



Introduction and welcome

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

- News from our recent AGM celebrating twenty years of our existence
- A different way of looking at things: The view of Roma in the UK from Slovakia
- All things Brexit – information, guidance and unusual largesse from the Home Office
- The Roma to be included as a separate and distinct ethnic group in the census
- Is deafness widespread amongst Roma children?
- The National Roma Network; the final report
- Anti-Gypsyism and neo-Nazism in the Czech Republic

News from Roma Support Group

Our 20th anniversary

Last month, Roma Support Group held its Annual General Meeting and also celebrated twenty years of existence. Our patron, Thomas Acton, summed up the evening by saying:

Workshops on immigration status after Brexit, gripping educational drama on child protection, lively noisy democratic elections, amazing food, children drawing, foot-tapping Roma electronic music, dignified

elders dancing with abandon: as ever, the AGM of the Roma Support Group is the best party in the Roma Civil Rights movement....See you all next year!

You can read our annual report, and glimpse some of the events throughout the last twenty years, here.

http://romasupportgroup.org.uk/wp/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/AnnualReport_RSG_1998_2018.pdf

Our chair of trustees (Rosa Kotowicz) and chief executive (Sylvia Ingmire) explain:

We have pioneered and continue to share our models of engagement and good practice with young and older Roma people, proving that no community is 'hard to reach' but there are those communities who may be marginalised, overlooked and under-served due to a lack of political will, resources, prejudice and discrimination. The Roma Support Group can mean different things to different people – so please read through the text of this report to hear what our work meant to our community members, volunteers, professionals and other stakeholders.

And finally, Thomas Acton explains how RSG has had to develop to defend the rights of all Roma people in the UK:

RSG realised it should not just cope with what the local and national policies sling at them; it could campaign to change policy, from London Councils' attempt to withdraw funding from the frontline voluntary sector organisations in London to Newham Council's attempt to sabotage independent advice and to the present Government's attempt to undermine the EU Roma Integration Strategy. The Roma Support Group is one local organisation, but its influence has spread throughout Roma, Gypsy and Traveller community action.

[Xmas card and New Year](#)

*Season's Greetings
and
A Happy New Year*

*Thank you for all your support in 2018
from everyone at the Roma Support Group.*

“If we were Roma, we would not come back from Britain”

Denisa Gdovinova and Filip Olsovsky (Tyzden, 25 September 2018)

We saw Slovak Roma people in English schools, we spoke to their health visitors and political representatives. We saw how they speak perfect English, want to be policemen and doctors and are supported by all the people around them. What is it that the British do differently?

English translation here: <https://www.tyzden.sk/temy/50501/if-we-were-roma-we-would-not-come-back-from-britain/>

Slovak translation here: <https://www.tyzden.sk/temy/49339/keby-sme-boli-romovia-z-britanie-by-sme-sa-uz-nevratili/>

Ruth Barnett has written this introduction to the Tyzden article.....

This is a fascinating account of how health workers and teachers in Sheffield have been able to reach out to and help Slovakian Roma immigrants to develop their potential. This will never happen in Slovakia until the majority population face their prejudice and hatred that has been expressed in persecuting the Roma.

Genocide, and the unprocessed hatred that leads to it, are usually driven by ignorance and envy. The persecuted target group is envied for something the prejudiced ignorant people lack and blame the target group for it. The Nazis envied Jews for their academic and financial success and invented propaganda to demonise Jews as stealing their success and pronounced them inferior.

Majority populations in Europe still envy Roma for having a wonderful life of freedom: they roam where they will, sleep under the stars and wake up to sunshine and birdsong. This is the romantic life they imagine Roma have and don't deserve. No-one wants their cherished stereotypes to be exposed, so they will have nothing to do with Jews or Roma because they have decided that Jews and Roma are bad. Moreover, it becomes the fault of the Roma and Jews who they then blame for not coming forward and being friendly!

I hope there are other places in Britain like Sheffield where health visitors have gone out of their way to reach out to Roma. The reward is great! People like Ondrej, labelled 'stupid' in Slovakia, are able to blossom and develop their potential. Those immigrants who meet friendly helpful concern, wherever they come from and whatever trauma they have suffered, once they develop their human potential, are usually most willing to contribute richly to their host country.

I was an immigrant on the Kindertransport at age four in 1939. 10,000 of us Kinder were sent to England by our parents, most of whom were murdered in the concentration camps. We were treated decently and a very large proportion of the 10,000 grew up to work in the helping professions.

For the Roma, unfortunately, there are no established communities of Roma to speak up for those being persecuted all over the world. Those whose education was cut short for one reason or another, do not have the confidence to stand up to prejudice and own their identity with pride. Even in England the

authorities are slow to accept Roma as ordinary human beings like themselves and too many Roma hide their identity out of shame and fear of persecution.

But this is changing. Particularly in Britain, but also in other countries, Roma/Gypsy Travellers are getting together and claiming their rightful voice. And the secret is Education. There are a growing number of British Roma reaching and doing well at university and they are coming out determined to claim their voice.

Census 2021: Roma to be included as Roma

The government has issued a white paper which explains the changes that they intend to make for the next census in March 2021. Roma Support Group and other local groups in Derby, Peterborough and Sheffield have been working with the Office for National Statistics (ONS) to test out a proposal that 'Roma' should be included as a separate ethnic category. The ONS explain:

During the consultation and research undertaken for the 2021 Census topics, the user need for data on the Roma community, alongside Gypsy and Irish Travellers which first had a tick-box included in the last census in 2011, was clear.

In recognition of this need, The Office for National Statistics (ONS) has made a recommendation to add a Roma tick-box to the ethnicity question in the 2021 Census. We're keen that the community is made aware of this.

ONS are not recommending including Roma within the existing Gypsy or Irish Traveller response option. After extensive engagement with data users, service providers, and members of the Roma community, we understand that there are different data needs for this community.

Our recommendations fully recognise the need for good data on all groups, backgrounds and communities. ONS has committed to work with them and their local authorities to ensure that data are easily available to decision-makers.

As well as adding a new Roma tick-box to the ethnic topic in recognition of the specific needs of the Roma community ONS will be making it easier for everyone to identify as they wish through the development of “search-as-you-type” capability.

You can read the white paper in full here – the references to Roma are on pp48/49.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-2021-census-of-population-and-housing-in-england-and-wales>

There is a detailed report of the outcome of the various focus groups that were held with Roma participants in London, Derby, Peterborough, Luton and Sheffield available on the ONS website here (see section 5 ‘Ethnic group’; and annex 4 ‘Summary of research undertaken for ethnic group’, paragraph A, B and E).

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/census/censustransformationprogramme/questiondevelopment/2021censustopicresearchupdatedecember2018#annex-4-summary-of-research-undertaken-for-ethnic-group-december-2017-to-november-2018>

We will return to this in our next newsletter. The census is planned to take place on 22 March 2021. It can best be summarised, quoting two Roma participants:

I haven’t heard of the census, but I also was not in this country in 2011. When I look at it, I also see that it says Gypsy which is not ok to call us in Hungary.

I would always record myself next to Gypsy. We are not the same at all, but we have shared experiences. It makes no sense for us to be separated.

Brexit & Roma

Whilst we might all be endlessly worried, completely confused and disempowered by Brexit, it’s essential that we keep this under close

surveillance. See here for our concerns about the EUSS (European Union Settled Status) scheme in the *Independent*, 1 November 2018.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/brexit-roma-gypsies-travellers-windrush-immigration-paperwork-a8613606.html>

Roma Gypsies warned over risk of deportation after Brexit without paperwork proving residency: (Independent, 1 November 2018)

Home Office support for 'vulnerable' EU nationals

The Home Office is awarding up to £9m to voluntary groups and consortia around the UK to “support vulnerable EU citizens and their family members with making their EUSS applications”. The Home Office say “The key outcome is for those funded to provide practical application support to vulnerable EU citizens and their family members”. Applications have to be completed by 1 February 2019 and further details and information are available here.

https://www.contractsfinder.service.gov.uk/Notice/dcc90ff7-c416-465a-ad92-9dd7f15bcce7?utm_campaign=eu-settlement&utm_source=gcs-local-southeast&utm_medium=social

EUSS and Free movement – further information

Free Movement, providing an excellent website and blog, have updated their guide on EUSS last month (November 2018). It is available here:

<https://www.freemovement.org.uk/how-to-apply-for-settled-status-temporary-status-brexit/>

Here for Good provides free post-Brexit immigration advice and explains that “our goal is simple; to help those who need it most. We don’t exist to support politicians or political parties; we’re here to support people. We’re willing to work with anyone who supports our vision”. They have published their guide to EUSS and it’s available here in a question and answer format.

<https://hereforgoodguide.com/>

OISC guidance: Immigration assistance

The Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC) has published a guide which “sets out what assistance individuals and organisations may provide to those people who have queries regarding their immigration position or need advice and assistance with an immigration matter”. This is a big problem for many smaller agencies working with Roma if you have not got accreditation to provide immigration advice for the EUSS scheme. The OISC guidance is available here.

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/749370/Immigration Assistance - PRACTICE NOTE - 161018 v3.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/749370/Immigration_Assistance_-_PRACTICE_NOTE_-_161018_v3.pdf)

Concerns about OISC guidance

Free Movement have some concerns about the guidance though. Not just because there are potentially well over three million applications to process in just over two years, but also because of a massive shortage of accredited immigration advisers. As they say;

If it is illegal for a community support group to advise an individual and it is illegal to advise someone whether their documents are adequate to make an application, how are people going to get help with applying under the scheme? There just aren't enough regulated advisers out there to provide the scale of work needed.

See their full blog post here.

<https://www.freemovement.org.uk/advising-eu-citizens-on-their-settlement-rights-may-be-illegal-warns-regulator/>

Deaf Roma children in the UK: a research project at Leeds University

Recent evidence from some parts of the country suggests that some Roma children are more likely to experience deafness and hearing loss. It hasn't been reported extensively by families working with RSG in London, but it

seems to be in some parts of the country. How do Roma families support their children who are deaf? How do schools and specialist services respond? Staff at Leeds University have been looking into this for the last year.

Dr Jess Elmore (from the School of Education) writes:

The School of Education at the University of Leeds has just completed a research about deaf Roma children in the UK led by Ruth Swanwick with Jackie Salter and Jess Elmore. The project was started because some local authorities had noticed there were increasing numbers of deaf Roma children and young people accessing their services and they wanted to find better ways to support these children and their families.

Previous research suggests that there is a higher incidence of moderate to severe hearing loss among Roma communities. It is difficult to generalise about hearing loss but someone with a moderate loss will find it difficult to follow a spoken conversation in a quiet room. This level of hearing loss will therefore affect a child's social and educational development if they don't receive the right support. However, there has been no research on the experiences of deaf Roma children or on how they can best be supported. One reason for this is the challenging nature of research with deaf Roma children because of their potentially vulnerable circumstances.

Our study involved a survey of deaf education services in England to find out the numbers of deaf Roma children, a questionnaire and interview with five deaf education services, and four case studies of deaf Roma children and their families.

We found that the number of deaf Roma children in the UK is under-reported and that better collection of ethnic data is needed. Beyond this, it seems that there is a high incidence of undiagnosed deafness in England's Roma communities among both adults and children. We also found that being deaf and being Roma can have a dual impact on childhood development, education and achievement as well as on longer term health and well-being. However, the Roma families in our research all had resources to draw on in supporting their children. Families often had multiple deaf members so parents had communication strategies they could use with their children. There was also

evidence that families and communities were learning over time how to navigate the complex systems in place around having a deaf child.

There is further research needed in this area. We want to look at the Central and Eastern European contexts to understand Roma families' prior experiences of education and health/audiology support and how this has shaped their understandings of deafness and their engagement with services. There are also wider questions about the support of deaf children from other migrant populations at risk of exclusion. However we feel that the case of deaf Roma children is exceptional because of the higher likelihood of deafness among Roma families, the associated communication challenges, the particular context of language and literacy as well as families' potential reluctance to self ascribe and their experiences of exclusion and discrimination.

We are now looking to build a stakeholder group to continue our research. Please get in touch if you are interested in getting involved. Our project report is available here:

<https://deafed.leeds.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/28/2018/12/Roma-families-and-deaf-children-web-version.pdf>

You can contact Jess Elmore on 0113 343 6562 or at j.elmore@leeds.ac.uk

News about the project is available here.

<https://deafed.leeds.ac.uk/category/news>

[National Roma Network \(NRN\): final report 2015-2017](#)

The NRN report outlines findings from the work of the National Roma Network between 2015 and 2017.

It starts with an overview of the structure and work of the Network, then goes into key issues and practice in a range of policy areas such as: education, employment and skills, police and criminal justice, Brexit, housing and health and finally explores cross-cutting themes, such as data on migrant Roma, cultural awareness and diversity of the migrant and the complexity of the Roma situation.

The NRN recommendations include:

- Establish a national plan for Roma inclusion.
- Commit to evidence-based policy for improving lives of Roma and local communities.
- Tackle complex issues facing Roma communities such as exploitation, inequality and poverty.
- Provide opportunities for Roma people and Roma communities to help themselves.
- Ensure Roma are fully prepared for Brexit changes.

We hope that this report will inspire informed action and planning to better integrate and support the Roma communities across Yorkshire and the UK.

The executive summary says:

Roma migrants have been arriving and settling in the UK for over 10 years in search of a better life. Their experiences of poverty and discrimination in their countries of origin often mean that they have faced additional challenges while accessing services in the UK, and have been perceived as having complex needs by services. Those needs are gradually being recognised at local levels and support measures are being put in place in many areas across the country, but there is still work to be done to join-up those measures and create comprehensive long-term solutions.

Despite local actions, wider progress is more challenging without a specific and coherent approach from central government to strategic and practical policy solutions.

The National Roma Network was set up to support local authorities, services and practitioners to respond to Roma migration. It provides a platform for them to engage with voluntary organisations and emerging Roma activists, discuss current issues and agree the way forward.

The difficulties and barriers recognised in the early years of Roma migration by practitioners and support organisations do not seem to be diminishing. The lack of national leadership and policy focus on the issue has led to challenges

for Roma migrants and their ability to integrate in the UK, but also for the local communities to which they are migrating.

Brexit has provided a further opportunity for the government to engage with Roma issues in the context of migration and integration. If the UK is to avoid the entrenched exclusion of Roma experienced in a number of areas across Europe, there needs to be greater recognition that Roma migrants are a distinct group with additional vulnerabilities, and a holistic framework is required to facilitate their integration and encourage inclusion in society.

<https://www.migrationyorkshire.org.uk/userfiles/file/publications/MY-finalNRNreport-Oct2018.pdf>

Far right in Czech Republic: the politicians turning on Roma

Paraic O'Brien (Channel 4 News, 5 October 2018), 10 minutes

<https://www.channel4.com/news/far-right-in-czech-republic-the-politicians-turning-on-roma>

Hostility towards Roma people is so ingrained in Czech political life, the country's president recently called them "work shy", and in the recent Czech municipal elections some politicians are openly stirring up virulent anti-Roma sentiment. In the city of Most, just north of Prague, some local parties are advocating building a separate area for Roma people and using slogans which hark back to Nazi-style propaganda. (A warning: this film contains views which many will find offensive)

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

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