



Statement: Incident in Harehills, Leeds on the afternoon of 18 July 2024

As charity organisations supporting people from the Roma communities and human rights organisations we were made aware that on the afternoon of 18th July 2024 an incident developed between a Roma family and local Children's Services. The incident erupted when Children's Services presented themselves at the address of the Roma family to remove the children from the family.

According to media reports, the incident escalated and involved a police vehicle being overturned and fires breaking out.

We are concerned to see the safety of local neighbourhoods in Leeds being affected and we condemn the violent actions that took place.

We are concerned by the forceful manner in which the children were removed and the impact this has had on them and the wider local community.

We are concerned by the virulent racism that has proliferated on social media since these events unfolded. Roma communities in the UK are frequently subject to racist stereotyping and stigma and this tragic event is being manipulated to stoke hate and fuel division.¹

What do Roma and those who help them say?

Frontline casework of Roma NGOs finds that Roma families report negative experiences when engaging with Children's Services in England, including direct and indirect discrimination, poor communication, lack of access to information and lack of appropriate support, generally making them feel scared and powerless.² This is compounded by the shared experience and history of oppression against Roma communities in their countries of origin.³

Existing research, as well as the frontline casework of Roma NGOs and other charities supporting Roma in England, shows a lack of knowledge and cultural competence among

¹ Clark, C., & Rice, G. (2012). Spaces of hate, places of hope: the Romanian Roma in Belfast. In Stewart, A. (Ed). *The Gypsy 'Menace': Populism and the New Anti-Gypsy Politics*. London: Hurst & Company, pp. 167-190; Clark, C. (2015). Integration, exclusion and the moral 'othering' of Roma migrant communities in Britain. In *Revisiting moral panics*. Bristol: Policy Press, pp. 231-242; Mullen, A. (2018). 'Race', Place and Territorial Stigmatisation: The Construction of Roma Migrants in and through Govanhill, Scotland. In: Devine, T.M. and McCarthy, A. (2018). *New Scots: Scotland's Immigrant Communities since 1945*. Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 205-231; Yuval-Davis, N., Varjú, V., Tervonen, M., Hakim, J., & Fathi, M. (2017). Press discourses on Roma in the UK, Finland and Hungary. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 40(7), 1151-1169.

² Cemlyn, S., & Allen, D. (2016). Outreach: care experiences among Gypsy, Traveller and Roma families. In *Social work in a diverse society*. Bristol: Policy Press, pp. 161-180; Humphris, R. (2019). *Home-Land: Romanian Roma, Domestic Spaces and the State*. Bristol: Bristol University Press.

³ Picker, G. (2010) 'Nomads' land? Political cultures and nationalist stances vis-à-vis Roma in Italy' in Stewart, M. and Rovid, M. (eds) *Multi-disciplinary perspectives on Romany Studies*, Budapest, Central European University Press, pp. 211-227.; Nacu, A. (2012) 'From silent marginality to spotlight scapegoating? A brief case study of France's policy towards the Roma', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, vol. 38, no. 8, pp. 1323-1328.





Children's Services regarding Roma families.⁴ Frontline casework also shows that Children's Services often fail to address the barriers that Roma face within the child protection process. For example, failing to enable meaningful communication with Roma and provide culturally appropriate support.

Our recommendations

- Leeds Children's Services should immediately enable meaningful engagement with the Roma family subject to this case, to achieve the best outcome for the children. This should include working with a bi-lingual Roma advocate and/or a relevant Roma charity to facilitate communication/engagement with parents and culturally appropriate support for the children involved.
- Leeds Children's Services, and all Children's Services across the UK, should address the scarcity of kinship placements and foster care placements within Roma families, and the lack of cultural competence in foster care placements to ensure the cultural, emotional and psychological needs of Roma children in care are being met.
- The Head of Leeds Children's Services and a representative from the Police should meet with Roma NGOs and local community representatives to reassure local Roma communities, and prevent the possible negative impact this incident could have on Roma families and their engagement with local services.
- The Department of Education should investigate the failures of Children's Services to address the barriers and disadvantages Roma people experience during child protection cases.
- The Government should take immediate action to ensure Roma families have access to culturally appropriate support and a fair process during child protection investigations.
- The media must report responsibly on these events, ensuring balanced and ethical coverage and appropriate representation in line with Clause 9 of the National Union of Journalists Code of Conduct and Clause 12 of the IPSO (Independent Press Standards Organisation) Editors' Code of Practice. Social media platforms must act swiftly to remove hateful posts.

⁴ Allen, D. and Hulmes, A. (2021) 'Aversive Racism and Child Protection Practice with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Children and Families'; Allen, D., & Riding, S. (2018). The Fragility of Professional Competence: A Preliminary Account of Child Protection Practice with Romani and Traveller Children. Budapest: European Roma Rights Centre.





Background information

Roma started to migrate to the UK from Central and Eastern Europe in 1989. The 2021 Census recorded 103,200 Roma living in England and Wales. Previous research found that around 200,000 Roma live in the UK.⁵

Statistical data on Children's Services in the UK is not disaggregated, in most cases grouping British Romany (Gypsy) and Roma people together.

Research suggests that Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) families are subjected to a disproportionate amount of child protection reporting and intervention.⁶

What's happening in England?

DfE data from 2023 shows a disproportionate increase in the number of Gypsy/Roma children in the care system. Between 2019 and 2023, the total number of looked-after children increased by 7.29%, while for Gypsy and Roma children, it increased by 22.44%.⁷

What's the situation in Europe?

In Europe, as many as four in five children in the care institutions of some countries are of Roma origin.⁸ In Bulgaria, more than 60% of children in care homes are Roma, despite Roma making up less than 10% of the population.⁹ In Slovakia, the proportion of Roma children in care homes rises to 80%.¹⁰

For questions please contact Mihai Calin Bica of Roma Support Group at mihai@romasupportgroup.org.uk

⁵ Brown, P., Scullion, L., & Phillip, M. (2013) *Migrant Roma in the United Kingdom. Population size and experiences of local authorities and partners*, University of Salford.

⁶ Allen, D. and Hamnett, V. (2022). Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children in child welfare services in England. *The British Journal of Social Work*, vol. 52(7), 3904–3922.

⁷ Department for Education. (n.d.-a). *Children looked after in England including adoptions*. GOV.UK.

⁸ Kostka, J. (2022, January 27). [Social Care: How Gypsy, roma and Traveller children face discrimination across Europe and the UK](#). The Conversation.

⁹ Rorke, B. (2021, January). [Blighted Lives: Romani Children In State Care](#). ERRC. .

¹⁰ Ibid.





Organisations supporting the statement

Roma Support Group

Romani & Traveller Social Work Association

EuropeanDrom

Roma Voice Centre

Contact Point for Community Relations UK

RoConnect

Union Romani Voice

Roma Access Newcastle

Romano Lav

Traveller Law Reform

Idea Rom Association

Ando Glaso

Luton Roma Trust

European Roma Rights Centre

