



Introduction and welcome

Following the Prime Minister's announcement on 10th May for the easing of some lockdown restrictions, many of us have encountered new situations and challenges.

Depending on your circumstance, whether you are based at home, you have returned to work outside of your home or you have been working outside of home from the beginning of lockdown, we continue to wish you safety during this time. This edition of our newsletter focuses on the following areas:

- COVID-19 and Roma in the UK
- COVID-19 and Roma in Europe
- The launch of our Roma Stories website
- The EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS)
- Gypsy Roma Traveller History Month art competition



COVID-19

The Independent: From Coronavirus to the hostile environment, the chronically overlooked Roma community has been completely abandoned

One of our campaigning and policy workers, Mihai, has written an [Independent Voices article](#) on the experiences of UK Roma in the COVID-19 context. It includes accounts of hardship during the pandemic, but focuses too on the strength and resilience that the community has shown. Mihai sums up the appeal for support from the community: **'We are not asking for special treatment. We want fairness.'**

Open Society Foundations: Roma in the COVID-19 Crisis

The Open Society Roma Initiatives Office has published a [briefing](#) documenting the effects that COVID-19 and the government-led responses to it have had on the Roma populations of six EU countries: Bulgaria, Hungary, Italy, Romania, Slovakia, and Spain. The briefing proposes that **EU institutions should centrally allocate and manage targeted funds for Roma communities across Europe, in partnership with Roma advocates and Roma-led organisations.**

The briefing concludes with recommendations for EU institutions covering seven key areas: health measures, security measures, emergency and humanitarian measures, social measures, education measures, economic measures, and disinformation measures. The recommendations for these key areas are separated into urgent and long-term.

Roma Issues in Parliament

The All-Parliamentary Group for Gypsies, Travellers and Roma has written to the Minister for Communities, Lord Greenhalgh, calling on the government to set up task forces to assess and address the challenges faced by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) communities during the COVID-19 pandemic. They have also called for the Public Health England review into BME COVID-19 deaths to include effective data collection for GRT communities.

You can access the letter through this APPG for GRT [tweet](#).

Since the Roma Support Group wrote letters to MPs and leaders of local authorities, providing concerns and recommendations about the impact of COVID-19 on Roma communities in the UK, there has been increased mention of Roma in Parliament. The questions submitted by MPs and Lords, and their government responses, can be found in this [document](#).

On 12th May, Lord Bourne submitted the following question to the government:

To ask Her Majesty's Government what consideration they have given to establishing a task force to deal with specific challenges experienced by Gypsy, Traveller and Roma communities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Lord Greenhalgh's response makes no mention of a task force and instead cites the £3.2 billion the government has provided to local authorities. He states, 'It is for local authorities to determine how best to support vulnerable groups, in line with their public health vulnerabilities.'

Included in Lord Greenhalgh's response is a [letter](#) written to local authority chief executives.

The letter addresses the issues experienced primarily by Gypsy and Traveller communities rather than Roma, and Roma are not included in the title of the document.

The government's response has not followed the recommendations provided in the Open Society Foundations *Roma in the COVID-19 Crisis* briefing. Rather than providing centrally allocated and managed funds targeted at Roma communities, **the government has provided each local authority with a blanket funding package not tied to specific commitments and without any ring-fenced funding for Roma communities in each local authority.** The GOV.UK [website](#) states that the £3.2 billion funding is 'for local government to help them respond to coronavirus (COVID-19) pressures across all the services they deliver.'

The government's diluted response means that there is no way to guarantee that Roma communities will see the benefits of funding for the disproportionate vulnerabilities they face.

COVID-19: Europe

The Guardian: Europe's marginalised Roma People hit hard by Coronavirus

The Guardian have published an updated [account](#) of Roma experiences across Europe. **Some European governments continue to apply their lockdown measures in an arbitrary and discriminatory manner, setting parameters for Roma that other citizens are not subject to.** Many Roma living in Western Europe at the beginning of the pandemic have been forced to return to their countries of origin due to loss of employment and earnings. **Some face a situation where they are not covered by support measures, they are not eligible for unemployment benefits and they do not have health insurance.**

The structures that are acting against Roma during this pandemic were in place long before its arrival. The actions, or inaction, of governments and local authorities will shape the outcome of this crisis for Roma communities across Europe.

Roma Stories Oral History Project





We are pleased to announce the launch of our Roma Stories [website](#). The project focuses on ‘the unrecorded oral histories of Roma refugees and migrants from Eastern and Central Europe living in London, exploring themes of displacement and the Holocaust, a sense of belonging and changing identities.’

A range of resources are available on the website including school materials, the profiles and life stories of three Roma individuals, and extracts from interviews with project participants.

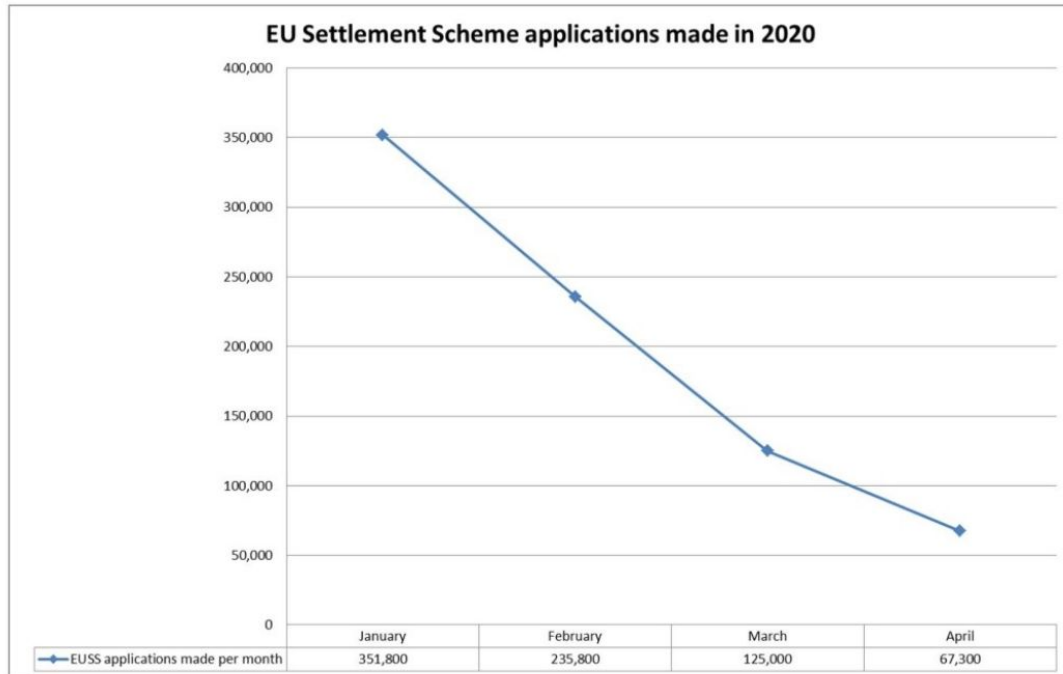
You can keep up to date with the project by accessing our Roma Stories [blog](#) and following our dedicated [account](#) on Twitter.

The story of one of the project's participants, Baronita Adam, has been published on the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust [website](#).

Brexit: EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS)

The current crisis has had a significant impact on the ability of Roma community members to make EUSS applications. For more than two months, the postal route through which applicants are required to send supporting evidence for their applications was closed. Subsequently, applicants possessing only a National ID not equipped with a readable chip were not able to make applications at all. Many Roma, especially those from Romania, fall into this category. All ID scanning facilities were closed when lockdown was introduced and continue to be closed until further notice. Furthermore, any support offered by charities has had to be moved online.

Across the charity sector, a large drop in applicants directly supported by charities has been widely reported. This is reflected in the latest Home Office statistics for the total number of EUSS applications made per month. We have presented these statistics in a graph below.



Considering the unforeseen difficulties that applicants have experienced through no fault of their own, the RSG is campaigning for an extension to the EUSS deadline.

We also urge the Home Office to confirm that all those who have been unable to return to the UK during the pandemic will not see their applications impacted by their absence from the UK.

And finally...

In June, we will celebrate...

**GYPSY
ROMA
TRAVELLER
HISTORY MONTH**

We would like to encourage **all young people** age 6 to 18 to participate in celebrating GRTHM by submitting their artwork for a competition.

Our term '**artwork**' is all-inclusive and it could be a drawing, picture, 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 promote an understanding of and celebrate the richness and diversity of **Roma culture**.

Deadline: **7 June 2020**

Prizes to win!

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

Gypsy Roma Traveler History Month art competition

The Roma Support Group is holding an art competition for young people aged between six and eighteen years old as part of our celebrations for Gypsy Roma Traveller History Month.

More information about entries and how to submit artwork and can be found on our [website](#).

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

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

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