

March 2018 bulletin



Introduction

Welcome to the latest Roma Support Group e-bulletin. Theresa May – the UK Prime Minister – took time off from Brexit last October to launch what is called the Race Disparity Audit. This is a website where government services (like Education and Health) are able to show how well they match the realities of life in multi-ethnic Britain. She said at the launch of the audit:

I think what this audit shows is that there isn't anywhere to hide. And that's not just for government, it is for society as a whole actually. The issues are now out in the open and we all have a responsibility to work together to tackle them. So I think the message is very simple; if the disparities can't be explained, they must be changed.

We provide evidence below to show that for Roma, this is just not true. Virtually all the information is silent about how Roma receive public services; and the only inclusion of Roma children and families, is always in conjunction with Gypsy children and families. So the issues are not “out in the open”. The government has to recognise that the Roma cannot be made invisible. For us, Roma are here visible, contributing and asserting their rights; for the government, it seems determined to deny Roma presence in our towns and cities.

We provide news about what the government is claiming to do about the massive over-representation of Roma pupils facing school exclusions. And news of a major defeat for the government lawyers in the High Court – it is

now unlawful for immigration enforcement teams to try and administratively remove EU nationals on the grounds that they are sleeping rough.

And we reproduce – surprisingly - an article from the Mailonline about the recent BBC Three documentary about the plight of Roma families, women and children in Hungary. Don't let that stop you from watching the film.....

This issue of the newsletter features:

- RSG's concerns about the government's Race Disparity Audit
- RSG's video about Hate Crime – made with the Met Police in Newham
- The latest Roma Support group training for professionals
- Some news about school exclusions, and the absence of Roma students in UK universities
- The BBC Three documentary about Roma families in Hungary – the cycle from poverty imposed by far right functionaries, via racist social workers, to disinterested children's home staff – ending with Roma young people fending for themselves, separated from their families
- News of an important victory against the UK government which prevents the Home Office from removing EU nationals who are forced to sleep rough – they are not breaking their right to live and work in the UK because they are homeless and in the open
- And the last meeting of the National Roma Network

RSG news

Race Disparity Audit

Our submission and evidence to the Parliamentary Women & Equalities select committee inquiry

Does the government's Race Disparity Audit help or hinder the demands for Roma rights in the UK? It was launched by Theresa May, when she became Prime Minister in 2016, promising to shine a light on injustice and

discrimination. The Audit was published in October 2017 under the title Ethnicity: Facts & Figures. In our evidence, Roma Support Group:

- Questions the value of the Audit in providing evidence about relations between public services and Roma communities.
- Finds that very few of the published datasets contain any information about Roma.
- Concludes that the few datasets that contain information are conceptually flawed as Roma are combined with 'Gypsy', which creates a problematic and unsound category – for both migrant Roma and English Gypsy communities.
- Finds that in some sections, the narrative departs from accepted statistical principles (e.g. varies the baseline for understanding trends).
- Finds that the emphasis on differences *between* ethnically described populations, has hidden differences and trends *within* particular ethnic populations (e.g. gender, age, locality).
- Outlines that a major contextual issue is that since 2014, the circumstances of many Roma families and communities has been determined as much by their national origin and migrant status, as by their ethnicity. This is underwritten by the changes in relation to access to social security provision, for families and individuals.
- Concludes that the UK government should adopt a national Roma integration strategy, to ensure that the needs and aspirations of Roma and Gypsy and Traveller communities are met.

Read our full submission here. And if you have the time, watch the session where we were asked to give evidence to the MPs on the committee.

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1cQp_qQqSqjx64EGBWm-BQ-Dv7Mm0V0hx/view

<http://parliamentlive.tv/Event/Index/40f0e888-c6f1-456b-9542-0e8beb87e0ba>

Hate Crime: an explanation for the Roma community

'Hate crime' is not unusual for Roma families in countries of origin – or in the UK. For example, see the article about Hungary in this bulletin. But it is unusual for families to realise that it is a crime which needs to be reported and investigated and the perpetrators charged.

Following several hate crime events involving members of the Roma community, and a collaboration with Newham LGBT Police team, Roma Support Group has recorded a video message that explains 'Hate Crime' for the Roma community in Romanes language (Slovak Romanes dialect). It provides an easy to understand definition of Hate Crime, including in relation to LGBT issues. Watch it here.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UayJb4mPLfs>

Training for professionals – working with Roma in a safeguarding context

Our Roma Support & Engagement Programme (RSEP) is holding one of our regular training days for professionals working with Roma families. One previous participant said:

The trainers had a really good insight into the practical issues that Roma communities face in accessing services and solutions to effective partnership working, a must for any public organisation who wishes to reach out to under-served communities.

The training session is on Thursday 19 April, from 9.30am – 4pm at a Central London venue. Booking is essential. Further details are available here.

<http://romasupportgroup.org.uk/?p=5029>

Roma and education – schools and universities

We reported in the last bulletin about the recent RSG publication about the huge problem of Roma children and young people being excluded from schools.

It was announced by Lord Young of Cookham in Parliament on 10 October 2017 that,

...the Department for Education will take forward an external review to improve practice in exclusions. This will share best practice nationwide and focus on the experiences of those groups who are disproportionately likely to be excluded. The House can expect further announcements on future government work to follow in the coming months.

The same minister further said,

If one looks at excluded children, which I did this morning, one sees that those most likely to be excluded are Traveller children and those in the Roma community. Publishing the figures highlights the fact that those children are more likely to be excluded. The noble Baroness is right that there are substantial discrepancies and differences between particular ethnic groups when it comes to exclusion. Now those who run our schools will have to explain or change—that is the whole purpose of the exercise.

<https://www.theyworkforyou.com/lords/?id=2017-10-10b.113.6>

In answer to a question on 5 February 2018 from Jo Platt MP about the timetable for this review, and which ethnic groups are disproportionately affected by exclusions, the schools minister (Nick Gibb) said;

The Department will publish full details of the review, including timetables and how views can be submitted, in due course. The externally led review of exclusions practice will consider how schools use exclusion overall and how this impacts on pupils, particularly why some groups such as those eligible for free school meals, those with special educational needs and disabilities, looked after children, children in need and pupils from certain ethnic groups are more likely to be excluded from school.

There doesn't appear to be either (a) any rush to get this review completed, or (b) specify how Roma children, young people and communities might expect to benefit from such a review.

It is also worthwhile reading this article in *Schools Week* about the DfE announcement.

<https://schoolsweek.co.uk/dfe-to-review-disproportionate-exclusions-of-certain-ethnicities/>

Roma students and higher education

The pressure to campaign for more Roma young people to attend universities in the UK continues. A recent report for Kings College London outlines the scale of the problem:

43% of all 18-30 year olds in the UK attended higher education in 2015. But only 200 Gypsy & Traveller young people were registered in the student population. And as there is no classification for 'Roma' on the UCAS form, it is not known how many Roma people were in higher education....

The report, *The underrepresentation of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils in higher education: A report on barriers from early years to secondary and beyond*, was commissioned by Kings College and written by LKMCo. It does not adequately live up to its title. The authors carried out a literature review, held a roundtable discussion with about 16 people (none Roma, but one teacher and a couple of academics who are committed to Roma inclusion), conducted four interviews (including one Roma) and held two discussion groups in schools (one was with about 12 Roma pupils). The study therefore is mainly focused on Gypsy & Traveller non-participation in university education.

Nevertheless, the report summarises many of the problems facing young people from both GRT and other marginalised backgrounds. And it gives voice to some Roma young people's views about higher education:

There's not a lot of people that have Roma background that have got someone to speak to about [university]. It would be great if they did...I don't think a lot have that contact with anyone to actually speak to, it's sad because if they did they would be more encouraged to go to university. I think most of them are scared of what university will be like. I think it's a great thing, but they might think it's a waste of time, because they don't have the people that I have around me to tell me differently so they might have really difficult time...Some of them might think it's a waste of time because the way the education system is in Slovakia it would be a waste of time because even if I got in there and I got a degree at university I would not get a job after because I'm Roma and that is a fact. (Ondrej, 18)

It costs a lot as well... and now people are saying that you can't get a loan to go to university because of the thing that's uh, that's happening now because of we're leaving the EU... It makes it more difficult to get into university as well. (Roma pupil, 13)

The first thing I would do to encourage Roma to go to university is to explain what it brings, but it would probably have to be a Roma to speak to them. If I saw a Roma who had been to university and then got the job they want and he was happy and motivated in life then that would motivate me more than anything else. Because when people tell us this and that you can't see it but it's much easier for people to believe in what they can see. (Ondrej, 18)

The report concludes with a series of recommendations for both schools and for higher education/universities.

https://cdn.lkmco.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/KINGWIDE_28494_FINAL.pdf

BBC 3 documentary: “Gypsy Kids Taken From Home”

We are pleased – for once – to be able to re-produce an article from the Daily Mail about this very impressive, and provocative documentary by Stacey Dooley.

Mailonline, 15 February 2018 by Natalie Corner

'Nightmare' plight of the Roma children being taken from their families and placed at risk of abuse in Hungary's state-run care homes is exposed in shocking documentary.

- Stacey Dooley travelled to the poorest parts of Hungary for BBC Three show
- Hostility towards the Roma community has grown with rise of far-right
- Stacey met with Roma mothers whose children have been placed in care
- The care homes are said to be rife with drugs and the threat of violence
- Anonymous worker says hundreds of children are being abused where he works

The plight of Hungary's Roma Gypsies is exposed in a new documentary that reveals how children are being removed from their families and placed in 'horrific' conditions in state-run care homes. After being placed in the care system by local authorities - ostensibly in an attempt to provide them with a better life - the Roma children actually find themselves in homes rife with drug abuse, and at risk of physical and sexual violence from both older children and staff, it is claimed. One Hungarian care worker told BBC Three presenter Stacey Dooley that he believed as many as 300 children at the home where he works are being abused - and that he is powerless to intervene.

Stacey also met with bereft Roma mothers who described the situation as 'the stuff of nightmares'. One, a mother-of-five named Zsanett, told how her sons had run away from a care home after they witnessed older children molesting younger children. But she was still forced to send them back or risk being punished. The distraught mother said: 'The children are in worse situations than their mothers.'

Hostility towards the Roma community has grown in Hungary, where the political scene is now dominated by far-right nationalist parties. The Jobbik party, or The Movement for a Better Hungary, has a long history of anti-Gypsy

campaigning. It's been reported that one right-wing town mayor is using child removal as a weapon and offering to buy the homes of the Roma families, but when Stacey attempts to question him about it he says the allegations are untrue.

Removing children from families because they are too poor is illegal in Hungary but many claim this is exactly what happens, and with the Roma children in a spiral of poverty and no opportunity for education, they are powerless. Two women told how they had five of their children taken away by the authorities because they were illegally stealing electricity to power their homes. One distraught mother, Melinda explained that the four social workers that turned up to her house told her that it was 'the end' and that she should know why they were there. Stacey asked how she would cope if she doesn't see her children again. 'Then I am going to kill myself,' she wept. 'I am going to take my own life. I wouldn't wish this on any mother, ever.'

Stacey meets with one care worker, who remains anonymous as he's scared he could lose his job, who confirms her suspicions about the horrific treatment of the children in Hungarian foster care. He believes roughly 250 to 300 children are being sexually and physically abused at the care home where he works. He tells Stacey: 'It's an everyday thing. When these incidents come to light there won't be any witness to testify as the children are intimidated usually by physical abuse so they don't dare talk. 'The only people who can see what happened are the people who really care about the children. 'And I can see what happened from the children's eyes, marks on their bodies, and I cannot do a thing about it.'

Stacey goes on to visit one of the female-only care homes where teenage girls congregate in the common rooms. Here she learns that the majority of residents have turned to prostitution to earn money. She is disgusted to learn that the care workers who monitor the girls do nothing to prevent them taking to the streets. Despite this one care worker tells Stacey she doesn't feel like she is letting the teenagers in her care down. 'The parents are drug addicts, prostitutes... It's the same pattern. A few of them really want to get out of this situation. But they really have to want it otherwise they can't do that,' she explained to Stacey. Stacey meets with one 15-year-old prostitute Jenny, and her pimp, who she refers to as her boyfriend. The underage teen, who was

taken from her home at 13, confesses she knows she's 'being used' for sex to make him money but relies on him for attention. The pimp, who remains anonymous, explains how he promises the girls a new life adding: 'I know that these girls, you know, are broken. You know, they are weak.'

Stacey concludes that wherever possible Roma children should be allowed to stay with their families, and that removing them should only be done as a last resort. Hungary's child protection authorities were approached by the BBC regarding the allegations of abuse in their children's homes made in the film. However, the programme makers claim 'their response did not address any of the individual allegations.'

Watch it here on BBC Three, 42 minutes long

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/p05x5rh4/stacey-dooley-investigates-gypsy-kids-taken-from-home>

Rough sleepers – EU nationals: legal judgement

There was excellent news just before Christmas. On 14 December 2017 the High Court ruled unlawful the Home Office's policy of detaining and administratively removing EEA nationals who sleep rough. North East London Migrants Action (NELMA) and Public Interest Law Unit (PILU)/Lambeth Law Centre have made two factsheets to help homeless people and those supporting them understand the implications of the ruling.

What are the implications of the High Court decision?

The High Court decision has two main implications:

- Firstly, the process by which the Home Office systematically checked whether EEA rough sleepers were exercising their treaty rights has been declared unlawful.
- Secondly, the High Court clarified that rough sleeping does not constitute an abuse or misuse of EU Treaty Rights.

This means that any removal decision served on an EEA national for rough sleeping is unlawful. If the individual is detained, they should be released immediately and their property, including their identity documents, should be returned to them. If they are not detained, they should receive written confirmation that the removal decision has been withdrawn and their documents, if retained, should be returned to them.

For more information on the factsheets for organisations supporting homeless EU nationals, see here.

<https://nelmacampaigns.files.wordpress.com/2018/01/rough-sleeper-removals-factsheet-for-organisations.pdf>

For homeless people themselves (in a variety of languages – e.g. Romanian and English) see here.

<https://nelmacampaigns.files.wordpress.com/2018/01/rough-sleeper-removals-factsheet-romanian.pdf>

<https://nelmacampaigns.files.wordpress.com/2018/01/rough-sleeper-removals-factsheet-eng.pdf>

And for the full judgement, see here.

<http://dpglaw.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Approved-judgment-RGureckis-v-SSHD-Ors.pdf>

And here is the story of one man who was threatened with removal for sleeping rough, whilst working

I came to the UK from Bucharest around a year ago. I left Romania due to family problems. I'd worked importing and distributing merchandise but was forced to leave because of tensions with my uncle who made my life increasingly difficult.

When I first came to the UK I went to the Home Office explaining my difficult family situation and I asked for help as I had nowhere to sleep. The Home

Office sent me to Croydon Council who said they couldn't help me. I ended up sleeping in a park. I had experience training dogs in Romania and got to know some of the dog-owners through playing with their dogs in the park. One of these people eventually became my girlfriend and I ended up moving into her council flat with her. She was worried about someone finding out I was living there but arranged for me to register as self-employed at her uncle's address.

I got a job working on a construction site in August 2016 through some Romanian people I knew. Originally I told the boss that my rate was £100 which he agreed to pay me, but after a few weeks he told me he'd found other workers willing to work for £60 and fired me. No notice, no negotiation, nothing – and I was never paid any of the money I was owed.

In January I broke up with my girlfriend and went to live in a hotel in Swiss Cottage. I worked odd jobs that I heard about through friends and other Romanians I'd met in London. It was mostly cash-in-hand. The jobs included removals work and plumbing jobs, whatever I could get. People I worked for tended to pay very low rates and sometimes wouldn't pay me for the work I'd done. I found it difficult to chase up outstanding payments because people would start ignoring my calls. The work was also really unreliable and piecemeal so it was difficult to get by, to know where the next job was coming from.

Eventually I rang a person from the construction job I'd been fired from – they told me if I came to Weymouth [in Dorset] they could give me work and would also pay the outstanding money they owed me. Now I think this was just a bribe. But I went down to Weymouth and lived on the building site in a caravan. In the end they didn't pay me at all – either for the work I'd done there or for my previous work. I went to the police but nothing happened. There's nothing you can do. I was lucky that while I was there I met a man in a café – an elderly British man – who let me stay in his home and in exchange I performed some domestic chores. He offered to pay me but I didn't feel comfortable taking his money. I was there for a week.

After that I returned to London. I had no money for a hotel room so went to sleep in a park in North West London with a Romanian friend. I'd only been staying there a couple of nights when there was a big raid. A big group of

police came through and woke everyone up at around 5am. Later we found out that the people involved were National Rail [who owned the land the park is on], the police, the Home Office and outreach workers from Thames Reach homelessness charity. There was a Romanian speaker with them too – maybe an interpreter or maybe a Romanian speaking police officer. They were also accompanied by a journalist from the BBC who said he'd help us but we didn't hear from him again. We were taken to the police station and they gave me and my friend a piece of paper in Romanian and English stating we were being charged with vagrancy, drinking in public and loitering for work. But I don't drink and I hadn't been getting work that way so I refused to sign it. Only one of the charges applied to me. But they said I had no choice.

My friend was detained, first at The Verne and then in Harmondsworth [immigration removal centres]. We heard most of the other people in the park were deported straightaway. They were all Romani people. I wasn't taken to The Verne as I had papers on me saying that I am registered as self-employed and other documents about my taxes, but the Home Office kept my passport and national identity card anyway [he was given a 'Notification of Temporary Admission to a Person who is Liable to be Detained' following the raid and a Home Office appointment to report to].

From the police station I was sent directly to the charity No Second Night Out [who work with Thames Reach]. After a few days I realised they didn't want to help me at all but were trying to get me to go back to Romania. They were also in contact with the Home Office. I explained the situation with my family and told them why I needed to leave Romania - the problems with my uncle, fears for my safety etc. Telling these stories led the charity to do a psychiatric assessment in which they claimed I was a paranoid schizophrenic and they tried to give me anti-psychotic medication. They didn't believe anything I was saying. I said I wouldn't take anything unless they provided me with an official diagnosis from a doctor. I'm not sure who the people who conducted the assessment were. Instead of providing the diagnosis they sectioned me [under the Mental Health Act, 1983]. I was taken to a nearby hospital. I was kept there for six days. They gave me 200ml of anti-psychotic medication and another medicine to counteract nausea and other side effects. My dose was raised to 400ml and then to 600ml during the time I was there. The

medication made me physically sick – I had nosebleeds and severe pancreatic pain. It was like being stuck in a nightmare – being told I was crazy when I was just explaining things that had happened. It was only when a different doctor saw me that they said there was no evidence of psychosis after all and let me out.

[The hospital notes recount his reasons for leaving Romania mentioning, for example, that he was scared about being followed and felt unsafe. They note that he also expressed fears about his life in the UK and state: ‘He was preoccupied with his physical health and the possibility of being deported.’ They note that he had never had contact with mental health services, that his appearance was clean and his responses clear. Why his anti-psychotic drug dose was consistently raised is unclear (although the notes document that it was). Eventually the hospital declared there was ‘no evidence of psychosis’ and discharged him.]

After being discharged I approached Crisis for help who found me a place to sleep where I can stay for three months. I’ve got a job washing dishes but it’s hard to get better work without my passport or ID. I’m still waiting to see the Home Office. I just want to be able to get a job and find a place to live. I had no idea things would be so hard.

(Thanks to NELMA)

National Roma Network

The last meeting of the Network took place on 14 December 2017 at Coin Street community centre in London. Kate Green MP (the co-chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Gypsies, Roma and Travellers) made the keynote address. It is worth reading.

Further sessions covered:

- The funder’s view of their support for the National Roma Network
- The main policy issues facing Roma in the UK – a summary of the last seven national network events
- A panel discussion on ‘Roma Rights and Equalities’

- And a final panel on 'Future Roma Voices in the UK'

The slides are available here.

<https://nationalromanetwork.files.wordpress.com/2017/12/final-nrn-presentation-14-12-17.pdf>

The meeting also included local updates from all around the country – an invaluable source of current news and concerns from Glasgow to Kent. You can read them here.

<https://nationalromanetwork.files.wordpress.com/2017/12/combined-local-issues-doc1.pdf>

As we've said before, their website contains lots of useful and up to date information. Take a look. The Network has come a long way in the last five or six years. It has almost transformed from being just a gathering of local councils staff talking about the Roma, to be an opportunity where Roma activists and NGOs, and other supportive voluntary organisations, and researchers and academics and national and local government staff meet together to talk and consider actions.

It is hoped that within the next few months, the final report of the Network will be available – which could provide invaluable in helping to construct a national Roma integration strategy....or something similar.

<https://nationalromanetwork.wordpress.com/about/>

.....and finally

On the day after the Italian elections, not all Romaphobia is in Eastern Europe. Matteo Salvini, the leader of The Lega, has benefitted from increased support at the election. There is talk of him being their next prime minister. He is no friend of Roma or Sinti. Two years ago he said Roma camps in Italy should be bulldozed. Forewarned is forearmed.

<https://www.yahoo.com/news/italian-wing-chief-sparks-anger-bulldozer-threat-roma-220451459.html>

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