying to stand up against racism, they faced further discrimination.

"A certain person goes and does something, and you follow up on it… but you hear this settled person saying 'Here they go again, (they're) playing the Traveller card."

The cumulative effects of racism and discrimination have severe consequences on mental health. Many participants spoke about the emotional toll of navigating a system that continuously marginalises their community. This was further compounded by intergenerational trauma, as negative experiences with education were transferred to others within families. Participants highlighted that the detrimental impact of racism, discrimination, and bullying during their educational experiences had negative effects on their mental well-being. They also discussed the high levels of suicide among Travellers and how this often correlates with the racism and discrimination faced throughout their lives.

"The one thing that struck me was the sense of loneliness and isolation because there's nobody here (higher education), and oftentimes throughout my educational journey, I felt very isolated."

Travellers are considered a 'high-risk' group for suicide, with rates six times higher than those of the general population. This statistic, based on confirmed suicide cases from the General Register Office (GRO), does not include external causes of death, such as alcohol or drug overdoses, which account for nearly 50% of all external causes of death among Traveller men (AITHS, 2010).

Pause for Reflection:
How can educational and professional institutions better support the mental well-being of Traveller and Roma individuals?

Participants called for systemic changes to effectively address racism and discrimination within higher education institutions (HEIs) and beyond. They emphasised the necessity of a whole-of-government approach to tackle racism, advocating for coordinated action at all government levels to ensure comprehensive and lasting change. This approach must prioritise the development of robust policies, accountability mechanisms, and targeted support to combat discrimination against Travellers.

Participants stressed the importance of implementing a zero-tolerance policy towards racism against Travellers within HEIs. One participant remarked that **"(HEIs) can't just move on if a comment is made."**

They pushed for clear accountability and consequences for racist behaviour, stating, "**(HEIs) need to follow up on inappropriate comments.**"

Anti-racism training was identified as critical to combating discrimination in higher education institutions (HEIs). Participants stressed that this training must be developed, delivered and led by Travellers, grounded in anti-racism best practices, and designed to address the unique challenges faced by Traveller communities. It should be interactive, action-based, and compulsory for all staff and students, with a monitoring process to ensure accountability and adherence.

A whole-institution approach to anti-racism was strongly advocated. This involves embedding anti-racist principles across all institutional policies and practices, including curriculum development, staff training, and student support. HEIs must champion impactful, mandatory training, launch awareness campaigns, and ensure ongoing advocacy and accountability. As influential societal institutions, HEIs play a pivotal role in shaping future teachers, employers, and employees, making it essential to embed anti-racism into their frameworks to drive transformative change.

The report highlights the historic and systemic racism experienced by Travellers and its pervasive impact. Addressing this requires systemic reform to create inclusive and equitable educational and professional spaces. Without such targeted efforts, the cycle of marginalisation will persist.
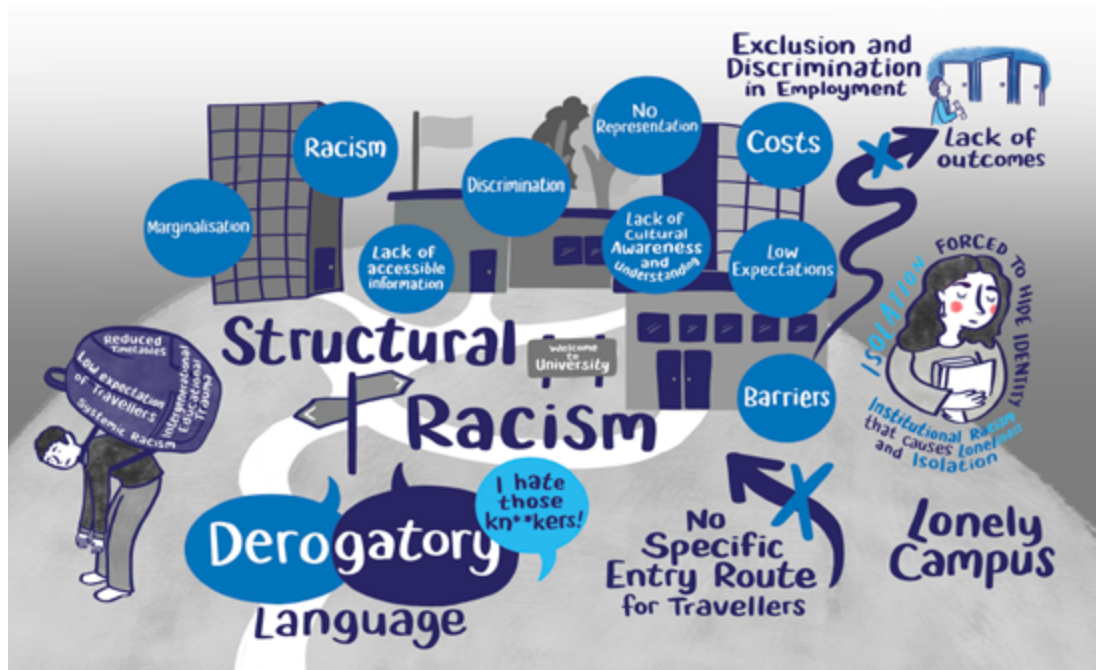
Identity and Belonging

"We are all in our own identity journey."

Exploring Traveller identity and cultural awareness formed a significant part of many participants' reflections and their sense of belonging within the education system. Students emphasised the importance of opportunities to explore and celebrate their Traveller identity during their education.

"And that's what the education system does to you. It tells you that you're not good enough, that Travellers are not good enough… You've broken through that barrier. But you're not allowed to bring the most important part of your identity with you."

There was also the case of how a participant's identity as a college student and their sense of appearance and image can differ from that of their identity in wider society. Some students spoke about changing their appearance or accent in order to try and fit in.

Some students described the challenges of navigating their identity, feeling as though they did not fully belong to either the Traveller or settled communities. This sense of being caught between two worlds was particularly acute for those who had one parent from the settled community and one from the Traveller community:

"But anyway, I guess in education, I was segregated by the Travellers for not being the Traveller. And… settled people being segregated because I was a Traveller, you know."

There was also the case of how a participant's identity as a college student and their sense of self and image can differ from that of their identity in wider society. Some students spoke about changing their appearance or accent to try and fit in, while others spoke about the internal conflict of where they fit in once they become educated.

"Once you become educated by settled society, are you really a Traveller anymore? Or are you a settled Traveller? Or you're from a Traveller background?"

Pause for Reflection:
Reflect on moments when you felt the need to monitor or modify your behaviour to fit into certain environments, and what caused you to do so?

Participants often felt unsafe to identify as a Traveller within educational environments due to the systematic and institutional racism they had faced throughout their educational journey and/ or life experiences. Disclosing their ethnicity to peers and educators was viewed negatively, leading to concealment of an important part of their identity. Most described hiding such a huge part of 'the self' as a negative experience.

"I just didn't feel like I could embrace or accept who I am. And, you know, to the extent wherein I identified via different surnames, that people don't know that I was a Traveller, and just overall just had a really horrific time in secondary school."

One participant described how barriers in the education system can lead to a hidden or diluted identity, with their sense of belonging questioned or compromised. This participant emphasised the importance of education being a space for celebrating identity and culture, rather than a space that dilutes or undermines one's identity:

"It's one thing going through the barrier but we need to be allowed bring our culture with us. We need to bring our identity with us at every step of the way or else it's no good for us."

The barriers of racism and discrimination that students encounter, combined with limited opportunities to belong and take pride in their Traveller ethnicity within educational institutions, profoundly impact their sense of self, restricting their ability to connect with their identity. This often led to significant mental health challenges and feelings of isolation for some participants. As one reflected:

"I hated who I was. I hated being a Traveller in college and then throughout the years and realised I started having mental health problems. Right, and why I was having mental health problems because I was lying to myself about who I was myself and that kind of, that core part of your identity."

Pause for Reflection:
What can be done to create spaces where people feel safe to express their true selves?

Despite these negative experiences in earlier stages of education, many participants reported feeling more comfortable sharing their identity and celebrating Traveller culture once they reached higher education.

Some were still on this journey but said they might feel more comfortable identifying over time or after graduation. Other participants repeatedly mentioned the crucial role of family in helping them embrace their identity.

"Purely just because my dad and my nanny they (are) the reason like I have such a strong bit of pride of who I am... it did take a long time to do that - within secondary school but through my father behind me we got there in the end."

Many students also highlighted the significant role of Traveller staff in HEIs in helping them reconnect with and proudly identify as Travellers:

"I never really connected again with the Travellers or anything until I met (Access worker). And she kind of took me here. And it's only since I've started doing this again that I've kind of found that piece of myself and like rediscovered my identity."

Participants shared the profound challenges of concealing their Traveller identity, driven by fear of prejudice and discrimination, which often led to isolation, diminished self-worth, and mental health struggles. Despite this, higher education emerged as a space for rediscovery and pride, with some participants reclaiming their cultural identity through supportive networks and mentors. The critical role of family and Traveller staff in fostering resilience and cultural pride underscores the importance of inclusive environments. These narratives emphasise the need for education systems to break down barriers and celebrate and integrate Traveller identity, enabling students to thrive authentically. HEIs must create conditions that make it easier for Traveller students to be open about their identity.

Pause for Reflection:
How can societal and systemic barriers in education or professional environments discourage Travellers from fully expressing their identities?

One Good Person

"For Travellers, there are lots of locks and chains around our education, but by one person doing something and going back, you can open up these locks and give other people access to it."

This sentiment encapsulates the importance of having one good person to guide, encourage, and support individuals in breaking through barriers on their educational journey. Throughout the consultation process, many participants highlighted the impact of one person who supported and encouraged them at different points of their educational journey. For some, this individual was a teacher, a school guidance counsellor, a mentor, a community worker, a lecturer, or an access worker who supported them to have belief and confidence in themselves. They emphasised the importance of these people being approachable, understanding, and effective advocates who helped students navigate complex systems, such as financial aid applications or enrolment procedures. In some cases, a single lecturer or staff member stood out through their empathy and flexibility, providing reassurance during difficult times and helping students feel seen and valued.

"But coming back to this thing on my photo here, is a photo of my lecturer and myself at my level 8 graduation. Because I believe in the world, we have that one good person that kind of helps you along the way. And in my level seven, originally, I did go to drop out because of, I suppose, the hardships that were happening for me at the time. But she kept me in."

"When I qualify, I will be just handing my (degree) certificate to him (participant's father), because I wouldn't be here without him."

Family Support

The importance of family support emerged as a strong theme among many participants throughout the consultation day. Some participants spoke passionately about their parents, grandparents, siblings, aunties, uncles and cousins—and the value they place on the impact family support had on their academic success. Many also highlighted the ripple effect that one family member's engagement in higher education can have on others. Some participants spoke about the strong value for education their parents had that encouraged them on their educational journeys. Others discussed instilling this value of education to their children. Participants spoke about the influence of seeing family members attend higher education and the impact that had on their own choices.

"So I suppose starting out my education experience growing up, I would have seen the likes of (names fellow participant) and his sister graduating and doing college courses and stuff. And it kind of led me to believe that I could do the same and, you know, be what I wanted to be…"

Others spoke of how attending higher education themselves changed family members' attitudes towards education and had a ripple effect on other family members.

"And of course he's doing (a) college course now with that as well. So looking at him to be a couple years ago telling me that I was a big eejit, and I was all these things for starting in (HEI). He is now asking me to help him with his assignments. So it's just good see how times change and the whole thing, and hopefully they will keep changing."

One participant emphasised this point during the Photovoice session, where they chose a photo of a key with locks and chains.

"The reason why I picked the picture, this picture is because my daughter started her Junior Cert yesterday. And she was saying to me she wanted to skip the transition year, do (it) then in two years and then go to college. She wants to do Community and Youth Work…. So the point I'm trying to make is for Travellers there are lots of locks and chains around our education but by one person doing something and going back you can open up these locks and give other people access to it."

Participants highlighted how this ripple effect is essential to increase the number of Travellers in higher education. During the world café session, simple things like 'more graduation tickets' were recommended to include the whole family in the student's higher education experience and the knock-on effect that can have on other family members. Most HEIs only give two tickets per student for graduation, but increasing this amount for large Traveller families could have a transformative effect. During an interview, another participant spoke about the importance of building relationships with Travellers and the knock-on effect this can have on the wider community.

"Build relationships with them because what knock-on effect will happen? The Traveller student would say they had such a great time in college. They'll tell their family, who will tell another family, and then it'll go around in the community. So it'll be kind of breaking down that stereotype that we perceive of education being against us."

The themes of "One Good Person" and "Family Support" work together to highlight the important roles individuals and family members have in students' educational journeys. Whether a family member, guidance counsellor, employer, lecturer, or mentor, these individuals provided the belief and support necessary to inspire participants to pursue and persist in their educational journeys. The ripple effect of such support often extended beyond the individual, influencing entire families and communities. For participants who felt they had family support, this underscored the deep value placed on familial encouragement, with parents and grandparents instilling pride in Traveller identity and a commitment to education. Together, these stories emphasise the profound impact of personal connections in supporting Travellers to access and thrive in higher education. However, participants noted that supporting Travellers should not rely on one good person and that it is up to institutions to provide adequate supports to ensure that this support is not dependent on individuals.

Financial Support

"If I didn't have SUSI, I wouldn't be here."

Some participants flagged poverty and overcrowded accommodation during the consultation and interviews. The financial challenges of attending college were especially significant for participants with children or caregiving responsibilities. Many participants also described the burden of long commutes and the associated travel expenses. The need for financial support was a universal concern, with participants emphasising its importance in enabling Travellers to access and participate in higher education.

"Kind of the financial side, and I found having my little one at home and only three (years old) and going back to college, like finances, was a big issue on whether or not I would have been able to get through the course."

The lack of financial support for part-time students was a significant concern, with participants noting that part-time courses often suit Traveller students juggling work or family commitments.

"Grants for part-time students are so important because childcare might hold them back from attending."

For many participants, financial concerns extended beyond tuition. Small gestures, such as providing printing credits or lunch vouchers, were described as meaningful ways to alleviate stress during their college journey:

"…if we needed supplies, like things like printing—even those days we got like a voucher for lunch. It was just things that took the burden off."

Participants stressed the importance of accessible, early information about financial aid. Delays in learning about available funding often resulted in missed opportunities:

"I didn't know I had to apply the year before. I didn't know until I came in, and sure then, it's too late."

The complexity, bureaucracy and means-testing processes of existing financial aid applications were identified as a significant challenge. Many found these systems overly demanding, with excessive paperwork and a lack of clear, user-friendly guidance. Such barriers often discouraged or prevented Traveller students from accessing essential resources. Simplifying these processes was strongly recommended to improve accessibility. The recurring need to reapply annually for financial aid added another layer of frustration:

"They ask for a lot of personal information... they made it so complicated it would put you off, and you just give up... What makes you think because I work during summer, that I can afford college for the rest of the year."

Some participants secured funding through community organisations, employers, employment schemes, grants, scholarships, or bursaries. However, this process was described as ad hoc, with no standardised financial scholarship specifically for Traveller students:

"I had to source funding from local organisations... there was no Traveller-specific funding."

Finally, some students highlighted that they can sometimes feel like they are being judged for seeking financial support. Participants emphasised that they '**don't want to feel like we are begging for supports**'.

Additionally, participants highlighted that financial support should be non-transactional. There should be no clauses or expectations from colleges for students to represent or undertake unpaid work to "give back" to the institution after receiving funding:

"It's not a transaction; you shouldn't be expected to give something back because you were given funding."

Furthermore, the ethical collection of ethnicity data was another key issue highlighted by those who participated in the consultation when discussing university and financial applications. Participants recognised the importance of collecting this information to design targeted supports and track progress in inclusivity. However, it was emphasised that such data must be collected transparently and used responsibly to ensure it serves the best interests of Traveller communities. Travellers should be told clearly why and how their data is being collected to enable them to feel comfortable in providing their ethnic data. Travellers should never be required to prove their identity, and ethnic data must only be collected voluntarily through a self-identification process.

A Traveller-specific scholarship emerged as a critical recommendation. Such a scholarship would acknowledge the long history of racism and discrimination they have endured in their educational journeys and address the unique financial burdens faced by Travellers. Given the small numbers of Travellers entering higher education, it is recommended that initially, the scholarship could be awarded to all Travellers entering higher education. As highlighted by the findings, it is important that financial aid is not means-tested, and it should not affect any student's social welfare benefits. Participants also called for a comprehensive Traveller support package that could be part and parcel of this scholarship. There is a clear need not only for financial assistance but also for personal, social and academic support services tailored to the specific needs of Traveller students, enhancing their overall higher education experience.

Pause for Reflection:
How can financial supports be more targeted to the specific needs of Travellers?

Visibility, Celebration and Representation

"More than likely, you are going to be the only Traveller in the class."

Many participants highlighted challenges in feeling a sense of belonging and the need to hide their identity within higher education. Many experienced loneliness and fear of judgement, leading to feelings of being an 'outsider.' To address these barriers, participants emphasised the transformative potential of visibility, celebration, and genuine representation of Traveller Culture throughout university life. Examples of successful practices, such as Cultural Celebration Days and Traveller-led initiatives, were identified as key strategies to create a welcoming culture for Traveller students.

"I find with a lot of Traveller students, they're wary of being on their own going into college—that they're not gonna fit in, that they may be judged, and that they'll be outsiders."

Participants spoke about others' lack of cultural awareness, noting that they often felt like the 'token Traveller kid' expected to represent the entire Traveller community.

"Travellers should be able to go to college without feeling like they need to be the answer to everything about Travellers."

The participants discussed the value of visual representation of Traveller and Roma culture within educational spaces. Initiatives such as Traveller and Roma Cultural Days and the inclusion of cultural symbols, like the barrel-top wagon, were praised for fostering a sense of belonging. These visible affirmations helped students feel seen, valued, and connected to their heritage.

"I saw the wagon on campus. There was something special about that. I stood there for 20 minutes—I just felt like I belonged there. Even seeing the country people there looking at our culture and not feeling like you're gonna be killed over it"

These events instil pride in Travellers and raise cultural awareness throughout the entire university community.

"When I talk about the wagon, country people often think we're crazy—they don't know what it is or understand its significance."

Participants proposed ways to enhance visibility and celebration of Traveller culture in higher education, including Traveller Pride events and University Open Days to invite Traveller families to campuses to provide information on scholarships, courses and support services.

Another idea was promoting Traveller representation online through targeted resources, videos, and photos to amplify their voices and experiences.

"Colleges need to promote themselves more, but in a way that is led by Travellers. Videos, photos, and other materials should feature Traveller voices and perspectives. Cultural awareness training and events, Traveller Pride initiatives, and programmes that connect Travellers to educational opportunities should all be part of this effort."

Participants stressed the importance of fostering visibility and celebration of Traveller culture on campuses. This includes integrating cultural awareness into teacher training, embedding Traveller culture into curricula, and hosting events such as Traveller Celebrations Days. However, they cautioned against tokenism, underscoring the need for community-driven, Traveller-led initiatives to achieve authenticity and sustainability.

Beyond visibility, genuine representation within higher education is crucial for creating a sense of belonging for Traveller students. Participants consistently highlighted the need for increased representation of Travellers in professional roles across all university departments—not only in access offices but also as lecturers, administrators, and university leaders. The presence of Traveller staff in these positions was seen as a vital step towards dismantling systemic barriers and creating a more inclusive academic environment.

"It's nice to have a person in university who knows what you're going through."

The importance of employing Travellers in student support roles was also a recurring theme. Having staff members who share lived experiences helps build trust, foster relationships, and create a safe space for students seeking guidance and support.

"That's what Travellers need. They need support from one another, not to be judged."

"If you're not from a Traveller background, you need a Traveller there. It doesn't work to have all settled people in a room with Travellers."

Representation and Traveller-led initiatives are essential for creating inclusive and equitable higher education environments. By adopting these approaches, higher education institutions can create an inclusive environment where Traveller students feel seen, valued, and empowered to embrace their identity without fear of judgement or isolation.

Throughout the day, participants highlighted successful initiatives arising from collaboration with community groups and HEIs. However, these efforts often occurred in silos within access offices or individual departments. A coordinated, whole-institution approach was deemed essential to maximise impact.

Collaboration with Traveller organisations is critical for creating inclusive and culturally respectful events. However, it was recognised that local Traveller organisations are often oversubscribed with high demand for collaboration without adequate funding and staff to support these partnerships. The imbalance of power and resources must be acknowledged to ensure equitable and sustainable collaboration.

Pause for Reflection:
What steps can you make to promote Traveller voices and perspectives in your place of study or work?

Cultural Awareness Training

Participants stressed the necessity of Traveller-led cultural awareness training for staff and students. They emphasised that universities must also hold themselves accountable as institutions that train future teachers to ensure that teachers receive cultural awareness training as part of their professional development, from primary education through to higher education.

"I think lecturers and teachers in primary and secondary schools need to be trained and familiar with the Irish Traveller and Roma community's culture and ways of living. Without this understanding, stereotypes persist, and people rely on hearsay instead of getting to know Travellers and their culture firsthand."

Participants highlighted the need to integrate cultural awareness and representation throughout the education system- from early childhood education to higher education. They stressed the importance of visibility in the curriculum to nurture pride and identity among Traveller children.

"The visibility of Traveller culture in the curriculum and the classroom helps ensure children grow up feeling they don't need to hide their identity. Without this, they carry the impact of cultural invisibility into the world."

Participants highlighted the critical need for Traveller-led cultural awareness training for staff and students. They pointed to the responsibility of universities, as institutions that prepare future educators, to ensure that cultural awareness training is integrated into teachers' training and professional development at all levels, from primary education to higher education.

In HEIs, participants noted that Traveller culture should be prominently reflected in curriculum content, libraries, reading lists and celebration days. These should be seamlessly integrated into all aspects of university life.

Flexibility of Options and Culturally Appropriate Supports

Flexible support systems are essential in creating equitable access to and success within higher education for Traveller students. These systems must account for Travellers' diverse responsibilities, cultural realities, and educational needs. Participants in consultations highlighted the importance of part-time courses, culturally sensitive teaching approaches, and flexible pathways that empower students to balance their education with caregiving, work, and other commitments. While many effective practices have emerged, challenges such as rigid structures and limited accommodations remain.

Many participants shared how they and their families, and the wider community, have had extremely negative experiences of education due to racism and discrimination. This has led to high levels of early school leaving amongst the community. Participants called for educators to recognise these traumatic experiences and provide appropriate and culturally sensitive supports to students earlier at primary and secondary school.

"There's no supports there in primary school for Travellers. So they're coming out of primary school, not being able to properly read, write, then they're put into secondary school. Well, when they're in secondary school, they're expected to adapt and take on the different level of subjects."

As outlined in the Traveller Roma Education Strategy (2024 – 2030), educational interventions must be happening at primary and secondary levels to ensure every Traveller reaches their full potential and all opportunities are afforded to them on their educational journeys.

Traveller-led initiatives were identified as best practices in creating inclusive pathways for Travellers into higher education. Participants emphasised the principle of "**nothing about us, without us**," advocating for Traveller leadership in the design and delivery of programmes. They highlighted the importance of hosting initiatives close to Traveller communities to increase accessibility and engagement.

"When we hold study classes, homework clubs, or women's groups near Traveller areas, the numbers go up. If we hold them in schools or places too far away, there's only one or two who show up."

The Whidden Workshops were identified as a model of good practice that could be embedded across all HEIs. This cross-institutional initiative supports Traveller

and Roma students in accessing and navigating higher education. Traveller and Roma students lead the workshops, allowing students and graduates to share their educational journeys with secondary school Traveller and Roma students, offering advice, inspiration, and a sense of connection. One participant described its impact on them:

"Lucky enough—I found Whidden Workshops. Only for the Whidden Workshops, would I be in college?"

PATH 5 Traveller Access/Outreach Officers were described as pivotal in supporting students throughout their educational journeys. These roles are essential for guiding students through complex processes like financial aid and enrolment. Participants spoke highly of the dedication of these staff members, who have spent years building trust and cultivating relationships with students and their communities. There was a strong call from participants to expand these positions, with a particular emphasis on including more community support workers, starting in primary and secondary schools and continuing through higher education.

"It's very important to have peer education workers in primary, secondary, and third level."

However, challenges persist. Some participants who also serve as PATH 5 Access Officers in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) voiced concerns about the often invisible workloads shouldered by Traveller staff. These roles are marked by exceptional commitment to their communities, usually extending far beyond contracted hours. Because many staff members are from the community, they

are frequently seen as the go-to person for any education-related issue. This responsibility can blur the lines between their professional and personal lives. Over time, this dynamic can lead to unrealistic expectations and mounting pressure on staff in these newly established roles. Furthermore, many of these roles are funded through temporary contracts, which can lead to higher staff turnover and undermine the trust and relationships built with the community.

"Because of the funding round, our jobs could be gone tomorrow. There needs to be a permanent person who can support students from start to finish."

While participants recognised these roles as invaluable, the concerns raised must be addressed before further expanding these positions. Adequate support must be made available for staff, and the responsibility for supporting Traveller and Roma students in higher education must not fall solely on PATH 5 workers. Systemic reform is necessary, and a comprehensive, whole-of-institution approach should be implemented, guided by a collaborative community development model.

The need for flexible and culturally appropriate support systems and pathways was a recurring theme among Traveller participants. Many described the difficulties of balancing educational responsibilities with complex personal lives, including caregiving, parenting, and full-time work. Participants expressed frustration with rigid timetables, limited accommodations for personal circumstances like mental health and family obligations, and inadequate study spaces.

These challenges underscore the importance of culturally aware lecturers and adaptable arrangements that encourage students' inclusion and success.

"With the assignments, I actually found that struggle because I am a young mother myself I have three kids at home and just lived on a halting site and taking out the books at a table where a knock could come to the door and you could have visitors coming in. That was kind of a big struggle for me."

Participants consistently emphasised the need for education systems to "**meet students where they are at**," advocating for more adaptable, inclusive, and flexible pathways. Some pointed out that the combination of negative school experiences, which leads to early school leaving, alongside the mature student entry minimum age requirement (23), with a tendency for child-caring responsibilities by their early twenties, creates a significant barrier. This age threshold inhibits students wishing to return to education in their late teens or early twenties until they reach 23. They called for part-time and flexible course options that would eliminate the age restrictions on alternative pathways to education.

Other participants supported these calls, commending successful partnerships between specific departments and Traveller and Roma community organisations that established accessible pathways through progressive qualification opportunities. However, these programmes were also critiqued for being inaccessible to some students, as they were only available to those aged 23 or older.

> **"Well, actually, five years ago I (did) a Return to Learning (course) through (name of community worker)... I suppose, she seen something in us. And then (name of lecturer), as I said, came to us again four years ago and said, 'Look it, the degree is coming up there again. Will ya just, will ya try it out?'"**

The transition between further and higher education courses showcases successes and areas for improvement. Some participants spoke about the benefits of further education in preparing them for higher education. Some had completed access courses, Youthreach and various level 6 and 7 courses. One participant gave an example of good practice in a pathway being created from Youthreach through to further and higher education:

> **"So it's basically like a transition route where students from Youthreach go to the HEI for one year and then sample other courses and stuff and the HEI while also keeping their Youthreach payment. So that was a great way to bridge the gap between students from Youthreach to college."**

Participants highlighted literacy, digital literacy and technology supports as essential during the consultation. Participants suggested making such technology widely available through access services or other institutional supports to assist students with literacy difficulties. One participant noted that although some of their peers struggled

with reading and writing, technology offered potential for inclusion saying, "**(there is) so much software out there that they can use like the voice for writing an essay.**" The importance of digital literacy support for mature students was emphasised. The quote below demonstrates that with the proper support, it is never too late for someone to achieve their educational goals:

> **"My dad was asking me how to use (Microsoft) Word. He never went to secondary school—now he's doing his Masters."**

Some participants also mentioned them or peers having hidden or undiagnosed disabilities, which made it more challenging to navigate their journey through higher education. They praised the supports received by their HEI's disability service.

> **"If I didn't have it, I didn't think I'd get through college. I thought I was stupid – turns out I had dyslexia."**

Due to the knock-on effects of the systematic and institutional racism and low expectations, and the feelings of loneliness and isolation within higher education on the mental health of Travellers. HEIs must provide mental health supports through counsellors who are culturally aware of the issues the community faces.

The insights shared by Traveller students underscore the critical role of flexible support systems in higher education. Programmes like Youthreach, access courses, return-to-learning initiatives, and further education courses have demonstrated their value in bridging gaps and building confidence. At the same time, culturally aware lecturers and adaptable accommodations can create a sense of belonging and success. However, significant barriers persist, including literacy challenges, inaccessible pathways, and insufficient mental health supports. By expanding flexible course offerings, leveraging disability supports, and ensuring culturally competent services, higher education institutions can create opportunities that genuinely "**meet students where they are at.**"

Employment and Postgraduate Opportunities

Participants expressed significant concerns about job opportunities after graduation, citing racism and discrimination as persistent barriers. Many shared their fears about investing time and effort in higher education, only to face discrimination based on their Traveller identity when seeking employment:

"The stigma around Travellers not being able to go into jobs is a barrier. It's worrying to put three or four years of effort into a course, and then find your surname has more of an impact than your degree."

Some participants felt compelled to "**hide who you are to get a job**" due to fears of discrimination. The pressure to hide one's identity in the workplace also had a significant impact on well-being:

"You shouldn't have to walk away from your community to be educated or employed, but discrimination makes it so hard."

While participants acknowledged that higher education qualifications improved their employment prospects, they noted that opportunities were often limited to community development roles within Traveller and Roma organisations. These roles are vital but can restrict graduates' potential to explore diverse career paths.

Workplace schemes, internships, and partnerships between higher education institutions (HEIs) and industries were identified as positive measures. Paid internships with organisations like the HSE and the Department of Justice were praised for their supportive environments and creation of direct pathways to employment:

"And then what I found great was that the Access Office was linked in with (Employer) and (Name of Traveller Outreach Officer) sent me an email one day and rang me about an opportunity in (Organisation) where it was linked with college where they give students a placement during the summer of the course. And it's paid placement and then you're guaranteed your job afterwards."

Such good practices were seen as examples to be expanded across all departments and disciplines, not just limited to a couple of departments. Participants emphasised the need for diverse career pathways across all disciplines, reducing the assumption that Traveller and Roma graduates should exclusively work within their communities. Participants emphasised that, as with all access and progression initiatives supporting Travellers, employment strategies and supports must align with best practices in community development, which must be developed and delivered collaboratively with the community. They also stressed the importance of a cohesive, university-wide approach that encourages interdepartmental and cross-departmental collaboration, rather than working in isolated silos.

"There shouldn't be the perception of not getting a job when you leave. Employment support is great in areas like youth work or social studies—but it doesn't have to be limited to the same department."

Tailored career guidance from culturally aware staff was also recommended to help Traveller students navigate career opportunities:

"Maybe for Traveller students, towards the end of your course, there could be culturally tailored career guidance—because I don't know what's out there."

Strengthening connections between employers and university career services was identified as a key approach to create more inclusive opportunities. Additionally, securing funding for postgraduate courses surfaced as a crucial need, allowing Traveller students to advance their education and broaden their career possibilities.

"Encouragement and information about postgrad masters, and future opportunities would really help."

Addressing workplace discrimination and promoting cultural awareness is vital for Traveller graduates to better benefit from their higher education qualifications. Strengthening university career services, connecting with employers, and providing tailored guidance can bridge the education-employment gap. While community-focused roles are valuable, career opportunities must

encompass all disciplines, reflecting the diverse aspirations of Traveller graduates. Universities should be accountable for their students' post-graduation outcomes, ensuring career guidance and pathways for all Traveller students. Paid internships and partnerships with employers can support Traveller graduates in achieving their career goals while honouring their cultural identity. By implementing these measures across all disciplines, HEIs and industry partners can create a more equitable landscape that truly reflects the capabilities and ambitions of Traveller students.

Pause for Reflection:
What can HEIs do to better support their Traveller graduates into employment, after they have successfully graduated?

Chapter Reflections

A key takeaway from this research is that true inclusion in HEIs requires robust supports for Traveller students and a critical examination of practices that perpetuate inequality. There is a pressing need to promote educational environments that support Travellers' academic success and emotional well-being. Participants emphasise the importance of anti-racism training for staff and students, highlighting anti-Traveller racism, a zero-tolerance policy for discrimination, and accountability mechanisms to ensure HEIs actively combat racism at all levels.

HEIs, as powerful drivers of social equity, must lead transformative change. They have a responsibility to create safe, welcoming spaces for Traveller students and dismantle discriminatory systems. Institutions should adopt a whole-institution approach to anti-racism, integrating anti-racist principles into curricula, staff training, and student services. HEIs must visibly celebrate Traveller culture to truly support these students, ensuring their identity is recognised and embraced, not hidden. Traveller-led programs and the recruitment of Traveller staff at all levels are vital for a genuinely inclusive academic environment.

Moreover, the findings call for a renewed focus on creating pathways that lead to academic achievement and meaningful employment opportunities. Addressing workplace discrimination and enhancing career support services within HEIs will enable Traveller graduates to thrive beyond their education. Universities should be accountable for their students' academic success and postgraduation outcomes, ensuring that career opportunities are accessible to Traveller graduates in all disciplines.

While these challenges are significant, models of good practice have been identified. A great deal of valuable work is already happening within certain HEIs, but much of it remains in silos. This highlights the need for a coordinated and unified approach to support Traveller students effectively. National policies, such as the Traveller Roma Education Strategy (TRES), are much welcomed; however, the strategy places limited emphasis on further and higher education. Similarly, while the National Access Plan (NAP) 2022–2028 explicitly prioritises Traveller and Roma access, progress is hindered by limited data availability and a lack of sustainable funding. This chapter underscores the necessity of systemic and sustainable action, calling for robust policies supported by long-term funding and transparent accountability mechanisms. The NAP mid-way review in 2025 presents a crucial opportunity for policymakers to address these gaps. We strongly urge those involved in the review process to utilise the insights and recommendations of this report as they move forward into 2026 and beyond.

Only through implementing systemic reforms, guided by the voices of the communities affected, can HEIs genuinely become places of transformative social change, where all students are empowered to reach their full potential in an inclusive, supportive, and fair environment. This is not just a moral obligation for HEIs but a societal imperative. By addressing systemic racism and championing social equity, HEIs can help to create a more just, inclusive, and equitable society for all.

Chapter 5

Recommendations and Conclusion

Introduction

The findings highlighted in this report are rooted in a history of systemic racism and discrimination faced by Traveller and Roma communities. These issues have profoundly impacted their access to, participation in, and outcomes from higher education. This report calls on the state, Irish society, and higher education institutions to stop, reflect, and take responsibility for acknowledging these injustices. There is a duty on HEIs to critically examine norms, implicit biases, and systemic structures that have normalised exclusion and inequity within higher education. This process of reflection must be paired with meaningful, affirmative, and transformative actions to remove barriers and embed inclusion at every stage- from access to higher education, through continued success during studies, and into postgraduate opportunities and outcomes.

Progress is being made—albeit slowly. More Travellers and Roma are entering and graduating from higher education in Ireland than ever before. The government has committed to the continued implementation of both the *National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy (NTRIS)* and the *Traveller and Roma Education Strategy (TRES)*, and Traveller and Roma communities are now explicitly prioritised within the *National Access Plan (NAP) 2022–2028*.

The recommendations presented in this report build directly on these national policies, aiming to drive forward actionable and sustainable change across the higher education system. While frameworks such as TRES are welcome developments, they place limited emphasis on further and higher education. Similarly, although the NAP highlights the importance of Traveller and Roma inclusion, its effectiveness is currently limited by persistent gaps in data collection and the lack of sustainable, long-term funding.

This report's recommendations are intended to complement and reinforce these national strategies. They should be implemented in alignment with TRES, NAP, and other key initiatives including the *National Action Plan Against Racism* and the *HEI Race Equality Action Plans* currently being drafted by higher education institutions. Moreover, findings from participants' earlier educational experiences underscore the need to fully implement the *Cineáltas: Action Plan on Bullying*, with a particular focus on addressing racist bullying in schools. The report also highlights the urgent need to realise the health-related commitments outlined in the *National Traveller Health Action Plan* and the *National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy*.

Together, these recommendations underscore the necessity of systemic and sustainable action—action that is supported by robust policies, long-term investment, and clear accountability mechanisms. The mid-term review of the NAP in 2025 presents a vital opportunity for policymakers to address the current shortcomings and embed meaningful reform. We urge those leading this process to draw on the insights and proposals in this report as they shape the path forward into 2026 and beyond.

The recommendations put forward in this report offer a roadmap for policymakers and HEIs to acknowledge and address systemic racism and discrimination, while increasing access, retention, success,

and progression for Traveller and Roma students. Importantly, this report includes an Action Plan (Appendix 5) for the development and implementation of a Traveller and Roma Higher Education Inclusion Strategy, providing a cohesive and comprehensive framework to guide efforts for transformative and sustainable change. The Action Plan includes key actions for each of the recommendations, where responsibility lies (whether government departments, the HEA or the HEIs themselves), and how actions link to the National Access Plan Goals.

Ensure a Community and Values-Driven Approach

Actively involving Traveller and Roma communities in the design and consultation processes for policies, funding calls, programmes and initiatives is essential. The process itself is paramount-policies and programmes must be developed using a community development approach grounded in values of collaboration, meaningful participation, and social justice. Successful initiatives identified through this report, consistently share a key feature: they are Traveller- and Roma-led, values-driven, and developed through genuine community engagement.

The success of these programmes is not determined by the specific details or content alone but by their **community-driven approach**. Tokenistic or transactional practices undermine this success and must be eradicated. If there is one overarching principle to take from these recommendations, it is that meaningful engagement, guided by community development principles, is the foundation for creating impactful and lasting change.

Recommendations

1	Implement a National, Coordinated Approach to Supporting Traveller and Roma Higher Education Students
2	Provide Ring-fenced, Long-term Funding to Support Traveller and Roma Higher Education Students
3	Mandate Institution-Wide Anti-Racism and Cultural Awareness Training for Staff and Students
4	Embed Traveller and Roma Culture and History into University Practices and Curricula
5	Collect and Report on Ethnicity Data
6	Provide Pre-Entry Targeted Outreach and Information for Traveller and Roma Students
7	Establish Flexible Access Routes
8	Provide Traveller and Roma Financial Scholarships
9	Implement Comprehensive Mental Health, Wellbeing Support, and Post-Entry Support for Traveller and Roma Students
10	Develop Employment Pathways and Post-Graduate Outcomes

1. Implement a National, Coordinated Approach to Supporting Traveller and Roma Higher Education Students

Findings show that support for Traveller and Roma students in higher education is inconsistent across institutions.

While good practices exist, they are not applied nationally. A coordinated approach is needed to ensure that, no matter which Higher Education Institution (HEI) a student attends, they can access the same targeted support. This should build on existing frameworks like the Traveller and Roma Education Strategy (TRES) and the National Access Plan (NAP) while working closely with community organisations to prevent fragmentation.

A National Coordinator should be appointed to oversee Traveller and Roma student support, with dedicated HEI coordinators in each institution to drive implementation. Pre-entry and post-entry support roles should be funded to assist students both before and during their time in higher education. The staff in these roles should receive their own supervision and mental health support. Additionally, a national network should be established to connect HEIs, policymakers, and community organisations, ensuring collaboration, knowledge-sharing, and a Traveller – and Roma-led approach.

2. Provide Ring-fenced, Long-term Funding to Support Traveller and Roma Higher Education Students

Participants highlighted the need for government to take responsibility for ensuring stable, long-term funding to address systemic racism and support Traveller and Roma students in higher education.

Funding must go beyond individual supports to tackle the structural barriers that Travellers and Roma face in accessing and thriving within higher education. Core, ring-fenced funding is essential to increase access, participation, and success while addressing historical and systemic inequities through well-resourced interventions. Short-term or precarious funding models undermine progress, leading to staff turnover, unstable support structures, and weakened trust with Traveller and Roma communities. To implement the recommendations in this report effectively, sustainable funding models are essential to ensure long-term impact and lasting structural change.

Cultural events co-designed with the Roma Community

3. Mandate Institution-Wide Anti-Racism and Cultural Awareness Training for Staff and Students

Systemic and structural racism and discrimination underpinned all of the findings discussed in this report.

To create an inclusive and equitable higher education system, anti-racism and cultural awareness training must be mandated across all institutions. This training should not be optional but a core requirement for all staff and students, ensuring a sector-wide commitment to combating racism. Government oversight is essential to enforce these measures, with institutions required to report on training outcomes in alignment with Race Equality Action Plans. A zero-tolerance approach to racism must be implemented, with clear policies addressing racist language and behaviour, accompanied by meaningful consequences.

Accountability mechanisms must be embedded at all levels, including mandatory reporting on incidents of racism, training participation, and policy enforcement. A unified framework should be developed to ensure consistency across higher education institutions, integrating anti-racism training into teacher education, career guidance, and all professional training programs. A whole-institution approach is necessary-responsibility should not fall solely on access offices, but rather be embedded across all departments and leadership structures. To be effective, this training should be action-based, ongoing, and developed in collaboration with Traveller and Roma communities, ensuring it is responsive to their lived experiences. One-off sessions are insufficient; sustained, continuous training is required to foster lasting institutional change and create a safe, inclusive learning environment for all.

4. Embed Traveller and Roma Culture and History into University Practices and Curricula

Participants highlighted the value of celebrating Traveller and Roma history and culture.

Higher education institutions must fully integrate Traveller and Roma culture and history across all disciplines, ensuring they are not confined to social sciences but embedded throughout the curriculum. Universities must create a progressive and inclusive curriculum that highlights the positive contributions and cultural heritage of Traveller and Roma communities while addressing historical and ongoing systemic racism. Teaching must go beyond surface-level inclusion to reflect both traditional and contemporary aspects of these communities, representing their full diversity and evolution. Institutions must eliminate tokenistic approaches by embedding Traveller and Roma culture as a normal and valued part of university life. Universities must also commit to increasing the representation of Traveller and Roma staff in all roles, including leadership positions.

5. Collect and Report on Ethnicity Data

Findings showed the lack of data on Traveller and Roma education and participation.

Higher education institutions must systematically collect and report ethnicity data to ensure a comprehensive understanding of Traveller and Roma students' experiences. All institutions must gather this data ethically, following best practices and maintaining consistency across the sector. Data collection must be linked to student registration, with a clear mandate for reporting to the Higher Education Authority (HEA).

Students must have the choice to self-identify in a safe and supportive environment. Institutions must create transparent processes that explain why and how data is collected, ensuring trust and encouraging participation. Data collection must go beyond enrolment figures to track post-graduation outcomes, providing insights into student progress and career trajectories. Strengthening data collection and reporting is essential for holding institutions accountable and developing policies that genuinely improve access, participation, and success for Traveller and Roma students in higher education.

6. Provide Pre-Entry Targeted Outreach and Information for Traveller and Roma Students

Participants emphasised the need to provide targeted support to Traveller and Roma communities earlier in the education system, before they enter university.

Higher education institutions must actively engage Traveller and Roma students long before they apply to university. Targeted outreach programmes must begin in primary and secondary schools, working in partnership with parents and community organisations. Universities must provide clear and accessible information about entry routes, funding opportunities, scholarships, and available support, ensuring this information is tailored to the specific needs of Traveller and Roma communities.

Targeted outreach efforts must extend beyond access offices and social sciences, involving all academic departments to create a university-wide approach. Every discipline must take responsibility for engaging with prospective Traveller and Roma students, ensuring they see themselves represented across all fields of study. Institutions must also learn from successful models, such as the Whidden Workshops, to design effective outreach initiatives that build trust and demonstrate a genuine commitment to inclusion. Expanding and improving outreach efforts is essential to increasing participation and breaking down barriers to higher education for Traveller and Roma students.

7. Establish Flexible Access Routes

Participants identified inflexible pathways and intrusive documentation and entry requirements as barriers to accessing higher education. They emphasised the importance of skills, access and foundation programmes.

Higher education institutions must create flexible and inclusive access routes that recognise the diverse pathways Traveller and Roma students may take into university. Pre-access and tailored skills programmes must be introduced to support students in developing essential skills such as digital literacy and academic writing. These return-to-learning courses must be free from age or fee restrictions to ensure that all prospective students can participate, regardless of background or previous educational experience.

Access courses must be designed to provide students with clear information on subject choices and career pathways, helping them to explore their interests and capabilities before committing to a degree programme. Institutions must implement flexible academic entry routes by removing intrusive and excessive documentation requirements in schemes like HEAR and DARE. Ethnicity should always be self-reported, with no requirement for verification. A more accessible and adaptable admissions process is essential to increasing participation and ensuring Traveller and Roma students have fair and equal opportunities to enter higher education.

8. Provide Traveller and Roma Financial Scholarships

Participants consistently highlighted the urgent need for comprehensive financial support in order to be able to access, participate and succeed in higher education.

Higher education institutions must offer comprehensive financial scholarships that address the intersectional barriers faced by Traveller and Roma students, including poverty and systemic racism. These scholarships should cover a broad range of expenses, such as accommodation, travel, childcare, and food, as an affirmative action measure to ensure that all students can access higher education without financial barriers.

Scholarships must be universally accessible and not competitive, ensuring that all eligible students benefit. Eligibility should be based on self-identification, with no requirement for verification. Universities must remove intrusive documentation processes that could limit access to these essential supports. Financial support should not be means-tested, meaning income should not affect eligibility. Additionally, scholarships must not impact students' social welfare benefits, allowing them to maintain their entitlements. Institutions should also expand SUSI eligibility to include Traveller, Roma, and all part-time students. Flexibility is crucial in adapting to students' diverse needs and circumstances.

9. Implement Comprehensive Mental Health, Wellbeing Support, and Post-Entry Support for Traveller and Roma Students

Findings emphasised the need for extensive, targeted, wrap-around support post-entry into higher education, including comprehensive mental health and wellbeing support.

Higher education institutions must prioritise the mental health and wellbeing of Traveller and Roma students by offering long-term, culturally sensitive counselling services. These services should move beyond short-term models and provide ongoing, tailored support that acknowledges the unique challenges faced by these communities. Counsellors must receive specific, culturally aware training to equip them with the knowledge to understand the trauma, stress, and discrimination that Traveller and Roma students often experience. Mental health initiatives should also directly address the impact of identity, bullying, racism, and systemic barriers, ensuring that these factors are integral to support efforts.

In addition, institutions must appoint dedicated Traveller and Roma support workers to offer personalised, holistic support throughout the student journey, ensuring this role complements, rather than replaces, mainstream supports. Mentorship and peer support programmes, led by Traveller and Roma students, should be developed to foster a sense of belonging and provide guidance throughout university life.

Flexible and consistent support is essential, including extended deadlines, exam accommodations, and considerations for family events, to ensure that both full-time and part-time students receive the necessary adjustments.

10. Develop Employment Pathways and Post-Graduate Outcomes

Findings discussed the racism and discrimination faced by Traveller and Roma during work placements, internships and employment as well as the fear of not securing employment post-graduation due to their identity.

HEIs must build strong partnerships with employers and implement targeted career development programmes through their careers offices. These programmes should be part of a whole-of-institution approach, tailored to meet the needs of students.

Employers should be engaged in the creation of paid internships and placements that offer degree-related pathways. Personalised career support, including mentoring and networking opportunities, must be provided to guide students' career development.

Inclusive hiring practices must be promoted by recognising employers who support graduates, encouraging equitable hiring. Institutions must implement accountability measures to address racism or discrimination in placements and the workplace, ensuring fair treatment. Finally, specific funding should be allocated for Traveller and Roma to pursue level 9 and level 10 postgraduate degree opportunities.

11. Roma-Specific Recommendations

i) Roma participants highlighted the need for some additional recommendations that were specific to the Roma community.

ii) Higher education institutions must introduce pre-access and tailored programmes to support Roma mature students, including specialised English language support through collaboration with Education and Training Board and Further Education and Training centres. These programmes will help Roma mature students build essential language skills before entering higher education.

iii) Further Participatory Action Research is needed with Roma students in further and higher education to better understand their experiences and challenges. This research will help inform policies and practices to improve outcomes for Roma students.

iv) Data collection on Roma students should be strengthened, with ambitious targets established for Roma representation in the National Access Plan. These targets will help measure progress and ensure that Roma students have equitable opportunities to access and succeed in higher education.

v) Universities must embed Roma history into curricula, particularly by acknowledging and educating students and staff on the Roma Genocide. This will ensure that Roma history is fully recognised and integrated into university practices.

vi) Lastly, the Department of Social Protection must be urged to clarify the Habitual Residence Condition (HRC) and the requirements for PPS numbers. Addressing these barriers can ensure Roma students can access financial support and other entitlements.

It's important that our Roma young people, everybody who works in this field, Travellers, Roma, stand up and shout loud and loud and loud, and make sure that we get the outcomes, we can do so much research, so many things. But if we don't have (the) outcomes (from the) research, you're not gonna get anywhere.

The Importance of Collecting ethnicity data and further Roma research

SURVEY ethnicity

Concluding Remarks

This report provides a unique contribution to the higher education sector through its peer-led approach, combining the academic and community-driven perspectives of professionals directly engaged with Traveller and Roma communities. This dual perspective enhances the credibility and relevance of the findings, reflecting a practical understanding of the barriers faced. Rooted in participatory action research, conducted across four institutions, this report wishes to drive tangible change.

By advocating for meaningful reform within HEIs, this report urges institutions to reflect on their role in perpetuating exclusion and inequity, calling for comprehensive and sustainable changes to support Traveller and Roma students. The recommendations and clear action plan presented in the appendices of the online report, offer a roadmap for implementation and an opportunity to influence policy, including the mid-way review of the National Access Plan and HEI anti-racism strategies.

The recommendations outlined call for a multi-layered approach to address systemic barriers in higher education. Actions such as implementation of ring-fenced funding, mandatory anti-racism training, and targeted mental health and student support will create a more inclusive and supportive environment. Embedding cultural awareness and Traveller and Roma history and culture into curricula, ensuring accessible financial support, and creating clear employment pathways are crucial to reducing barriers.

To ensure there is lasting change, collaboration, sustained investment, and accountability are key. HEIs, government bodies, and community organisations must work together to implement these recommendations effectively, creating a more inclusive and equitable higher education system for Traveller and Roma students.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Examples of Targeted Measures for Traveller and Roma Students in Higher Education

As part of the literature review, a scoping exercise was carried out to explore what types of programmes HEIs are offering already for Traveller and Roma students. A list of the initiatives, scholarships and programmes found are collated in Appendix 1. This list has been collated into a table which represents some of the specific targeted measures which are being implemented by some higher education institutions in Ireland. Please note this is not an exhaustive list but is derived from searching of Irish HEI websites for initiatives or programmes which specifically mention targeting either the Traveller or Roma community in Ireland. This may act as a reference point for stakeholders who want to strengthen their engagement with Traveller and Roma communities however it must be noted that many of the interventions mentioned are not evaluated and therefore the impact of which cannot be determined by the authors.

Name	Target Group/ Participants	Intervention	Impact	Further Information
Whidden Workshops	Prospective Traveller & Roma students	Whidden Workshops – Its Kusti to Rokker (WWKR) is a virtual, peer-led workshop series where Traveller and Roma students connect to inspire, inform, and encourage participation in higher education.	• Winner of AONTAS Star award for Third-Level Access and Engagement	https://www.soarforaccess.ie/latest-news/whidden-workshops-its-kusti-to-rokker-wwkr/
The TOBAR Project	2nd & 3rd level students from a Traveller background, that wish to pursue teaching as a career.	The TOBAR Project offers tailored supports for Traveller students in 2nd & 3rd level education to progress to become primary and secondary school teachers. Supports include academic assistance, social supports on campus, personal mentoring, financial assistance for college fees and associated expenses, counselling and additional needs support,	• Increased numbers of teachers from the Traveller community in the education system. • Increased cultural competency of Traveller	https://www.mie.ie/en/study_with_us/diversity_and_inclusion_programmes/tobar/

		and new qualified teacher (NQT) post college assistance.	culture in the education system. • Increased numbers of Traveller students in HE.	
Leadership in the Community programme	Traveller Women	The Leadership in the Community Programme is delivered in partnership with the Southern Traveller Health Network, University College Cork, Adult and Continuing Education (ACE), and funded by SOAR Project. The programme fosters an inclusive learning atmosphere, empowering Traveller women to gain qualifications to work in and with their own communities and transition on to higher education (Level 7 Diploma).	• It recognises the lived experience and cultural expertise of Traveller women to become leaders and changemakers in their own communities. • Increased numbers of Travellers in higher education.	https://www.ucc.ie/en/news/2022/women-from-the-travelling-community-graduate-from-life-changing-ucc-course.html

| Certificate in Learning to Learn at Third Level | Traveller Adult Learners | Mincéirí Port Láirge in partnership with SETU (South East Technological University) co-created a Level 6 transitional access qualification to higher education for Traveller adult learners. The syllabus includes the discovery of own learning style, challenges in HE, supports available, time management, study planning, academic writing, etc.

The course is delivered in the community and is free of charge. | • Increases Traveller student ability to work at third level.
• Increases number of Traveller students in higher education. | https://minceiriportlairge.ie/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Flyer_Learning-to-Learn-at-Third-Level.pdf |
| Certificate in Mentoring in Education | Individuals from within the Traveller community to educate and | The Certificate in Mentoring in Education is a short training programme by Munster Technological University (Kerry) to eligible members of the Traveller community. The Certificate enables these individuals to become mentors to traveller students in leaving | • Provides additional support for Traveller students and parents.
• Increase Access to Higher Education. | https://www.mtu.ie/courses/tlhmeduu/ |

	mentor Travellers in secondary education.	certificate year and transitioning into higher education.	• Provide positive mentor and role modelling opportunities to Traveller students.	
The Traveller Graduate Network	Current and prospective Traveller students.	The Traveller Graduate Network aims to inspire and support current and prospective students from the Traveller community by providing peer lead networking, mentoring, workshops, and hosting Traveller specific job fairs.	• Potential positive shift in Traveller perspective of educational achievement potential. • Increased visibility of Traveller role models with third level qualifications. • Culturally competent peer support infrastructure.	https://www.soarforaccess.ie/latestnews/traveller-graduate-network/ (Brennan, Cummins, Leane, Ó Súilleabháin, McGovern & Quiligan, 2024)

				https://doi.org/10.1080/03323315.2024.2330890
Mentoring in Education	Part-time courses for adult learners	Mentoring Programme which discusses access routes to higher education outside of the Leaving Certificate (The Leaving Certificate Examination is the final exam of the Irish secondary school system and the university matriculation examination in Ireland); information on available financial supports; complaints procedures within various educational contexts; governance structures such as the schools board of management etc.	• Personal empowerment experienced by participants in initiative. • Critical reflection and understanding the structural inequalities • 'Trickle-down effect' - learners discussed how their families and children reacted to their taking part	(Brennan, Cummins, Leane, Ó Súilleabháin, McGovern & Quiligan, 2024) https://doi.org/10.1080/03323315.2024.2330890

			in the Certificate in Mentoring in Education	
Grinds4Mincéirs	Traveller and Roma students sitting Leaving Certificate & Leaving Certificate Applied	Grinds4Mincéirs is part of Mincéirs Misl'd in Education Project, providing personalised one to one tutoring in English, Irish, Mathematics, Science, History, Modern Languages, along with exam preparation. Also, organising visits to University of Galway Open Day and Revision Week.	• Removes some environmental barriers to entering third level education. • Increases individuals' sense of belonging in higher education.	https://www.universityofgalway.ie/media/access/Widening-Participation-Report-2022.pdf
Atlantic Technological University (ATU) Sligo	Traveller and Roma Students	Working in partnership with regional education providers that support Traveller and Roma students to achieve their educational potential in second and third level education. This is achieved by facilitating school visits, providing informative open days, arranging student and parent campus visits and	• Provides additional support for Traveller students and parents. • Increases Access to Higher Education.	https://www.itsligo.ie/student-hub/access-office/

Access and participation support.		taster sessions, summer camps, and developing transition programmes, offering financial support and advice.		
Sligo Traveller Support Group After School Services	Traveller students transitioning from first to third level.	Assisting to families with school enrolment, attendance, involvement, and the transition between primary and secondary education, as well as examinations and advancement to third level education.	• Enhancing Traveller parents' ability to support their children's learning by fostering positive relationships with schools	http://stsg.ie/education-support/
Star Pupil Traveller Access to Education	Traveller students in 5th year secondary education.	This a multi-agency collaborative programme ensuring enhanced support for Traveller students in during their final years of secondary education, with the aim of facilitating their advancement to third level education.	• Works in partnership with Travellers to increase participation and promote positive outcomes in the education system	https://www.ittralee.ie/en/InformationFor/CurrentStudents/StudentLife/StudentSupportSe

Programme MTU (Kerry)		MTU Kerry Campus allocates reserved places for graduates of the Star Pupil programme.		rvices/AccessOffice/TravellerLiaisonOfficer/
Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland Traveller and Roma Communities Access Scholarship	Traveller and Roma students	The scholarship offers Traveller and Roma students reduced point entry requirements, and financial support.	• Offers opportunities to students from these communities who may face barriers to attending higher education because of social or financial disadvantages. • Increases participation of members of the Traveller and Roma Communities in Medicine, Physiotherapy,	https://www.rcsi.com/dublin/undergraduate/application-information/scholarships/traveller-community-access-programme-scholarship#:~:text=RCSI's%20Travel

				Pharmacy and Advanced Therapeutic Technologies programmes.	[ler%20and%20Roma%20Communities,and%20Advanced%20Therapeutic%20Technologies%20programmes]().
The Gisele Schmidt Scholars Fund Trinity College Dublin	One Traveller chosen by a committee for each academic year. Post/Undergraduate.	€1500 awarded annually to assist the student with university associated costs.		• Reduces cost of third level education.	[https://www.tcd.ie/equality/themes/traveller-community/#:~:text=Trinity%20Access%20Programmes,members%20of%20the%20Traveller%20community]().

| Access UCC Traveller Success Fund University College Cork | Students from the Traveller Community | A bursary assistance fund designed to encourage Traveller students to participate in third level education (at UCC). This fund is supported by the Dormant Accounts Fund to run in tandem with the Student Assistance Fund and the Financial Aid Fund. | • Reduces cost of third level education. | https://www.ucc.ie/en/sfsa/further-supports/traveller-success-fund/#:~:text=The%20Access%20UCC%20Traveller%20Success%20Fund%20is%20a%20bursary%20scheme,by%20the%20Dormant%20Accounts%20Fund. |

Appendix 2. Recommendations for a Traveller and Roma Inclusivity Strategy

Key Actions for Recommendations, where responsibility lies, and how actions link into National Action Plan Goals.

Ensure a Community and Values-Driven Approach (underpins all recommendations)		
Key Action	Responsibility	Link to NAP Goal
• **Implement a Collaborative Approach** – Ensure initiatives are Traveller- and Roma-led, values-driven, and based on genuine community engagement using principles of collaboration, meaningful participation, and social justice. • **Actively Involve Traveller and Roma Communities** – Ensure Travellers and Roma are included in the design of policies, programmes, and funding initiatives. • **Reject Tokenism and Transactional Approaches** – Focus on meaningful engagement, ensuring that success is determined by the process, not just the content or output.	DFHERIS, HEA, HEIs	Inclusivity: Goal 1.4 Coherence: Goal 4.1

1. Implement a National, Coordinated Approach to Supporting Traveller and Roma Higher Education Student

Key Action	Responsibility	Link to NAP Goal
• **Establish a National Coordinator Role and HEI Coordinator Roles** – Oversee and develop Traveller and Roma support across higher education. Ensure dedicated support within each institution. • **Create Pre-Entry Outreach and Post-Entry Roles** – Fund dedicated support for Traveller and Roma students, one for outreach (pre-entry) and another providing support once they are in higher education (post-entry). • **Develop a National Network** – Share best practices, develop collaboration across institutions, departments and community organisations and ensure the approach is Traveller- and Roma-led and that there are mechanisms for implementation of strategies.	DFHERIS, HEA, HEIs	Inclusivity: Goal 1.1, 1.3 Clarity: Goal 3.2 Coherence: Goal 4.2, 4.3

2. Provide a Comprehensive, Ring-Fenced, Long-term Core Funding for Traveller and Roma Students

Key Action	Responsibility	Link to NAP Goal
• **Ensure Stable, Ring-Fenced Funding** – Secure dedicated, long-term financial support for Traveller and Roma students over short-term, precarious funding models. • **Ensure PATH 5 funding serves as supplementary rather than primary funding.** • **Focus on Affirmative Action** - Improve access, participation, retention, and success for Traveller and Roma students. • **Combat Institutional Racism** – Provide funding for anti-racism training, accountability measures, and cultural awareness. • **Support Community-Led Programmes** – Fund partnerships between Traveller and Roma organisations and HEIs.	DFHERIS, HEA, HEIs	Inclusivity: Goal 1.1, 1.3, 1.9 Coherence: Goal 4.1, 4.2, 4.3 Sustainability: Goal 5.1, 5.2

3. Mandate Institution-Wide Anti-Racism Training and Cultural Awareness Training for Staff and Students

Key Action	Responsibility	Link to NAP Goal
• **Government-Mandated and Monitored** – Ensure government enforcement of mandatory reporting on training outcomes in line with Race Equality Action Plans. • **Zero Tolerance for Racism** – Enforce clear policies on racist language and behaviour with real consequences. • **Strong Accountability Measures** – Mandatory reporting on racism incidents, training participation, and enforcement of anti-racism policies. • **Sector-Wide Implementation** – Develop a unified framework for HEIs to ensure consistency. • **Integration into Professional Training** – Embed in teacher education, career guidance and all other professional training. • **Whole-Institution Approach** – Not just the responsibility of access offices; accountability at all levels. Create a college-wide inclusive and safe environment.	HEA, DFHERIS, HEIs	Inclusivity: Goal 1.1, 1.3, 1.4 Coherence: Goal 4.1, 4.2, 4.3 Sustainability: Goal 5.1 Evidence-driven approach: Goal 6.1, 6.2

- **Community-Led Training Design** – Must be developed in collaboration with Traveller and Roma communities.

- **Action-Based and Ongoing** – Training must be continuous, not a one-time session.

4. Embed Traveller and Roma Culture and History into University Practices and Curricula

Key Action	Responsibility	Link to NAP Goal
• **Integrate Across All Disciplines** – Include Traveller and Roma history and culture in all subject areas, not just social sciences. • **Create a Progressive and Inclusive Curriculum** – Highlight positive contributions and cultural heritage while addressing historical and ongoing systemic barriers and racism. • **Celebrate Traditional and Contemporary Culture** – Represent the full diversity and evolution of Traveller and Roma communities. • **Eliminate Tokenism** – Culture and history should be embedded as a normal part of university life. • **Ensure Representation** – Increase Traveller and Roma staff in all roles in HEIs, including leadership positions, to ensure a 'nothing about us, without us' approach.	HEIs	Inclusivity: Goal 1.3, 1.4 Coherence: Goal 4.1, 4.2

5. Strengthen the Collection and Reporting of Ethnicity Data

Key Action	Responsibility	Link to NAP Goal
• **Ensure all HEIs collect Ethnicity Data** – Ensure data is gathered ethically in line with best practice and that data is collected consistently across HEIs. • **Ensure Voluntary Self-Identification** – Students must have the choice to self-identify. • **Mandate Reporting to HEA** – Link ethnicity data collection to student registration. • **Include Post-Graduation Outcomes** – Track student progress through and beyond higher education. • **Ensure Transparency** – HEIs must create the conditions for individuals to self-identify. Clearly explain why and how data is collected.	HEA, HEIs	Inclusivity: Goal 1.1 Evidence-driven approach: Goal 6.1, 6.2

6. Provide Pre-Entry Targeted Outreach and Information for Traveller and Roma Students

Key Action	Responsibility	Link to NAP Goal
• **Develop Targeted Outreach Programmes** – Engage Traveller and Roma students from primary and secondary school through community partnerships. • **Provide Clear, Accessible Information** – Ensure information on entry routes, funding, scholarships, and support is tailored and easily accessible to Traveller and Roma communities. • **Expand Outreach Across Disciplines** – Involve all academic departments in outreach, not just those traditionally focused on community education. Ensure outreach efforts cover a wide range of academic fields, not just limited to certain disciplines. • **Learn from Successful Models** – Use proven approaches like the Whidden Workshops to inspire and guide outreach efforts.	DoE, DFHERIS, HEA, HEIs	Inclusivity: Goal 1.1, 1.3, 1.4, 1.6, 1.7 Clarity: Goal 3.1, 3.2 Coherence: Goal 4.2 Evidence-driven Approach: Goal 6.1

7. Establish Flexible Access Routes

Key Action	Responsibility	Link to NAP Goal
• **Implement Flexible Academic Entry Routes** – Reduce barriers such as excessive documentation and ethnicity verification on Access Routes for the HEAR and DARE scheme. • **Establish Holistic Support Systems** – Develop a whole-of-institution approach with collaboration across departments (e.g., access offices, career services, and counselling) to deliver tailored, sustainable support. • **Introduce Pre-Access and Tailored Programmes** – Provide support in building essential skills (digital literacy, academic writing) through return to learning courses. Remove age or fee restrictions from these (pre)access courses.	DFHERIS, HEA, HEIs	Inclusivity: Goal 1.1, 1.3, 1.7 Flexibility: Goal 2.3 Clarity: Goal 3.3

8. Provide Traveller and Roma Financial Scholarships

Key Action	Responsibility	Link to NAP Goal
• **Intersectional Supports** – Recognise factors like poverty and systemic racism to provide comprehensive support. • **Offer Comprehensive Financial Supports as Affirmative Action Measure** – Include costs like accommodation or travel, childcare, and food. • **Ensure Accessibility** – Scholarships should be universal, not competitive. • **Ensure Self-Identification** – No verification required for eligibility. • **Remove Means Testing** – Financial support should not be based on income. • **Protect Social Welfare Benefits** – Scholarships should not impact entitlements. • **Expand SUSI Eligibility** – Include Traveller, Roma, and **all** part-time students. **Guarantee Flexibility** – Adapt to students' needs and circumstances.	DFHERIS, HEA, HEIs	Flexibility: Goal 2.1 Clarity: Goal 3.3 Sustainability: Goal 5.3

9. Implement Comprehensive Mental Health, Wellbeing Support, and Post-Entry Support for Traveller and Roma Students

Key Action	Responsibility	Link to NAP Goal
• **Offer Long-Term, Culturally Sensitive Counselling** – Move beyond short-term models to provide ongoing, tailored support where counsellors are trained on the unique challenges, trauma, and stress faced by Traveller and Roma students. • **Address Identity and Discrimination** – Create mental health initiatives that consider the impact of identity, bullying, racism, and systemic barriers. • **Dedicated Post-Entry Student Advisors** – Appoint key Traveller and Roma support workers to offer personalised and dedicated support for Traveller and Roma students, ensuring a holistic approach across the institution. Ensure this role is supplementary to mainstream supports as opposed to instead of. • **Mentorship and Peer Support Programmes** – Create Traveller-led and Roma-led initiatives to foster belonging and provide guidance through university life.	DFHERIS, HEA, HEIs	Inclusivity: Goal 1.1, 1.3, 1.4 Coherence: Goal 4.1 Sustainability: Goal 5.1

- **Flexible and Consistent Support** – Provide flexible deadlines, exam accommodations, and family event considerations for both full-time and part-time students.

10. Develop Employment Pathways and Post-Graduate Opportunities

Key Action	Responsibility	Link to NAP Goal
• **Build Strong Partnerships with Employers and Integrate Targeted Employment Initiatives** – HEIs should implement tailored career development programmes through careers and employment offices as part of a whole-of-institution approach. • **Develop Paid Internships and Placements** – Collaborate with employers to create degree-related, accessible pathways for Traveller and Roma students. • **Provide Personalised Career Support** – Offer career guidance, mentoring, and networking opportunities specifically designed for Traveller and Roma students. • **Promote Inclusive Hiring Practices** – Recognise employers who support Traveller and Roma graduates to encourage equitable hiring.	DFHERIS, HEA, HEIs	Inclusivity: Goal 1.1, 1.3, 1.6 Clarity: Goal 3.1 Coherence: Goal 4.1 Sustainability: Goal 5.1, 5.3

- **Establish Accountability Measures** – Implement mechanisms to address racism or discrimination in placements or the workplace, ensuring fair treatment for Traveller and Roma students.

- **Fund Postgraduate Opportunities** – Provide specific funding for level 9 and level 10 degrees for Traveller and Roma students.

11. Roma Specific Recommendations

Key Action	Responsibility	Link to NAP Goal
• **Introduce Pre-Access and Tailored Programmes** – Offer tailored English language support for Roma students through pre access skills programmes, this could be in collaboration with ETB and FET centres. • **Embed Roma History into University Practices and Curricula** - Recognise and educate students and staff on the Roma Genocide. • **Further Roma Research** – Further participatory research is needed with Roma further and higher education students. • **Establish Roma Targets** – Strengthen data collection on Roma and establish ambitious targets for Roma students in the National Access Plan. • **Clarify the Habitual Residence Condition (HRC) and PPS Numbers** – advocate to the Department of Social Protection to clarify how such barriers can be overcome.	DFHERIS, HEA, HEIs	Inclusivity: Goal 1.1, 1.3, 1.4 Clarity: Goal 3.2 Coherence: Goal 4.1, 4.2, 4.3 Sustainability: Goal 5.1 Evidence-driven approach: Goal 6.1, 6.2