



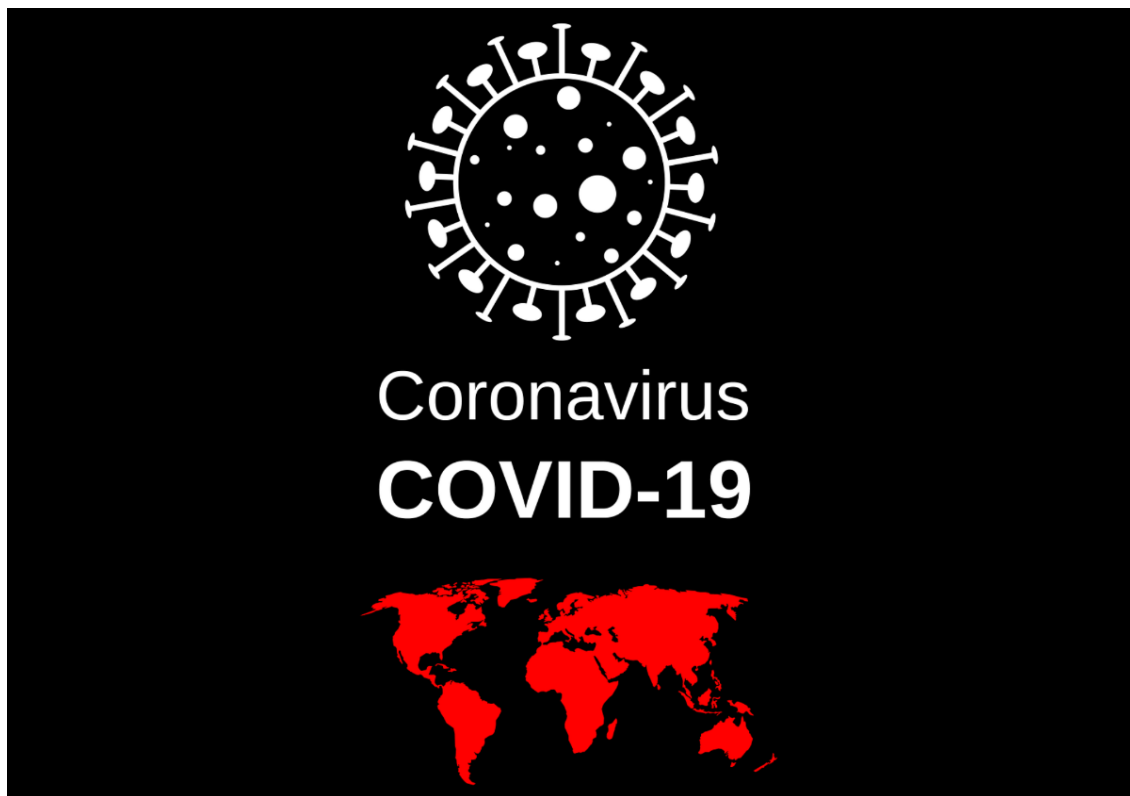
Introduction and welcome

We empathise with everyone affected by the COVID-19 crisis and are doing all we can to provide support to those who need our help. We hope all of our readers are keeping safe during this difficult time.

We are wholly committed to standing up for Roma voices, holding government to account and using our expertise during this period of uncertainty. COVID-19 has become a dominant force in our lives. As a result, this edition of our newsletter focuses on the following areas:

- Advice on how to stay safe and the support that is available.
- The work we have been doing in response to the pandemic.
- Anti-Roma racism in the context of COVID-19.
- The impact of the virus on Roma communities across Europe.
- The effects of COVID-19 on the EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS).
- International Roma Day.

COVID-19



Roma in the UK are particularly vulnerable to contracting COVID-19 and developing severe illness from it. **Roma in the UK are also susceptible to suffering the worst economic effects** caused by the government-led response to the virus.



On our website, we have provided a range of [resources](#) and advice in different languages about how to keep safe during the course of the pandemic.

Despite the disruption that COVID-19 has caused, **we are still providing advice, support and appointments to Roma community members via telephone.** You can access [posters](#) in English, Romanian and Polish on how to contact us and videos explaining how to access our different projects on the same page.

Public statement

The Roma Support Group has issued a [public statement](#) on COVID-19.

We are also writing letters to MPs and leaders of local authorities, tailoring them to address issues that have arisen or could arise in their areas and detailing our concerns and recommendations.

We will continue to monitor the actions of national and local governments to ensure they are safeguarding our families and communities wherever possible.

COVID-19: anti-Roma racism in the UK

We are deeply concerned by **the emergence of anti-Roma incidents, attitudes and narratives in the UK amid the difficulties and suffering experienced in the pandemic.** During this time, those regularly scapegoated are at a heightened risk of being targeted. We have seen some disturbing instances of this during April.

Govanhill incidents

In early April, images of people breaking social distancing regulations began circulating [online](#) with the claim that they were Roma from Govanhill in Glasgow. It has since been confirmed that the images were not taken during lockdown and they were from different cities altogether. Davie Donaldson, the chairman of Glasgow based Roma charity Romano Lav, believes that up to 50 per cent of the local Romanian Roma population has returned to mainland Europe because they fear the racist abuse that they could encounter during the pandemic.

Channel 5 documentary

On 1st and 22nd April, Channel 5 aired the programme 'Gypsies on Benefits and Proud', which first aired in 2014. We regard it as significant that Channel 5 chose to re-broadcast this programme during the current crisis.

The programme trivialised the lives of migrant Roma and mocked Roma and Eastern European culture. It focused on a few individuals and families and made no mention of the systemic racism migrant Roma often experience in their countries of origin.

The documentary set up its participants to fail in the eyes of the viewer. One section focused on a man who said he would pickpocket if he could not afford food in Britain and would squat in an unoccupied property if he came across it:

“It’s the last day in Romania for thirty-six-year-old ‘....’ Time for some final chores before he heads off to Britain in search of cash... ‘...’ plan is to pocket enough to build a dream home to share with the family... with more than a little help from the British taxpayer.”

In another section, the documentary asserts that a family in Rotherham are living comfortably, despite receiving only £50 a week to support five family members:

“In Rotherham, 43-year-old Slovakian Gypsy ‘...’ has already made a big move even if she’s just crossed a few streets to her new home. Now she’s settling into a much swankier pad with her husband and four of her eleven kids, and it’s all paid for by benefits.”

The documentary can be seen as a targeted attempt to whip up racist abuse and xenophobia. The choice of the term ‘Gypsy’ over Roma when referring to individuals in the programme seems pejorative. It is little surprise that we are seeing new incidents of racist abuse emerging when programmes such as this selectively misinform viewers and leave Roma at risk of attack.

Those responsible for re-airing the programme need to be held to account and their reasons for doing so need to be scrutinised. In the COVID-19 context where Brexit is not at the top of the national agenda, this programme can be seen to reinforce anti-migrant attitudes that featured in the Brexit debate. With the recent welfare packages announced by the government in response to COVID-19, it is not hard to imagine that those perceived as ‘welfare tourists’ could be scapegoated during this time.

Channel 4 documentary

On 16th April Channel 4 aired its latest Dispatches documentary ‘The Truth About Traveller Crime.’ It has since become one of the most viewed and **spoken about** programmes on the network.

The documentary singles out the Traveller community for the crimes of a small minority and presents statistics in a misleading way. One such statistic is that the rate of crime in areas surrounding Traveller sites is higher than elsewhere. Professor Liz Yardley, a criminologist who features on the programme, states that there are other factors that affect this correlation; these include poverty and deprivation. The documentary makers did not seek to pursue this aspect but instead set about listing examples of crime perpetrated by Travellers across the UK.

Romani journalist Jake Bowers has written a **response**, featured on our Facebook page.

Following a high volume of complaints lodged with Ofcom about the programme, Channel 4 issued a **response** on the 18th April.

The response does not contain an apology regarding the way data was presented in the documentary nor for the programme’s lack of editorial balance but continues to assert that the programme presented a balanced view.

BBC: ‘Coronavirus: Sheffield Roma warned over social distancing breaches.’

On the 8th April, the BBC produced an [article](#) focusing on social distancing amongst the Roma community in Sheffield. Singling out Roma is a problematic approach. It could feed into attitudes and assumptions that Roma are being uncooperative. The article did not feature the disproportionate disadvantages Roma communities are facing during the pandemic.

COVID-19: Europe

EU Observer: Inequality, anti-Roma racism, and the coronavirus

This [article](#) covers the way Roma populations across Europe are being treated in response to the pandemic. Roma settlements across Europe are frequently not provided with clean drinking water and sanitation, nor do those living in these settlements have the opportunity to self-isolate. The article describes how thousands of Roma have been left without the means to follow government advice and the sustained neglect of governments is now coupled with the inability of social workers and health mediators to visit settlements because they lack personal protective equipment. Roma living in settlements are extremely vulnerable to contracting COVID-19 and developing severe illness from it. The pandemic has intensified racist scapegoating of Roma, with politicians blaming Roma for the spread of the virus.

Reuters: Bulgaria's Roma say some coronavirus measures are discriminatory

This [article](#) focuses on the racist backlash Roma are facing in Bulgaria. In a nation where the government imposes a range of oppressive policies towards Roma, COVID-19 provides a convenient excuse to further single out Roma communities and impose draconian measures on them.

Al Jazeera: Without safe homes or jobs, Italy's Roma fear coronavirus impact

This [article](#) features lockdown experiences amongst the 30,000 Roma in Italy that live in camps. It shows how restrictions that form part of the Italian government's response to the virus disproportionately impact Roma communities. Their experiences exemplify the risk of imposing one-size-fits-all policies in response to COVID-19 that do not differentiate the needs of individual groups. The article describes how the approach is leaving Roma populations in desperate situations that others in society will not face.

April 2020

Brexit: EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS)



As might be expected the response to COVID-19 has affected all parties involved with the EUSS. **Thousands of people with an uncertain legal status in relation to Brexit could be put at risk.** We feature two articles below:

The **first** sheds light on the situation and shows where many EU and EEA migrants stand. The Roma Support Group is one of 30 signatories to a letter written to the Home Office expressing concerns on this topic. The **second article** collates advice from several sources and provides options that EU migrants can take during lockdown in the absence of their normal avenues for assistance.

The Roma Support Group is still providing **assistance** with the EUSS via telephone and email. Additionally, we are posting relevant information on our Facebook page.

EU Romani Week: Romano Kurko 2020

EU Romani Week 2020, which was due to take place in the European Parliament from 23-26 March, has been postponed. Organisers are hopeful that events can take place later this year.

International Roma Day 8th April 2020

A [message](#) from the Roma Support Group

And finally...

A message of hope and strength in the form of a [Roma song](#) put together by Ando Glaso whilst following social distancing guidance.

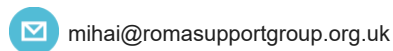
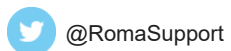
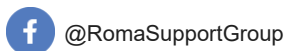
Usually, you would have expected to receive this newsletter from our friend and colleague Andy Shallice. As you may know, Andy is no longer with us. We miss him greatly and hope to carry on his work.

"Those we love most,
Never go away,
They still walk beside us
Each Day."

Remembering Andy Shallice 1952–2019



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



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.

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