



Introduction

Last week, staff and volunteers from Roma groups around the country attended a meeting with officials from the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government. The main subject of the meeting was “integration” – and in particular, the [government’s consultation paper called Integrated Communities](#). We already knew that there are only two references to Roma in the 78 pages. But we were amazed to hear the reason: "we didn't know what to say because of Brexit".

Maybe this isn't so surprising. This consultation paper is based on the work undertaken for David Cameron (remember him?) [by Louise Casey](#). She travelled around England and mainly focused on the position of Muslim communities. In passing, Casey referred to the Roma; she suggested that Roma families took up valuable school places (#1.26), unsettled local Pakistani families (#1.42), created fly-tipping and conducted benefit fraud (#3.50). It is not obvious however, that she spoke to any Roma.

What is surprising is that Casey published her report six months after the Brexit referendum. The government publishes a report this year on integration which fails to mention its own commitment to the integration of Roma, and Gypsies and Travellers. And anyone and everyone within the Roma communities knows the uncertainty and fear generated by Brexit; indeed, amongst the whole three million EU nationals in the UK. Which is why this newsletter dwells on Brexit, the implications for Roma communities in the UK and how well integration policy is working.

Welcome to the latest Roma Support Group e-bulletin. Including:

- Major new report and statement from MPs about Roma & Brexit
- Other recent information about the potential impacts of Brexit on Roma communities and other EU nationals in the UK
- Vital report for Roma parents: *A survival guide: child protection for Roma parents*, from Advicenow, part of Law for Life
- How well is the UK government performing in its commitment to Roma integration as (still) a member of the European Union?
- How effective is government policy towards the Roma? The parliamentary inquiry continues

For more information about Roma Support Group (RSG), go to our website here and look at the [‘projects’ pages](#).

Contact us via:

andy@romasupportgroup.org.uk

Roma & Brexit: Report on a Joint All Party Parliamentary Group roundtable event

For over two years, Roma communities in the UK have lived with the fear and uncertainty created by the decision to leave the European Union. After considerable planning, and working alongside sister agencies, Roma Support Group was able to receive support from Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust to arrange a roundtable meeting hosted by parliamentarians in the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Gypsies, Travellers and Roma who are committed to support Roma, Gypsy and Traveller rights. The focus was to encourage local Roma groups from around the UK to explain to parliamentarians the main concerns of Roma families they worked with; and to get specialist input from lawyers and colleagues from the Council of Europe. The government’s proposals for EU nationals to apply for Settled Status had been published in June 2018. The historic meeting took place in the Palace of Westminster on 11 July 2018. Roma representatives and supporters attended

from Glasgow, Newcastle, Leeds, Doncaster, Rotherham, Sheffield, Liverpool, Luton, Peterborough, Derby, Kent and London. The report of the event, and the main conclusions, are available [here](#).

The APPG have agreed to:

- monitor the effectiveness of the Settled Status process and bring matters concerning Roma to the attention of UK and EU Parliaments;
- assess that the remit of the Independent Monitoring Authority (IMA) is sufficiently robust and its powers are adequate to deal with the complications affecting Roma;
- further monitor the work of the IMA once established and with particular reference to Roma;
- assess the evidence and produce an early analysis of the experience of Roma communities in 2019; and continue reviewing the process in 2020 and 2021, with updates and relevant actions.

To prepare for the meeting, we wanted MPs and members of the House of Lords to understand the problems being reported locally. Red Zebra in Kent explained:

- There are high levels of anxiety and fear over Brexit and people's futures in the UK.
- Many Roma are very misinformed, with their understanding of what is happening in relation to Brexit being based on headlines in the British or country of origin newspapers. These headlines are often misleading and not actually backed up by the full article but are often taken at face value.
- The fighting and negativity around Brexit has not helped the abilities of charities to reassure and inform Roma around Brexit. As one Roma man said, *"so they tell us we can stay now, but who knows they will change their mind later. This has already happened so why not again. They are all fighting with each other so one day this group say this thing, and the next day the other group will get power and say the opposite. We cannot put our faith in anything."*
- We are seeing high levels of request for help with depression. Fear of having to leave the UK is one area feeding into this depression.

- Vulnerable Roma are being targeted by those outside their community who are exploiting Roma people's anxieties around Brexit and offering to sell them false documents which they are wrongly told will help them stay after Brexit.
- Roma families worry that they will struggle to pay to register for settled status. Many families are not in a position to be able to find any extra money, and will be faced with harsh choices about whether to pay the rent, buy food or pay their registration fee.
- We feel concerned that some Roma who have been continuously in the UK for over five years may not have records that establish their presence in the UK through the suggested electronic checks. If the government is serious about its intention to just check presence in the UK than we would hope that the extra documents accepted as per annex one are genuinely kept broad and evidence of interaction with charities is accepted as evidence.

Friends of Romano Lav (Glasgow) stressed the existing operations which they feel are already targeted at sections of the Roma community. They said:

“Romano Lav is deeply concerned about recent Immigration Enforcement activity in Govanhill relating to Romanian Roma residents. We have built up a significant body of evidence regarding the Home Office's harassment of Govanhill's Romanian Roma residents and are concerned that the Home Office is using the mechanism of 'voluntary return' to effectively deport Romanian Roma from their homes in Glasgow. As EU citizens exercising their EU Treaty Freedom of Movement rights, Romanians are lawfully entitled to live and work in Scotland. Yet due to a series of removals and increasing routine patrols, Romanians are living in fear that the next knock at the door will be immigration officers seeking to arrest and deport them. We believe that the Home Office is casting a wide net and, along with partner agencies through 'Operation Mighty', is racially profiling the community.”

See all the evidence we collected from around the country [here](#).

[Settled? Avoiding pitfalls and maximising potential for those seeking post-Brexit settled status](#)

In the last newsletter, we carried the report from the Migration Observatory at Oxford University which explained which groups of EU migrants might be most at risk to becoming “illegal” as a result of Brexit. Now the New Philanthropic Capital (NPC) – a charity which supports other charities and NGOs have greater impact – have released a report which looks at this in more detail. It’s available [here](#).

It deals explicitly with Roma migrants. This research from *Reveals Reality*, reports the findings of focus groups with EU nationals in Thetford (Portuguese nationals), Wirral (Polish), Ealing (Polish and Romanian), Burnt Oak (Romanian) and Govanhill in Glasgow (Roma). 83 people were interviewed in total, including at least 12 Roma. It captures the under-reported pleasure that many Roma feel about living in the UK. For example, Lamuie from Glasgow says:

“When I came to this country I didn’t expect to get any kindness. The day I went to my son’s school for the first time, I was scared because I am often looked down on because of the way I dress. But the school’s headteacher was so nice to me, she said ‘that’s a beautiful dress’. I looked around and there were also other people wearing different clothes, like the Muslim ladies with burkas. I felt really good.”

The research is both detailed, extremely illustrative of people’s worries and fears, and also suggests how the government can take action to make dramatic improvements – like:

- Discredit certain rumours and communicate that certain actions aren’t necessary
- Raise the profile of the term ‘settled status’ to make it more recognisable and understandable
- Continue reassuring applicants that reviewers are not looking for reasons for applicants to be rejected

This is a very valuable and serious piece of research. Let’s hope the government and its advisors are taking careful note.

Fear mounts as Roma prepare to apply for post-Brexit settled status in the UK

Roma Support Group and Luton Roma Trust were both quoted in a newspaper report about “Roma communities fear deportation in post-Brexit Britain”. See the article [here](#).

Martin Burrell from Luton said:

“We’re all holding our breath to see what’s going to happen on the other side of Brexit. We’re all very worried that many of our families won’t be able to demonstrate that they have been resident in the UK. They may not be able to provide a list of addresses that they have lived in over the years and may not be able to demonstrate that they’ve been in regular work. We are all very fearful of what might happen to these families, many of whom have been here 10 or 15 years now.”

And our own Mihai Bica said:

“The Roma community is the most vulnerable group when it comes to accessing their future settled status. [The Home Office scheme] is an online scheme and there are high levels of illiteracy among Roma people.”

Another article from Sarah Zawacki who works for RSG, on the implications of Brexit for Roma. Sarah reports the discussions that have taken place in focus groups arranged with clients and users of RSG, and she concludes by saying:

The Home Office must urgently consider the potential human rights implications of its settled status scheme for vulnerable migrant groups, and offer greater transparency about the mechanisms of how immigration advice is provided and the criteria on which applications will be assessed.

Another major piece of research and analysis. Available [here](#).

Why are children being treated as adults by the government on Brexit?

As part of the Settled Status process, the government are saying that every young people over 16 would have to pay the adult rate of £65. For those under 16, the cost would be £32.50. However, Roma Support Group and a range of other GRT and children’s charities and agencies have written to

government ministers complaining as the UK is signed up to international treaties – like the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child – and indeed the Children Act 1989, both of which define a child as a person under 18.

Read the letter to government [here](#).

It was worth noting that the [European Parliament's Brexit steering group](#) said in July that:

“MEPs remain unhappy that EU27 citizens in the UK, who have contributed to British society and paid their taxes, will have to pay for registration. We continue to believe this process should be cost-free, in keeping with the European Parliament's longstanding position on this matter.”

A survival guide to child protection for Roma parents

Dada Felja from Advicenow and Law for Life explains:

“We have created this guide for Roma families but the information is also relevant to anyone else in this situation who lives in England. Although the guide addresses Roma families directly, we anticipate that it's these community, support or advice workers who, in practice, will be the main users of the guide. We hope that these workers will select the key messages that are most relevant for use with their Roma clients on a case by case basis”.

“The Roma community was involved in all stages of the project delivery: from consultation about the community's concerns and understanding in regards to child protection through involvement in the design of this information resource”.

“We are now in a process of making a short film illustrating key elements of the legal framework and the skills needed to fully comply with the child protection requirements. The film will be narrated by Roma community members in Romanes. We will then deliver three community training sessions for Roma champions in London, Rotherham and Derby”.

“Our aim is that these resources will also be used by Children's Services in order to help them make the legal frameworks more accessible and engage more effectively with Roma families”.

The guide is available [here](#).

Worthwhile looking at the [range of other guides](#) Advicenow have produced – guides to winning a PIP appeal, to dealing with divorce, through to threats of evictions.

Monitoring the UK government's virtually non-existent National Roma Integration Strategy

A contradiction? Monitoring a strategy that doesn't exist? Yes and no. All EU member states have agreed to support greater Roma integration – especially in terms of education, housing, health and employment. As readers of this newsletter are well aware, the UK government have said they will not adopt a national Roma integration strategy, but they will adapt existing social inclusion and integration policies to ensure Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities experience massive or minor improvements.

Every year, the EU has tried to assess progress, or lack of progress. Last year, the EU decided that they would support NGOs in all member states to undertake assessments of progress – not just relying on the governments' assertions. The initiative is co-ordinated by the [Central European University](#) in Budapest, and the [ERGO Network](#). In the UK, four NGOs/charitable agencies have been selected to undertake this work:

- National Association of Gypsy Liaison Groups (NAGLG)
- Friends, Families, Travellers (FFT)
- Roma Community Care
- Roma Support Group

The first report on the UK government's progress was produced earlier this year. It is available [here](#).

Key findings detailed in the report are that:

- Unlike most European governments the UK government has still not established a National Roma Integration Strategy, despite both a number of recommendations in international treaties (which urged the UK government to do so) and repeated requests from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) NGOs. The UK Government continue to hold to the position that mainstream laws and policies already offer protection to GRT populations and will in themselves promote integration – although

this is not the experience of community members and their representative organisations. Accordingly, GRT communities continue to be marginalised, with attempts to meet their needs and foster their integration being piecemeal and poorly funded.

- There is no systematic mainstreaming for GRT inclusion within central Government and there is little evidence of Roma inclusion being mainstreamed across local authorities. Similarly, with regard to promoting the empowerment and participation of GRT communities there has been little in the way of specific initiatives, apart from a few pilot programmes, with most positive work that has been done coming from NGOs.
- There is clear inconsistency in data collection with regard to Gypsies, Roma and Travellers in official data sets.
- Despite the UK's anti-discrimination legislation, evidence shows that discrimination and racism towards Gypsies, Irish Travellers and Roma continues across the UK.
- Negative media coverage of the communities, coupled with the "localism" agenda, an active "anti-Gypsy" stance on the part of some national and local politicians and the change in the definition of "Gypsy" under Planning Policy for Traveller Sites and its knock-on effect in terms of the reduction of identified need have helped to worsen the situation.
- There is a lack of a structured approach to address anti-gypsyism, which is often left out of discussions about racism.
- Racism towards most ethnic minority groups is now less frequently expressed in public and widely seen as unacceptable. However, racism towards GRT communities is still common and is frequently blatant. In addition, abusive media coverage and overtly racist statements from local and national politicians add to the ignorance and prejudice of many members of the settled population
- While the UK government has adopted policy measures to eliminate hate speech, a clearer strategy is needed to take action against the media (including social media) or individuals that incite discrimination and racism against GRT communities and individuals.

A more detailed second stage report will be available by early 2019.

Select committee inquiry: tackling inequalities faced by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities

The Women & Equalities select committee of the House of Commons is continuing to take evidence about the effectiveness of government policy for GRT communities. [See here](#) for the link to all the written evidence that has been submitted, and the three sessions that have been held so far where the MPs have taken verbal evidence from witnesses – including RSG staff and other Gypsy and Traveller advocates and activists, and those working with GRT communities.

.....and finally.....in Italy

In our last newsletter, we highlighted the extreme hostility to Roma and migrants by leading members of far right La Liga in Italy, in advance of their election. In particular, the hatred from Matteo Salvini, La Liga's leader. He is now the deputy leader of the Italian government, and their interior minister. Salvini announced in June that he intends to conduct a "census" of Roma; [see here for a short 90 second video](#) the European Roma Rights Centre about why this should be completely opposed.

And what then happens when leaders of a country start to demonise a marginalised community? [Read here](#) about what happened on a train last month travelling from Milan to Manova

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

We gratefully acknowledge the support provided by the Barrow Cadbury Trust.
