

In this November 2014 edition of the newsletter, we are leading with two major reports that have been launched last month. Both reports explore the British government's decision not to adopt a national Roma integration strategy. Both reports use a wide range of respondents to illustrate why this is a failed policy, and why the Gypsy and Traveller and Roma communities remain marginalised in Britain in 2014.

There is more news of the British government policies to reduce access to welfare benefits for EU migrants, including many newly arrived (and some longer established) Roma families. We have a report on the Roma community organisation in Derby, and the annual report of MigRom in Manchester. The newsletter also covers a number of recent initiatives aimed at supporting Roma communities in the UK, and in Hungary. We conclude with the recent public haircut of the Roma Support Group's patron - to raise funds for RSG's early years' project.



[November 2014 newsletter](#)

### **[Welcome from Roma Support Group](#)**

Welcome to the sixth edition of the newsletter. We want to bring you information, reflections, arguments and discussion about the issues that face Roma communities in the UK. The Roma Support Group has developed over the last fifteen years into a major service agency working for and with Roma communities, mainly in London. We run advice and advocacy sessions; education support programmes (including homework support) for children and families; a Roma Support and Engagement Programme (including tailored staff training and development); and an arts and culture programme. Recently, RSG has been able to develop its work on developing Roma advocacy and mediation, community engagement and development (again principally in

London) and also into policy development and information provision. This e-bulletin is one manifestation of these recent developments.

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## Reviewing the UK government's policy on Roma integration

Readers of this newsletter will be all too aware that Roma Support Group – along with a wide range of Roma, Gypsy and Traveller organisations and agencies – have argued that the UK government's existing policies towards migrant Roma do not meet the challenge that the European Commission has asked all EU member states to consider; namely, how to secure lasting Roma inclusion and integration. Initially, the Commission proposed that all member states should adopt national Roma integration strategies. But after lobbying by the UK government, this proposal was modified; national governments could *either* adopt specific Roma integration strategies, *or* they could adapt existing policies (e.g. around social inclusion) which would have similar impacts – for securing Roma integration.

Does this equate to arguments about angels dancing on a pin-head? Yes and no. “Yes”, in that most of us – and without doubt, most Roma families and communities – want to see systems and services which provide for all, without fear, favour or discrimination.

On the other hand, we would say “no” – this is important. Because first and foremost, to have an agreed national policy for Roma integration is to acknowledge that Roma people and communities (and Gypsy and Traveller communities too) are part of what makes up the UK in 2014. There is no going back; women, men and communities are staying. And, as many testify, the way in which existing priorities and services about work, education, health care, housing provision and justice are organised tends to work against Roma communities, and to maintain patterns of exclusion.

So we are pleased to be able to welcome two reports launched last month which put the UK government's approach under the spotlight. Don't let the rather tedious titles put you off – they are both full of devastating critiques and narratives. The initial report – funded by the Open Society Foundation - is part of a European initiative to monitor Roma inclusion; the UK volume is ***Civil Society Monitoring on the implementation of the national Roma integration***

***strategies in the UK in 2012 and 2013*** (Ryder and Cemlyn) and is available [here](#).

The second report – funded/supported by Joseph Rowntree Charitable Foundation - ***Experts by Experience; Gypsy, Traveller, Roma – reviewing UK progress on the European Union framework for national Roma integration strategies*** (Lane, Spencer, Jones) is available [here](#).

The Decade for Roma Inclusion Secretariat Civil Society Monitoring report authored by Ryder and Cemlyn is the more substantive and policy focused report which the Decade for Roma Inclusion Secretariat is circulating amongst the EU Commission, European Parliament and other key decision makers. The other report funded by Joseph Rowntree primarily used the research in the 'Decade report' to produce an 'easy read' version but also one which contained more direct comments from community members. These were quotations which came from interviews collected for the 'Decade report'.

There are differences between the two reports despite the fact that they share the same field-work and qualitative interviews. The Open Society Foundation/Ryder & Cemlyn report focuses extensively on what they call the “structural requirements” that ensures Roma integration. Here the report explains the twists and turns of the UK government’s attempts to alter the Commission’s initial proposals re national strategies; and reveals some of the detail, the then minister responsible Grant Shapps saying that the Commission’s initial proposals were not relevant as,

*...a separate strategy might impose unhelpful targets and be a burdensome reporting requirement.*

The Open Society Foundation/Ryder & Cemlyn report also traces the wider issue of anti-discrimination legislation (and the current threat to it with the Repeal of the Human Rights Act) in its impact on Gypsy, Traveller and Roma communities.

Both reports tend to prioritise issues particularly affecting Gypsy and Traveller communities. The range of recommendations is perhaps understandably sharper; there are fewer recommendations that specifically respond to the needs of migrant Roma communities. This is particularly the case with the examples provided of best practice – very few local or national examples of migrant Roma; many more for Gypsy and Traveller communities and initiatives.

Nevertheless, both reports provide hard and clear evidence about why there needs to be a national strategy for Roma integration in the UK, and also provide recommendations for future actions.

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### **Further changes in welfare benefits for EU migrants; a reminder about the 'call for evidence'**

The government has further tightened access to benefits for EU migrants who find themselves out of work and forced to seek state assistance. As from 10 November, all EU migrants who are 'jobseekers' will have to attend interviews at Job centres with their employment advisors after three months of claiming JSA (previously there had been a six month limit on their JSA claim). After three months - on the 91st day of the claim - they will have to satisfy the Job Centre that they have a "genuine prospect of work" (e.g. providing evidence of a job offer, according to the DWP).

This will help to remind you that Roma Support Group, alongside a number of other organisations, is supporting a "call for evidence" about how these changes are having a direct and negative impact on Roma families in the UK. We are aware, for example, that landlords are offering tenants (who are now denied housing benefit) to stay in a tenancy if they provide the landlord with 'free labour'.

We would welcome contributions by 30 November. Click [here](#) if you want more information.

We have just received a copy of the report from the Social Security Advisory Committee (SSAC), and the Department of Work & Pensions' response, to the benefit changes which from 1 April 2014 denied EU migrant 'jobseekers' the right to claim housing benefit to assist in paying housing costs. The SSAC's report, and the DWP's response, can be read [here](#). The SSAC report is on page 8-22; the DWP response is on page 3-7.

Readers might also want to see the report that the DWP commissioned from MORI of local authorities in the spring/summer of 2014 which identified some of the issues that local authorities were starting to become aware of in relation to the denial of housing benefit for some EU migrants. The MORI report is available [here](#).

Finally, some agencies are dealing with a growth in the number of rejections of benefit on the grounds of residency. (See the August 2014 issue of this

newsletter and the article by Anna Blus of AIRE Centre, available [here](#)). This might be connected to the so-called "enhanced habitual residence test" which was introduced in January 2014. The extended list of 300 possible questions that the DWP have authorised when assessing "habitual residence" is available [here](#).

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## **The Roma community infrastructure in Derby**

Roma Community Care is a self-help and advocacy group, led by Roma activists. They have recently moved into a small self-contained unit in a primary school (formerly the Sure Start centre) to provide advice, advocacy, learning activities, youth provision and a meeting place for the Roma communities in Derby. RCC has had support from staff at the University of Derby, and latterly, has benefited from commissions with Derby City Council.

There are maybe about 4,000 Roma now living in Derby, mostly from Slovakia. We spoke to Petra Budiova and Michal Daniel - two young advocacy workers/volunteers at RCC - about the growth of the Roma community in the city, how it has changed and what they think are the major issues facing the communities. Both Petra and Michael had arrived in Derby with their families in 2004, and continued with their schooling in local schools. Their families had relatives already living in the city, which helped with finding somewhere to live and somewhere for their parents to work. Why did their families leave Slovakia?

*There were better opportunities here, particular for us as children... There's a much better life here; in Czech Republic there are clear racist campaigns now against the Roma – especially in work – whereas in the UK, employers will employ us.*

They described how their parents (mainly their fathers and male relatives) worked in factories and warehouses in and around Derby – like Marks & Spencer distribution centre, Bass Brewery at Burton, local food processing factories, and how women worked at Flower World (part of Morrison's) at Sinfen. But they said that things have got a lot harder to find work in the last ten years

*...now you've got three or four tests before and during work – Maths, written and spoken English and drug and alcohol checks; this makes it harder for older people who are arriving now, who don't have the language skills that our younger generation has....*

However, they say that in the last five years since the banking crisis and the depression,

*...employers have more choice about who they employ. We know some of our people have to pay to get jobs now. There's still a feature of white British people pointing at you and singling you out at work – and it also happens with non-Roma from Eastern Europe especially. Health and safety is important for everyone – but it's translated into Polish, but never into Slovak or Czech – ha, let alone Romanes!*

In Derby, they say that as younger people they sense that local tensions with other residents have decreased over the last few years.

*Things were tense when we were teenagers – particularly for some of the boys who used to adopt 'gangsta' styles in their clothes and haircuts which were matched by other young men in the neighbourhood; they both wanted trouble at times....but not now. We're calmer!*

What are continuing problems, and inform a lot of the casework they do at RCC, are issues generated by the weakness of people's English language, and problems with housing and landlords – the quality of accommodation, the level of rents and continual difficulties with housing benefit claims when families find themselves in need of assistance.

Petra and Michael are keen to stress the importance for Roma people to be as independent as possible. It's not always achievable but that should be an aim for everyone.

*You don't want to be told by the Job Centre people all the time what you should be doing – you need to find work to support your family; you have to develop your English if you're going to stay in Derby – if that means attending English classes, at least give it a chance. If you acquire English, then it means getting a better job and putting food on the table.*

We spoke to Margarita Cechova, who is one of the advice workers at RCC.

*I'm not young, I came here in my 30s without any English but I've learned since I've been here. I'm proud of being Roma, and I'm proud of the independence that I've brought to my family – with my husband who works as*

*a welder. We've had to work hard, try hard and learn the language – but we've done it. And we've got a lovely house here now. But we've also got to be more forceful with our children – we've got to get them to study and learn.*

Why does Margarita think that so many local Roma people (young and old) use the RCC space and services?

*They feel safe here; we've tried to develop in response to what they say they need; it's run by Roma people and they know us as workers and as friends; they know they can always ask us questions – and they know we will always try.*

We talked to Michael Daduc finally who's been the main stay of the RCC as it's developed. Michael was full of praise for both the determination of the Roma communities to make a better life for themselves in Derby; and the support that has been offered by some agencies and some front line staff. But he also mentioned matters within the communities that aren't resolved; for example, he talked about the changing nature of relationships between older parents and their grown up children; sometimes he felt that there was a tendency towards disrespect. And the stresses and strains of migration and settlement meant that divorce and separation were not unusual; that the changes in families' social lives and the use of alcohol was becoming problematic for some; and that with the low levels of many parents' education, they couldn't support and didn't comprehend the difficulties that their children are facing in schools – children had different standards and different aspirations to their parents.

Michael talked about some amazingly successful and supportive initiatives – like the 'new emerging communities' local healthcare team with one experienced (white British) health visitor and one (white) Slovak interpreter/support worker but which had been formidable as a way of helping both Roma families and NHS staff to understand and best utilise health provision in the city (and recognised by the Department of Health):

And the importance of having sympathetic and pioneering local media to report on local issues affecting Roma communities. For example, see [here](#):

And the way in which these foundations can help in forming opinions and influencing the mainstream – like the impact of the changes in welfare benefits affecting all EU migrants, but likely to have a profound impact on migrant Roma families. See this clip from Channel 4 news last January with Roma

people in Derby talking about the press hysteria and the government's changes to benefit changes (including refreshing statements from the local Labour MP); [watch](#).

If you want to contact Roma Community Care, click [here](#).

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### [The annual report of the MigRom project \(Manchester\)](#)

The MigRom community development project in Manchester - sponsored and supported by the University of Manchester and also part of a wider European project - has produced its latest annual report. To read the report, click [here](#).

MigRom are also organising a public meeting on Tuesday 2 December at 5pm - 7pm at University of Manchester (Samuel Alexander building) with the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) committee on the Genocide of the Roma, entitled "**Overcoming the exclusion of the Roma: lessons from history**". Further details are available [here](#).

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### [EHRC request for cases involving Roma](#)

27 October 2014

Dear Colleague,

We are very interested in hearing about cases or issues which fall within our strategic priorities or which otherwise merit our involvement. In appropriate equality cases it is possible for us to fund a case conducted by an external solicitor, or to represent a claimant ourselves, and in equality and human rights cases we can bring a case on behalf of the Commission or intervene in a case.

We are particularly interested in cases which resonate with the range of work being undertaken by the Commission, including at first instance. Areas of especial interest currently include, but are not restricted to, pregnancy and maternity cases, race discrimination in letting cases, service cases in relation to all protected characteristics especially age discrimination, objective justification cases for direct age discrimination, cases involving access to justice and cases involving particularly marginalised, vulnerable groups, for example, Gypsies and Travellers.



Legal representatives can call to discuss a referral with Eleanor Williams 07812 674216 [eleanor.williams@equalityhumanrights.com](mailto:eleanor.williams@equalityhumanrights.com) or the Lawyers' Referral Helpline on 0161 829 8407 (Tues to Thurs, 10am to 1pm) for England and Wales. The Lawyers' Referral helpline can also be accessed on-line at [legalrequest@equalityhumanrights.com](mailto:legalrequest@equalityhumanrights.com).

Please bear in mind that securing assistance will normally take upwards of 4 weeks so we ask that you contact us as soon as you can.

If you would like further information about our strategic priorities please see our current litigation strategy and also our business plan, both of which are found on our [website](#).

Finally, if you haven't yet replied to our consultation on our litigation strategy, we would be very grateful if you would. All details are at [EHRC litigation strategy consultation](#).

Yours sincerely,

EHRC Legal Directorate

**PS. When you publicise, could you make clear that the EHRC strategic litigation policy means that not every case can be taken?**

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### **No Mad laws – new website**

Roma Support Group is pleased to sign up to the new website No Mad Laws which aims to highlight and reverse the massive impact that changes to legal aid and judicial review procedures by the government will affect Gypsy and Travellers in the UK. This will particularly affect the campaign for Travellers' site provision. See the website [here](#).

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### **"The Evergreen in Red and White": Rabbi Howell; the first Romani footballer capped for England**

Some good publicity for Sheffield United! A football enthusiast and historian - Steve Kay - has written a novel based on the life of the first Romani footballer who was capped by England. Rabbi Howell was born in Sheffield in the 1860s and went on to play for Sheffield United. Rabbi won his first England cap in 1895, played again for England in 1899, before falling foul of the masters of the game. He went on to play for Liverpool and Preston and had to retire due to

having his leg broken. He went on to become a fruit and veg trader in Preston before dying in 1937 and being buried in an unmarked grave. Steve Kay is campaigning for a headstone for Rabbi's grave, and to highlight the contribution that Romani players have made to the game of football since Rabbi Howell's career. You can visit the website built around the book [here](#).

Steve can be contacted about the book and the campaign via his email of [stevek1889@gmail.com](mailto:stevek1889@gmail.com)

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### **Video – Praxis in Hungary**

Bagazs is a project working in a Roma settlement just outside Budapest and we have been working together on a European funded mentoring project. There are two videos illustrating the work that they are doing – one funded by a local newspaper which is trying to change perceptions of Roma in Hungary, and one about the football teams they have created.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GDvznVwsCa0>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MWC84Hbr80g>

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### **Roma Support Group news – the Patron shaves....**

Finally, a short clip of Roma Support Group's patron being publicly scalped ("the shaggy professor becomes a skinhead professor") to raise money for our appeal for an early years project, for very young Roma children and their parents. See [this link](#) for the video; and click [here](#) for the donation page.

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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**