



Introduction and welcome

In this month's newsletter we update you on the work of some of our projects, but also draw your attention to pressing issues facing many Roma in the UK.

In total, this month's newsletter will focus on:

- RSG's COVID-19 report.
- RSG's Mental Health Advocacy Report.
- Announcing the Health & Wellbeing Alliance.
- Updates on the EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS).
- Updates on the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill.
- The World Roma Congress Art Exhibition comes to London.
- Our latest Roma News video.



Image courtesy of [Beverley Carpenter](#)

RSG COVID-19 Report

In collaboration with local authorities and community organisations, Roma Support Group has produced a report on overcoming Roma health inequalities in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic:

Lessons learned: Supporting the Roma community through Covid-19.

The report provides recommendations to UK local authorities and central government on effective public health outreach and adapting support to changing community needs.

Though the extent of the impact of COVID-19 on Roma communities in the UK is not yet clear, RSG's experience suggests that Roma have faced disproportionate and unique disadvantages during the pandemic stemming from a backdrop of social exclusion and widespread inequality. Without a centralised, uniform approach there was much variation in how different local authorities responded to the needs of Roma communities during the early stages of the pandemic. Few local authorities are aware of their Roma communities, and even fewer have Roma-specific engagement strategies. The report came about as a means to address these gaps in support and provide strategies for local engagement.

Since March 2020, RSG has been engaged in discussion with local authorities and community organisations to analyse their responses to the pandemic and the ways they have addressed health inequalities amongst Roma populations in their areas. RSG followed up these discussions with an online workshop for local authorities and community organisations in May 2021, to share good practice and influence wider policy. Along with RSG's community research on COVID-19, the good practice approaches gathered from these activities forms the basis of the report's content and recommendations.

The report suggests a range of methods to work with Roma communities on healthcare and the delivery of other services. These can form a starting point for engagement or supplement existing policy and outreach. Although many of the learnings from the pandemic come through public health outreach work, the approaches and recommendations contained in this report can inform anyone looking to engage Roma

communities across a range of services. We encourage you to distribute this report to any contacts you have in health policy and outreach.

RSG Mental Health Advocacy Report

Roma Support Group's (RSG) Roma Mental Health Advocacy Project, ran from December 2015 to April 2021. With the conclusion of this project, RSG has published a [Self-Evaluation Report](#), providing a comprehensive overview of the project's origins, activities and outcomes.

Building on RSG's first Mental Health Advocacy Project from 2008–2011, the second project began with three main aims:

- Improve Roma community members' access to mental health services.
- Empower Roma community members to communicate more openly about mental health issues.
- Improve mental health professionals' knowledge of Roma culture and help them to communicate more effectively with Roma service users.

Roma people in the UK face specific challenges that can affect their mental health and their ability to access support. This is related to a wide range of circumstances:

- Language barriers, low literacy levels and high rates of digital exclusion can make it difficult to navigate UK public services.
- Past and present discrimination in the UK and across Europe.
- The reliance on interpreters to communicate with healthcare practitioners which can create barriers to the disclosure of sensitive information.
- A lack of Romanes speaking interpreters.

- Limited access to education.
- Cultural taboos related to health.

The project pursued its aims by holding one-to-one and peer group mental health advocacy services for Roma refugees and migrants. The project workers also made referrals to mental health services, requested language support for medical appointments and communicated with service providers about beneficiaries' cultural backgrounds. Over the course of the project, the team assisted 753 distinct beneficiaries across 1,845 advocacy sessions.

Another part of the project involved providing Roma cultural awareness training for health professionals and the production of informational leaflets and materials for both Roma community members and health professionals. The Report also details how the project adapted its services and overcame problems posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

We are delighted to receive a three-year grant from the Tudor Trust to continue our Mental Health Advocacy Project. For updates on this in the near future, please visit out [website](#).

Health and Wellbeing Alliance

Following on from RSG's health advocacy projects, we are pleased to announce our involvement in the [Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise \(VCSE\) Health and Wellbeing Alliance](#). As part of a consortium with [Friends, Families and Travellers](#), RSG joins seventeen other organisations in a programme designed to alleviate health inequalities amongst communities with protected characteristics.

The Alliance is jointly managed by the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC), Public Health England (PHE), NHS England and NHS Improvement. It aims to:

- Provide a co-ordinated route for health and care organisations to reach a wide range of VCSE organisations.
- Support collaboration between VCSE organisations and provide a collective voice for issues related to VCSE partnerships in health and care.
- Enable health and care organisations and VCSE organisations to jointly improve ways of delivering services which are accessible to everyone.
- Ensure health and care decision-makers hear the views of communities which experience the greatest health inequalities.
- Bring the expertise of the VCSE sector and communities they work with into national policy making.

You can get monthly updates on the work of the Alliance by subscribing to the [Health and Social Care e-news bulletin](#).

EU Settlement Scheme Updates

At the beginning of October, *The Independent* published an [article](#) covering some of the confusion that has characterised the last few months since the deadline for applications to EUSS in June. The Department for Work & Pensions (DWP) has wrongly sent letters to thousands of EEA citizens announcing the termination of their welfare benefits if they do not apply to the EUSS by 24 October. Many of the EEA citizens in question, some of them Roma, have been granted status under the EUSS or have indefinite leave to remain, which means they already hold a valid immigration status compatible with access to benefits.

As campaigners have pointed out, nearly half a million applications to the EUSS are still

being processed. Another consideration is that it is still possible to apply to the scheme through a [late application](#). Campaigners argue that DWP should not look to cut off benefits while there are still so many outstanding applications and there is the potential for the Home Office to receive many more.

Given the varying approaches towards changes to the EUSS taken by government departments, local authorities and other organisations, we want to publicise materials that will help local authorities, landlords and employers to stay fully informed. [the3million](#) has produced a [summary of rights table](#) to quickly differentiate between the rights of different immigration status holders, and a [breakdown](#) of the changes since 1 July.

Updates on the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill

The Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill is entering the committee stage in the House of Lords. In their latest opposition to the Bill, the [Drive2Survive](#) campaign led a [march](#) outside the Conservative Party Conference in Manchester.

The New Statesman has recently published a video breaking down the bill and its threat to Gypsy and Traveller life in the UK. Rough sleeping Roma are also in danger of coming into conflict with the new proposed rules on trespass.



World Roma Congress Art Exhibition comes to London



Image courtesy of [Beverley Carpenter](#)

At the end of September, Brixton-based [198 Contemporary Arts & Learning](#) hosted the [World Roma Congress Art Exhibition](#). The activities featured guided talks on the artworks and a round table discussion with artists, activists and curators.

A focus of the exhibition and discussions were on the intersection between Roma art and activism. Read more about the exhibition in this article from [Traveller Times](#) and view the artworks on display on the World Roma Congress Art Exhibition [website](#).



Image courtesy of [Beverley Carpenter](#)

And finally...

August Roma News video



Our latest Roma News Project video focused on Roma Holocaust Memorial Day, which we commemorated on 2 August. The video discusses Romani Resistance Day on 16 May and why 2 August was chosen as a day of remembrance.

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.

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

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