



Introduction and welcome

MPs in the UK Parliament have told the Government that Roma (and Gypsies and Travellers) have been comprehensively failed. The MPs think that it's because it's too difficult. We don't agree – we think that a country should be run for the benefit of all; it requires that the Government listen and understand what people and communities want.

We report again on another example where Roma might be ignored – the way that schools are due to be inspected from September. School inspection staff might cease to be alert to the range of issues – for pupils, parents and schools – where substantial numbers of Roma are educated.

European countries in the EU – ha, including the UK – are facing elections. Almost inevitably, the racists and xenophobic politicians are prominent. We example episodes of anti—Roma agitation in both the East and West.

But there are more hopeful signs of change and progress. The FutureRoma stand at the Venice Biennale; the video of the singer Cate le Bon's new release; and last, but by no means least, our launch of Roma News on YouTube.

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

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 [@RomaSupport](#)

Parliamentary Select Committee concludes “Gypsy Roma and Traveller people have been comprehensively failed by policy makers and public services for far too long”

After over two and a half years investigation, the Women & Equalities Select Committee have reported on the effectiveness of Government policy for GRT communities. It does not make pretty reading. The MPs reported on a number of what they called the worst inequalities suffered. The chair of the Select Committee, Maria Miller MP, said:

"Our inquiry has tried to shine a light on the issues that are rarely talked about by policy makers: Gypsies and Travellers are likely to die over a decade earlier than non-Travellers, only a handful of Gypsy and Traveller people go to university every year and many Roma are being exploited by rogue landlords and paid far below the minimum wage."

The Committee made a whole series of 49 recommendations for change, in areas of public service ranging from education and health, through to domestic violence, data collection and combatting discrimination. Crucially, the Committee concluded that,

"Gypsy Roma and Traveller people have been comprehensively failed by policy makers and public services for far too long. Access to education, health, employment, criminal justice, tackling hate crime and domestic violence - all these require services which differentiate between different groups who have different needs, and yet so many services are ill-equipped to support Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people. The Government must stop filing this under 'too difficult' and set out how it intends to improve health, education and other outcomes for these very marginalised communities who are all too often "out of sight and out of mind."

You can read the Women & Equalities Select Committee press release [here](#).

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/women-and-equalities-committee/news-parliament-2017/grt-tackling-inequalities-report-published-17-19/>

You can read their full report here.

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmwomeq/360/full-report.html>

Roma Support Group – our comments on the Select Committee report

We welcome the main conclusion of the inquiry which states that leadership from the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government “has been lacking”. We welcome the call for Government to have “a clear and effective plan to support these communities that is equal to the level of the challenges they face.”

We are aware that the few Government initiatives towards Roma communities are supporting a variety of nominal “pilot projects”. We never understand what happens and what has been learned – projects start and then the money runs out. So, we welcome the call from the Committee that when funding for such projects ceases, there are “evaluations of the pilot projects, stating which ones are will be taken forward, and setting out the Department’s plan and timescales.”

There is little statistical information about how Roma access and benefit from a variety of public services. We strongly support the call for all Government departments to collect information about their user’s ethnicity (including Roma, Gypsy and Traveller) by the end of this year. In future, with the 2021 census using a tick-box for Roma (and Gypsy and Irish Traveller), this will be presumably be updated.

We welcome the call for “Ofsted should ensure that inspectors are actively inspecting schools for gender and racial stereotyping or signs of sexism or racism” in relation to Roma, Gypsy and Traveller pupils and learners. This is particularly relevant as Ofsted are presently consulting on removing Gypsy, Roma & Traveller pupils and learners from their groups of learners which require “particular attention in school inspections in terms of outcomes”.

We strongly welcome the call that the Quality Care Commission embraces GRT people and patients as *experts by experience* “who might have the best experience of where unequal treatment is taking place”.

We welcome the extensive presentation of concerns about how hate crime and discrimination is understood and responded to by Roma communities in the UK, and the variety of issues connected with violence against women and girls in GRT communities.

We think that the Committee could have been much stronger in its expression of the mistrust, difficulties and lack of awareness amongst Roma of the requirements of the impact of Brexit and the so-called EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS). Our own experience in the trial phase was that very few of our clients could complete the process without any assistance. This will be a major issue within the Roma communities until June 2021 (and probably of more concern, afterwards) or potentially sooner if there is a no-deal Brexit.

We are much more sceptical about the value of projects (again short term) funded by the Controlling Migration Fund (CMF) which the Committee describes as a “welcome development”. The prospectus of the CMF originally put great emphasis on the benefits of any projects being for the “wider local communities” (which are understood to be non-migrant, sometimes known as longstanding). We recognise some CMF initiatives are trying to resolve service pressures and very local neighbourhood tensions, we also think that this has to be understood against the impact of austerity and reductions in grant support to local government.

We are aware that in some areas of Roma settlement, Selective Licensing has been a helpful tool in encouraging an improvement in the quality of private rented housing being made available, and residential landlords are registered with local councils. However, we also await confirmation of the benefits of such schemes (and similar ones in Scotland) being of proven benefits for Roma households.

We are unsure if the Committee fully understands the issues of the access by schools of Pupil Premium, and its use for those pupils and learners who attract Pupil Premium. We support the call for payments to be made available to schools within a term of a pupil enrolling (who is entitled to Pupil Premium). But we are aware that many Roma (as well as many other low paid working parents) households do not qualify for Pupil Premium as they are denied access to many of the qualifying benefits as a result of the welfare reforms in 2014 focused on EU nationals.

We welcome the recommendation that “Ofsted should actively inspect schools for signs of Roma students being internally or informally excluded.” We also think – given the scale of the problem that Edward Timpson is due to report on very soon – that those schools at primary and secondary level which formally exclude a much higher proportion of Roma (and Gypsy and Traveller) pupils and learners should be actively inspected.

Finally, we think that the Committee’s report might break the silence of this Government – and preceding ones – into recognising and accepting the growing importance of Roma communities in the UK, and the rights that Roma people have, but which they do not exercise. This will gradually be changed by reports like this from the Women & Equalities Select Committee, but also by the voice of Roma women, man and young people in many areas of their lives – locally, nationally and throughout Europe.

Roma Support Group

5 April 2019

News from HM Revenue and Customs: getting to grips with employers’ exploitation and starvation wages

The Government has increased marginally the national minimum wage on 1st April 2019. It is now unlawful to pay anyone,

- age 25 and over, less than £8.21p an hour;
- age 21 to 24, less than £7.70p an hour
- age 18 to 20, less than £6.15p an hour
- age under 18, less than £4.35p an hour

It applies to anyone working

It isn’t very often that you get good news from the tax authorities. But we received this letter/circular from the HMRC, and we think it’s worthy of a wider audience:

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am writing as we have identified your organisation as a group who are likely to be supporting vulnerable low paid workers in some capacity. We are asking

for your support in encouraging workers who may be underpaid the minimum wage to come forward and make a complaint with a view to them getting back any money owed.

When a worker makes a complaint to HMRC about a particular employer, we will consider that complaint and decide whether to investigate the employer in question. If that investigation finds there has been underpayment, HMRC will issue the employer with a Notice of Underpayment which instructs the employer to pay the worker any arrears due.

We know that the most vulnerable workers don't necessarily come forward to make a complaint but we would like to ask for your support in encouraging people to do so as and when you think that underpayment of the minimum wage may be an issue. Making a complaint online [here](#) is easy and HMRC protect the anonymity of the worker. Complaints can be made about previous employers as well as current ones.

From 1 April 2019, National Minimum Wage rates have increased. The Government is running a communications campaign to raise awareness of the rate increases. A stakeholder pack to support the campaign is available if you would like to make use of the promotional materials it offers. The pack is available [here](#).

Regards

Liz Bowen

Liz Bowen

National Minimum Wage

Taskforces and Specialist Compliance

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Mobile: 07393781276

Email: Liz.bowen@hmrc.gov.uk

[News from Roma Support Group](#)

[Our own YouTube channel opens](#)

Our small team of volunteers and staff – Mihai, Daniel, Klarysa and Joanna – have launched the first edition of a regular YouTube channel. The language of presentation is Romanes; English subtitles are provided. We are aiming to have a new programme every fortnight. Watch it here (2 minutes, 45 seconds long) and subscribe.

<https://www.facebook.com/RomaSupportGroup/videos/1060162587521894/>

As Daniel explains in the opening edition:

“The idea of a Roma News Programme came from our experience of seeing many of our Roma brothers and sisters asking so many questions for which they were receiving completely different replies. We would like this to be a space for all of you to have access to clear and correct information about issues affecting your life. We will provide all the information you need to know in regards of:

- *Brexit and the Settled Status scheme,*
- *rights and responsibilities in the UK,*
- *as well as changes or decisions made by UK authorities relevant to you,*
- *Roma activities or projects happening in the country*
- *and important news regarding UK.*

Roma and Hate Crime, 2019

RSG has produced this short seven-page report on hate crime against Roma people. The report explains the outcome of an intensive six months campaign by ourselves with Eastern European Resource Centre to identify, support and successfully defend Roma people from attack and abuse on London streets. We talked with 91 people from our communities. We found that:

- very few Roma people thought that racist attack and abuse was punishable as a crime
- most Roma had experienced one incident, and a minority had experienced many incidents
- no one had ever reported a hate crime incident; and no one knew that they could report such incidents as a crime

We describe two case studies where Roma have been attacked and abused in public places, where these incidents have come to the attention of the local police, and how no further action has happened, despite clear evidence.

We also include the views of non-Roma children who we worked with on an education programme, supported by Show Racism the Red Card in 2017. We asked children:

What is the first thing that comes into your mind when you hear the words Roma or Gypsy?

Their responses reveal the extent of the underlying problems of what is called Romaphobia.

Read the full report here.

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1XASHBTAMLI60aS4KQyL3c1FwoSuZppdZ/view>

As a result of receiving support from the Home Office, RSG has also produced this short video in an attempt to de-mystify who are Roma. It is only two minutes long – well worth the time spent!

https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=14&v=8vqUESWZ_g

Ofsted: are they going to ignore Roma pupils now?

Ofsted is the government agency that is responsible for checking how effective all schools, colleges, nurseries and early years settings are in developing and educating our children - and their pupils, students and young children.

The decisions and judgements that Ofsted makes about an institution can have huge impacts, not least for the staff who work there and the young people that attend. So, the way in which Ofsted and their inspectors conduct themselves, and carry out their work, is very important. All Ofsted inspections are governed by an Education Inspection Framework. The previous template was introduced in 2015; Ofsted were consulting over the winter on a revised template which they hope to introduce from next September.

You can find out what Ofsted themselves say for the changes here.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/ofsted-launches-a-consultation-on-proposals-for-changes-to-the-education-inspection-framework>

Roma Support Group – and many other charities and agencies working with Gypsies, Travellers and Roma – are very concerned about another change that Ofsted appear to be making. In the 2015 framework which you can see here,

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/717953/The common inspection framework education skills and early years-v2.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/717953/The_common_inspection_framework_education_skills_and_early_years-v2.pdf)

they talk about groups of learners to which “inspectors will pay particular attention...” One such group are Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children/young people. In the new proposed 2019 framework for inspections, there is no mention of the need for inspectors to “pay particular attention to the outcomes” of any groups.

How much does this matter? Sean Harford, the Director of Education at Ofsted explained to the Parliamentary Women & Equalities Select Committee hearing 12 September¹ why it matters (Q420). The Government ministerial working group had stated in 2012²:

We are also refocusing school inspection around the core areas of achievement, teaching, leadership and behaviour/safety. Within this more streamlined approach is a requirement for Ofsted to consider the extent to which the education provided at the school meets the needs of all its pupils. This means considering the data on all groups and individuals, with a particular emphasis on the most vulnerable and disadvantaged.

They recommended:

Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils are specifically highlighted as a vulnerable group in the revised Ofsted framework, ensuring that school inspections will pay particular attention to their progress, attainment and attendance.

Sean said:

(The) commitment.....was to highlight them as a vulnerable group in the revised Ofsted framework, and there were a couple of revisions when we revised it in 2014 or 2015..... Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils were identified as one of the vulnerable groups, or a subsection of them. As such, inspectors are directed to pay particular attention to those pupils if they are in sufficient numbers to be able to draw any conclusions from that.

1

<http://data.parliament.uk/WrittenEvidence/CommitteeEvidence.svc/EvidenceDocument/Women%20and%20Equalities/Tackling%20inequalities%20faced%20by%20the%20Gypsy,%20Roma%20and%20Traveller%20communities/Oral/89448.html>

² Progress report by the ministerial working group on tackling inequalities experienced by Gypsies and Travellers, CLG, April 2012

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/6287/2124046.pdf

That is one of the issues around this, because the youngsters tend to be in quite small numbers and spread quite thinly, although there are large numbers in some schools. That commitment, in addition to the survey work, has absolutely been fulfilled.

Sean concluded by saying:

I have examples of where, if Traveller, Gypsy or Roma pupils are being treated particularly badly or particularly well in schools, we have reported publicly on those specific schools on those issues, so I know it is coming through in the framework.

If Ofsted national director said in September 2018 that identifying GRT pupils as a vulnerable group was important in some inspections, what had changed by January 2019 when the new draft Framework was tabled?

Secondly, we have examples where a school has been found to be operating in a potentially unlawful manner for Roma students. If the inspectors had not been required to pay “particular attention” to outcomes for Roma students, would this have been picked up? For instance, Clifton Community School – a secondary school in Rotherham with about 15-20% of the students being (migrant) Roma – [was inspected in March 2016](#). The inspectors found:

Work to improve the attendance of pupils from the Roma community continues to have a positive impact. Their attendance now compares favourably with that of Roma pupils nationally, and is consistently better than it was last year. However, in order to achieve this improvement in attendance, leaders adopted a strategy of grouping Roma pupils into their own, culturally separate, mixed age tutor groups. Although this initiative has had some positive outcomes since its introduction last September, leaders accept it must be a temporary intervention, as it may, in time, conflict with the school’s wider work to promote tolerance and harmony between different cultural traditions. Leaders will now set time limits for the initiative and adapt their approach to better meet individual pupils’ needs, no matter what their cultural heritage.

Thirdly, you will be aware that two reports are forthcoming very shortly which might inform Ofsted’s approach to Roma pupils in education. There is the Edward Timpson review of why school exclusions appear to be particularly high for some minority ethnic groups of pupils (including Gypsy, Roma, Traveller

students) which has been commissioned following the publication of the Race Disparity Audit. There is also the imminent report from the Parliamentary Women & Equalities Select Committee who have been conducting an inquiry into the Government's policies to tackle inequalities faced by Gypsy, Roma & Traveller communities since 2016. It would be particularly relevant that the recommendations from these reports be considered before announcing the new inspection framework.

For all these reasons, to decide to omit any reference to learners of Roma, Gypsy and Traveller origin, or groups of learners for whom English is a new language, or particular groups of students and pupils of a minority ethnic origin would be a mistake. It would maintain a pretence that no groups of students face similar and difficult obstacles (as the Government's own Race Disparity Audit clearly showed). And that groups of particular ethnic and cultural backgrounds face some real difficulties in benefiting from the opportunities that the English educational system should provide, and which Ofsted should be resolving.

Many Roma families explain their reason for wanting to be in this country is it gives their children access to an education that is denied to them in Eastern Europe. We hope that Ofsted will not lose the focus on Roma (and Gypsy and Traveller) pupils and learners that the previous inspection framework encouraged.

April 2019

What is happening across Europe? Oh, there's elections everywhere.....

We have carried frequent reports in this newsletter about how European states treat Roma communities and families, and how Roma communities have responded and acted. It is with sadness that we carry reports this month from four different countries, from Bulgaria to France. Old myths, given a modern 'tinge' through social media, continue to prevail; for all the official talk about "Roma integration", the influence of far right and xenophobic forces continues to do damage.

Hungary

DW in Germany report on how Hungary has remained unchanged in their policies towards Roma under Viktor Orban, ten years after a wave of Neo-Nazi inspired murders and attacks on Roma villages.

<https://www.dw.com/en/decade-after-neo-nazi-killings-hungary-hostile-for-roma/a-47642342>

Italy

In Italy, far right vigilantes and organised groups tried to force local authorities in Torre Maura, a suburb of Rome, to move families from temporary accommodation into which they had been housed after being removed from old social housing which was being demolished.

<https://www.thelocal.it/20190403/rome-torre-maura-roma-protests>

However, there was also significant opposition, both from the Roma and from local citizens – memorably captured to the voice of young Simone.

<http://newsvideo.su/video/10548818>

France

Vigilante attacks against Roma were also reported in France, in the Parisian suburb of Bobigny. This followed yet another bout of false allegations, carried by social media, about vans being driven to abduct children.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/mar/27/roma-call-for-protection-after-vigilante-attacks-inspired-by-fake-news>

Bulgaria

Finally, Bulgaria has seen repeated anti-Roma violence over this last winter and into the spring. A fight in a shop led to an organised attack on Roma families in the town of Gabrovo.

<https://sofiaglobe.com/2019/04/11/strong-police-presence-in-bulgarias-gabrovo-after-attack-on-roma-houses-follows-shop-brawl-1/>

This followed earlier attacks on Roma in a village just outside Plovdiv after an assault on a soldier allegedly by two Roma men. This led to a campaign by Bulgarian nationalists and ultra-right forces to demand (again) the removal of Roma from local temporary housing. However, Roma responded by demonstrating in Sofia outside the Cabinet office demanding the removal of the deputy prime minister Karakachanov who had led the agitation against the

Roma. Support for the Roma, and against the nationalists, was especially notable from Jewish organisations in Bulgaria.

<https://sofiaglobe.com/2019/01/14/bulgarias-voyvodinovo-saga-karakachanov-impudent-gypsies-and-the-voices-of-concern/>

Venice biennale: FUTU ROMA

See it here

<https://eriac.org/futuroma/>

Venice biennale

“I am writing in my capacity as the director of ERIAC to make sure your ambitious and famous organization, with its Roma leaders join our force at the event which will change the (art) world`s future:

The FUTUROMA EXHIBITION at the 58th Venice Contemporary Art Biennale

“Since 1895, we Roma only managed to bring together the necessary resources for this initiative three times. We need to address together the importance and necessity of the recognition of Roma arts and culture, and the significance of the inclusion of our transnational community to the Biennale as equal with national representations.

“If we do not convince the Biennale and the international art scene now, we might never have a Roma exhibition within the frame of the most prestigious art event of the world again!

“The exhibition in Venice carries a huge financial burden due to both the high rental costs in Venice during the Biennale and the 24.000€ extra fee, which non-nation-state Pavilions are mandated to pay. Therefore, this might be the last time we can secure the Roma exhibition in Venice. It might be the last chance to show the immense strength of our community in the framework of the Biennale. We feel that this historic moment cannot be marked without the support of the Roma community. Please send to us a testimony on the importance of the permanent presence of Roma Pavilion in the Venice Biennale (maximum one page).

Join us on May 10, 2019

“In 2019 the exhibition FUTUROMA, curated by Daniel Baker and commissioned by ERIAC will be running for 6 months displaying 14

revolutionary Roma artists from eight countries at the most prestigious art event of the world.

“The opening of the exhibition will take place on May 10, 2019 at Palazzo Cavalli -Franchetti (S. Marco, 2847, 30124 Venezia VE) from where we will take a 10-minute March to the Future under our Roma flag with the exhibiting artists, our friends and allies to the exhibition space. The address of the exhibition is Fondamenta Zattere Allo Spirito Santo, 417, 30123 Venezia VE, Italy.

“This significant accomplishment testifies to the tremendous work of many ERIAC Friends and Allies. We want your organization to join, because we have struggled together for centuries: the non-Roma majority has been in control of the narratives and images associated with us Roma – through literature, visual arts, scholarship as well as public policies and the media, and we together are educating the world about the necessary change in narrative, policy and action: We Roma have been challenging these stereotypes and misconceptions by creating counter-narratives rooted in authentic and empowering discourses, created and communicated by Roma community members themselves.

“We now need to come together in support of our artists, and to claim space and recognition for Roma talents in majority owned art institutions around the globe. As far-right politicians and racist forces are gaining power around Europe, it is essential to celebrate the exhibition opening of FUTUROMA together. Just a few weeks before the European Parliamentary election, we Roma can show the richness and beauty of Roma arts in front of the world. The European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture (ERAC) exists to challenge and change this very status-quo, and we are counting on you joining forces with us!

“The FUTUROMA exhibition offers new and spontaneous re-interpretations of Roma past, present and futures via a fusion of the traditional and the futuristic in order to critique the current situation for Roma people and to re-examine historical events.” (Daniel Baker, curator)

“We know your immense capacity to mobilise your community. Please do your best as always, to contact Ministries of Cultures, your national governments and cultural foundations to request the support of the travel and accommodation of your groups.

Housing Rights for migrants

See here for the latest newsletter from the Chartered Institute of Housing migrants housing rights, and the link to their excellent website. They regularly have information about the impact of Brexit on housing rights of migrants, and EU nationals; worth a look!

https://i.emlfiles4.com/cmpdoc/9/6/0/5/4/files/548963_0262-hrn-issue-5-v1.pdf?utm_source=Chartered%20Institute%20of%20Housing&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=10501850_Housing%20rights%20newsletter%20April%202019&dm_i=YRX,693A2,50VND1,ONGZB,1

And their website is very useful.

https://www.housing-rights.info/02_0_New_arrivals.php

And finally.....

Cate Le Bon highlights Slovak Roma Communities in the video for new song "Home to You"

Welsh singer/songwriter/guitarist [Cate Le Bon](#) is releasing a new album, *Reward*. Now she has shared another new song from the album, "Home to You," via a video for the track. Le Bon doesn't feature in the video directed by Phil Collins (no, not that Phil Collins). It was filmed in the Lunik IX neighbourhood of Košice (Eastern Slovakia), which houses a Roma community that, as a press release states, "due to successive governmental and municipal policies, often live in slums and on isolated, dilapidated estates."

Watch it here (7 minutes long).

https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=4&v=n2Xsu1q3cAw

Collins had this to say about the song in the press release:

"In an age of discord, in which the politics of division and xenophobia - from Brexit to Trump - tears communities apart across nations and continents, it is crucial to stand in solidarity everywhere with those subjected to routine discrimination and denied a sense of belonging. With its invocation of yearning, absence and loss, Cate's hypnotic canon expresses this conviction with the lithe, acute awareness found in the best of critical pop, and speaks to its moment just like 'Ghost Town' or 'Private Armies' spoke to theirs.

The press release goes into further detail:

"Historically, and again in recent years, Roma communities across Europe have been targets of persecution and systemic neglect, from housing and access to basic services, such as electricity and water, to employment and health. These attitudes are reflected in the hostility and casual racism of the general population. Working closely with a number of local protagonists, Collins finds moments of dignity and joy amidst everyday hardships.

(Thanks to Colin Clark)

Views expressed in this newsletter do not necessarily suggest that they are in accordance with the trustees of the Roma Support Group.

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