

ESOL Strategy for England – response submitted on behalf of National Roma Network

We, as National Roma Network, believe that it is crucial for England to have a National ESOL strategy and the need for it manifested itself very strongly in the results of the EU referendum. With the country divided more than ever, it is vital to have a framework to improve social cohesion, and ability to communicate with each other is essential aspect of it. To enable migrants, who constitute large parts of many local communities, to interact and participate in the public and economic life, there needs to be a coordinated and monitored strategy that represents the needs of all migrant groups, including the needs of Roma migrants.

Natecla's proposed strategy is an important step in moving forward the agenda and should be seen in the light of other proposed and existing documents such as the DEMOS report, On speaking Terms, and the ESOL strategy for Scotland.

We have proposed a list of additional considerations for the strategy reflecting needs of the Roma community:

National objectives

- Current approach to ESOL is about getting people into work which is an important objective but should not be seen as the only one. More focus should be paid on other objectives, such as progression in employment to lift people from in-work poverty;
- All larger employers, including employment agencies, should be encouraged to facilitate access to ESOL provisions for their employees;
- Other positive impacts of ESOL, related to health and wellbeing, independence and community cohesion, should be promoted and reflected in the more joint-up, cross-departmental approach linked to other broader objectives, such as eliminating modern slavery, child poverty etc;

Local Level

- All areas should have their own ESOL strategies and Forums, to enable them to design and deliver ESOL provisions which address the needs of local communities; local strategies and forums should then feed into regional and national forums and inform further actions;
- ESOL strategies should take into account local migration trends, including internal migration;
- Roma should be consulted on and their views and needs reflected within the local ESOL strategies, especially in areas of high concentrations;

- ESOL should not be seen as means to an end, but rather as a step in wider integration strategy;
- Funding should not be tied to specific benefits but available to all new migrants but be available for all new arrivals, wherever they live, as a way of enabling their integration.
- Local ESOL delivery should be coordinated to meet local demand and provide cost-effective (avoiding duplications and gaps);

Provider level

- Fund research and develop specialist qualifications
- The previously existing specialist qualifications at Levels 5/7 should be reinstated across more providers as the need for good quality ESOL tutors/volunteers is key
- Funding should be more secure and long term so that learners do not 'get lost' between projects; this is especially relevant in the context of the Roma community as they often do not trust services very easily;
- Other creative ways of delivering ESOL should be explored and encouraged, especially those involving host communities;

Practitioner level

- Providing employment opportunities to members of the Roma communities to become qualified ESOL teachers to help with reaching wider communities;
- Availability of Roma cultural awareness trainings for ESOL teachers;
- Good practice of working with specific groups and resources used should be shared among providers;

Learner level

- Information about availability and accessibility of ESOL classes need to be provided in Roma languages;
- Availability of women only classes to reflect cultural needs;
- Opportunity to have a conversational and less formal ESOL classes;
- Availability of ESOL with other activities such as cooking, etc or qualifications, such as Maths and ICT;
- Enable learners to have a say in design and improvements of the provisions;

Progression

- Providers should encourage learners to move along pathways that take them to functional skills, vocational training and academic courses at FE and HE as appropriate;

- Learners need to have an understanding of ESOL progression so information should be provided in the language/format they understand, such as Youtube video in the learner's language or other appropriate formats;

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