



Introduction and welcome

Over the past month we have seen Black Lives Matter protests take place across the globe. We stand up in solidarity with our brothers and sisters and believe that **we all have the responsibility to challenge the institutional and structural racism internalised over the centuries and manifested in every aspect of our lives today.**

The principles and messages of The Black Lives Matter movement are not a recent emergence. They pre-date the movement's inception in 2013, with the movement itself representing a consolidation in activism following decades of ingrained prejudice and injustice that the social movements of the twentieth century did not solve.

We encourage you to research ways in which you can support this movement. By following this [link](#) you can access collated information on action you can take.

For Roma, the principles and messages of the Black Lives Matter movement resonate. The context of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller History Month (GRTHM) and the ongoing protests is an important moment to reflect on the historical and contemporary experiences of Roma.

This month's newsletter will focus on:

- The History of Roma slavery
 - The criminalisation of Roma prior to the Second World War
 - Treatment of Roma by authorities and institutional racism
 - Roma poverty and low employment levels across Europe
 - Police brutality against Roma
 - Gypsy, Roma and Traveller History Month
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History of Roma Slavery

For much of the last millennium, Roma were enslaved in many different contexts and across different continents. An overview of Roma slavery can be found in this [article](#).

Roma formed part of the Atlantic Slave Trade from 1714 onwards, when British Merchants applied to the Privy Council for permission to ship “Gypsies” to the Caribbean to be used as slaves.

Roma slavery in [Romania](#) lasted more than 500 years, beginning in the principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia in the fourteenth century. It was legally abolished in 1856.

In 2019, two activists took to the streets of Bucharest to [interview](#) passers-by on the topic of Roma slavery in Romania. **Many of those they encountered knew nothing or little about Roma slavery.** The activists drew attention to the omission of Roma slavery in the Romanian school curriculum.

Neglect of Roma history is common across much of Europe and in the UK. With the broader public discourse that has emerged since the murder of George Floyd, **the national curriculums of the UK have received greater scrutiny for the whitewashing of history and the narratives that are taught to students.**

Whilst in the UK children are required by law to be taught about The Holocaust in their key stage 3 education, there is no statutory requirement for children to be taught about Romani genocide in the Holocaust. There is also no statutory requirement for children to be taught about the Atlantic Slave Trade.

The new National Curriculum launched by the government in September 2014 was intended to focus on the celebration of British history. In practice, this has meant that diverse histories have been neglected.

The government has been resistant to modifying the National Curriculum or promoting diverse narratives and voices. When asked in February 2020 about the steps the government is taking to improve the teaching of the Roma Holocaust in schools, [this](#) is how the Minister of State for School Standards responded.

The absence of Roma history in schools means that initiatives such as the Roma Stories Oral History Project have to attempt to fill in the gaps.

Criminalisation of Roma before the Second World War



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Prior to the Holocaust, Roma in Nazi Germany became subject to the Nuremberg Race Laws (1935) and the Law for the Prevention of Hereditarily Diseased Progeny (1933). Roma were also [criminalised](#) under the Law against Dangerous Habitual Criminals (1933).

These acts led to the forced sterilisation of Roma and their incarceration in prison or

concentration camps.

As a prelude to the deportation of Roma to concentration camps, Roma were forcibly relocated to tightly guarded encampments where their freedom of movement was restricted.

Treatment by authorities and institutional racism

The relevance of Roma persecution in Nazi Germany has never subsided.

Between 1936 and 1976, 60,000 Romani women in Sweden were **sterilised**.

In 2013, a Swedish **secret police register** was leaked that contained the names of 4000 people, the majority of them Roma.

Roma communities continue to be among the most monitored and restricted communities in Europe. Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in Europe, reports of targeted and disproportionate action against Roma have been widespread.

Since the beginning of government-led lockdowns in Europe, uniformed guarding and freedom of movement restrictions imposed on Roma encampments and villages in Bulgaria, Italy and Slovakia have mirrored that of Nazi Germany.

Marginalisation and disproportionate action against Roma did not emerge with COVID-19 lockdowns. In many European countries, it is entrenched and systematically imposed.

In Europe today, Roma face inferior, and in many cases segregated, housing and **education**. This Amnesty International **briefing** from 2017 provides an overview of this and contains a map showing countries in which segregated Roma education has been documented. The total is thirteen.

A recent **report** published by the European Parliament in April 2020 states that in Slovakia:

At the primary school level, Roma children encounter school segregation and discriminatory practices, extensive and unjustified enrolment in ethnically segregated special schools and classes.

Roma poverty and low employment levels

A 2014 joint **report** by the Fundamental Rights Agency, The United Nations Development Programme and the World Bank presents the findings from UNDP and FRA Roma surveys, including data on poverty and employment. The surveys collected data from 11 EU member states.

The surveys found that:

- On average, around 90 % of Roma surveyed live in households with an equivalised income below national poverty lines
- On average, around 40 % of Roma live in households where somebody had to go to bed hungry at least once in the last month since they could not afford to buy food.
- On average, fewer than one out of three Roma are reported to be in paid employment.
- One out of three Roma respondents said that they are unemployed. Others said that they are homemakers, retired, not able to work or are self-employed.

Police brutality

Just this month, a fourteen-year-old Roma boy in [France](#) suffered a fracture to his eye socket and four broken teeth when he was kicked in the face by a Police officer after being taken into custody.

Police brutality against Roma throughout Europe is pervasive. Experiences of this are covered in [this](#) article.

The article focuses too on the neglect that Roma have faced from EU institutions on the issue of police brutality. Vice-President of the EU Commission Margaritis Schinas responded to police brutality in the United States by stating:

"There is no doubt that Europe as a whole has been doing better than the United States in issues of race, also because we have better systems for social inclusion, protection, universal health care."

Citing examples of unlawful police killings and brutality against Roma across Europe, and attacks that Roma have suffered from racist mobs incited by political leaders, the article questions Schinas's "blatant denial" of the existence of racist policing and structural discrimination against people of colour across Europe.'

Gypsy, Roma and Traveller History Month



Since 2008, GRTHM has celebrated the diverse cultures of the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities.

The GRTHM started in the London Borough of Brent in 2001, was endorsed by Parliament in 2007 and has been celebrated nationally in June since 2008.

The aims of the GRTHM are to:

- Promote knowledge of GRT History, Culture and Heritage;
- Disseminate information on positive GRT contributions to British Society;
- Heighten the confidence and awareness of GRT people to their cultural heritage;
- Celebrate GRT culture and heritage.

Schools, libraries, community groups and other organisations celebrate Gypsy, Roma and Traveller history and heritage over the month of June by organising various events across the UK.

GRTHM art competition

This year, the Roma Support Group celebrated GRTHM with an art competition. Our aim is to showcase the richness of Roma culture and the talent and creativity of children and young people.

Please see are our GRTHM art competition video below including winning entries by:

- Ayan Hussnain (age 9), video, winner for the under nine age group.
- David Buceani (age 12), drawing, joint winner for the 10–12 age group.
- Valentina Herakova (age 10), “Mountains”, painting, joint winner for the 10–12 age group.
- Maria Delia Vlad (age 15), two paintings (“Girl with White Hair Band” and “Group of Roma Celebrating”), winner for the 13–16 age group and overall winner for the individual entries category
- Bianka Zigova (age 5), Josephine Hoppe (age 10), Justin Javor (age 10), Sarka Sivakova (age 2), Justin Ziga (age 6), Vivien Zigova (age 4), Roman Gore (age 10), Red Zebra video, joint winners for the group entry category.
- L.B. (unknown age) – “Tree”, drawing, special nomination.



And Finally...

A message from the Mayor of London, celebrating GRTHM and acknowledging Roma contributions to London and the UK.



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.

We gratefully acknowledge the support provided by the Barrow Cadbury Trust.

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