



Introduction and welcome

We hope all of our readers have been able to adapt to the changing COVID-19 lockdown restrictions in the past weeks.

This month, the Immigration Bill is reaching its late stages. **Many members of the Roma community in the UK will be affected by its passage into law.** For this reason, we have devoted a large section of this month's newsletter to information surrounding the Bill and the work we have been doing in response.

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

- Roma Support Group's digital status campaign
 - Public Law Project's report on digital status
 - The European Children's Rights Unit (ERCU) research briefings
 - Issues with National Insurance numbers
 - The European Parliament's Resolution proposing legislation to combat antigypsyism and the social exclusion of Roma
 - A response to the BBC's Creative Diversity Commitment
 - An introduction to the Roma News Project
 - The Our Newham Artbook published by Protection Approaches
 - A bursary for GRT (Gypsy, Roma and Travellers) from Bucks New University
 - Daniel's reflections
-

PEOPLE SHOULD KNOW
SOMETHING ABOUT OUR CULTURE.
USUALLY WE ARE SCARED
OF UNKNOWN.



POWER

you might
NOT KNOW THAT
BUT WE COME
FROM INDIA



I want everyone to
know that I'm Roma.
I want to
be proud of it

I DON'T WANT PEOPLE TO
KNOW. SOME PEOPLE DON'T LIKE ROMA.
THEY MIGHT STAB OR SOMETHING.



SOMETIMES
you have to wear
a mask to survive

Not many things to do
around here. It is not a
safe area. A lot of stabbings.

EU Settlement Scheme



Digital status campaign

EU citizens are about to become guinea pigs for a new Home Office digital-only ID system that could expose many more vulnerable people, including many in the Roma community to the “hostile environment.”

After 30 June 2021, EU citizens granted a status under the EU Settlement Scheme will have to go through a complex checking process via the Home Office website to prove their immigration status to banks, employers or landlords. **If just one part of the process fails, it all fails.**

Under digital status, **an individual who has applied to the EUSS can only receive confirmation of their pre-settled or settled status online.** The GOV.UK [website](#) states that **even if an individual prints a copy of their confirmation letter, it cannot be used as evidence of their status.**

RSG has produced a [statement](#) on the impact of digital-only status on the Roma community.

The statement draws on a number of areas:

There is a lack of awareness of digital immigration status in the Roma community

- Roma charities do not have the time or resources to educate their clients about digital status.
- Third parties providing support often do not provide their clients with information about digital status.

Members of the Roma community face digital exclusion

- RSG has observed that only 3% of Roma are able to independently complete an online application such as that for the EUSS.
- During the COVID-19 lockdown, RSG observed that only 20% of Roma families the organisation works with has an IT device such as a tablet or a laptop.

Difficulties accessing digital status

- Applicants who are granted pre-settled status are required to continually update their digital accounts when their details change.
- Community members who were not aware of this or those who have lost access to email accounts, identity documents or other forms of identification have been unable to access their digital status.
- Subsequently, Roma have encountered great difficulty during the COVID-19 pandemic, with many having had their Universal Credit applications rejected because they could not access their status.

Roma with pre-settled status

- 62% of the community members RSG assisted to make EUSS applications were granted pre-settled status compared to a national average of 41%.
- We believe that the higher percentage of Roma granted pre-settled status combined with the difficulties that Roma have encountered in accessing their digital status will mean that Roma are more likely to face difficulties when securing settled status once their pre-settled status expires.

The statement concludes with the following recommendations to the Government:

1. Enable facilities, resources and support to allow all those who need it to receive physical evidence of their status in the UK.
2. Develop programs to enable community groups, organisations and public authorities to provide ongoing digital support when issues arise. This would include training to help those in need to access, use and keep their digital status up to date.

Call to action on digital-only status

RSG is supporting a new [campaign](#) by [the3million](#) to provide those who need it with physical proof of their immigration status.

The3million is raising concerns that people lacking digital skills will struggle to navigate the hostile environment. This includes the great majority of the Roma community, according to RSG's research. **Digital-only status will also construct an extra barrier to proving immigration status and accessing rights for people in precarious situations.**

A proposal to change the government's Immigration Bill was passed in the House of Lords **yesterday** — now the campaign calls for people to write to or tweet their MP ahead of the Commons vote.

Please check our Twitter feed [@RomaSupport](#) to hear more about how this will affect people. To take part in the #Deniedmybackup campaign, sign up on the [the3million's website](#).

To add your organisation's logo to the campaign website in support, please contact ilse.mogensen@the3million.org.uk.

House of Lords briefing

The House of Lords debated the Immigration Bill in detail between the 14th and 16th of September. In preparation, RSG produced a **briefing** urging members of the House to support the amendments below. These changes to the Immigration Bill would **provide physical proof of settled status for those EU citizens who need it**, and **scrap an unfair requirement for specific groups of EU citizens to hold private sickness insurance as a condition for becoming a British citizen**.

- New Clause 49: “EU Settlement Scheme: physical documented proof” (Lord Oates, Lord Polak, Lord Kerslake, Lord McNicol of West Kilbride)
- New Clause 51: “EU Settlement Scheme: physical documented proof” (Lord Rosser, Lord Kennedy of Southwark)
- New Clause 46: “Applications for citizenship from people with settled status” (Baroness Hamwee, Baroness Ludford, Baroness Whitaker, Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth) (*Briefing separately*)

During the debate, Lord Alton referred to Roma Support Group's briefing in his speech:



You can view the extended text version [here](#).

Baroness Whitaker also referred to RSG and the Roma community in her speech about [Comprehensive Sickness Insurance](#) below. The Home Office Guidance states that it is requirement for students and self-sufficient people to provide evidence of CSI in order to obtain British Citizenship. **Roma from these groups have subsequently had their applications for citizenship rejected.**



The Independent: Roma people left without support and at risk of exploitation due to digital-only status

Yesterday, The Independent published an [article](#) drawing on RSG's statement on the impact of digital-only status.

The article features case studies of RSG clients and reveals how Roma with a lack of digital skills **face the additional vulnerability of being open to exploitation from third-party EUSS support.**

Public Law Project (PLP) Report

On 1st October, PLP published a [report](#) on the risks of digital status. Many members of the Roma community are affected by issues they have drawn attention to, particularly those concerning digital exclusion and security.

One of the authors of the report, Dr Joe Tomlinson, believes that **"a digital-only system creates a real risk of harm."**

European Children's Rights Unit (ECRU) research briefings

The ECRU at the University of Liverpool's School of Law and Social Justice have produced two research briefings specifically focused on Roma children.

- *EU Roma Children and the EU Settled Status Scheme: Awareness, Access and Eligibility*
- *EEA Children and British Citizenship: Why it is Important to Focus on Roma Children*

The ECRU has also submitted a response to a call for further evidence for further inspection of the EUSS by the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration.

Both briefings and the response can be viewed on the ECRU's [website](#).

The ECRU is also in the process of developing materials for Roma children and young people to better understand the EUSS process.

Raising awareness: National Insurance numbers

The GOV.UK [website](#) states that you can currently only apply for a National Insurance number (NINo) in England, Scotland and Wales if you have entered the UK on a visa.

The same is not available for EU/EEA citizens, who are normally required to attend a face-to-face interview at the Job Centre Plus. **These interviews have been suspended since 17th March due to COVID-19, leaving EU/EEA citizens without the ability to obtain a NINo.**

Government [advice](#) states that in the meantime, EU/EEA citizens can prove their right to work without a NINo. In reality, RSG has found that **Roma clients are often not aware of this and employers are not well informed.**

Roma clients have been turned down by employers specifically because they do not possess a NINo and some have found that online application forms require the applicant to enter their National Insurance number as an obligatory part of the process.

This reduces the likelihood that EU/EEA Roma without National Insurance numbers will be able to find work and **it is likely that many will have to apply for benefits or take on irregular or exploitative employment.**

In response to a written Parliamentary **question**, the Government stated that it was *'working on a digital solution that should enable us to restart the process incrementally by the end of September 2020.'*

This deadline has now passed and Roma clients experiencing difficulties have been left in the dark. RSG is working on producing materials to explain the situation to Roma clients and prospective employers. Additionally, RSG is formulating a campaign to urge the Government to take action.

European Parliament Resolution

On the 21st September, the European Parliament adopted a Resolution proposing legislation to combat antigypsyism and the social exclusion of Roma. **This is the first time that the European Parliament has adopted a Resolution calling for legislation specifically targeted to Roma.**

ERGO Network have **summarised** the key legislative areas that the European Parliament have proposed to act upon. This includes measures to combat Roma inequality and measures to combat the effects of COVID-19 on Roma communities.

A response to the BBC's Creative Diversity Commitment

On 22nd June, the BBC **pledged** to spend **£100 million of its commissioning budget for 2021-2024 on diverse content.** This is coupled with a mandatory 20% diverse-talent target in all new network commissions coming into effect from April 2021. The BBC promotes this funding as “ring-fenced,” but there is concern amongst GRT (Gypsy Roma and Traveller) organisations and interests that our communities will be neglected by the new policy.

RSG is a signatory to a **letter** by Friends Families and Travellers calling on the BBC to discuss its plans for GRT inclusion in the Creative Diversity Commitment. **We call for the BBC to meet with representatives from our communities to establish a joint-**

planning process, with the aim of 'elevating Gypsy, Roma and Traveller voices, and providing opportunities for exposure and progression within the BBC.'

Introducing the Roma News Project

The foundations for the Roma News Project have been laid for some time, with RSG making inroads on a media initiative in 2019. **But this summer, the project has been transformed by a grant of £60,000 from the Paul Hamlyn Foundation.**

Starting from July 2020 and running for 18 months, the project '*will help young Roma, aged 16 to 25, benefit from specialist media training, peer support sessions, and opportunities to put in practice the skills gained through production and distribution of the monthly audio-visual "Roma News programme."*

In September, project participants took part in two half days of free training facilitated by guest journalists and the On Road Media team.

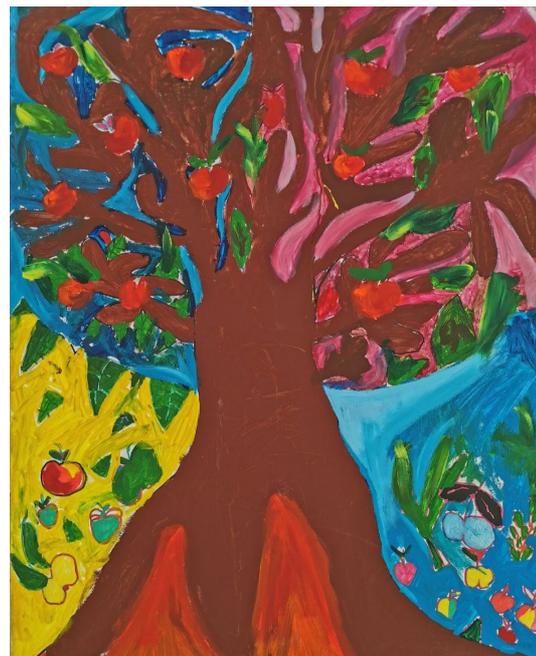
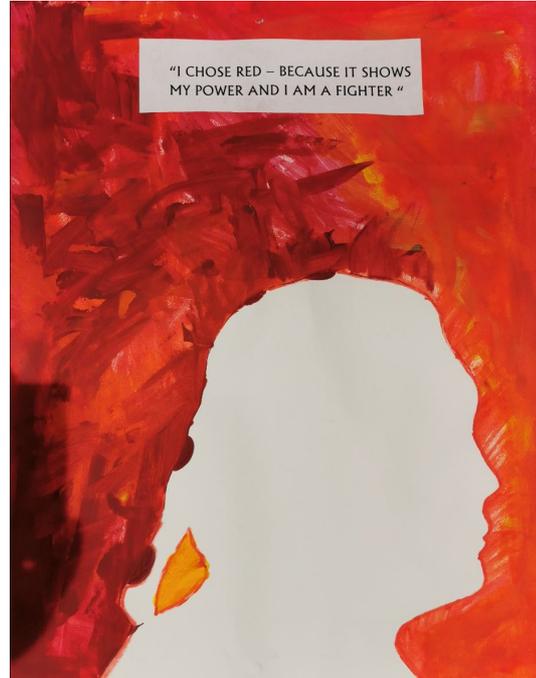
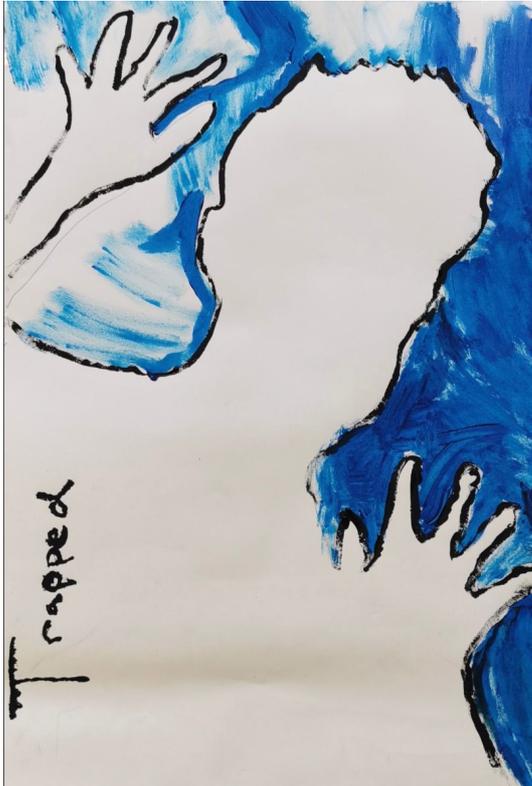
To read more about the work of the project and for information on how to get involved, visit our [website](#). To see work that the Roma News Project has produced so far, visit our [YouTube page](#).

Protection Approaches Our Newham project



With support from the Mayor of London's Young Londoners Fund and delivered in partnership with Roma Support Group and Newham Youth Zone, Protection Approaches launched a two-year project '*supporting young people in Newham, East London to identify, explore, and tackle issues of marginalisation in their communities.*'

In the first 8 months of the project, young people from Newham's Youth Zones and RSG's Roma Youth Club worked with four artists to explore '*issues related to prejudice, community, and identity through photography, poetry, painting and sculpture.*'



To mark International Youth Day, Protection Approaches has published the work produced in this first phase of the project in its [Our Newham Artbook](#).

In October 2019, a showcase for the artwork was held in Stratford Old Town Hall, and it was displayed in the atrium of Newham Council Headquarters for more than a month.

The opportunity to see the artwork from the comfort of your own home has been provided in the form of an [online exhibition](#).

To read more about the mission, values and origins of Protection Approaches, visit their [website](#).

Everyone at RSG looks forward to what is to come in the project's next phase.

Bucks New University GRT Bursary

Bucks New University have announced a [bursary](#) worth £1000 per academic year of study for students from Gypsy, Roma, Traveller, Showmen and Boater communities.

The University will also guarantee the availability of accommodation for GRTSB students all year round, provide assistance with their university application and provide them with a mentor.

Taking into account the intersectional experiences of GRT students is a step in the right direction and **we hope to see more higher education institutions offer these channels for support in the near future.**

And Finally...

Daniel's reflections

Our friend and colleague Daniel has shared with us some [reflections](#) he made during the pandemic. His account focuses on **the struggles that the Roma community has faced, includes stories of people coming together and concludes with his hopes for the future.**

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



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