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## Introduction and welcome

As lockdown measures continue to change, we hope that you have been able to navigate this transition safely. Given the publication of our EUSS report in June, we consider it important in this newsletter to address the ongoing difficulties with the service that are affecting many Roma around the UK.

In total, this month's newsletter will focus on:

- The commemoration of European Roma Holocaust Memorial Day
- The publication of our European Settlement Scheme (EUSS) report
- The effect of COVID-19 on the EUSS
- Amnesty's policing report
- Roma school exclusions
- The response of European institutions and governments in the context of Black Lives Matter and anti-racist activism

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## Roma Holocaust Memorial Day



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The 2nd August marked Roma Holocaust Memorial Day in Europe. To commemorate this, we have shared two short documentaries on our [Facebook Page](#). The [first](#) deals with the contemporary experiences of Roma in Europe and how their history has shaped this. The [second](#) documentary tells personal accounts of the holocaust through oral history.

On Sunday, a [ceremony](#) at Auschwitz-Birkenau remembering Roma and Sinti victims was able to go ahead with state officials and survivors in attendance.

The President of the European Commission, Vice-President, and Commissioner for Equality released a joint [statement](#).

The statement concludes with this appeal:

***'We urge Member States to commit to a new EU Roma strategic framework for equality, inclusion and participation to bring social fairness and more equality in all senses of the word.'***

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## EU Settlement Scheme



## Roma Support Group EUSS report

In June, we published our EUSS [report](#). It analyses the engagement of Roma communities in the UK with the EUSS, the problems that Roma have encountered, and provides recommendations to Government and the charity sector.

The key finding of the report:

***‘the EUSS is a plausible system for granting UK residency, but there are substantial barriers to Roma people gaining knowledge of and access to this system.’***

The report explores these barriers with the use of case studies. Positive examples of engagement contained in the report provide models for how EUSS services should operate.

## The effect of COVID-19 on the EUSS

COVID-19 has caused further difficulty for many Roma seeking to apply to the EUSS. Between March and May, the postal route for submitting applications was closed. This meant that those who hold a National ID card without an electronic chip, including Italian and Romania Roma, were unable to apply or progress with their applications.

**Roma were disproportionately affected by the halting of face-to-face support.** Alternative contact systems involving social media and telephone lines took time to be established, and because of their nature, were less accessible to Roma who often depend on support in person. The organisations which specialise in providing support to Roma were also required to modify their activities, meaning that **Roma could not access a**

**sufficient level of support specifically tailored to them.**

For advice on how to contact the RSG regarding the EUSS during this time, please see this [video](#).

The lockdowns in response to COVID-19 also led to the closure of the EU Settlement Resolution Centre's telephone helpline, meaning that those with complex cases found it more difficult to receive support from the SRC. In turn, this meant that **those with complex cases struggled to submit their applications or were unable to altogether.**

Roma who travelled to their country of origin before or during the pandemic are concerned about exceeding the terms of their period of continuous residence. To be eligible for Settled Status, an individual must have 5 years of continuous residence in the UK. Individuals who do not yet have five years of continuous residence are eligible for Pre-Settled Status. But, if an individual with Pre-Settled Status is abroad for more than 6 months in any 12-month period, their Pre-Settled Status will reset back to 0. This means it will take them another 5 years to become eligible for Settled Status.

There are many factors that have impacted the decision for some Roma to remain abroad or to leave the UK during the pandemic. **Many Roma in the UK work in the informal economy. The COVID-19 lockdown meant the loss of their income.** They might have travelled to their country of origin or elsewhere in search of work. Additionally, The COVID-19 pandemic is a time of uncertainty and suffering. Those with family in their country of origin might have travelled to be with them during this time.

Due to these issues and the unpredictable nature of travel forecasts around Europe based on the re-introduction of lockdowns and quarantines, there is a real risk that many Roma with Pre-Settled Status could lose the time they have accrued on their periods of continuous residence. **The Home Office is yet to address whether individuals exceeding the terms will be penalised.**

On 24th July, a representative from the Home Office responded to Patrick Grady's written [questions](#) regarding absences from the UK. Kevin Foster's response only repeats the terms of the EUSS.

He states:

***'It [The EUSS] also allows for a single absence of up to 12 months in the period of five years' continuous residence generally required for settled status under the scheme where that absence is for an important reason.'***

Foster did not provide any clarity or reassurance for those that have already used their one-off absence of up to 12 months prior to the pandemic.

## Submission to the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration

The Independent Chief Inspector for Borders and Immigration is currently looking at issues with the EUSS. We wrote to the inspector on 31st July, addressing our concerns. View our submission [here](#).

### Brexit Civil Society Alliance letters

Given the difficulties that Roma have experienced with the EUSS during the pandemic, the RSG is a signatory to two letters.

The [first](#) calls on the Government to extend the transition period for Brexit beyond 31st December 2020. It argues that **the current crisis means that full energy and focus cannot be put into negotiations with the EU**, and as a result, **vulnerable groups will not be safeguarded**.

The [second](#) letter calls on the Home Secretary to make adjustments to the EUSS. Firstly, it calls for making Pre-Settled Status 'an automatic "right to reside."' This is to ensure that EU citizens and their families can access social security benefits and homelessness assistance in the UK. Brexit Civil Society Alliance states that **'no one should have to choose between putting food on the table and securing their rights, and protecting their own and the public's health.'**

The second letter also calls for any breaks in continuous residency caused by COVID-19 to be treated as 'exemptions,' and raises concerns about the resumption of normal EUSS services.

### EUSS Resources

We have recently coordinated with Settled to produce a number of resources that explain and clarify aspects of the EUSS process.

On the SettledQA YouTube [page](#), you can find videos in [Romanian](#) and [Polish](#) explaining the difference between Settled and Pre-Settled Status under the EUSS.

On the same page, we have contributed to videos that explain the effect of Brexit on the rights of EU citizens more broadly. These videos are also available in [Romanian](#) and [Polish](#).

On 23rd July, we held a Facebook Live EUSS session with representatives from [Polish Migrants Organise for Change](#) and Settled. This video includes Romanes interpreting:



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## Amnesty report on policing

In late June, Amnesty International published a [report](#) on human rights violations by police in Europe during COVID-19 lockdowns. Roma are mentioned extensively throughout the report.

**Between March and May 2020, there were cases of militarized quarantines involving 10 Roma settlements in Bulgaria and Slovakia.**

Since a state of emergency was decreed in Romania on 19th March, emergency legislation was adopted that included amendments to the Criminal Code. Romanian police have used this to target Roma communities on the pretext of non-compliance with quarantine measures. This has led to **the deployment of 154 police teams consisting of 1,500 police and gendarmerie officers in areas that largely correspond to significant Roma populations.**

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## Roma school exclusions

Roma school exclusion statistics gained coverage in an article by the [Independent](#). A member of our team, Mihai, features in the article. He explains that part of the problem is that **education staff are not aware of the background of Roma communities.** He calls



for government backing and resources for the engagement of schools with their communities.

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## Council of Europe Recommendation on Roma history in schools

At the beginning of July, the Council of Europe **announced** for the first time that it was calling on its 47 member states to include the history of Roma and Travellers in schools.

We welcome this Recommendation and believe that **educating children and young people about our communities will foster knowledge and understanding amongst both Roma and non-Roma, inform our common history and help us to build better societies.**

This announcement, made during a period of heightened anti-racism activism, is a step in the right direction that shows the power of sustained pressure. However, **widespread curriculum reform will only be achieved if European governments are proactive in taking up the Recommendation.**

The UK government's **response** to Baroness Whitaker's written question in July regarding GRT history and curriculum reform rejects any calls for change.

With Wales due a new school curriculum in 2020, the Black Lives Matter campaign has been at the heart of the **debate** about reform. There is hope that changes to the curriculum will feature the inclusion of diverse history.

If the Curriculum for Wales takes on these changes, it will mount further pressure on the UK government and increase the likelihood for future progress.

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## And Finally...

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Another great piece from Ando Glaso! To hear more of their work and read about their mission, visit the their [website](#).

In commemoration of Roma Holocaust Memorial Day, Ando Glaso have produced a [video](#) honouring the life of Raymond Gurême. Gurême, who passed away on 24th May, was a long standing Roma activist, resistance fighter, anti-fascist and Holocaust survivor. Read about his life [here](#).

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

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**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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