

October 2023 Newsletter



Introduction & Welcome

Welcome to RSG's October newsletter, which has a special focus on mental health, to mark [World Mental Health Day](#) which was celebrated on the 10th of October. In this edition, our Mental Health Project Coordinator Simina Neagu, shares with us the work she has been doing with Newham Talking Therapies, aiming to improve mental health and tackle barriers to accessing mental health care. We also feature a blog written by Simina that gives us some key background information on mental health inequalities experienced by Roma communities, that will be useful for any professional working with Roma.

The newsletter highlights [changes to EU Settlement Scheme rules](#), some of which may create more challenges for digitally excluded or illiterate Roma to access the scheme and therefore access the rights and entitlements of settled status. This is worrying, and underlines how digital exclusion, while stemming from social inequalities, exacerbates them and leads to further marginalisation and exclusion. Additionally, we address the Home Office's actions against immigration law professionals through the "[Professional Enablers Taskforce](#)". This raises concerns as it may make it more difficult for Roma and other migrant communities to obtain legal support and representation, vital elements of a functioning democracy and an inclusive society.

We want to highlight a recent report that reveals significant disparities in [youth justice involvement among Roma children with care experience](#). Addressing this inequality is crucial, especially considering the rise in Roma children in care proceedings (see our [June 2023 newsletter](#)), and the huge impact youth justice involvement has on educational and employment outcomes.

We showcase Roma [representation in the media](#), including a new television program centred on Roma featuring our friend Toby Gorniak MBE, and a radio interview on BBC4 with Denisa Gannon, a member of the Roma Rights Forum. Additionally, we are delighted

to highlight the achievements of another Roma Rights Forum member, Romano Lav, in establishing [Scotland's first Roma cultural centre](#). Promoting Roma culture and stories is essential, which is why we are also pleased to share the [European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture \(ERIAC\)](#)'s [Roma Resistance Heroes project](#), which highlights stories of Roma activists and resistance heroes.

This edition also spotlights a recent video produced by [ERRC](#) on the current situation of [stateless Ukrainian Roma](#), who are still being denied healthcare and support from social services the state in Zakarpattia. We continue to share [links for donation](#) pages to support Roma refugees from the invasion of Ukraine.



This month's newsletter focuses on:

- [World Mental Health Day](#)
- [EU Settlement Scheme enhancements confirmed](#)
- [Care-experienced Roma and Gypsy children and youth justice](#)
- [Roma cultural centre to open in Glasgow](#)
- [Home Office targets 'crooked' immigration lawyers](#)
- [Roma resistance heroes](#)
- [Ukrainian Roma](#)
- [Other international news](#)
- [Roma in the media](#)
- [Ukraine donation pages](#)

World Mental Health Day

World Mental Health Day was celebrated on the 10th of October. The day shines a light on

mental well-being, offering positive alternatives to how we view and deal with mental health challenges. Its aim is to encourage open conversations, reminding us that taking care of ourselves is essential, and reaching out for support when we're going through tough times is absolutely normal.

To mark World Mental Health Day we are showcasing the work of Roma Support Group's Mental Health Advocacy Project.



Roma Mental Health Inequalities

Roma communities are considered to be an inclusion health group because they are socially excluded and have multiple overlapping risk factors for poor health. According to a study by the European Public Health Alliance, Roma life expectancy is reported to be up to 10 years lower compared to non-Roma communities in the UK [1].

Roma communities are identified for protection under the Equality Act 2010. Despite this, some people in the Roma community experience barriers in accessing health services, including: registration refusal, discrimination, digital exclusion, language and literacy needs, lack of cultural awareness and stigma. Lack of contact with health services can mean that many Roma people have little information about disease prevention. Poor housing or environmental conditions can contribute to physical health and mental health issues including stress, anxiety and depression [2].

Although high rates of anxiety and depression are reported [3] in Roma communities, there are low levels of access to mental health services. Talking about mental health is often a

greater taboo than any other health issue, although attitudes are changing among younger people. A history of discrimination also affects attitudes to health professionals: some parents worry that if they seek help with mental health problems they will be institutionalised, or seen as unfit parents and their children removed.

Stress is a key external factor affecting mental health. A Leeds HNA from 2013 found that 89% of Roma respondents reported high levels of stress, common causes being financial or work issues. In a 2021 survey [4] of community members in London facilitated by Roma Support Group, many members experienced job loss and financial difficulty during the Covid-19 pandemic, and reported having to borrow money or use food banks. Mental health problems for Roma patients may also be intensified by social exclusion, such as experiencing discrimination, stigma, or racist attacks. It is important to be aware that many people needing mental health support live in families with complex problems, and a holistic approach is advisable.

[1] [European Public Health Alliance, "Closing the life expectancy gap of Roma in Europe" \(2018\)](#)

[2] ["Improving Roma health: a guide for health and care professionals", Office for Health Improvement and Disparities \(2022\)](#)

[3] [Roma Support Group, "Roma Mental Health Advocacy Project \(2015-21\) Self-Evaluation Report" \(2021\)](#), p. 5.

[4] [Roma Support Group, "Lessons Learned: Supporting the Roma Community through Covid-19" \(2021\)](#)

RSG's Mental Health Advocacy Project

Roma Support Group's [Mental Health Advocacy Project](#), funded by the [Tudor Trust](#) continues the mental health advocacy work we have been active in since 2008. It aims to improve Roma community members' access to mental health services, empower Roma community members to communicate more openly about mental ill-health. Additionally, it works to improve mental health professionals' knowledge of Roma culture and help them to communicate more effectively with Roma service users.

In 2022, Roma Support Group's Mental Health project started a close collaboration with Newham Talking Therapies, delivering group sessions on mental health and wellbeing topics, such as stress management, women's health and wellbeing or managing worry.

Newham Talking Therapies is an NHS England service, which offers free confidential psychological support to the residents of London Borough of Newham. It helps with a

range of problems such as anxiety and depression by providing a range of different types of psychological support.

Over the past year, RSG's Mental Health Advocacy Project team has worked closely with Newham Talking Therapies to progressively tailor the workshops to better meet the needs of the community. Adjustments have included: providing interpreting and support during the sessions through bilingual advocates trusted in the community, translating sign-up forms and presentations, inviting bilingual health professionals, using accessible language and focusing on practical strategies. Using visual and discussion prompts was also appreciated, as a way to further engage the participants.

This has all helped to forge a relationship of trust between the Roma community and Newham Talking Therapies and further break down the stigma around mental health.

Simina Neagu (Mental Health Advocacy Project Coordinator)

New report on GRT mental health care:

The [NHS Race and Health Observatory](#) has published a new research report:

[**Inequalities in Mental Health Care for Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller Communities: Identifying Best Practice.**](#)

The report includes insights from Roma Support Group's Mental Health Advocacy Project, and addresses the gaps and challenges in mental health care services experienced by GRT communities in the UK. It highlights the importance of tailoring data collection and analysis to engender effective funding and investment for GRT communities.

The report also highlights the need to involve existing men's GRT mental health groups in research and suggests integrating GRT history events into school curricula and recognising them in health and social care services.

EU Settlement Scheme enhancements confirmed

Parliament have recently introduced [changes](#) to the EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS) that extend the deadline for upgrading from pre-settled status (Pre-SS) to settled status (SS) by an additional two years. This extension aims to prevent people with Pre-SS from losing

their status if they do not apply for SS after living in the UK for more than five years.

The Home Office also plans to automatically upgrade some eligible Pre-SS holders to SS, removing the need for them to make an application.

While we welcome these changes and recognise that the automatic upgrade could benefit some Roma, we are concerned that the system could present some problems. These concerns stem from our experiences testing the EUSS Beta 2 pilot system in 2018, which saw that the automated element of the pilot did not function properly for around one third of applicants.

Additionally, the Home Office has introduced more restrictive rules around what reasons are deemed acceptable for making late applications. As of the 9th of August, lacking internet access, computer literacy skills or English language skills are no longer regarded as reasonable justifications for making a late application.

Care-experienced Roma and Gypsy children and youth

justice

A [report](#) published by [Administration Data Research UK](#) has found 'disproportionate' levels of youth justice involvement amongst individuals with care experience in England. The report, which uses data collated by the Ministry of Justice and the Department for Education, is the first attempt to comprehensively measure youth justice cautions or convictions among care-experienced children in England.

Notably, the research found that **50% of all care-experienced Gypsy/Roma children received youth justice cautions or convictions**, compared to 16% of those with no care experience. This is considerably higher than the average of 33% across all cared experienced children in England.

Involvement in the youth criminal justice system was also found to be higher amongst nearly all other ethnic minority groups compared to their White British counterparts.

Roma cultural centre to open in Glasgow

Scotland's first [Roma cultural centre](#) has been given the green light after community group Romano Lav secured a location in the Southside of Glasgow. The new centre will be open by the end of the year and will feature an exhibition space, a community archive and a social space in which locals can relax.

Rahela Cirpaci, a project coordinator at Romano Lav, put forward his vision for the space: 'This is going to be a place where Roma people can say "this is my place", this is going to be a community hub so Roma people can come here at any time and feel like they belong here'.

Congratulations to Romano Lav for this historic achievement!

Home Office targets 'crooked' immigration lawyers

The Home Office has [announced](#) the "Professional Enablers Taskforce" to target 'crooked lawyers who coach illegal migrants to lie', and 'abuse the immigration system', in another attempt to demonise lawyers and the refugees and migrants they represent.

As our friends at [Public Interest Law Centre](#) have [written](#): the vast majority of lawyers 'work in the best interests of their clients, and act on instructions within the clear confines of the law.'

The taskforce is both a distraction from the huge human and economic cost of the government's failure to address the record high asylum backlog and the consequent shortage of suitable asylum accommodation, and an authoritarian attack on lawyers who dedicate themselves to safeguarding peoples' rights and the rule of law.

It is our concern that the taskforce, through putting yet more strain on legal professionals, will make it even harder for Roma and other communities to get legal support and representation.

Roma resistance heroes

The European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture (ERAC) has produced the webpage [Stories of Resistance](#) to highlight Roma resistance heroes from across Europe. The page features short biographies of 40 heroes and is based on a research project conducted by ERAC that aims to undermine historical narratives of Roma as passive victims.

The project shows how 'Roma not only fought against oppression and injustice, but also [contributed] to national and European struggles for freedom, democracy and justice across Europe'.



As part of the project ERAC have produced an educational [Roma heroes game](#), based on the classic "Guess Who?" board game format that can be played online [here](#) or can be downloaded to print and play at home [here](#).

Ukrainian Roma



ERRC: Stateless in War: Our Fight to Get IDs for Roma Fleeing War in Ukraine
(September 2023)

The [European Roma Rights Centre](#) has produced a video documenting stateless Roma in Ukraine.

Highlighting the stories of Ukrainian Roma who do not have documents, the video explores the difficulties faced by many Roma in the country who are rejected by employers, and refused medical care or support from social services. Most people in the video have lived in Ukraine all of their lives and were forced to move from the Donetsk region in the east of the country due to the war.

The video features local activists from Zarkapattia who have been assisting Roma in the area to have their Ukrainian citizenship recognised by authorities.

Other international news

- United States: [Open Society Foundation pledges €100 to support Roma](#)
 - Romania: [Council of Europe challenges record on tackling police violence and discrimination against Roma](#)
 - Slovakia: [Six Roma expected to be seated in National Assembly](#)
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Roma in the media

Infamia



Infamia (Netflix 2023)

Netflix has released *Infamia*, a series featuring the story of a Polish Roma girl who wants to become a rapper, that explores themes of tradition, belonging and discrimination.

Toby Gorniak MBE, hip-hop dancer and founder of Street Factory in Plymouth features in the series and told us: 'I was honoured to be featured in a Netflix series, witnessing my culture, music, and Roma characters on mainstream TV. Netflix has opened doors for our beautiful stories to be told globally. I eagerly anticipate the future for our Roma artists,

scriptwriters, directors, and actors. Let's showcase the world the sheer beauty, vibrancy, and magnificence of our culture. [100](#)'.

You can listen to Toby speak about his work on Infamia and Street Factory on the Romanistan podcast [here](#).

Infamia can be streamed on Netflix UK as Infamy (although we recommend changing the language to the original Polish and watching with subtitles!).

Denisa Gannon on BBC Radio 4

Denisa Gannon, the first Roma solicitor in England and Wales was interviewed on Radio 4, discussing her lived experience of discrimination as a Roma student in the Czech Republic. Listen [here](#).

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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