



**Programme for Access to Higher Education
(PATH) Strand 5**

Funding to support Traveller and Roma Students in Higher Education

Principles and Objectives of Fund

1. Background to application for PATH 5 to support Travellers and Roma students in Higher Education

In 2020, Minister Simon Harris announced ring-fenced funding of €300,000 for targeted supports to address the implications of Covid-19 for Traveller transfer to and progression within higher education in 2021. This funding was secured through the Dormant Accounts Fund and was aimed at helping ensure expected increases in Traveller participation in higher education remained on track. In 2021, the fund increased to €450,000 and was extended to students from the Roma community.

Early feedback from key stakeholders in relation to the Traveller and Roma Dormant Accounts funding indicated that this funding had a positive impact and has supported Travellers staying in higher education. Specifically, the Traveller and Dormant Account was welcomed as the first ringfenced fund for Traveller and Roma students in the higher education space. However, challenges in relation to the level and sustainability of funding were also identified.

In 2022, The fourth National Access Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education (NAP) (2022 – 2028) was launched. It identifies several priority groups that are currently under-represented in higher education, including Irish Travellers and the Roma community. The review of progress undertaken during preparation of this Plan showed that Traveller participation numbers in higher education have remained consistently low and below expectations. The new NAP sets ambitious targets for Traveller participation in Higher Education and for the first time, students from the Roma community have also been included as a key priority group.

Sustainable and increased funding through PATH 5 will support HEIs to build long term relationships in their communities with the Traveller community and in particular, the Roma community who there has been less engagement with to date, and where more work is required to build a cultural awareness of the needs of the Roma community in HEIs. It will enable HEIs to put in place an infrastructure to increase the participation of Traveller and Roma students in Higher Education. PATH 5 will also allow the targets identified as part of the new NAP (2022-2028) to be achieved and crucially, will enable the setting of higher targets consistent with the plan's vision.

The key objective of this funding stream is to increase the participation and progression of Traveller and Roma students in Higher Education and, to support the achievement of NAP (2022-2028) targets in this regard. While there are a number of funding streams in place which currently support Traveller & Roma Participation in Higher Education as outlined above the participation has remained consistently low. HEIs are asked to use this funding stream to support additional activities which will drive the objectives of the plan and in particular, increased participation.

2. Application for PATH 5 funding

To make a meaningful difference, an application for ring-fenced funding of €1.35 million over three years, 2022, 2023 and 2024, for targeted supports to improve access to and

participation of the Traveller and Roma communities within Higher Education was made by the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science Under the proposal the funding would be ring fenced to HEIs over a three-year period. Specifically, the funding would be used to address increased participation. It allows flexibility to provide additional supports in key areas including technology, access and supports, study spaces and facilities, mental health concerns and support for caring responsibilities. It is also expected that HEIs would use PATH 5 funding to add to the existing partnerships with the Traveller and Roma communities already developed through PATH 3.

Overarching Funding objectives

The key objectives of the fund to be referred to as the “*PATH 5 – Supporting Traveller and Roma Students in Higher Education*” are:

- To increase the participation and progression of the Traveller and Roma communities in Higher Education and, to support the achievement of NAP (2022-2028) targets in this regard.
- To further develop community-based partnerships with the Traveller Community.
- To build community partnerships with the Roma community and Roma organisations, recognising that further work is required to develop relationships with this community and to build cultural awareness of their needs in HEIs.

3. Funding Principles and Parameters

The funding principles and parameters are as follows:

- i. Funding can be used to provide support for, and to promote, a community-based partnership approach with local and national Traveller and Roma Organisations, developed through PATH 3. PATH 5 funding should leverage the capacity developed by PATH 3 funding to support additional activities to support the key objectives above.
- ii. Funding can facilitate improved linkages with Traveller and Roma students in early years, schools and further education settings and can include a focus on mature student participation.
- iii. Funding can be used to support additional retention measures for Traveller and Roma students in schools and further education settings separate to any initiatives that are already being funded from other sources.
- iv. Funding may be used to enable the retention of existing students in higher education and increase Traveller and Roma participation in Higher Education with the priority between these two elements to be determined by the HEI, giving the HEI maximum flexibility within overall funding principles and funding parameters.
- v. Funding can be used to provide better information on supports available and work with parents and students to assist with SUSI, CAO, and PATH 2 (1916 Bursaries) application processes.
- vi. Funding can be used for building capacity for increased engagement between HEIs and local and national Traveller and Roma organisations with a view to establishing local solutions to support future transitions to higher education.

- vii. Funding cannot be used to support core funding activities or schemes.
- viii. The funding should be used to provide additional supports to students from the Traveller and Roma Communities which complement existing activities and supports.
 - Direct financial support and/or indirect supports for full-time and part-time students can be facilitated where it is supporting the key objectives of PATH 5. This may include, but is not limited to, costs associated with the following:
 - Study Space – to address the needs of students living in challenging home environments.
 - Health and social impact – many students from the Traveller and Roma Communities experience isolation, uncertainty, and other mental health concerns. Building cultural awareness through training and events can increase the sense of belonging and help develop a deeper understanding to enable HEIs to address the needs of Travellers and the Roma community.
 - Caring responsibilities – options can support full-time and part-time participation to assist with removing these barriers to education.
 - Technology - where the recent ICT equipment grant has not adequately addressed the needs of Traveller and Roma students; and
- ix. Some funding may be used to monitor the impacts of COVID-19 responses on Traveller and Roma participation in higher education.

4. Conditions of funding:

- Funding conditions need to comply with overall PATH 5 funding requirements.
- Each HEI will be required to report to the HEA on how they have spent the money to support the key objectives of PATH 5. This reporting will provide visibility on impact and help inform any future application for funding in 2023.
- A reporting template will be developed by the HEA.
- HEIs must ensure that the funding is used in line with public financial procedures.
- The funding must be used in the 2023 financial year.
- HEIs will be expected to demonstrate that the funding was used to support participation in HE students from the Traveller and Roma Communities directly or indirectly via access supports services.
- HEIs must submit these project plans to the HEA (access@hea.ie) for approval by close of business on **Friday, 20 January 2023**. Project plans may be submitted to the HEA in advance of the deadline and the HEA Executive will seek to address any queries and approve plans as soon as possible after they are submitted.

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