

In the December 2015 edition of the newsletter, we highlight:

- The Bridging Sounds Roma youth orchestra; next concert Monday 7 December at 6.30pm in Stratford
- Notes of a meeting held with a delegation from the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance
- Statement from Roma Support Group about the suspension of the Department for Education's Gypsy, Roma, Traveller Stakeholder Group
- Two live consultations taking place;
 - the Equality & Human Rights Commission consulting on three year strategic plan (close of consultation Friday 18 December 2015)
 - the Welsh government consulting on whether they should support specific proposals to respond to the needs of migrant Roma communities in Wales (close of consultation Sunday 10 January 2016)
- A radio broadcast from BBC World Service about the failure of ten year "Decade of Roma" in Eastern Europe
- An excellent, well documented and researched report on the access of Roma families in Kent to primary health care, and other NHS services
- A 'call for evidence' from the AIRE Centre – a human rights centre dealing particularly with EU and UK law – about Operation Nexus
- A workshop and seminar about Roma Learning Leaders, in London, on Tuesday 15 December 2015, organised by the Institute of Education
- Season's greetings from Roma Support Group.....



December 2015 newsletter

Welcome from Roma Support Group

We want to bring you information, reflections, arguments and discussion about the issues that face Roma communities in the UK. The Roma Support

Group has developed over the last 17 years into a major service agency working for and with Roma communities, mainly in London. We run advice and advocacy sessions; education support programmes (including homework support) for children and families; a Roma Support and Engagement Programme (including tailored staff training); and an arts and culture programme. RSG has been able to develop work on Roma advocacy and mediation, community engagement, and also in policy and information provision. This e-bulletin is one manifestation of these developments.

Contact us via:

andy@romasupportgroup.org.uk

News from Roma Support Group

BRIDGING SOUNDS - ROMA YOUTH ORCHESTRA



Regular readers of the newsletter will need no reminders about the formation of the Roma youth orchestra. With funding from the Arts Council and the Rayne Foundation, and supported by the Newham Academy of Music, Roma and non-Roma experienced and budding musicians jointly practice, write, play

and perform music. This music has its roots in Roma heritage, but adapted to the setting of 21st century East London. The orchestra have played throughout Newham and East London, and are performing again at St John's Church, Broadway, Stratford on Monday 7 December at 6.30pm.

The Guardian recently published an article about the orchestra which is available here.

<http://www.theguardian.com/society/2015/nov/24/roma-music-youth-orchestra-promotes-acceptance-newham>

For more information, photos and tracks, see here

http://romasupportgroup.org.uk/?page_id=66

For more information about the orchestra, contact Tania Gessi at tania@romasupportgroup.org.uk

News from Roma Support Group

Meeting with European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), 6 November 2015

The Council of Europe supports its own human rights agency, the ECRI. For more information about the ECRI, see this link:

https://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/ecri/default_en.asp

The ECRI conducts regular, five yearly visits to all Council of Europe member states to draft monitoring reports on a wide variety of human rights issues, particularly focusing on manifestations of racism and intolerance. The ECRI visited the UK in early November:

https://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/ecri/Library/PressReleases/205-10_11_2015_UnitedKingdom_en.asp

Colleagues and friends working with migrant Roma communities in the UK (who were invited by the ECRI to attend this discussion) made the following points:

Roma Support Group:

- The absence of (migrant) Roma communities (with recent heritage/origins in Central/Eastern European countries) from any consideration in the UK government's approach to Gypsy, Roma, Traveller inclusion. Example – suggestion to ECRI that “non-nationals” wouldn't/shouldn't be the focus of this monitoring visit. The refusal of the UK government to adopt an explicit National Roma Integration Strategy, and instead, adopting the utilisation of existing supposed inclusion strategies.
- Extent of poverty throughout Roma communities – related to marginality within the labour market; formal and informal reductions in benefit entitlement; and character of family migration and family structure in Roma communities
- The growing issue of safeguarding of Roma children; the increasing evidence of more Roma children being subject to child protection proceedings; and the consequential impact on Roma families and communities (particularly since 2012 – Slovak TV ‘documentary’ on the UK care system; and 2013 – ‘Maria’ case etc). Lack of any response within Department for Education to these issues (e.g. training for social workers; advice and training to schools etc)
- Conditions of employment for many Roma in the margins of the formal labour market; reliance on casual work; little regulation and oversight. Strong belief that Roma workers are the first to have contracts terminated (they won't challenge); and also, contrastingly, also sought after for their willingness to work long hours in the informal economy
- Differential impact on Roma communities of changes to benefits/access to benefits for EU migrants - consequences of desperate poverty and greater likelihood of employment in most marginal and hazardous/exploitative sectors of the economy; and future impacts of reductions in tax credit

- Private sector housing - lack of regulation leading to overcrowding; living with disrepair; household mobility and knock on problems (e.g. churn in school attendance)
- Schools - no dedicated funding to support newly arrived/migrant children (in contrast to 1980s and 1990s - e.g. s11 support around language and culture); only access via pupil premium and growing evidence that this excludes Roma children (e.g., not on passported benefits for free school meals, and hence not eligible for pupil premium)
- Access to primary health care services e.g. due to language; to prejudicial attitudes of primary care staff; to different expectations of primary care and specialist services. Evidence from Newham and Kent
- Public space and public realm. Some evidence (e.g. Brent) of Roma being explicitly (or implicitly) targeted for introduction of PSPO (public space protection orders)

AIRE Centre:

- Home Office or police taking and not returning IDs and passports
- Administrative removals
- Ethnic profiling, e.g. under Operation Nexus
- Car insurance - disproportionately high quotes from mainstream providers for Romanian and Bulgarian nationals (this may or may not be linked to them being Roma)

UK Race & Europe Network:

- labour exploitation prevalent, including trafficking and some evidence of slavery
- beginning of trend of improving 'attainment' by some Roma students; and little systemic segregation in educational provision (a few schools segregate Roma pupils until their language ability is at a minimum level, but normally results in increased bullying and racism. Most schools keep Roma pupils in the mainstream class and give additional support, which works better)
- early years enrolment still low - informed by traditions of school age in CEE countries at age 6/7

- Concrete recommendations - UK govt to adopt an NRIS (along new Wales Assembly model?)
- particularly virulent race hate crime directed at Roma communities in Belfast

Questions from the ECRI rapporteurs included:

Is there any overlap in the UK between 'migrant Roma' and 'Gypsy and Traveller' communities?

Why are children being identified as vulnerable re child protection procedures?

Do Roma children tend to stay in care?

What is the estimated population for UK (migrant) Roma?

Is there a census definition which identifies (migrant) Roma – as distinct from (indigenous) Gypsy or Traveller?

Do Roma in UK tend to stay in the UK, or are they still active migrants?

What is the trend in terms of growth of the Roma communities?

Is there an issue with Roma being unfamiliar with the English language – fluency and literacy?

Are there any government programmes designed to improve spoken and written English?

How could pupil premium funding be determined, if not on the basis of FSM?

Is there an impact from the Scrap Metal Dealers legislation on (migrant) Roma?

Lastly, the rapporteurs asked:

What would be one concrete recommendation that you would like to see presented following this visit?

Our (RSG, AIRE Centre, UKREN/Equality) answers:

- UK government to adopt a National Roma Integration Strategy
- Roma to be officially recognised as a distinct ethnic minority

- For the DfE to prioritise safeguarding issues re Roma children and families and the relevant school/non-school services
- For there to be more focused intervention by the UK government in supporting access to European structural funds (ESF and ERDF) to support both Roma civic society and to achieve greater economic integration, especially in relation to training and skilled/quality employment opportunities
- For there to be explicit targeted funding for Roma students in school as the 'next generation', to support their integration in UK schools, and to support achievement and attainment

The rapporteurs explained that they had had about 20 meetings during the course of the week they were in the UK. They anticipated that the ECRI would produce the UK monitoring report in about 12 months time.

News from Roma Support Group

Roma Support Group's statement about the Department for Education Gypsy Roma Traveller (GRT) Stakeholder Group; by Laura Greason

The last meeting of the Department for Education Gypsy Roma Traveller (GRT) Stakeholder Group was held in March this year, during which members were informed that following the election it was likely that ministers would want to reconsider the role of the Group. The Group had been created to work in partnership with the Department to improve issues impacting on GRT pupils including ascription, attendance and attainment. With that in mind, we were advised to write into the Department as to the benefits of the Group and possible future arrangements. Roma Support Group sent a letter to the Department in March 2015. We have not received a response. No more meetings of the GRT Stakeholder Group have been arranged. We are concerned that this indicates a ministerial decision that there is no requirement to have dialogue about issues affecting Roma, Gypsy and Traveller communities about the educational development of children

In recent years the Stakeholder Group had managed to collaborate successfully in relation to:

- The separation of the existing category of Gypsy/Roma in the school census so as to create a better understanding of the needs of these distinct groups – This is to be applied from the next school census in January 2016.
- Communication with Ofsted on their revised inspection framework and the decision to commission the 2014 report – *Overcoming barriers – ensuring that Roma children are fully engaged and achieving in education*
- Contributing to the consultation on the repeal of s.444 (6) of the Education Act 1996 in relation to school attendance for families engaged in a trade or business which requires them to travel.
- Providing opinion on revised guidance on Children Missing Education

However, there is still a way to go to achieve equality within education for GRT children and young people. Issues still to be addressed are:

- Lowest attainment levels of any other ethnic group In 2013, only 13.8% of Gypsy/Roma pupils nationally gained five or more GCSE grades at A* to C, including English and mathematics, compared with 60.6% of all pupils. In the same year, only 23% of all Gypsy/Roma pupils in England achieved Level 4 or above in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Key Stage 2 compared with 75% of all pupils nationally (Ofsted report, December 2014)
- Highest level of exclusion of any other ethnic group. Attendance rates are much lower for Gypsy/Roma pupils than for other pupils. In 2012/13, their attendance was only 86.1% at primary (compared with 95.2% for all pupils) and 83.4% at secondary school (compared with 94.2% for all pupils). In addition, Gypsy/Roma pupils are three times more likely to be excluded from primary school and four times more likely from secondary school than any other pupil group.(Ofsted report, December 2014)
- Continuing incidents of racist bullying. The recent Ofsted report includes a case study of “Stefan’s” experiences:

‘There was name-calling, racism, bullying. Five White British guys set upon me in the gangway. It was reported; a meeting was set up and the police were involved. The school could have done more. There were no exclusions; no punishments. It happened to other Roma pupils as well. I didn’t do as well as I could have done at

secondary but I got enough grades to go to college.’ (Ofsted, December 2014, p28)

- Increasing numbers of Roma families opting for Elective Home Education
- Lack of good practice examples available for schools working with Roma pupils.
- Impact on schools of high mobility of Roma pupils as a result of a combination of reliance on the private rented sector and welfare reform.
- Predicted loss of pupil premium funding for schools with increasing numbers of Roma pupils based on welfare reform. For instance, we are aware that in one major northern city with significant numbers of Roma children, the proportion of Roma children eligible for free school meals – and hence pupil premium funding – has declined from 65% of Roma children in 2013 to 22% of Roma children in 2015.

The Group also provides an opportunity for ensuring delivery of the UK Government’s commitment to educational outcomes in its National Roma Integration Strategy, and a vital source of consultation with the communities to make these commitments effective.

The Stakeholder Group is in need of improvement. For example, it has been slow to consider the issue of safeguarding Roma children, and how Roma families have tended to be stigmatised with safeguarding interventions, hampered by a lack of knowledge of this community amongst social work professionals. There needs to be stronger involvement by civil servants from throughout the Department in the issues considered by the Stakeholder Group.

The recent Ofsted report on Roma children and English schools, made the following recommendations:

Where appropriate, local authorities should:

- *ensure that there is a dedicated and knowledgeable senior leader who can drive the local authority’s strategies for improving outcomes for Roma pupils*

- *ensure that all key services work in partnership effectively so that outcomes for Roma pupils are improved*
- *develop sufficient expertise within a specialist support service to provide advice and training for schools*
- *review strategies for improving Roma pupils' attendance and attainment, and for keeping track of pupils from highly mobile families*
- *encourage schools to ensure that pupils receive an initial assessment and induction when they start school in England and ongoing specialist support to meet their needs.*

The Department for Education should:

- *consider how the allocation of existing funding can more accurately reflect the changes in the number of eligible pupils on roll throughout the school year*
- *consider how the classification of pupil groups can encourage more accurate recording.*

Where appropriate, schools should:

- *assign a knowledgeable, informed leader to improve the achievement of Roma pupils*
- *recruit qualified teachers with relevant expertise to provide high quality teaching and support for Roma pupils who are learning English as an additional language*
- *check that staff who support Roma pupils or teach English as an additional language are well trained and sufficiently fluent in English*
- *strengthen the links between partner primary/secondary schools so that Roma pupils remain engaged in education as they move from one key stage to the next.*

The Department for Education GRT Stakeholder Group was one important way of assessing that these recommendations were being followed.

The recent European Commission assessment of how well EU members states are progressing in the implementation of Roma integration measures concluded that.

“Further key priorities to be urgently addressed include....stepping up the fight against discrimination, segregation and anti-Gypsyism to ensure effective equal access for Roma to education, employment, health and housing” (European Commission, report on the implementation of EU framework for national Roma integration strategies, 2015)

The Department for Education GRT Stakeholder Group should form a small but important way of trying to meet these ambitions.

Consultations

Equality & Human Rights Commission (EHRC)

2016 - 2019 Strategic Plan Consultation

The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) is currently conducting its 2016 - 2019 Strategic Plan Consultation. We recommend people respond to this consultation as it will determine the EHRC's future strategic work and we really want to ensure Gypsies, Travellers and Roma are included.

As you will see, the EHRC strategic plan is based upon their October 2015 report *Is Britain Fairer?* It is available here.

http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/uploads/IBF/Final-reports/revised/EHRC_IBF_MainReport_acc.pdf

This is their second statutory report, and follows the 2010 report entitled *How Fair is Britain?*

We think that the EHRC appears to be playing down the inequalities faced by migrant Roma, and by Gypsy and Traveller communities. We are very concerned that despite all the evidence, there seems to be a significantly lower profile for Gypsy, Traveller and particularly (migrant) Roma communities in their more recent 2015 report. For example, in 2010, the EHRC referenced inequalities faced by Roma children in school (examining the attainment gap, high numbers of permanent exclusions, and under-recording/ascription) and by political under-representation of Roma in the UK. In 2015, the only references about Roma communities are about a general “bias and hostility”

they face; “a stigma towards” the Roma by one-half of all Britons; and by the government’s failure to make progress on aspects of the national integration strategy.

As many of you will be aware the EHRC has and hopefully will in the future play a critical role challenging the inequalities and discrimination the communities too often face. The deadline for responses is Friday 18 December and you can complete the online questionnaire at the link below:

<https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/about-us/our-work/ehrc-consultations/2016-2019-strategic-plan-consultation?wssl=1>

At the bottom of this link there are seven questions. We would urge everyone to take a look and complete them.

Consultations

Welsh Government

A call for proposals on a migrant Roma strategy for Wales

The Welsh government agreed a policy for supporting Gypsy and Traveller communities in Wales in 2011. It was called *Travelling to a Better Future*. It is available here.

<http://gov.wales/docs/dsjlg/publications/equality/110928gypsytravelleren.pdf>

It did not include any references to what it called ‘migrant Roma’. Indeed, it stated

This Framework for Action has been developed specifically for the indigenous Gypsy and Traveller population in Wales and does not address emerging issues as a result of migrant Roma from Bulgaria and Romania settled in Wales. The indigenous Gypsy and Traveller population and European Roma are two very distinct groups, with different languages, cultures and traditions and they should not be confused. The Migrants Forum, a Welsh Government strategic group, will address any emerging issues on European Roma.

However, this autumn the Welsh government are asking whether this approach should be changed. This is a massive contrast to the UK government which both rejected the idea of a national strategy (whether for Gypsies, Travellers or Roma); and is certainly not minded to consult on the particular of “migrant Roma”. They have issued a consultation paper *A call for proposals on a migrant Roma strategy for Wales* and would like views from around Wales (and from agencies outside of Wales) by Sunday 10 January 2016. It is available here.

<http://gov.wales/docs/dsjlg/consultation/151004-migrant-roma-strategy-consultation-en.pdf>

The Welsh government minister leading the review, Lesley Griffiths AM, is not saying that any changes will happen. She says in the introduction,

Since the Framework for Action was launched in 2011, I have listened to stakeholders who have called for a dedicated strategy for migrant Roma, though I am not yet convinced such a strategy is necessary to improve the lives of the Roma community. However, I am keen to listen to your proposals for specific measures which could be included in any Roma Strategy and I will consider any realistic and deliverable proposals which come forward to ensure we're doing all we can to promote social inclusion.

The consultation paper is quite brief (4 pages long). It essentially is asking “whether (there are) any targeted proposals (which) could be identified to better support migrant Roma communities in Wales. This ‘Call for Proposals’ aims to identify and investigate (any) proposals to improve community cohesion and social inclusion of migrant Roma communities....” It asks organisations, voluntary agencies and individuals to answer five questions (see below), one of which asks directly for proposals that could be developed to meet the specific needs of migrant Roma communities in Wales.

Question 1 – Is there a need for specific proposals aimed at improving the social inclusion of migrant Roma in Wales?

Question 2 – What are the barriers to migrant Roma social inclusion and how should these barriers be addressed?

Question 3 – What proposals do you think should be developed?

Question 4 – Are there examples of good practice relating to targeted services provided to Roma which could be replicated elsewhere?

Question 5 – Have we asked all of the most important questions? If not, on what other issues should we be seeking views?

The Welsh government has also arranged a workshop to support this consultation on Thursday 7 January between 11am – 1pm in Cardiff. Booking a place should be done by Tuesday 15 December via this link:

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/migrant-roma-call-for-proposals-consultation-session-registration-19742864439>

Resources

Roma – a decade on; a radio documentary

BBC world service documentary; first broadcast 11 October 2015 (50 minutes)

Delia Radu reflects on the 'Decade of the Roma Inclusion'. In 2005 a plan was launched to improve education, health, housing and jobs for the Roma – Europe's poorest minority. But did it succeed? Ten years later Delia Radu travelled across Eastern Europe to find the Roma she spoke to when the plan was launched. Delia wanted to ask the people who the plan was supposed to help - if it delivered its promises and if anything changed.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p034gzxj>

Resources

HEALTH WATCH KENT: Access to Health and Social Care Services by Eastern European Migrants in the Thanet District

http://www.healthwatchkent.co.uk/sites/default/files/healthwatch_kent_report_on_access_to_services_by_eastern_european_community.pdf

A very impressive research report has been published by Kent Healthwatch on the use of NHS primary care services by Eastern European migrants (mainly all Roma patients) in towns in Kent. The report is based on detailed discussions with Roma female and male patients, with group discussions of Roma patients and with NHS staff and services throughout the county.

The themes that arise from the one-to-one interviews include:

- Registration at GPs
- Consultations at GPs
- Interpreters
- Using emergency services (like A&E)
- Trust with professionals

The group discussions covered similar territory and included:

- Access to appointments
- Language and communication
- Information
- Respect
- Consultations with medical staff
- Prescriptions

The report summarises what it calls a range of 'discussion points' that arise from the conversations and interviews with patients. This leads to a number of conclusions and recommendations. Finally, the report includes a number of appendices which are invaluable, and include interviews with a range of NHS service providers (e.g. practice managers; clinicians; dentistry services; TB services; CCG services). Another appendix includes notes of the group discussions; and a third appendix summarises six case studies which deserve detailed reading.

Resources

CALL FOR EVIDENCE – OPERATION NEXUS

Operation Nexus, is a joint operation between the Home Office's Immigration Enforcement Directorate and several police forces, including the Metropolitan police. It seeks to remove and / or deport from the United Kingdom foreign nationals whose deportation is said to be 'conducive to the public good'. This includes, but is not limited to, individuals who have previous convictions either in the United Kingdom or in another country. Operation Nexus began in London in October 2012 and has since been rolled out in several other areas including the West Midlands and Manchester. Polish and Romanian police officers have been seconded to the Metropolitan police to assist with the operation.

The AIRE Centre has launched a project which seeks to clarify the lawfulness of Operation Nexus. We are especially interested in how Operation Nexus impacts EEA nationals. From our research we have found that Eastern European nationals may be disproportionately impacted by the operation. Through this call from evidence we want to assess whether the implementation of Operation Nexus has led to specific groups of EEA nationals being targeted.

We are looking for EEA nationals who have been detained for the following reasons:

- You were arrested by Operation Nexus police officers; and / or
- You were given a notice of deportation because of an offence you committed in the country you are from and you served your sentence in that country; and / or
- You were interviewed at a custody suite in the UK, where you were asked whether you were exercising treaty rights; and / or
- You were homeless when you were picked up; and / or
- You are a citizen of an EEA country from Central or Eastern Europe and subject to deportation.

To submit your response please email nexus@airecentre.org

Alternatively, if you would prefer to submit your response or send us any documents by post, you can post it to the following address:

Audrey Cherryl Mogan
AIRE Centre
17 Red Lion Square
London
WC1R 4QH UK

Further details If you have any questions or would like to further discuss this call for evidence or your cases, please email Audrey Cherryl Mogan at nexus@airecentre.org or call at 0207 831 4276.

Events & training

Roma Learning Leaders

Seminar: Tuesday 15 December 2015, 11am – 2pm

At the UCL Institute of Education

Room 828; 20 Bedford Way; London WC1 H OAL

The Institute say:

“This European project aims to promote the integration of Roma people in lifelong learning, encouraging screening, promotion and development processes of Roma leaders in educational issues to mediate among their peers and get new models of behavioural changes flattering for their inclusion (Europe 2020 – Fighting poverty and social exclusion and reducing the rates of early school leaving).

“We aim to design a participatory process with an innovative methodology, which, taking advantage of dynamic workshops and new pedagogical techniques will create observatories for detecting leaders, who will disseminate their knowledge in subsequent workshops for young Roma, supporting them to continue on a Lifelong Learning process and avoiding early school drop out.

“With all this, we aim to generate a change in Roma learners, who have a high degree of school absenteeism, to start a process of development and

individual training, eliminating internal and cultural barriers and culminating in their own empowerment, while, at the same time, they will be reference points and models for change within their own community.”

See this link for more information about the project, the documentation and its impacts: <http://www.romalearningleaders.eu/>

As part of the work, the Institute has produced this report on Roma in the UK, highlighting the recent media storm about migrant Roma presence and their reflections on it:

http://www.romalearningleaders.eu/src/uploads/2015/06/WP-2-outcome_RLL-UK-NATIONAL-REPORT.pdf

And as part of their dissemination of the project outcomes, the Institute of Education is hosting the seminar on ‘Roma Learning Leaders’ on Tuesday 15 December. This will be led by staff from the Institute of Education and will be strongly influenced by contributions from staff and advocates from Roma Support Group. See this link for details of the venue, time and

<https://www.ioe.ac.uk/newsEvents/116235.html>

National Dissemination Seminar

Programme

10,30am Arrivals

11,00am Presentations by:

- Roma Support Group staff (Dada Felja)
- Participants in the project from the Roma Community in East London including Roma Learning Leaders (Ewelina Pawlowska, Sindy Czureja, Bobi Rostas)
- UCL Institute of Education Project Team (Robert Ferguson and Jack Peffers)

11,45am Coffee and formation of small groups

12,00pm Participants in small groups will discuss the issues raised by the presentations and ask presenters specific and general questions about their presentations.

12,45pm Plenary – Closing remarks

13,00pm Evaluation and Lunch

Confirm participation by phoning (07775 518 108) or emailing Jack Peffers (j.peffers@ioe.ac.uk)

And finally.....

Season's greetings from Roma Support Group:



Views expressed in this newsletter do not necessarily suggest that they are in accordance with the trustees of the Roma Support Group