



Introduction & Welcome

Roma refugees from the war in Ukraine are continuing to face disproportionate barriers in accessing humanitarian aid and safety. We therefore signpost again to the donation pages included at the end of this newsletter, and those from the [March edition](#) of our newsletter

This June we have been celebrating Gypsy Roma Traveller History Month (GRTHM). This annual event has been taking place since 2008, and in 2022 we attended an in-person GRTHM event at the Greater London Authority's City Hall (the first since 2019!). We are also hosting an art competition, open to submissions from all young people until the 12th of July.

Since our last newsletter there have been some changes in the law, with amendments to the Marriage Bill and the repeal of the Vagrancy Act, both of which will have an impact on Roma communities in the UK.

Looking outside of Britain, we want to call attention to the situation of Ukrainian Roma refugees, in particular those seeking asylum in the Czech Republic. Many have been denied state support and some forced to sleep on the floor of Prague railway station, with voluntary organisations struggling to provide assistance. Our newsletter also highlights a number of important news headlines from other countries, giving you some international Roma news at a glance.

As part of our work challenging health inequalities faced by Roma communities in the UK, we have been coordinating with other Gypsy Roma Traveller organisations to pressure the Government to bring about changes to public services. This has recently led to a consultation with the Public Services Committee. This edition of the newsletter features letters sent to the Government, following the meeting, asking what measures will be taken to address health inequalities and discrimination within public services, and a response

from Professor Chris Whitty.

This newsletter also highlights our work to combat another facet of inequality faced by Roma in the UK, digital exclusion (the unequal ability to use and access modern information and communications technology). This is an especially important issue when it comes to proving EU Settled Status, as the entire process is completed digitally. In response we have created a series of videos providing instructions in Polish, Romanian and English on how to navigate the online system.

Volunteers' Week took place at the beginning of this month, and as an organisation that owes a huge amount to volunteers, we have marked the occasion by thanking our volunteers and sharing the story of how Roma Support Group began, and the vital role that volunteers played.

Finally, we give you something to add to your Roma cultural calendar, a touring film - *The Deathless Woman* by Roz Mortimer, that charts the persecution of Roma in Europe through history.



This month's newsletter focuses on:

- [GRT History Month](#)
- [Marriage and Civil Partnership \(Minimum Age\) Bill](#)
- [Changes to Vagrancy Act](#)
- [Updates from Ukraine](#)

- [Other International News](#)
 - [Letters from the Public Services Committee](#)
 - [EUSS Videos: Updating Contact Details](#)
 - [Volunteers' Week](#)
 - [Film: The Deathless Woman](#)
 - [Ukraine Donation Pages](#)
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GRT History Month

This June we celebrated the 15th annual Gypsy Roma Traveller (GRT) History Month. The aims of the history month are to promote and celebrate GRT history, heritage and culture, to increase GRT people's confidence in their heritage, and to make sure that the British public are aware of GRT contributions to society.

Gypsy Roma Traveller History Month Event at City Hall

For the first time since 2019, we were able to celebrate GRT History Month in person, at the new City Hall in Newham. Despite a disrupted rail service, RSG were joined by members of [London Gypsies and Travellers](#), [Southwark Traveller Action Group](#), [The Traveller Movement](#), and London's Deputy Mayor for Communities and Social Justice, Debbie Weeks-Bernard.

At the event the Deputy Mayor for Communities and Social Justice spoke about Jimmy Carr's Holocaust "joke" and the response from parliamentarians, saying that it showed two things: *'That racism and discrimination against Gypsy Roma and Traveller communities is alive and kicking as much today as it was historically, but it also shows that there are individuals with power and platforms who are willing to step up and call it out.'*



She described how GRT History Month was an '*important moment*' that should be '*used as a platform*' to call racism and discrimination out.

She also talked about the impact of COVID-19 on GRT communities, the need to address the issue of data collection to measure and address inequalities, and the issue of mental health in GRT communities.

The Deputy Mayor for Communities and Social Justice then called out for GRT heritage projects for the Greater London Authority (GLA) to amplify, '*to highlight what [GRT] communities have contributed to this city*'.

This was followed by speeches from representatives of the different organisations attending, including our own Mihai Calin Bica. He described the uniqueness of London as a city that is called home by Roma communities from all over the world, and how events like the GLA's are important ways of showing how welcome they are in the capital.

We were lucky to have the wonderful **Ando Glaso Collective** playing fantastic traditional Roma music at the event, while we got a chance to socialise over some food and drinks.

Gypsy Roma Traveller History Month Art Competition

In June '22, we will celebrate...



GYPSY ROMA TRAVELLER HISTORY MONTH

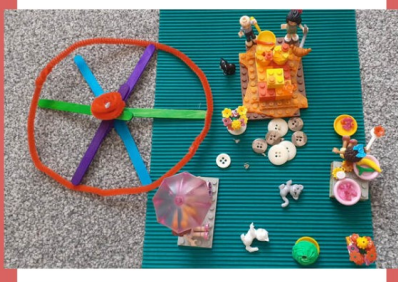
COMPETITION!

We would like to invite **all young people** age 6 to 18 to participate in celebrating Gypsy Roma Traveller History Month (GRTM) by submitting their artwork for a competition.

Our term '**artwork**' is all-inclusive and it could be a drawing, picture, photo, poem, audio recording on the mobile phone or a short video showing young people playing music, dancing or singing.

It could be anything that will help us to promote an understanding of and to celebrate the richness and diversity of **Roma culture**.

Deadline:
12th of July 2022



Prizes to win!

Please send your artwork to:
info@romasupportgroup.org.uk

The deadline for submissions to our GRTM art competition has now been extended to the 12th of July.

Please [share](#) the poster with any of your contacts you feel might be interested.

The winner will be announced in July, keep an eye on our [Facebook](#) page for updates!

Marriage and Civil Partnership (Minimum Age) Bill

[The Marriage and Civil Partnership \(Minimum Age\) Bill](#) received Royal Assent, passing into law on the 28th of April.

This change in legislation raises the minimum age of marriage to from 16 to 18 in England and Wales.

Our concerns about how the application of this law could impact Roma communities, are detailed in the [January 2022 edition](#) of our newsletter.

Changes to Vagrancy Act

The 1874 Vagrancy act was repealed by Parliament in February this year. The outdated act made rough sleeping a criminal offence.

New amendments to the act, proposed by the Government continue to focus on criminalisation, seeking to give police new powers to [‘help communities feel safer’](#) by outlawing begging.

According to [Crisis](#), 1 in 3 rough sleepers have *‘begged at some point during the last 12 months. To criminalise begging is to criminalise homelessness by the back door.’*

Punishing the symptoms rather than addressing the causes of homelessness in this way will have **negative effects on rough sleeping and begging people, including Roma**. There are concerns that the new measures proposed by the Government continue to leave people on the streets open to abuse, and will push those who have already been made the most vulnerable away from accessing vital support.

Crisis have launched a petition demanding the Government drop these proposals, which can be signed [here](#).



Updates from Ukraine

Ukrainian Roma refugees fleeing the war continue to be met with discrimination in Europe, many being denied access to humanitarian aid and state support.

In the Czech Republic, the Guardian has [reported](#) that **hundreds of Ukrainian Roma refugees have been forced to sleep on the floor of Prague railway station**, while more than 500 other Roma refugees have been placed in cramped and 'unsanitary' accommodation at the station, in shelters designed to hold only 260 people.

Many Ukrainian Roma refugees in the Czech Republic are waiting to be granted refugee status by the state, entitling them to be provided with permanent accommodation. Unlike other groups of refugees, Roma refugees' applications are frequently rejected due to discrimination, with many believing that Ukrainian Roma are "economic migrants". Roma who hold Ukrainian and Hungarian passports have been placed in a particularly precarious position, as Czech officials have stated that they do not qualify for refugee status, due to their dual nationality.

Voluntary aid organisations are reported to be inundated, and unable to provide the support needed in places such as Prague station. Geti Mubeenová, crisis coordinator at Organisation for Aid (OPU) to Refugees, says 'We were set up to provide information, but now we are dealing with a humanitarian crisis. It is no longer sustainable'. Along with other voluntary organisations OPU has stated that it will cease work at the station at the end of May, to prompt the Czech government into action.

Elsewhere in the [Czech Republic](#) the state has refused to offer support to Ukrainian Roma refugees, and questioned the legitimacy of their asylum claims.

Ukrainian Roma refugees in [Poland](#) are similarly facing a lack of support and discrimination from the state and wider society. As Mariam Masudi at NGO Salam Lab says: *'Roma are not admitted to other reception points. No one wants to rent to them. I don't know anyone who has managed to settle in Poland. Those who have been able to move out of the hostel have moved abroad.'* As well as being denied accommodation, Roma have also been refused access to other support offered to Ukrainian refugees in Poland, such as transport and food.

Other International News

- 16th May was [Roma Resistance Day](#), commemorating the Roma uprising at Auschwitz in 1944.
 - [Brussels](#): Roma Week 2022 held at European Parliament
 - [Spain](#): New law introduced outlawing racial discrimination against Roma.
 - [Bulgaria](#): COVID-19 measures in Yambol municipality ruled as discriminatory against Roma.
 - [European Union](#): Report published by [European Roma Rights Centre](#) on widespread police brutality and institutional racism across six EU states.
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Letters from the Public Services Committee

Government urged by Public Services Committee to address Gypsy Roma Traveller health inequalities.

Following a meeting with Gypsy Roma Traveller (GRT) groups, including RSG, the Public Services Committee has urged the Government to improve GRT life expectancy and access to healthcare.

In [letters](#) sent to Professor Chris Whitty (Chief Medical Officer) and Michael Gove (Secretary of State for the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities), the

Committee described the evidence put forward in the meeting as '**stark and shocking**'.

Representatives gave statements detailing the difficulties faced by GRT communities in accessing healthcare. The committee was told that **little has been done to address inequalities and how GRT communities face discrimination in accessing public services**.

Our colleague Mihai Calin Bica described how the move to online services during the COVID-19 pandemic has made accessing health support even more difficult, and that despite conversations with public health and NHS officials no changes had been seen.

In light of the evidence given to the Committee the Government were asked:

- What will be done to address GRT health inequalities?
- How will it improve available data around GRT health outcomes?
- What will it do to improve delivery of public services to GRT communities?
- How will it deal with educational barriers?
- How will it involve GRT communities in co-designing public services?
- What emphasis should they put on designing preventative services to improve health outcomes GRT people?

In response to the letter, Chris Whitty replied **agreeing that GRT health inequalities were 'a significant issue' that need 'to be addressed'**. He claimed that '*improving outcomes*' for GRT communities is part of the '*wider Levelling Up agenda*'. Professor Whitty also said that he has written to Sir Ian Diamond, the UK's National Statistician, about the need to improve data '*around GRT health outcomes*', and that '**Sir Ian has confirmed that the ONS are actively working to address this**'.

We await the response from Michael Gove.

EUSS Videos: Updating Contact Details

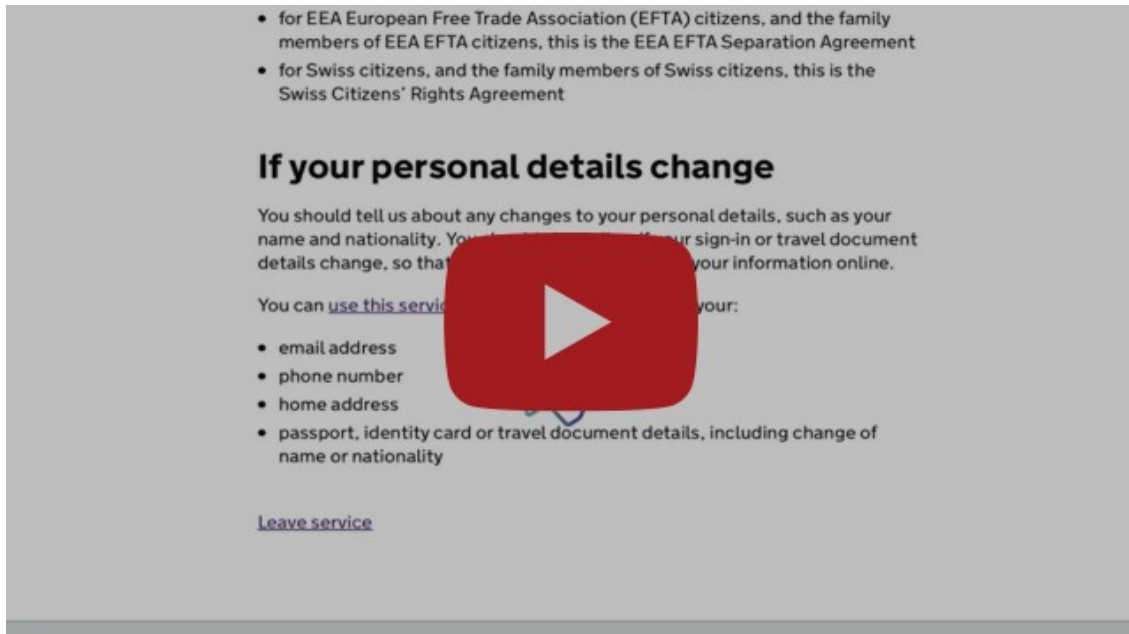
Our **[Ketane - Together: Roma Shaping Futures Project](#)**, that aims to address barriers faced by Roma communities in applying for the EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS), has produced a series of new videos in English, Polish and Romanian. The videos give information on how to update details on the EUSS system.

As EU settled status can only be proved digitally, it is vital that those who hold it can access their digital record. When trying to view or prove status online, the GOV.UK website

sends an access code to either a phone number or email address. It is important that these contact details are kept up-to-date, otherwise it may not be possible to prove settled status.

Click on the video below to watch in English. Click the links to watch in [Polish](#) or [Romanian](#).

Please share these videos with any of your contacts who might find them useful!



Updating EUSS Details (Ketane Project 2022)

Volunteers' Week

June 1st to the 7th was National Volunteers' Week, and we would like to thank all of our volunteers past and present. We owe our existence and success as an organisation to their dedication, commitment, time, expertise and skills.

The rationale for the Roma Support Group came from three Roma asylum-seekers from the Czech Republic, Jindrich Kovac, Josef Feco and Geza Gorol, who approached Sylvia Ingmire (our CEO) in 1997 with an idea to establish a **Roma self-help group to support other Roma asylum-seekers arriving in the UK**. At the time, most male Roma asylum-seekers were detained in prisons upon their arrival, while their wives and children were admitted into the country feeling scared, confused and vulnerable.

Without any network of support existing at the time, this idea of organising a self-help group was both pioneering, and highly necessary. **The small group provided informal support to Roma asylum-seekers in London, operating from homes, flats, hostels**

and parks across the city.

As Sylvia says: *'It was hard to drive something that didn't exist, it needed vision, perseverance, patience and time.'*

Gradually, other people joined in, including Andy Ingmire, Maria Szapszowicz, Morwen Tregudda, two Jesuits - Michal Pietras and Val Kovalenko, brothers - Gejza and Martin Grundza, Judith, Jesus and others – all voluntarily contributing their respective skills and time to shape the legal basis of the group (e.g., creating the name, setting up the first Management Committee, writing a constitution), give advice and advocacy support to people in need, refer them to legal professionals, and run art classes for children. But it was the amazing and electrifying Slovak Roma music played by Gejza and Martin on the battered keyboard that drew increasing numbers of community members to our volunteer-led sessions in St Stephen's Church – the first space that we were allowed to use free-of-charge.

Amongst those who came were Anna Krawczyk (Polish Roma), who introduced to the group her large family, including her husband, Vania, a fabulous accordionist, and her cousin Roza Kotowicz, (our Chair). Anna's family members (of all age groups) brought their musical instruments, passion for music and dance, and an incredible sense of togetherness and fun!

Thanks to their energy and passion, **Romani Rad** was established, an ensemble made up of musicians from older and younger generations, aiming to pass down traditional music skills to young Roma and give them something meaningful to do, while showcasing Roma culture and introducing it to British audiences. Romani Rad teamed up with Martin and Gejza, and together we were putting on concerts, organising first ever Roma Culture Festivals in Britain, releasing an album and eventually performing in front of Pope Benedict XVI and hundreds of thousands of people in Hyde Park in 2010.

'The RSG were the first agency to put East European Roma music on the British stage and - by doing so – it pioneered Roma cultural politics in the UK. All of this happened while all of us were volunteers. It takes vision, guts and perseverance from many different people to start a charity. Being driven by a desire to make the world a better place through our energy, skills and commitment. That's why people volunteer.'

By 2001, the RSG received its first grants from the Jesuit Fund for Social Justice, City Parochial Foundation and Community Fund, and from then on, we were able to employ two part-time staff - but volunteers have continued to play a vital role, inspiring, leading and assisting with our key projects.

Volunteers have been integral to the history and success of the Roma Support Group – and always will be! So, to all of our volunteers, we would like to extend our heartfelt **THANKS**.

Film: The Deathless Woman



[The Deathless Woman](#) by Roz Mortimer traces the persecution of Roma from an unmarked WWII forest grave in Poland, to the rise of hate crimes in present-day Europe.

It was described as a 'must watch' at the Ake Dikhea Festival of Romani Film.

This summer the film is touring cities and towns across the UK with introductions, discussions and Romani language workshops.

The film has been shown in Erith, Manchester, Chester, and will be screened in Sheffield (2nd July) and Leeds (3rd July). Free tickets to the screening and language workshops can be booked [here](#).

Ukraine Donation Pages

Human rights fund for Ukrainian Roma

European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC) are [collecting donations](#) to support their efforts to prevent the discrimination and rejection of Roma refugees in Ukraine, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania and Moldova.

The activities of ERRC consist of:

- Sending human rights monitors to border crossings, train stations, and refugee reception centres to monitor potential human rights abuses of Roma.
- Supporting initiatives which provide humanitarian aid and legal advice to Roma, inside and outside of Ukraine.
- Making sure that human rights abuses are documented and publicised so that these violations are not forgotten, and hopefully one day can be brought to justice.

Hot Meals in Ukraine

Given the difficulties that Roma are experiencing in accessing humanitarian aid, [ERGO Network](#) and [Roma Women Fund Chiricli](#) have launched a campaign: [Hot meals in Ukraine](#).

Access to the meals are open to anyone in Ukraine in need but the organisers are ensuring that Roma (and other minorities) are aware of when and where the meals are handed out.

The cost of providing one hot meal is €4.

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

We would be grateful if our subscribers could help us to reach more people by using the "Forward" button below to share the newsletter in your networks.



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Views expressed in this newsletter do not necessarily suggest that they are in accordance with the trustees of Roma Support Group.

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