A response to Women and Equalities Committee's inquiry on tackling inequalities faced by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities in the UK

Photos © Roma MATRIX

National Roma Network

January 2017

Introduction

1. This response has been compiled by Migration Yorkshire, on behalf of the National Roma Network (NRN), and agreed by the National Roma Network Working Group (NRNWG). NRN is a partnership of voluntary and community organisations, Roma community groups and individuals, representatives from local and central government and statutory organisations, universities and researchers. It was established in 2012 to improve and promote the integration of migrant Roma across the UK for the benefit of all communities. We welcome the opportunity to contribute our understanding and knowledge of the issues faced by Roma communities across the UK.

2. Our response is concerned with the migrant Roma aspects of the inquiry only, as per the remit of the NRN. Migrant Roma are defined as a Romani ethic group migrating to the UK from mainland Europe, predominantly after the EU accession in 2004.

3. Members of the NRN are each concerned with some, but not all, of the issues covered in this submission and the views expressed do not necessarily reflect the policies and positions of each of the contributing organisations or individuals, but rather aim to provide a collective picture of the situation of migrant Roma in the UK.

Key issues of concern

Government's commitments – progress, monitoring, funding, improvements achieved

4. As stated in the Ministerial Working Group's progress report[1], the focus of their group was primarily on improving the inequality experienced by 'ethnic Gypsies and Travellers', understood to include more settled and acknowledged British Romani communities, rather than migrant Roma. Roma were only said to be included when the issues recognised 'overlap with those impacting Gypsies and Travellers' (para1.6), which was seen as relevant only in the area of education; however, it is unclear whether the term 'Roma' was referring here to migrant Roma or a British Roma, as there seemed to be confusion over the terminology throughout the report.

5. A specific 'migrant' Roma term was only mentioned briefly in relation to language difficulties in the health context (para3.7), recognising that poor English could create an additional barrier in navigating the health system for migrant Roma and therefore affect their access to health, but no specific action was consequently proposed to mitigate the issue.

---

[1] Department for Communities and Local Government (Apr, 2012) *Progress report by the ministerial working group on tackling inequalities experienced by Gypsy and Travellers*
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/6287/2124046.pdf

6. As the commitments were not necessarily aimed to deliver specific improvements to migrant Roma communities, Roma have been rarely highlighted in any national strategies aiming to tackle the exclusion of GRT communities.

7. Commitment 1: The Ofsted evaluation schedule to in October 2014 stated *'it may be relevant to pay particular attention to the achievement of..... Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children, as defined by the Equality Act 2010'*. This was withdrawn in September 2015. Under the new evaluation framework[2], there is no reference to the particular needs of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children.

8**.** Commitment 3: The absence of school places is much more pressing for Roma.

9. Commitment 4: The report commissioned to explore exclusion among GRT pupils was based on a number of trial schools, however 'trial schools were broadly typical of all schools nationally, with the *notable exception that they have substantially lower numbers of pupils from Caribbean or Gypsy and Roma Traveller ethnic groups'*[3].

10. Commitment 5: A report was published in 2012 and included one reference to Traveller children, but no references to Gypsy or Roma children[4].

11. Commitment 6: The only one referring to Roma specifically as the government seemed to acknowledge additional challenges faced by migrant Roma. Ofsted produced a report exploring the barriers Roma children face in education[5] and subsequent examples of good practice[6].

12. The identification of barriers to Roma accessing and succeeding in the UK's educational system, was not, however, followed up by additional funding from the government. The pupil premium continued to be linked to eligibility for free school meals, despite many Roma not qualifying for it due to parents being in low paid employment and receiving Working Tax Credit[7], and many schools missed out on additional funding which could be

---

[2] GOV (2016) *School inspection handbook* https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-inspection-handbook-from-september-2015

[3] DfE (2014) *School exclusion trial evaluation: Research report,* p30
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/331795/RR364_-_School_Exclusion_Trial_Final_Report.pdf

[4] Ofsted (2012) *No place for bullying* https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-strategies-for-preventing-and-tackling-bullying

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ofsted (Mar, 2015) *Raising aspirations and retaining Roma pupils at Key Stage 4: Babington Community College*
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/416658/Good_practice_example_-_Babington_College.pdf

[7] Roma Support Group (2016) *Free School meals and Roma children in England*
https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B2lw1_Krq5gnS3pqSGRnb0xRYjQ/view

spend on Roma staff or additional EAL support, the interventions which are seen as very effective[8][9].

13. The recommendations for the Department of Health do not include Roma communities specifically, under the remit of the National Health Inclusion Board, there were a number of reports and good practice in relation to the health needs of Roma communities – in addition to Gypsy & Traveller health needs.

14. Commitments 14 – 18: The government published a new Hate Crime Strategy[10] in which focus was given to Gypsy and Traveller communities. While Roma were mentioned as belonging to GRT communities, there was no acknowledgement of additional barriers Roma migrants might face in reporting hate crime, such as the language barrier, deep-rooted fear of police or becoming more 'visible' and more vulnerable to administrative removal by the Home Office[11].

15. Similarly, a hate crime operational guidance was updated with additional information on Gypsy and Traveller culture, but little attention was given to the cultural background of migrant Roma. This is despite Roma belonging to two (GRT and new migrant communities) of the four main groups identified as requiring more engagement, due to being recognised as being more likely to be affected by hate crime but not reporting it[12].

16. Commitment 26: This group no longer exists as the 'DWP has chosen to operate on a more one-to-one basis […] involving linking up with specific organisations who we feel can help us develop specific aspects of our plans'[13].

17. Commitment 27: The response claims that the publication of a report[14] by DCLG will have some relevance to Gypsy & Travellers' but there is no reference throughout the report to Gypsy, or Roma, or Travellers.

18. Commitment 28: The Hub was set up by the DCLG staff. There have been no posts by anyone in the last 11 months and the last post by a DCLG staff member was four years ago.

---

[8] Ofsted (2014) *Overcoming barriers: enduring that Roma children are fully engaged and achieving in education* https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/430866/Overcoming_barriers_-_ensuring_that_Roma_children_are_fully_engaged_and_achieving_in_education.pdf

[9] Mark Payne et al (2015) *The educational, linguistic and social integration of the Slovakian Roma at Firth Park Academy, Sheffield* http://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/96084/1/Research%20Report_FPA.pdf

[10] Home Office (2016) *Action Against Hate: The UK Government's plan for tackling hate crime* https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/543679/Action_Against_Hate_-_UK_Government_s_Plan_to_Tackle_Hate_Crime_2016.pdf

[11] NRN (2016) NRN Forum on Police and Criminal Justice: discussion notes

[12] College of Policing (2014) *Hate Crime Operational Guidelines* http://www.report-it.org.uk/files/hate_crime_operational_guidance.pdf

[13] GOV ()*Ethnic minority employment stakeholder group* https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/ethnic-minority-employment-stakeholder-group

[14] GOV (2013) *Ethnic minority business and access to finance* https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ethnic-minority-businesses-and-access-to-finance

19. There are also some issues that were omitted from the working group's commitments completely, mainly in relation to reports documenting a high number of GRT children, including Roma, being taken away from families by social services[15]. This is significant as it not only has heartbreaking consequences for affected families, but also prevents other services in building positive relationship and earning trust of the community[16].

Adequate data

20. There have been some attempts to estimate the Roma population locally[17] and nationally[18] but there is currently no reliable way of monitoring numbers of Roma arriving in the UK. As Roma come to the UK mainly from new EU members stated such as Slovakia, Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria, they do not have to register anywhere when arriving.

21. Some local estimates of Roma populations are based on a number of EU nationals registering for National Insurance Number (NINo) [19], assuming certain proportion of Eastern Europeans who applied for NINo are Roma, while national or regional often relied on local authorities estimating the number of Roma living in their areas[20].

22. Some, but not all, services do monitor ethnicity but ethnic categories they use are in line with those used in 2011 census, where Roma is grouped together with Gypsies, and relies on self-ascription. This creates difficulties, as many Roma do not want to disclose their ethnicity due to discrimination experienced in their countries of origin[21]. Consequently, fearing further discrimination and not having the reasons and benefits for ascribing explained to them by services, they are unlikely to do so. Moreover, many find the term Gypsy offensive.

23. The only nationally available data where Roma are described as a separate ethnic group is collected through the school census. The Ofsted report on overcoming barriers Roma

---

[15] BBC (2012) *Roma children: Britain's hidden problem* http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-20770420 ; Traveller and Romani Advice and Information Centre (2016) *Number of Romani and Traveller children in public care* http://www.train-uk.com/number-of-romani-and-traveller-children-living-in-care.html

[16] Upcoming: Migration Yorkshire (2017) *Roma experiences as living and working in South Yorkshire*

[17] Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council (2015) *Communities of interest: Roma community* http://www.rotherham.gov.uk/jsna/info/23/people/46/communities_of_interest/7 ; Sheffield City Council (2015) *Roma Community Knowledge Profile 2015* https://www.sheffield.gov.uk/your-city-council/sheffield-profile/community-knowledge-profiles.html ; Glasgow City Council (2013) *Mapping the Roma Community in Scotland: Final report* *http://www.gov.scot/resource/0043/00434972.pdf*

[18] Philip Brown and all (2013) *Migrant Roma in the United Kingdom* http://www.salford.ac.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0004/363118/Migrant_Roma_in_the_UK_final_report_October_2013.pdf ; Gary Craig (2013) *United Kingdom: The Roma, A Study of National Policies* http://www.york.ac.uk/inst/spru/research/pdf/EURoma.pdf

[19] Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council (2013)

[20] Philip Brown and all (2013) and Glasgow City Council (2013);

[21] Upcoming: Migration Yorkshire (2017) *Roma experiences as living and working in South Yorkshire*

pupils face in schools[22] stressed the importance of accurately monitoring the number of Roma pupils which, together with heavy lobbying by the third sector organisations, resulted in 'Roma' being added as a separate ethnic category in the school census from September 2015[23].

24. The lack of reliable data in other public services makes is impossible to establish the extent of exclusion of this group in all other aspects of life. While, there is many local evidence that Roma pupils are one of the most excluded ethnic minority groups[24], their parents face difficulties in accessing public services[25][26][27], are exploited by employers and landlords, are severely affected by welfare changes[28] and are subject to Home Office administrative removals[29], without the reliable data collection the issues will continue to be seen 'local' and 'anecdotal'.

25. Opportunities have been missed to improve ethnic monitoring data by adding a separate Roma ethnicity when new services, such as Universal Credit, were being developed. This will continue to create difficulties in demonstrating inequalities Roma experiences when accessing public services and show the scale of their marginalisation in the UK. Audit of public services[30] will be unable to identify systematic exclusion without such data.

---

[22] Ofsted (2014) *Overcoming barriers: enduring that Roma children are fully engaged and achieving in education*
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/430866/Overcoming_barrie rs_-_ensuring_that_Roma_children_are_fully_engaged_and_achieving_in_education.pdf

[23] Department for Education (2015) *Education Data Division – Request for Change Form for CBDS*
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/418148/RFC_784_changes_t o_ethnicity_codeset.pdf

[24] Chris Searle (2017) *Xeno-racism and the scourge of school exclusion* http://www.irr.org.uk/news/xeno-racism-and-the-scourge-of-school-exclusion/ ; UK Parliament (2016) *Pupils exclusions: Travellers http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2016-01-07/21520/*

[25] Leeds City Council and Advocacy Support (2016) *Health within the Leeds Roma community: Final Report* http://eprints.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/2741/1/ROMA%20Report%20FINAL.pdf ; Oxfam and Govanhill Law Centre (2011) *Unequal and unlawful treatment*
http://www.cpag.org.uk/sites/default/files/Oxfam%20Law%20into%20Practice%20Project%20and%20Govanh ill%20Law%20Centre%20Report%20Unequal%20and%20Unlawful%20Treatment.pdf

[26] Equal Rights Trust (2015) *Letter to Rotherham Job Centre Plus Regarding Services for Roma Communities* http://www.equalrightstrust.org/resources/equal-rights-trust-letter-rotherham-job-centre-plus-regarding-services-roma-communities

[27] Equal Rights Trust (2015) *Letter to Rotherham CCG Regarding Health Access for Roma Communities* http://www.equalrightstrust.org/resources/equal-rights-trust-letter-rotherham-ccg-regarding-health-access-roma-communities

[28] Roma Support Group (2015) *The impact on migrant Roma communities of changes to welfare and entitlements* https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B2lw1_Krq5gnOGRrb3dlamRocm8/view

[29] Roma Support Group (2016) Rough sleeping Roma in the City of Westminster http://www.mungos.org/documents/7233/7233.pdf ; The AIRE Centre (2016) *NRN Forum on Police and Criminal Justice: Deportation and removals of EEA nationals: a Roma perspective*

[30] Gov (2016) *Prime Minister orders government audit to tackle racial disparities in public services outcomes* https://www.gov.uk/government/news/prime-minister-orders-government-audit-to-tackle-racial-disparities-in-public-service-outcomes

Diverse needs of the GRT communities

26. As previously indicated, Roma is a separate group within Gypsy, Roma and Travellers umbrella, which has been largely excluded from the scope of the ministerial group's commitments; therefore policy changes have not taken the needs of Roma into account. While many of the challenges Roma face in the UK are similar to those experienced by Gypsies and Travellers – such as low level of education, high rates of school exclusion and illiteracy (mainly among the older population) and low life expectancy, there are additional ones which further exacerbate Roma exclusion and inequality.

27. Additional barriers include lack of fluency in English, restricted access to welfare benefits, lack of knowledge and understanding of UK's services, minimal experiences of schooling before arriving to the UK and a high level of exclusion and discrimination experienced in countries of origin prior.

Engagements mechanisms

28. There have been no formal mechanisms established enabling effective communication between national and local policy-makers and members of migrant Roma communities. One of the reasons behind setting up of the NRN in 2012[31] was to fill that gap and various stakeholders to get together and discuss the issues relating to the Roma community in local context. The NRN was also a platform for sharing good practice.

29. In 2015 the NRN was restructured to encourage better participation from the members of the Roma communities and newly established grassroots Roma organisations. Two Roma individuals, chosen by the members of the Roma communities, became co-chairs of the NRN to ensure that the discussions were shaped by the Roma priorities.

30. While representatives from the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) were involved in the NRN, there have been no policy responses to the issues raised by the members.

Inequalities experienced by migrant Roma

31. There have been many reports[32] highlighting the issues faced by Roma communities in the UK. These relate to poor accommodation, difficulties in accessing health and DWP services, labour exploitation, difficulties in securing school places, bullying and racial abuse in schools and in communities, high rate of school exclusion, and many more. Worryingly, the majority of the issues identified by the earlier reports are still as prevalent as they were ten years ago, or even becoming more extensive. This increasingly has negative effects on

---

[31] Migration Yorkshire (Sep, 2012) *National Roma Network minutes 21.09.12*, Migration Yorkshire
[32] See also: LCC and Advocacy Support (2016); Roma Support Group (2016); Roma Support Group (2015); Gary Craig (2013); RMBC (2013); BBC (2012);

mental health of Roma individuals, adding to the degree of exclusion[33].

33. Some difficulties are the effects of national policy changes. Public sector cuts have meant diminished funding for ESOL, the abolition of Traveller Education Services (which played a significant role in helping newly arrived Roma settling in schools)[34] and welfare changes restricting access to Housing Benefit and Jobseeker's Allowance. Increased digitalization of services such as prevalence of online job applications and CVs, online or telephone GP appointments only are changes, for which Roma had not been prepared and they have been left behind.

32. There are also new difficulties Roma face. There is increasing evidence that Roma are often targeted by the Home Office to be removed from the UK for not exercising EU treaty rights in the UK[35]. There are also concerns that Roma might be more adversely affected by the post-Brexit arrangements due to difficulties in accessing legal help in proving permanent residency requirements[36] and high costs of applying for British citizenship, compared to other EU nationals.

33. Some grassroots Roma organisations have also expressed difficulties in securing funding that would allow them to help their own communities[37]. They often feel that lack of fluency in English has affected their ability to make successful funding applications.

Particular challenges within the migrant Roma communities

34. It is important to remember that migrant Roma are not a homogenous group and there are differences among various Roma groups. For example, Roma from rural settlements, might often face additional barriers to those faced by Roma from urban areas.

35. Within those different groups, Roma women would often be even more excluded, for the variety of reasons. They are often responsible for staying at home and raising children, and therefore have lesser opportunity to learn English[38]. Their exclusion is often exacerbated by the fact that they are more likely to speak Romani only, and reduced knowledge of the languages of the countries they came from. This creates challenges in communication, especially when accessing specific services such as maternity services, domestic violence or social services involvement.

---

[33] Mark Robinson and al (2016) The mental health support experiences of Roma men, born outside of the UK, in Leeds, Leeds Beckett University and Touchstone Leeds

[34] Dr John Lever (2012) *A report into the impact of multi-agency work supporting Roma children in education* http://orca.cf.ac.uk/42241/1/routes_report_030113.pdf

[35] Roma Support Group (2016) *Rough sleeping Roma in the City of Westminster* http://www.mungos.org/documents/7233/7233.pdf ; The AIRE Centre (2016) *NRN Forum on Police and Criminal Justice: Deportation and removals of EEA nationals: a Roma perspective*

[36] IPPR (2016) *Roma communities and Brexit: Integrating and empowering Roma in the UK* http://www.ippr.org/publications/roma-communities-and-brexit

[37] Submission from NRN Roma Co-chair (2016)

[38] Dr Daniela Sime et all (2014) *Roma families' engagement with education and other services in Glasgow* https://pure.strath.ac.uk/portal/files/39688102/Sime_etal_roma_families_engagement_with_education.pdf

Conclusion

36. The fact that Roma have not been explicitly included in the government GRT strategy has meant that their specific needs may have been missed. We have commented on the individual commitments in relation to Roma. We have also explained some of the additional needs of Roma that could be usefully taken into account in any revised strategy.

<u>Contact for further information</u>

Ewa Jamroz, Data Policy and Development Officer
Ewa.Jamroz@migrationyorkshire.org.uk
0113 378 9017