



Introduction and welcome

We wish all of our readers well during this extended period of national lockdown and we hope you can safely navigate the upcoming easing of restrictions announced at the start of this week. **The turn of the new year brought significant changes for many Roma EU citizens living in the UK.** As we approach the deadline for applications to the EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS) **it is important for all those working with or involved with Roma communities to be aware of the changes and the upcoming timeline.**

Next month, for the first time, there will be a Roma ethnic group tick-box on the census. RSG is involved in a campaign with the Office for National Statistics to promote the census, raise awareness and encourage Roma people to tick the box. **Please keep an eye out for videos, posters and other materials on our social media pages over the next month.**

In this newsletter we will bring you:

- The significance of 2021 for Roma EU and EEA citizens
- Our toolkit and webinar on EUSS outreach and engagement

- A report from our EUSS event with the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Gypsies, Travellers and Roma
 - An Inclusion Health groups tool for Primary Care Networks by Friends, Families and Travellers
 - NHS resources on COVID-19 vaccines
 - An online survey for EU citizens in the UK
 - The commemoration of Holocaust Memorial Day
 - The making of the 'Roma Stories' Roma Oral History Project
 - The commemoration of the abolition of Roma slavery in Romania
 - Romani Cultural & Arts Company GRT LGBTQ+ Spoken History Archive
 - RSG's contribution to an article from *Huck* on the experiences of GRT communities amid the COVID-19 pandemic
 - A BBC Young Reporter podcast by Ollie — a Roma actor and activist from our community
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The significance of 2021 for Roma EU and EEA citizens

The Brexit transition period and free movement with the European Union ended on 31 December. A [new immigration system](#) has been introduced for EU and EEA citizens.

With a number of [exceptions](#), any EU or EEA citizens and family members already living in the UK by 31 December 2020 **must apply to the EU Settlement Scheme by the deadline of 30 June 2021 in order to continue living and working in the UK**. Only those who were living in the UK by 31 December are now eligible for the scheme, except in [specific circumstances](#) – for example, it is still possible for family members to join EEA citizens if the relationship existed before that date.

This change has implications for Roma communities in the UK who **continue to face significant barriers in applying to the EUSS and managing their status under it**. In the next few months, helping members of our communities to secure the immigration status that they are eligible for will remain at the top of our agenda.

Toolkit on EUSS outreach and engagement

RSG has developed a **toolkit** for local authorities and community organisations on good practice in providing EUSS support to Roma. **The toolkit identifies the various barriers that Roma face and provides solutions that can be taken to solve them.**

This approach focuses on bringing government, local authorities and community organisations together to support everyone in the Roma community to secure their immigration status. The toolkit also collates a range of resources on **EUSS guidance and materials in community languages, and contact details for Roma community organisations in areas with large Roma communities.**

We encourage distribution of the toolkit to anyone facilitating EUSS support for Roma.

EUSS toolkit webinar

On 4 of February, our colleagues Ilse, Mihai, and Tania were joined by Hayley Morgan of TGP Cymru as the panel for a Q&A webinar on our toolkit and engaging Roma with the EUSS.

Over 70 people from a wide range of local authorities, Citizens Advice services and community organisations attended the meeting.

The lively discussion covered the main barriers that Roma people face in applying to the EUSS and accessing status, including digital exclusion and a lack of valid ID. The panel

went on to discuss the most effective methods for reaching out to Roma communities. **The panel stressed the importance of working with and resourcing organisations and individuals that are rooted in Roma communities as 'invaluable resources for outreach and referrals.'**

You can view a recording of the webinar below:



The impact of immigration rule changes on Roma rough sleepers

Coinciding with the end of the transition period, the government has rolled out a new set of draconian immigration rules without active approval from Parliament that will affect EU and EEA citizen rough sleepers.

They have been described as '[shockingly cruel and inhumane](#)' by Amnesty International. Given the disproportionate presence of Roma in UK rough sleeping populations, **Roma rough sleepers are particularly vulnerable to being amongst those most affected by the changes.**

RSG has covered the dangers and urgency of this situation in a recent [article](#) for FEANTSA.

The Home Office [statement](#) of changes to the Immigration Rules published on 22 October 2020 contains the following clauses:

9.21.1. Permission to stay may be refused where the decision maker is satisfied that a person has been rough sleeping in the UK.

9.21.2. Where the decision maker is satisfied that a person has been rough sleeping in the UK any permission held by the person may be cancelled.

The rule changes do not apply to the EU settlement scheme, so rough sleepers who are eligible will not be refused (pre-)settled status. However, RSG has found that **many Roma rough sleepers are not applying to the EUSS and still risk losing their legal status in the UK after the 30 June deadline.**

RSG signed a [letter](#) by the Greater London Authority written to the Home Secretary and Housing Minister on 6 November. It urges the government to scrap these plans, seeks clarification on what these changes will involve and calls for measures to protect EU and EEA rough sleepers during the pandemic.

The government [responded](#) on 14 December, stating that:

'We will not apply this rule until guidance for decision makers which makes clear the circumstances in which permission may be cancelled or refused is published.'

This means that until guidance is published, the future of Roma EU and EEA rough sleepers in the UK hangs in the balance.

There is also a similar lack of clarity concerning late applications:

'Where someone has reasonable grounds for missing the deadline of 30 June 2021, they will be given a further opportunity to apply.'

The Home Office is yet to confirm what 'reasonable grounds' for missing the EUSS deadline consists of. The Home Office has carried out [research](#) into the circumstances of looked after children and care leavers. **The same has not been carried out for the circumstances of rough sleepers.** As the deadline gets closer it is unclear whether rough sleeping will be included as reasonable grounds, **leaving EU and EEA rough sleepers once again exposed to the hostile environment.**

Report from RSG's EUSS event

In November, RSG hosted an online event with the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Gypsies, Travellers and Roma titled ***'Falling through the gaps: the EU Settlement Scheme and the case of Roma communities in the UK.'***

The purpose of this event was to re-examine the progress of engaging Roma communities with the EUSS and to address the barriers that Roma continue to face.

You can view a recording of the event [here](#).

Last month a comprehensive [report](#) of the event was published providing the background

to the event, an overview of presentations by the speakers, comments and concerns from the audience and the next steps to be taken.

FFT Inclusion Health groups tool

Friends, Families and Travellers have launched a **new tool to support Primary Care Networks to assess and improve their work with Inclusion Health groups and people experiencing health inequalities**. Information and advice on addressing the health inequalities of Gypsies, Roma and Travellers forms a core part of the tool.

If you are a member of a Primary Care Network you can access the tool [here](#) to complete a self-assessment. The self-assessment takes around ten minutes to complete and once completed you are provided with a unique and tailored guide to support you to embed action on tackling health inequalities in your everyday activities.

An example of a tailored guide for a fictional Primary Care Network, Aldenham, can be found [here](#). RSG's Mental Health Advocacy Project has been referenced as an example of best practice.

Primary Care Networks who score highly across 22 inclusion health metrics are able to download an Inclusion Health Quality Mark and use this across communications materials.

NHS resources on COVID-19 vaccines

NHS England has produced videos for communities in London to encourage vaccine uptake. Below are videos in Polish and Romanian, which of the videos produced are most applicable to Roma.

NHS England encourages the videos to be shared amongst friends, families, and faith and community groups via WhatsApp, text message and on social media.

The script for the videos in English can be found [here](#).





EU citizens online survey



Calling EU citizens in the UK!

Prof Tanja Bueltmann and Dr Alexandra Bulat from [@UniversityOfStrathclyde](#) are looking to **hear your views on identity, belonging and representation in post-Brexit UK.**

The survey is anonymous and takes approximately 15 minutes to complete. You can access the survey [here](#).

You can participate in this survey if you are:

- an EU, EEA or Swiss citizen OR
- a dual British-EU/EEA or Swiss national who acquired British nationality through registration or naturalisation (not by birth)

And you must:

- normally be living in the UK & have arrived here before 31 December 2020 AND

- be over 18 years old and be able to give individual informed consent

The research was granted ethical approval by the School of Humanities Ethics Committee, University of Strathclyde. Should you have any questions about the research, please contact Prof Tanja Bueltmann (anja.bueltmann@strath.ac.uk) or Dr Alexandra Bulat (alexandra.bulat@strath.ac.uk).

Holocaust Memorial Day

The 27 January marked Holocaust Memorial Day on which we remembered all victims of the Holocaust.

The genocide and persecution of Roma and Sinti during the Second World War **remains a forgotten Holocaust and our people are still suffering today.**

Roma Holocaust history has never been embedded in public memory. It has been subject to deliberate erasure due to the politicisation of Roma people. It has also been faced with the problem that many records of Roma in the 1940s have been lost or destroyed, or above all, that no records of Roma who were persecuted, tortured, or killed existed in the first place. The trauma experienced by survivors and cultural taboos has also meant that discussion of Holocaust history within Roma circles has often been limited.

For these reasons, oral history, and a sensitive approach to obtaining it, is the primary tool for recording Roma Holocaust history. **Visit the Forgotten Genocide [website](#) to learn about the experiences of Roma who shared their stories and the experiences of those whose records survive.**

Nearly four years ago RSG began its own Roma Oral History Project. The project workers were acutely aware that if they did not undertake this project, the histories of our community members and their ancestors could be lost with their passing. In this edition of

our newsletter, we would like to guide you through the journey that the project took and share some of the resources created.

Many of the resources collated in the project can be found by visiting our [Roma Stories website](#) which was launched in May 2020.

The making of the 'Roma Stories' Roma Oral History Project



Artwork by Robert Czibi <https://czibiart.com/>

The project began in 2017 and was underpinned by a set of aims:

- Empower the Roma community to share their history within the public domain.
- Increase public awareness of Roma history and heritage.
- Challenge negative perceptions and discrimination against the Roma community.
- Enable academics and students to challenge their own views of British and European history and broaden their understanding of it.

The project focused not only on the Roma Holocaust, but anti-Roma persecution and ethnocide following the Second World War, migration and changing Roma identity, and the exploration of a sense of belonging and a process of integration in the UK.

These themes were explored through recording 37 oral interviews from Eastern/Central European Roma refugees and migrants living in London. All of the interviews were transcribed and are now [housed](#) at the London Metropolitan Archives.

Seven interview extracts have been uploaded to our Roma Stories website which you can view [here](#).



Artwork by Robert Czibi <https://czibiart.com/>

The interviews were conducted by two Roma researchers. This was an important component of our work for much of Roma history has been written from a non-Roma 'top-down' perspective. It also allowed the interviewers to broach taboo subjects which would not have otherwise been disclosed.

Outcomes

The project produced a range of resources for schools and engaged 360 children and 24 educators in 8 educational workshops. An online learning resource suitable for KS2, KS3 and non-school audiences can be found [here](#). **This forms an excellent and enduring resource for educators and can also provide useful materials for homeschooling along with the [Activities](#) page.**

The project staff and volunteers devised a mobile exhibition which toured 6 venues in 3 weeks. 2,439 people in total saw the exhibition. To read about the exhibition and follow the Roma Stories timeline, visit our Roma Stories [blog](#).

The project had a significant impact on its contributors and recipients. Here are some of their thoughts:

'Discovering that my great grandfather fought in the First World War and then escaped from a Nazi forced labour camp was an incredible, emotional experience. And that was possible thanks to this project. Our elderly generation is passing away and because they don't want us to suffer, knowing what they've been through, they take our past with them. And with that, our hidden history.' (M.B. project participant, Roma from Romania)

'Helping with this project has really broadened and deepened my knowledge of Roma heritage. The interviewees are united in some respects by certain things but there is a massive variety of experiences, even among our relatively small sample of people. There isn't one homogenous history or heritage, which is something which isn't necessarily discernible from mainstream discussions of Roma people.' (T.S Volunteer)

'Not one child in my class knew that Roma as an ethnic group of people existed. Roma have an interesting history, which the children enjoyed and appreciated. Personally I was really surprised to hear about famous Roma, since the workshop I've been telling my friends who they are.' (L.S. Teacher at Southern Road Primary School)

'I thoroughly enjoyed the film; it was very insightful to learn about Roma stories in London. I am interested to see how the project develops and the possibility of expanding the project nationwide, as more Roma stories need to be documented.'

For a short overview of the project and to credit some of its contributors, view the video below:



Commemorating the abolition of Roma slavery

On 20 February we marked 165 years since the abolition of Roma Slavery in the territories of present-day Romania. **As with the Roma Holocaust, public memory continues to neglect more than 500 years of suffering that our people endured.**

In 2019, two activists [investigated](#) the way that the history of Roma slavery is treated in Romania today:

'Roma slavery is not part of the Romanian school curriculum and up until now, there has been no form of reparation, neither by the Romanian state nor by the Romanian Orthodox Church.'

The legacies of Roma slavery continue to affect Roma people. [Here](#) Dr. Margareta Matache argues that **it is time 'to remember the past and correct the present.'**

Romani Cultural & Arts Company Gypsy, Roma and Traveller LGBTQ+ Spoken History Archive

RCAC have launched their new project archive bringing together the stories of GRT LGBTQ+ individuals from across the world, as told by themselves.

This is another powerful example of the value of oral history in bringing forward the voices of those who are often left out of mainstream history.

The project highlights the roles that these individuals play in the rich complexity of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller life and celebrates their intersectional heritage, culture and experiences.

The [archive](#) consists of 20 oral history interviews of people from different walks of life. We

encourage you to listen to their stories for their history is our history too. If you would like to learn more about RCAC and the work they do, visit their website [here](#).

***Huck* article on COVID-19 and Roma**

Our colleagues Mihai and Daniel have contributed to an [article](#) from *Huck* on the experiences of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

They speak on the **lack of specific policy tools and engagement for Roma from government and local authorities**. Combined with the inherent disadvantages that our communities face, **Roma children suffer from a lack of accessibility to home schooling, the messages of the pandemic have not reached our communities and many Roma have been left without financial support**.

And finally...

HEAR ME BBC Young Reporter podcast — Ollie

HEAR ME explores what identity means for young people growing up in the UK today. Ollie is a member of our community and speaks about what it means to be Roma. listen to his podcast [here](#).

Ollie speaks about the difficulty he had growing up embracing his Roma identity, often hiding it from people close to him for fear of prejudice.

He discusses issues that are felt deeply and widely in the community. One is about visibility:

When Ollie fills out a form *'There's no Roma box to tick. At all. So it's hard to balance two sides of an identity that aren't even written down on paper.'*

Ollie's experience shows the importance of including the new Roma tick-box on next month's census. It is hoped that this move will help pave the way for Roma to declare their identity officially in other contexts and allow our communities to be supported with the proper resource allocation from all levels of government and other services.

Ollie draws particular attention to hate crime, which contributed to the earlier concealment of his identity:

'a lot of hate crime happens to us as Roma people, both physical and verbal and nothing is really done about it, and it's been going on for years to us.'

It was only through his own research and when he began to talking to his family more that Ollie found out about the Roma Holocaust, something which is invisible in the conventional school curriculum.

'these are all things that aren't written down, they're not documented, I've never been taught in school, but they're all things that have happened to us.' Even my family personally, my great grandfather, had to watch his family die in front of him because of who they were.'

'The reason we might hide who we are, or hide our language, is because before if we didn't hide who we were or hide our language we would literally die for it, and my family have had to see that firsthand.'

'It's aggravating that no one knows our side of the story and they don't know our pain and when they talk about our side, dismiss us in these ways, and they violate our culture.'

The suppression that Roma have faced throughout their history and today has caused much Roma history to be marginalised. To see the impact on young Roma like Ollie reminds us why initiatives like the Roma Oral History Project are of boundless importance.

Today Ollie recognises the importance of advocating for his community and celebrating his identity. He wants Roma to have widely celebrated leaders like those in other movements for social change and empowerment.

Ollie is becoming an important voice in his community. He has not only hosted this podcast but has performed on stage in a play about his family and an Irish Traveller family, speaking about Roma culture and their lives.

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

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