

COVID-19 Support and Outreach for Roma Peoples: Best Practice

In April 2020, the Roma Support Group – with support from Clifton Learning Partnership, CommunityWorks, Luton Roma Trust and TGP Cymru – sent a letter to 21 local authorities known to have Roma populations, expressing concern for the impact of COVID-19 on these populations and outlining our recommendations. The letter can be found [here](#).

As of 10th June 2020, we have received formal responses from 19% of the authorities we engaged. The small percentage of respondents reflects concerns that local authorities are not equipped with specific strategies to support their Roma populations through this crisis and into the future. Furthermore, there are clear gaps in the strategies of authorities that did respond, in areas of health or Roma-specific provision (in Leeds, the council does not have a specific strategy for their Roma community). Based on the responses we received, we have identified three areas as demonstrative of good practice – communication, education, health – and have outlined some key policies below.

1. Communication

The COVID-19 pandemic positions local communications as a vital aspect of response for already-vulnerable communities, like Roma, where low literacy, linguistic diversity and limited access to internet can limit access to information on health guidelines and other COVID-19-related supports. It is therefore critical that there is support for communications channels that broadcast in appropriate ways and in local languages.

Local councils can work with local Roma-led charities and community groups, who know how best to reach Roma people, to create targeted communications in appropriate formats and languages. For example, in Birmingham, the council is collaborating with local charities that work with Roma, such as Centrala, to ensure relevant information reaches the Roma community. This targeted engagement of the Roma community will also help the council to understand the specific impacts of COVID-19 on Roma. As well as this, Bradford council have supplied Wi-Fi devices to households with limited internet access and have deployed an ‘i-Van’, with side panels displaying digital messages in multiple languages (e.g. Slovak and Czech), to Roma areas.

2. Education

Roma adults and youth have disproportionately low learning outcomes. The closure of schools and the switch to online learning further jeopardises these outcomes, as many Roma households have limited access to internet and relevant devices and may not be English speaking, making home learning additionally difficult for parents to facilitate.

The government initiative to supply eligible households with devices needs to be supplemented with teacher and language support where relevant. In Bradford, where students and parents do not have access to teachers who speak community languages, interpreting services have been made available. In addition, both Rotherham and Bradford council have made available physical resources.

3. Healthcare

Across Europe, Roma populations have considerably shorter life expectancy and lower health outcomes. Recent reports from the UK, show that BAME communities are more vulnerable to COVID-19, generating additional concern around vulnerable communities like UK Roma. Councils should support the Roma community in self-isolating through offering financial aid and considering advising Roma people below the age of 70 to self-isolate. In Bradford council, Roma youth were funded to create their own health videos and disseminate them among the community.

However, not enough has been done to ensure that the root causes of health inequality is addressed.