



Roma Rights Forum
London
1 April 2025
Mishto Campaign Launch

Designing and implementing fair services for Roma people in education,
housing, child protection and advice & support



Mishto

Fair services for Roma people

Acknowledgments:

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1. Background

The Roma are an ethnic group originating from northwest India, with migration into Europe beginning over 1,000 years ago. Today, Roma communities exist across the world. In the UK, official figures suggest there are just over 100,000 Roma (Census, 2021)¹, but community estimates place the number closer to 300,000, due to underreporting and a lack of recognition in official data.

Roma people speak Romanes, a language that has developed into many dialects shaped by the regions in which Roma have lived. Over centuries, Roma communities have faced systemic exclusion, including slavery in parts of Eastern Europe and genocide during the Holocaust, where hundreds of thousands were murdered under Nazi rule.

Discrimination against Roma continues today. In many countries, Roma face significant barriers in education, employment, healthcare, and housing. In the UK, Roma communities are often misunderstood or invisible within public services, and many struggle to access fair treatment in areas such as immigration, welfare, and legal support. This report highlights some of the key challenges Roma people face today and calls for meaningful change in how services engage with and support Roma communities.

The Mishto campaign, launched as part of this event by the Roma Rights Forum, aims to address these inequalities by increasing Roma visibility, building trust between services and Roma communities, and promoting fair access to support and opportunities across sectors.

¹Office for National Statistics (2023) [Roma populations, England and Wales: Census 2021](#).

2. About The Roma Rights Forum

The Roma Rights Forum is a national learning and influencing network initiated by the Roma Support Group in September 2022. It brings together Roma professionals, activists, and community leaders from across the UK, sharing the aim of strengthening the capacity of Roma communities to drive and influence positive change. By facilitating engagement with decision-makers, developing joint campaigns, and building strategic alliances, the Forum works to ensure Roma voices are heard and represented in key areas of public life.

In 2025, this particular event also marked the official launch of the Mishto campaign, a new initiative aimed at improving how public and third-sector services engage with and support Roma communities. We were honoured to be joined by Baroness Janet Whitaker, a long-time advocate for Roma inclusion, who opened the event and helped set the tone for an important discussion.

In addition to launching the campaign, the event offered a vital space for important discussions, focusing on the key barriers, challenges, and actions needed to ensure fair and accessible services for all.



3. The Mishto Campaign



Fair services for Roma people

The Mishto campaign is the culmination of two years of collaborative work led by the Roma Rights Forum and initiated by the Roma Support Group. It aims to unite Roma communities across the UK and support meaningful change through shared learning, advocacy, and collective action. At its core, the campaign offers tools and guidance for services, especially schools, charities and local authorities, to become more inclusive and responsive to the Roma communities.

The campaign includes a national directory of Roma-led organisations, enabling services to easily connect with local Roma representatives. It also provides training recommendations, practical guidance, and resources to increase cultural awareness, including leaflets, posters and social media materials designed to promote the Mishto pledge.

Importantly, the campaign isn't just for Roma organisations; it is a tool for anyone looking to create fairer, more accessible services. Through partnerships, awareness-raising, and practical support, Mishto encourages all services to take proactive steps toward equity and inclusion. Services are invited to join the campaign by committing to the Mishto pledge, learn and lead change in collaboration with Roma communities.



4. The Mishto Campaign Pledges

Table 1: Mishto Guidance	
Organisation	Pledge
Charities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure services are accessible and inclusive for Roma. • Adopt an inclusive communication strategy. • Apply a community development approach. • Promote Roma culture and history. • Adapt your recruitment policy to enable employment of Roma staff. • Increase cultural competency of staff.
Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adapt your anti-bullying/racism policy to reflect the experiences of Roma pupils. • Promote Roma culture and history. • Plan and implement activities to raise aspirations. • Adopt an inclusive communication strategy. • Adapt your recruitment policy to enable employment of Roma staff. • Increase cultural competency of staff.
Local Authorities	<p>Children's Services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure services are accessible and inclusive for Roma residents. • Adopt an inclusive communication strategy. • Adapt your recruitment policy to enable employment of Roma staff. • Increase cultural competency of staff. • Implement inclusive child protection conferences. • Protect cultural identity of Roma children in care. <p>Housing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure services are accessible and inclusive for Roma residents. • Adopt an inclusive communication strategy. • Adapt your recruitment policy to enable employment of Roma staff. • Increase cultural competency of staff.

5. Roma Rights Forum, London, 1st April 2025

Speakers and Contributors

Nicu Ion, a Mathematics teacher for secondary education, achieved a historic milestone in 2021 by becoming the first Roma person elected to public office, serving as a councillor in Newcastle City Council. Beyond his teaching career, Nicu is recognised for his unwavering commitment to Roma community activism, tirelessly advocating for inclusivity, equal representation, and Holocaust commemoration and education activities. He is also the initiator of the first Memorial Monument in the UK dedicated to the memory of Roma victims murdered during the Holocaust, set to be unveiled in August 2025 in Newcastle upon Tyne.

His impactful contributions extend globally through his dedicated involvement in humanitarian causes. Nicu's leadership in coordinating aid for Ukraine and Turkey underscores his strong humanitarian commitment and global perspective. His strategic thinking and diplomatic skills have been evident, earning him respect in navigating complex political landscapes.

Nicu Ion's journey is marked by a balanced blend of activism for the Roma community, humanitarian endeavours, and exceptional political acumen, showcasing his dedication to positive change on both local and international fronts. In 2022, Nicu Ion was awarded in the political participation section of the Top 100 Romanians worldwide, further highlighting his significant contributions and influence.



Mihai Bica is a member of the Romanian Roma community with over 10 years of experience working with people from Roma communities. Currently, Mihai coordinates the policy and campaigns work at the Roma Support Group. Over the years, Mihai has worked on issues concerning Brexit and the EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS), rough sleeping, education, the 2021 Office for National Statistics Census, Roma children in care, voting rights and more. Currently, Mihai coordinates and facilitates the Roma Rights Forum.



Alexandra Bahor is a Roma activist with seven years of experience working as a Project Officer for Roma communities. She currently holds the position of Community Inclusion Delivery Manager at Mersey Care NHS Foundation Trust.

Teo Benea is the CEO & Co-founder of Social Equity Centre, a not-for-profit organisation founded in 2023, committed to breaking down barriers for first-generation migrants in the UK, with a focus on increasing their representation in the public sector. She is also a local councillor and a Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Planning and Property at Brent Council.

An experienced communications and community engagement consultant, Teo has previously worked in public affairs, advising on planning and regeneration projects across the UK.

She has also worked as a Training Organiser for Migrant Democracy Project, where she led the design and delivery of the first MPower Political Leadership Programme, training first-generation migrants to stand as candidates in local council elections.

Her skills and expertise include project management, community engagement, advocacy, leadership, training delivery, people management and community campaigning.





Terezia Rostas is a Hungarian Roma from the Gabor community, a passionate advocate for gender equality, race equality, and Roma rights. She holds an Honours Degree in Law and a PGCE in Education from Sheffield Hallam University, bringing both legal expertise and educational insight to her work.

Terezia is the Founder of Welcoming Cultures and Care for Young People's Future, focusing on inclusive policies that address racial and social inequalities. She serves as a Roma Educational Consultant/Advocate and plays a key role in shaping cultural and social policies through her involvement in the Cultural Strategy Task and Finish Group, City GOALS, Growth, and the DfE Roma Stakeholder Group.

Committed to supporting underserved communities facing inequalities in race, gender, and access to rights, Terezia is deeply passionate about heritage, culture, and reconnecting communities with institutions. She is also a peace activist, working towards building inclusive, equitable, and culturally rich societies.

Helen trained as a teacher to teach children with additional needs, and taught in primary and middle schools in Newcastle for a number of years. She then went to Newcastle University and undertook a Master's degree in Educational Psychology. She moved back to South Yorkshire and worked as an Educational Psychologist for Rotherham Council, before taking up a secondment to work with a group of schools in the centre of Rotherham, working in their Education Action Zone. When the EAZ ended, both herself and the Director founded the charity Clifton Learning Partnership to work with the community of Eastwood to support them in whatever way they wanted. They built up a staff team and acquired premises to work from. They employed inspiring Roma women and gradually the organisation developed to become what it is today. They aspire to constantly learn and improve, and ensure that Roma culture and identity is championed.





Denisa is a qualified solicitor, originally from the Czech Republic. She is the first qualified solicitor of European Roma origin in the UK.

Denisa is working as an immigration lawyer specialising in the EU Settlement Scheme. Denisa is helping vulnerable EU citizens to gain legal status in the UK.

She works as the Director of Community Interest Company; Social Justice for All, and helps the Roma community with all sorts of issues.

She also helps other vulnerable communities such as the homeless, care leavers, children in care, elderly, people with physical and mental disabilities and individuals with impaired mental capacity.

Denisa also has expertise in Family , Immigration, Housing and Criminal law.

Martin Grinvalsky previously worked with Czech Television, contributing to the production of the national Roma magazine programme and the world-renowned Khamoro Festival – the most significant international Roma cultural event held in the Czech Republic.

After relocating to the United Kingdom, he spent some time working in the corporate sector, but his passion for cultural work led him back to creative production. He is now based in Scotland, where he collaborates with the organisation Ando Glaso on the development and delivery of cultural projects, including the annual Ando Glaso Roma Fest, which promotes Roma culture, music, and intercultural dialogue.





Sonia is Polish Roma and moved to Scotland over 20 years ago with her family. Ever since she was a child, she has had a curiosity about everything and a deep desire to help people, particularly children. Through her work with Romano Lav she does just this as a community advocate, as well as running a family musician and dance group - Romane Cierhenia.

Her vision for a better future is that Roma are visibly accepted on an equal footing with others, so that their children are not afraid to go to school, so that they can rise to the top, be happy, and that their tradition and culture and history will last forever, so that they are not afraid to say, "I am Roma."

Simona was born into a traditional Ursari Roma family in Romania and has extensive experience working with minority groups and asylum seekers across Europe. She holds a BA in Social Work, a Master's from Emanuel University, and completed the Roma in European Leadership Programme at CEU Budapest. Most recently, she attended a summer school at the University of Liverpool's School of Law and Social Justice, focusing on the European Court of Human Rights. Appointed CEO of Union Romani Voice in January 2024, she leads the charity's development and advocacy, collaborating with institutions such as the Council of Europe.



6. Opening Remarks

“It is an honour to celebrate International Roma Day with you and congratulate you all on the launch of the Mishto Campaign. It is certainly the right time to let the world know that there are at least 100,000 Roma, possibly three times more that are still fighting for values for Roma interests that they have in education, housing, advice and the Mishto campaign. May I also congratulate all the Roma professionals, advocates and activists who came together to develop the campaign. It will bring about change in the way our Roma fellow citizens are treated if the campaign is supported. Many of you have come far, and that shows you the campaign is getting off to a flying start. I hope to hear more of its success in the weeks and months to come. Thank you very much.”

- Baroness Janet Whitaker



7. Panel Discussion

This report brings together the voices and insights shared during the panel discussion which focused on the experiences of Roma communities in accessing fair and equitable services in the UK. The event created space for Roma professionals, community leaders, and advocates to speak directly about the barriers they face, the factors that shape those experiences, and the actions needed to drive meaningful change.

At the heart of the discussion were the key challenges that continue to affect Roma individuals and families, ranging from institutional discrimination and a lack of cultural understanding to systemic gaps in housing, education, healthcare, immigration, and employment support. Panellists also explored the deeper structural issues and social factors that shape how Roma communities are perceived and treated across services.

Importantly, the conversation did not stop at identifying problems. It highlighted the resilience and determination of Roma communities, the value of Roma-led initiatives, and the urgent need for public services to adapt and respond more effectively. This report captures those reflections and aims to inform service providers, policymakers, and advocates about what must change and how².



²Please see the annex for a summary table of the points made by the panellists and how they interlink.

8. Key Challenges in Enabling Fair Access to Services for Roma People

Due to a long and painful history of discrimination and marginalisation, Roma people have faced significant barriers in accessing fair and equal services. Often, they experience neglect and exclusion in areas such as housing, healthcare, education, and children's services. This is not just a reality for Roma people living in the UK but also for those living in other countries.

The purpose of the Mishto campaign is to establish a change that will enable Roma people to have fairer access to services through encouraging services to adapt to their needs. In order to do this, it is important to recognise what the challenges are to access.

8.1 Lack of Trust in Authorities

Individuals from the Roma community often feel reluctant to engage with local authorities, a hesitation that is deeply rooted in both historical and personal experiences of discrimination. Many have had negative encounters with institutions in the past or continue to face systemic bias when trying to access services or communicate their needs. This mistrust is not only shaped by experiences in the UK but also by the exclusion and hostility many faced in their countries of origin, prompting some to migrate not simply in search of opportunity, but because they were rejected or unsafe at home.

8.2 Living in Marginalised and Under-Resourced Communities

Roma individuals often live in areas that are already affected by high levels of deprivation and social exclusion. In cities like Liverpool and elsewhere in the UK, Roma families are part of wider communities that face similar discrimination and poverty, which compounds the difficulties they experience. In these environments, access to accurate information about services is limited, and people often struggle with how to navigate complex public systems.

8.3 Misinformation and Peer Knowledge Gaps

Another significant issue is the spread of misinformation, often rooted in peer knowledge. Because many Roma individuals do not feel confident turning to official sources, they rely on information shared within the community. While peer networks are valuable, this informal knowledge is sometimes inaccurate, leading to confusion about legal rights, entitlements, and available services. This creates additional barriers and deepens isolation.

8.4 Persistent Prejudice and Discrimination

Unfortunately, prejudice against the Roma community persists, not only on an individual level but also within institutions. People are often made to feel unwelcome. Racial profiling still occurs, and many policies fail to take into account the specific needs of Roma people.

8.5 Systemic Discrimination and Policy Gaps

Discrimination against Roma people is not only interpersonal, it is systemic. Roma communities continue to face racial profiling, exclusionary policies, and practices that fail to reflect their lived realities. These barriers exist in multiple areas, including housing, employment, and healthcare. For example, strict residency or documentation requirements can make it nearly impossible for some Roma individuals to access essential public services.

8.6 Lack of Cultural Understanding and Professional Knowledge Gaps

There's also a widespread lack of understanding and recognition of Roma cultures. Too often, service providers in the UK fail to understand the distinct background and trauma that Roma people carry. They are sometimes treated as a homogeneous "migrant" group, rather than a unique ethnic community with a long history of marginalisation. This lack of understanding creates a cultural disconnect, making communication difficult and discouraging engagement.

Cultural competence among professionals in frontline services is also an issue. Roma people are often misunderstood by those working in health, education, and social care due to inadequate training on Roma history, culture, and communication styles. This disconnect can lead professionals to misinterpret hesitation or mistrust as a lack of willingness to engage, reinforcing stereotypes and perpetuating a cycle of disengagement.

8.7 Exclusion from Decision-Making

Despite being directly affected by many local and national policies, Roma people are often excluded from the decision-making process. Without representation in policy forums or consultation processes, policies are frequently designed without considering the specific needs of Roma communities, leading to ineffective or even harmful outcomes.

9. Key Factors Needed to Enable Fair Access to Services for Roma

Ensuring fair and equal access to public services for Roma communities is not only a matter of social justice but also of effective service delivery.

This section of the report focuses on identifying the key factors that must be in place to overcome these barriers and create inclusive, accessible services for Roma communities. Drawing on the lived experiences of community members and frontline organisations, it highlights what effective practice looks like, from building trust and reducing bureaucratic hurdles to properly funding grassroots organisations and including Roma voices in decision-making. The solutions are not abstract and must be implemented with commitment and urgency.

9.1 Building Trust

Trust and engagement are key, but they must be earned. Services must reflect critically on themselves: Are they truly inclusive? Or are they shaped by internal policies that inadvertently exclude Roma people? Building respectful, inclusive environments requires services to acknowledge and address these dynamics while consistently working with Roma communities to repair long-standing mistrust and power imbalances.

9.2 Partner with Community Organisations

Local Roma-led or Roma-trusted community organisations are crucial in bridging gaps. These groups are rooted in everyday realities, operate without bureaucratic barriers like referral forms, and are often the first and only point of support. Services should see them not as optional partners but as essential collaborators in both design and delivery, helping anchor national frameworks in a local context.

Partnering with Roma-led organisations also allows for building strong and united relationships, which can enhance advocacy efforts and policy influence. A more coordinated, collective approach strengthens the impact of campaigns for fairer, more inclusive services.

9.3 Offer Accessible, Barrier-Free Support

Support must be practical, human, and easy to reach. Many Roma people are excluded not by choice but by design because services are inaccessible, confusing, or intimidating. An open-door, no-questions-asked model allows people to walk in and get help without needing to “fit the system.” Services must meet people where they are, not where policies expect them to be.

9.4 Employ People with Lived Experience

Representation is not symbolic; it's structural. Hiring Roma professionals with lived experience, language fluency, and cultural insight improves service relevance and helps challenge biases from within. These staff members are also best positioned to advocate effectively, translate institutional processes, and build sustained trust with service users.

9.5 Promote Flexibility and a Willingness to Learn

Services often rely on fixed procedures that do not work for diverse communities. Real inclusion demands flexibility and a willingness to adapt. Staff must be educated and supported to deliver culturally competent services, shifting away from a “one size fits all” mindset. This includes understanding that Roma communities are not monolithic and must be served with nuance and care.

9.6 Embed Roma Voices in Decision-Making & Increase Representation

It is not enough to consult Roma communities after services are already designed. True equity means embedding Roma voices in planning, policy-making, and implementation from the outset. This includes ensuring Roma professionals sit on equality, anti-racism, and cultural strategy boards, where they can influence decisions that shape public life and service delivery.

Encouraging greater civic engagement from Roma individuals, through voting, volunteering, public sector work, and even standing as local councillors, helps embed Roma voices in decision-making spaces. Representation matters, and increasing Roma participation helps ensure that policies are informed by lived experience and reflect the real needs of the community.

9.7 Improve Data Collection and Evidence Use

A lack of reliable data on Roma communities weakens policy responses and leaves needs unacknowledged. Meaningful, community-informed data collection is vital to understanding local realities and tracking outcomes. Services must avoid relying on inaccurate national datasets and instead work locally to gather evidence that reflects real challenges and helps target support.

9.8 Ground Services in Local Reality

Too often, programmes are designed using EU or national frameworks that do not reflect the lived

experiences of Roma in UK towns and cities. These communities may not speak English, may lack documentation, or may not appear in mainstream datasets. Service design must begin with local insight, grounded in what people are actually experiencing, not what systems assume they need.

9.9 Educate Professionals and the Wider Public

The responsibility for inclusion must be shared, not placed solely on a few community organisations. Every public service, professional, and institution must commit to anti-racism, cultural literacy, and engagement. This includes structured training, ongoing reflection, and public awareness campaigns that challenge harmful narratives about Roma people.

9.10 Fund It Properly

None of this is possible without adequate funding. Culturally competent services, strong partnerships, and accessible pathways all require sustained investment. Fair access must be properly resourced if it's to be achieved in practice.

10. Key Actions to Consider to Enable Fair Access to Services for Roma People

Creating fair access to services for Roma people requires deliberate, practical actions that respond to long-standing structural inequalities. While commitment to equality exists in many institutions, real inclusion only happens when services are shaped through genuine engagement with the communities they aim to support.

This section highlights key actions that public bodies, service providers, and community organisations can take to ensure services are more accessible, responsive, and equitable for Roma people. It recognises the importance of collaboration, working with Roma communities, not simply for them, and stresses the need for better visibility, inclusive policy design, and accountability.

By focusing on awareness, representation, cultural recognition, and systemic change, these steps offer a path toward services that are not only fair in theory but effective in practice.

10.1 Raise Public Awareness and Challenge Stereotypes

Public messaging and awareness campaigns, such as the Misho campaign, are vital tools in challenging harmful stereotypes and misinformation. Highlighting the positive contributions of Roma communities helps shift public perception, fosters understanding, and combats discrimination.

Campaigns like the Roma Rights Forum's work should be sustained and expanded. These initiatives combat stereotypes, celebrate contributions, and correct misinformation. It's crucial they're grounded in Roma perspectives, designed with and for the community, and delivered in culturally and linguistically relevant ways.

10.2 Strengthen Partnerships Between Authorities and Roma Organisations

Fair access requires meaningful collaboration between local authorities and Roma-led organisations. These partnerships must go beyond token consultation to actively co-design policies and outreach efforts, with Roma voices leading the process.

10.3 Make Roma Visibility a Priority

Fair access starts with feeling welcomed in public spaces. Roma communities should see themselves reflected in service environments, cultural institutions, and media. This means using inclusive signage, campaign imagery, and public communications that feature Roma faces, language, and culture. Visual representation matters; it signals that Roma voices belong and are valued.

10.4 Revive and Celebrate Roma Language and Heritage

There is an urgent need to protect and promote the language and cultural heritage in the UK. Education systems must recognise and validate Roma heritage, ensuring children grow up seeing their identity respected in schools, museums, and public life. Institutions must embed Roma heritage, both tangible and intangible, into national narratives.

10.5 Empower Community Ambassadors

Community ambassadors play a key role in bridging the gap between services and Roma communities. By representing their communities and advocating for their needs, ambassadors like those from organisations such as Roma Support Group ensure services are more relatable, accessible, and trusted.

10.6 Reform Policy and Address Systemic Barriers

Structural changes are necessary to eliminate systemic barriers, including racial profiling, that continue to hinder access. Policy reform must be informed by the lived experiences of Roma people and aim to dismantle entrenched inequalities within public systems.

10.7 Develop Inclusive Consultation Mechanisms and Push for Roma Representation

Roma people must be included not just in service delivery, but also in the design, evaluation, and policymaking processes. Creating accessible and inclusive consultation channels ensures that policies reflect real needs and empower Roma communities to shape decisions that affect their lives.

True equity means Roma people must have a seat at the table, in politics, policy, education, and public service. This includes advocating for Roma inclusion in national institutions, decision-making boards, and high-level planning processes. Human rights training and capacity-building are tools to prepare Roma individuals for these roles.

10.8 Adapt Job Recruitment Policies

Many recruitment processes are unnecessarily lengthy and complex, even for roles that do not require high-level qualifications. This can create significant barriers for Roma applicants, particularly when the application process is unfamiliar, overly bureaucratic, or not accessible in clear language.

To promote fair access to employment, services must adapt their recruitment approaches by simplifying job applications, providing support with the process, and recognising different experiences and forms of expertise. Removing these barriers makes it more likely that Roma individuals will feel confident and able to apply, which is essential for improving representation and building trust in services.

10.9 Invest in Community-Based and Youth-Led Programs

Funding must support grassroots, community-led projects, especially those that focus on youth empowerment, human rights education, and Roma women's leadership. This builds long-term capacity and helps shift narratives from passive service use to active participation and leadership.

10.10 Ensure Accountability and Policy Monitoring

Accountability is vital. It's not enough to write inclusive policies; they must be monitored, evaluated, and enforced. There needs to be a clear measurement of impact, with Roma communities involved in evaluating whether policies meet their needs. Sustainability and transparency are key to real, lasting change.

11. Roma Rights Forum: Roma Group Presentations

11.1 Romani Union Voice - Simona Lazar

A Roma-led charity based in Suffolk presented their work and insights, highlighting key issues and opportunities around trust-building, education, and service delivery.

The organisation is staffed by highly qualified Roma professionals with experience across local government departments such as social services, public health, and education. Simona emphasised how Roma professionals working within mainstream services can have a direct impact, citing improved Ofsted outcomes in one school following her employment due to the ability to engage more effectively with a large population of pupils who speak English as an additional language.

The presentation underscored that trust remains the cornerstone of effective engagement with Roma communities. The charity has focused its efforts on building trust locally, particularly in areas where no Roma organisations or community leaders exist. In such contexts, Simona stressed the importance of sustainable local initiatives that empower Roma communities from within, supported by inclusive policies that are responsive to their specific needs.

She cautioned that while frameworks and strategies for inclusion may appear comprehensive on paper, they often fail to align with the real-life experiences and priorities of Roma people. Simona also drew attention to the historic and ongoing educational exclusion of Roma communities, identifying it as a root cause of broader inequality and vulnerability.

In closing, Simona reiterated that Roma communities must not be treated as an afterthought in diversity and inclusion efforts. Instead, systemic change requires recognising the unique challenges faced by Roma people, resourcing Roma-led initiatives, and committing to culturally competent and context-aware engagement. The charity welcomed further collaboration and invited stakeholders to learn from their work in building trust and supporting Roma communities across the UK.

11.2 Ando Glaso - Martin Grinvalsky

Ando Glaso is a Roma-led cultural organisation based in Glasgow, founded in 2017 by Roma musician János Lang. Its mission is to celebrate and preserve Roma culture in Scotland through creative expression, music, and heritage work. The organisation operates with a strong emphasis on community, identity, and visibility.

Roma Orchestra & Youth Music Initiatives

Since its founding, Ando Glaso has focused on building a collective of Roma musicians from across Europe, creating Scotland's first Roma Orchestra. In 2019, the organisation expanded its efforts to support young Roma musicians in forming their own bands, fostering talent and pride within the community.

Cultural and Heritage Work

In partnership with institutions, Ando Glaso works to protect and share Roma traditions. This includes recording and preserving Roma heritage, which has historically been underrepresented in Scotland.

Festival Leadership

The organisation launched Scotland's first Roma Festival in 2022, providing a major platform for Roma cultural expression. Despite interruptions due to the pandemic, the festival returned in 2024 and was met with significant success.

Community Space and Representation

Ando Glaso has established its own creative space where it runs various music and youth projects. Their work goes beyond performance; it's rooted in visibility, empowerment, and ensuring Roma people are seen, heard, and respected in Scottish cultural life.

Ando Glaso highlighted the importance of Roma identity being accurately represented in systems and policy. Roma people are frequently misidentified in public records, sometimes being mistaken for other nationalities. This misrecognition has led to exclusion and systemic gaps, such as the absence of a Roma tick-box in the UK's settlement scheme.

The organisation emphasises that Roma people must be involved in planning and decision-making processes that affect them. Respect and representation are central to Ando Glaso's advocacy.

True respect for Roma communities must include recognition of their culture, history, and contributions. Ando Glaso uses arts and heritage as powerful tools to combat invisibility and promote dignity.

11.3 Denisa Gannon

A legal representative with expertise in immigration law shared insights into the significant challenges Roma individuals continue to face when navigating the UK's immigration system, particularly in relation to the EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS). Denisa, a qualified lawyer with a background in supporting Roma applicants since the scheme's inception, emphasised that while early access to immigration support was effective, funding cuts have severely limited the availability of help for those now applying late or for the first time.

A major concern raised was the high number of invalid or incomplete late applications due to a lack of understanding about the process or the evidence required. Many Roma applicants struggle to gather documentation that proves continuous residence in the UK, particularly those who have lived in informal housing arrangements or without consistent employment.

Denisa explained that the evidence threshold set by the Home Office is rigid, with little room for discretion. Without formal documentation such as tenancy agreements or utility bills, applicants are at serious risk of being refused, even with legal support. This lack of flexibility disproportionately affects Roma people, many of whom face digital, literacy, or language barriers.

The long-term consequences of such refusals are severe as individuals may be pushed into irregular status, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation, homelessness, and health inequalities. For example, Denisa highlighted a case of a young Roma man who, despite having lived in the UK since age 18, had no documentary proof of residence. Without legal aid or a right to appeal, he risks being left without NHS access, unable to work legally, and at high risk of marginalisation or exploitation.

Denisa emphasised that there is an urgent need for:

- Renewed funding for immigration advice services
- More flexible and inclusive evidence criteria within the EUSS
- Targeted outreach to Roma communities
- Clearer guidance and simplified application processes

11.4 Romano Lav– Sonia Michalewicz

A Roma-led organisation based in Glasgow delivered a compelling presentation outlining their work in cultural advocacy, community building, and anti-racism efforts. Founded in 2013, Romano Lav has been at the forefront of challenging discrimination while celebrating Roma identity, heritage, and unity.

The organisation runs a cultural centre in the heart of the city, where they deliver a wide range of educational and artistic programmes. Their goal is to raise awareness of Roma history and culture across Scotland and the wider UK. They have taken steps to ensure this includes recognition of the Roma genocide during the Holocaust, aiming to incorporate this history into formal education through schools and national institutions.

Romano Lav is currently working in partnership with the National Museum of Scotland to feature Roma contributions and stories through exhibitions and gallery space. This is part of their broader mission to embed Roma presence into national narratives and challenge ongoing marginalisation.

The presentation also reflected on the importance of cultural representation through the arts. Romano Lav has long incorporated music and performance as powerful tools of engagement, especially with young people. The organisation was the first Roma-led charity in Scotland, founded by Marcela Adamova.

Sonia, a long-standing community worker at Romano Lav, emphasised the emotional and cultural impact of their International Roma Day celebrations, which showcase both traditional and modern Roma fashion, dance, and music. These events serve as a platform for positive visibility and engagement with both Roma and non-Roma audiences.

They also provide school-based workshops, helping young Roma children understand their own identity and educating teachers on how to work more effectively with Roma pupils. Sonia stressed that many children born in the UK may not have a deep understanding of their heritage and benefit greatly from such cultural education.

A key message from Romano Lav's presentation was the importance of trust and unity within Roma communities and between communities and services. Trust must be earned, particularly from historically marginalised groups, and Roma people are more likely to engage with services and initiatives when they can see positive outcomes and authentic involvement from within their own community.

Their concluding remarks highlighted the need for inclusive leadership and genuine representation, calling for more Roma professionals to be involved in decision-making at all levels. They emphasised that through hard work, solidarity, and Roma-led action, sustainable progress is possible.

12. Annex

Summary Table

Table 2: Key Points		
Barrier	Aim	Action
Lack of trust in authorities	Building trust- Services to become inclusive.	Strengthening partnerships between authorities and Roma-led organisations. Requiring more Roma representation in services.
Marginalisation and misinformation	Improving accessibility to services and partnering with Roma-led organisations	Improving Roma visibility in services and creating accessible and inclusive consultation channels.
Prejudice and systemic discrimination	Employ people with lived experience, staff need to be culturally competent, and services need to be inclusive. Improve data collection for research.	Job recruitment processes need to be adapted, accountability is needed, as well as policy reform.
Lack of cultural understanding	Educate professionals and the wider public. It may also require funding.	Raising awareness, using campaigns to advocate for fairer services and capacity building by investing in community-based and youth-led programmes. Education systems must include and teach children about Roma heritage.
Exclusion from decision-making	Embed Roma voices in planning and policy.	Empowering Roma ambassadors can aid with this.

