

'It is what it is - this is what we face...'

- Roma Community During COVID-19

This is not a diary but a collection of snapshots and reflections shared with us by our friend and colleague, Marius Daniel Banceanu through his weekly updates to illustrate the struggle that his community endured during the pandemic, the loss they have suffered, their resilience and hopes for the future.



Marius Daniel Banceanu – is a young activist; active member of the Roma communities in London and Ipswich. Since July 2019, Marius has been working for the Roma Support Group as EUSS project worker. Marius is also studying Social Care at the University of Bedfordshire.

 **17th April'20**

Many young Roma (around 30 years of age) and older died because of COVID-19. Our community is suffering a lot because many Roma people are frontline workers employed in farms and food production sector, for example chicken factories, etc.

 24th April'20

Many Roma families from London and Ipswich have left or are about to leave the country and go back to Romania because they are scared to stay here.

Sadly, many Roma died in my community because of the virus. In Ipswich alone more than 5 people died last week. One man who died had 3 children and was expecting another one to come into this world.

I didn't want to make you sad, I just tried to show you how cruel reality is now.

 15th May'20

A very important person died yesterday. He was over 60 years old and was always the first person to open our church making everyone feel welcome and comfortable.

All churches are closed but the good thing for most Roma communities in the UK is that they have managed to find another way of meeting. We meet via Zoom every Sunday and the pastor asks everyone about their health, financial problems and spiritual life.

 22nd May'20

Well, I haven't heard Roma people raising any significant issues this week but most Roma people I talked to, said that they want to go back to Romania. They said that during these critical times, they prefer to be in their villages with their families.

 29th May'20

Our Roma community in Toflea (Romania) is severely affected by the virus. Nobody can come in or leave the village for 14 days.

As we have an aging population there (the younger generations have all left the village to seek a better life), somebody dies nearly every day.

The Roma community in Toflea puts the blame on us saying that we should have stayed in the UK.

Ethically and morally, I think, we should have stayed until the pandemic is suppressed as going back to Romania has put our aging community at risk.

On the other hand, elderly people in Toflea could get the virus from anywhere because the pandemic is wide-spread.

I don't know whether it was worth mentioning this - but it is what it is. This is what we face.

 5th June'20

I am very proud of having this opportunity to work with the Roma community in a different way this week. I have contacted many Roma parents and children asking them to take part in our art competition to celebrate Gypsy Roma Traveller History Month. All people I have spoken to, loved this idea and were very happy to join us.

 12th June'20

A small group of people from my church congregation will meet in the park this Sunday to discuss what needs to be done during these difficult times.

 19th June'20

More Roma families are going to leave the UK for good. Some have already left the country. I've asked two families what is the reason for them to leave the UK and was told that they can't see a good future for themselves and their children here.

 26th June'20

We continue to meet in the park with our brothers and sisters from the church.

 3rd July'20

We didn't meet last week because of the bad weather. Happily, no more cases of Coronavirus to record.

 7th August'20

I'm aware that I haven't been writing about our community for a few weeks but there was nothing significant to write about.

It's really good that churches reopened in almost every city where Roma people have settled. I believe that this will help us to observe and understand many more things about the social life of Roma people simply through meeting people in the church and being updated about what's going on around us.

A few people asked me about music classes for children. An elderly lady told me a few days ago, "I want to see our children singing, creating art, playing instruments and not drinking or taking drugs."

I'm aware that it is not easy to put in practice but I can see that most people from our community wish for their children to learn to play music. I think most Roma parents would like that because we have many role models in the community, who make a good living from playing music or singing.

It would be great to make a video promoting Roma culture after the lockdown with children singing Roma songs.
