

June 2023 Newsletter



Introduction & Welcome

Welcome to Roma Support Group's June newsletter!

One of the highlights of our year so far, featured in this edition, was the first in-person meeting of the [Roma Rights Forum](#) in Manchester. The forum brings together Roma from across the United Kingdom, to provide a platform for them to represent and organise their communities. The Manchester event was an inspiring gathering that strengthened our collective spirit, with the discussions that took place paving the way for future campaigns.

We would like to draw your attention to a concerning issue covered in a recent [BBC article](#), the [rise in Roma child protection cases](#). It is vital that we raise awareness of this topic, and work with local authorities to ensure that we avoid replicating child "protection" systems seen in other [European countries](#) that discriminate against Roma families.

In this edition, we also introduce [Gypsy Roma Traveller \(GRT\) History Month](#), a time to celebrate and raise awareness of GRT history and culture. We highlight upcoming events and take the opportunity to share our art competition with you. Additionally, Friends Families and Travellers have created an excellent set of resources, which we encourage you to explore.

We announce the launch of several resources created through our ongoing work within the [Health and Wellbeing Alliance](#). These resources include a health statistics data platform, and guidance for professionals on the cost-of-living crisis, GRT maternal health, and digital exclusion. Through providing this information for policy-makers and care professionals, we aim to help address the unequal access to health services and unequal health outcomes faced by Roma communities.

Our policy team has also been actively supporting government departments working

on recent legislative changes, and we are pleased to report that our efforts have already made a significant impact. We have influenced the guidance surrounding changes to [early marriage law](#) and created a set of resources to inform Roma communities about the [new voter ID legislation](#).

Lastly, we are delighted to announce the launch of our new housing project, [Romano Kher](#). At a moment when Roma communities (like the majority of our society) are confronted by a housing crisis, this project is urgently needed. We aim to influence local and national strategies around housing and homelessness, and provide Roma with the support and tools required to overcome discrimination and barriers within the housing system.



This month's newsletter focuses on:

- [Roma Rights Forum](#)
- [Rise in Roma child protection cases](#)
- [Health and Wellbeing Alliance](#)
- [Gypsy Roma Traveller History Month](#)
- [Early marriage guidance](#)
- [Voter ID resources](#)
- [International news](#)
- [New RSG project](#)
- [Ukraine donation pages](#)

Roma Rights Forum



The Roma Rights Forum, a group of Roma activists, leaders and professionals from around the UK met in person for the first time in April, at Friends Meeting House in Manchester.

The forum, organised through Roma Support Group's Policy and Campaigns project, aims to empower Roma communities to be able to influence positive change, while representing their interests through meetings with decision makers and developing joint campaigns.

At the meeting the forum discussed the main issues experienced by their communities, and the main barriers to Roma accessing their rights in the UK. These fruitful discussions will lay the foundation for future campaigns to be undertaken by the group.



'Roma Support Group is very excited to be able to bring together Roma people with such a huge experience regarding Roma communities, to pave the way to new joint work on addressing rights and injustice that Roma people face. Personally, I feel the meeting we had in Manchester bringing us together after so many years and discussing ways we can better organise, fuelled my energy and motivation for a better, stronger, and more mobilised and organised Roma community in the UK.' *Mihai Calin Bica (Policy and Campaigns Project Coordinator).*

The forum also received some inspirational training on community organising from Zrinka Bralo of [Migrants Organise](#), giving the group examples of successful organising and tools to help plan and conduct future campaigns.

It was fantastic to see so many Roma from different communities coming together to make changes! We will update readers on the progress of the forum.

Rise in Roma child protection cases

A recent BBC article, [Fears of a hidden rise in Roma children in care](#) highlighted the concerning rise of Roma children involved in care proceedings.

Through our 12 years of experience supporting vulnerable families through child protection processes, we have seen first-hand the conspicuous increase in Roma children being taken into care and therefore recognise the importance of this issue receiving media attention.

The article focuses on the impact of the post-Brexit immigration system under the EU Settlement Scheme, and the associated loss of access to services and benefits for those without pre-settled or settled status. While this is not irrelevant to Roma families being increasingly subject to care proceedings, it does not fully explain the situation.

As Gaba Smolinska-Poffley (RSG Deputy Manager, & Roma Support and Engagement Programme Leader) says: 'For the past 12 years I've supported many disadvantaged Roma parents who have been involved with children's services due to safeguarding concerns. I also often worked with children's services and other professionals involved in those cases to provide insight into Roma culture. In my experience early help and culturally

aware and sensitive support can make a huge difference.'

In cases where there are concerns around parenting, getting this support makes it far less likely that families enter care proceedings. If the gap in support at Local Authority level was filled, cases such as that featured in the article could be prevented from escalating.

'Many disadvantaged Roma parents who genuinely want to provide good care for their children, are struggling to understand UK requirements and develop their parenting skills accordingly. I observed a huge difference between cases where early help or focused, culturally sensitive support was offered, and cases where it was not. In the first instance many of the parents were able to improve their parenting skills and provide the standard of care expected by the professionals.' (*Gaba Smolinska-Poffley.*)

Improving the prevention strategies of local authorities' care services and providing culturally competent help and support to vulnerable families are undeniably more effective approaches to safeguarding children.

We appreciate the BBC highlighting the very real issue of the "hidden rise" of cared for Roma children. Roma Support Group welcomes them further investigating its causes, in particular the reasons why Roma families are increasingly engaged with by children's services and how this engagement so often escalates to care proceedings.

Health and Wellbeing Alliance

SPOTLIGHT - Improving inclusion health outcomes:

As part of the [VCSE Health and Wellbeing Alliance](#) (HWA) Roma Support Group has supported the Office for Health Inclusion and Disparities to develop [SPOTLIGHT](#), a public data sharing platform which presents key statistics related to the public health outcomes of inclusion health groups.

Our [summary paper](#) presents the main findings of consultations with people with lived experiences from inclusion health groups.

Cost of living:

The HWA has launched a new resource: ['Tackling the cost of living crisis and impacts on health and wellbeing: Key actions health and care policy makers, commissioners and provider organisations can take'](#).

The resource discusses how the cost of living crisis is having a significant impact on health and wellbeing with particularly acute challenges being faced by groups who already face health inequalities.

GRT maternal health:

The ['Tackling GRT Maternal Health Inequalities Report'](#) , created by Friends Families and Travellers in collaboration with Roma Support Group is now available to read.

The report is designed to support professionals who provide maternal health and care services to Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) communities.

Tackling inequality and disadvantage:

The HWA has also launched a new resource: ['Tackling inequality and disadvantage: Key actions policy makers, commissioners and provider organisations can take when developing an approach with a digital component'](#).

The resource highlights the key actions people who design health and care can take to tackle inequality and disadvantage when using digital tools.

New projects:

There are several new projects being undertaken by the HWA related to GRT communities:

- Guidance: Working with GRT communities, guidance for social prescribing link workers.
- Guidance: Extent and Enablers: accessing primary health services through digital means for the GRT communities.
- Guidance: GRT Infant feeding

If you have any relevant information or experience related to these projects, you can contact the at info@romasupportgroup.org.uk.

Gypsy Roma Traveller History Month

Introducing Gypsy Roma Traveller History Month (GRTHM) 2023!

Join us as we celebrate and promote the rich culture, history and heritage of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities.

GRTHM events:

The **Greater London Authority** will be hosting a series of events to mark the month, with a Young GRT Carers event on the 13th of June, a screening of *Leaving to Remain* (featured in our [November 2022 newsletter](#)) on the 26th of June, and the main GRTHM event on the same day at City Hall.


For more information and to register for the event click [here](#).

The Wiener Holocaust Library has collaborated with Brolly Productions to organise *Roma Voices: The Patrin, Testimony and Archive*, an event celebrating and sharing testimonies from the Roma community. It will feature a roundtable discussion, a launch of an aural installation of female Roma voices and a live performance from Sindy Czureja from *The Stopping Place* opera. Roma Support Group's Mihai Calin Bica will also be talking at the event.

To attend, RSVP Dominic and Rachana at brollyproductions@gmail.com

RSG art competition:

In June '23, we are celebrating...




**GYPSY
ROMA
TRAVELLER
HISTORY MONTH**

ART COMPETITION!


Every year since 2008, we come together to celebrate and honour Gypsy, Roma, Traveller history month! This year, the theme is *Weaving Journeys: A celebration of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller lives, histories and cultures, exploring their traditions and inspiring their dreams of the future.*

We would like to invite all young people ages 6 to 18 to participate in celebrating Gypsy Roma Traveller History Month (GRTHM) 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.

Join the wonderful event of the entire country celebrating and promoting the fantastic heritage of Roma culture!



Please submit your artwork by: **July 10th 2023**

Prizes to win!

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

Friends Families and Travellers resources:

Friends Families and Travellers have created a series of resources around the theme of 'Weaving Journeys: A celebration of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller lives, histories and cultures', to help you celebrate GRTHM.

Click [here](#) to download a brochure, an education pack for schools and prisons, and a digital engagement pack for social media! .

Early marriage guidance

The work of our Policy and Campaigns team with the Ministry of Justice and the Home Office, on the Marriage and Civil Partnership (Minimum Age) Act 2022, has led to changes

in the [guidance](#) for agencies enforcing this law.

The guidance now specifies that agencies should take into consideration that in some Roma communities, pre-marriage relationships between young people and their cohabitation arrangements might be described by the community as a 'marriage', but that this does not necessarily mean that the couple are subject to the new legislation.

Roma Support Group's concerns about the act, which was given Royal Assent in April 2022, were detailed in our [January 2022 newsletter](#).

Voter ID resources

Roma Support Group has collaborated with the Electoral Commission to produce a series of [resources](#) for organisations and agencies that support Roma communities, to provide information about the recent changes to voting laws that made it a requirement to show photo ID at polling stations.

The resources include [videos](#) in Romanes for Bulgarian, Polish, Romanian and Slovak Roma communities.



Voter ID video for Bulgarian Roma

International news

- **Belgium**: Roma Week held in Brussels.
- **Germany**: Berlin hosts Roma International Congress.
- **Slovakia** referred to Court of Justice of the EU for school segregation.
- **Turkey** : Roma man killed by police in İzmir.

New RSG project

Romano Kher: Housing Project

The Romano Kher: Housing Project aims to support Roma migrants at risk of or experiencing homelessness in the UK to access and maintain sustainable housing and to influence public policy, strategies and practice in response to Roma housing needs.

'Romano Kher is an incredibly timely project. We will help Roma communities to fight against discrimination and systemic housing accessibility barriers, which have exacerbated since Brexit. Through this project we will also challenge current housing policies at the local and national level, so that they can reflect the realities of our communities and respond to their needs.' *Tania Gessi (Romano Kher Coordinator)*

The housing and homelessness issues we plan to tackle through this Project include:

- Gatekeeping issues: discrimination and lack of information/ misinformation from local Housing Departments
- Systemic accessibility barriers to the Housing Register for social housing;
- Unsafe housing and disrepair problems
- Lack of joined-up approach to address homelessness/rough sleeping at local level between the homelessness sector and local authorities
- Discrimination against Roma people from letting agencies

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.

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](#).

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](#).

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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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