

ROMA COMMUNITIES AND BREXIT

Integrating and empowering Roma in the UK

Marley Morris | October 2016

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60-SECOND SUMMARY

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union and EU enlargement, the UK has experienced a rise in the migration of Roma from central and eastern Europe. In the wake of the Brexit vote, Roma migrants face a triple whammy of challenges. Legally, there is uncertainty over the future terms of their residency in the UK (although for now their rights to free movement continue). Socially, as a group that has experienced sustained prejudice in Europe, the surge in reported hate crime is likely to exacerbate feelings of insecurity. And financially, EU funding to support Roma integration is likely to cease.

In this new context, local authorities with large Roma communities have a clear incentive to bolster their support for integrating Roma. Taking action only at crisis point places unnecessary pressures on public services and proves costlier in the long run than investing in early-stage interventions. While local authorities should be proactive in their approach to integrating Roma, their interventions should avoid targeting Roma exclusively: instead, they should embed specialist provision within mainstream services.

Finally, the EU has been a key source of funding for Roma integration. Without compensation from government, services are likely to struggle. We therefore call on local authorities with significant Roma populations to develop a common platform to ensure that funding shortfalls caused by Brexit are covered by central government.

KEY FINDINGS

- Since the fall of the Berlin Wall – and particularly following the accession of several central and eastern European nations to the EU in 2004 and 2007 – the number of Roma migrants in the UK has grown. Estimates of their precise number vary considerably, ranging between 80,000 and 300,000. Whatever the true figure, it is clear that some local areas have seen a rise in Roma migrants in recent decades – including Govanhill in Glasgow, Page Hall in Sheffield and Normanton in Derby.
- In the wake of Britain's vote to leave the EU, Roma migrants from central and eastern Europe, alongside all other non-British EU citizens, face uncertainty about their future in the UK. In the short term, reports of a sharp increase in the number of hate crimes towards ethnic minority groups are a cause for concern and require immediate attention. In the long term, EU migrants' legal rights of residence and access to healthcare and other public services are no longer set in stone.
- These uncertainties are particularly worrying for Britain's Roma community as many Roma migrants face multiple dimensions of disadvantage. Evidence from Glasgow suggests that Roma often work in unregulated sectors of the economy, taking temporary jobs through non-statutory employment agencies, with very low wages, illegal deductions and poor working conditions. Gypsy/Roma children (as categorised by the Department for Education) tend to have high school exclusion rates and low levels of educational attainment. Research suggests that Roma tend to experience poor housing conditions and overcrowding. Finally, our research has found that Roma face particular barriers to accessing healthcare, often due to language difficulties and their unfamiliarity with NHS systems.
- In general, there is little evidence of widespread conflict between Roma and non-Roma groups in the UK. However, in some communities, low-level tensions have emerged between Roma and other residents, developing on the one hand from concerns about alleged anti-social behaviour among the Roma community, and on the other from fears of anti-Roma xenophobia and stigmatisation.
- Local authorities face a major funding shortfall in supporting Roma communities, which exacerbates these issues. Given the likely loss of European structural funds, there is considerable uncertainty over the future funding base for Roma integration, support and advocacy work.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LOCAL AUTHORITIES WITH LARGE ROMA POPULATIONS

- **Local authorities without strategies for supporting migrant integration should urgently develop such strategies in the aftermath of the Brexit vote.** The strategy should analyse how Brexit could affect the rights of vulnerable residents and impact community relations, and should set out priorities for supporting cohesion in the lead-up to, and aftermath of, leaving the EU. Local authorities with large Roma communities should ensure a specific focus on Roma within their strategies.
- **As a key part of this strategy, local authorities should encourage the development of Roma-led community groups to directly provide services and support.** This is essential for strengthening the community's social and political capital, creating a trusted and representative Roma voice, and providing a dependable and permanent resource for Roma in the local area.
- **Local authorities should take a more active role in planning services for Roma migrants** – for instance, by collecting better data on the Roma community in their area (such as data on Roma pupils in local schools), sharing information on their Roma populations between services and with neighbouring local authorities where appropriate, assigning clear responsibilities for Roma integration to relevant officials, and making sure that they are aware of different funding sources to support work with Roma communities.
- **Local authorities should also ensure that service provision is adapted for their Roma population.** This can involve service providers doing the following.
 - **Providing support for non-English-speaking Roma** – for instance, by hiring interpreters and providing translation services and bespoke English language education.
 - **Targeting those Roma communities who might be unaware of services or reluctant to engage** – for instance, by promoting services to local residents in areas with large Roma populations, by hiring experienced Roma individuals who can work with Roma communities or act as community mediators, or by working with local schools attended by Roma pupils to engage with families.
- **Only running exclusive projects or services for Roma when strictly necessarily** – for instance, by focusing on Roma indirectly by targeting services at particular areas or at hard-to-reach groups. Where exclusive interventions are necessary, they should be designed on the basis that they will be integrated into mainstream provision to help encourage interaction between Roma and non-Roma communities in the long term.
- **Equipping the frontline staff of mainstream services with the necessary cultural understanding and specialist skills to support Roma clients** – for instance, by hiring part-time bilingual Roma community engagement officers or mentors, or by organising exchanges between the local authority and the Roma population's region(s) of origin.
- **Local authorities should take action to improve community relations when tensions arise** – for instance, by supporting the third sector to reconcile different communities, by facilitating public meetings to discuss difficult issues, by publishing open letters to communities to delimit expected norms of behaviour, and by holding community events and festivals to encourage Roma and non-Roma to interact.
- **Local authorities should urge government to replace EU funding for Roma integration work.** The government has begun to make a number of commitments to make up for the significant funding shortfalls expected as a result of Brexit. Given the scale of EU funding available for supporting Roma integration in the UK – a total of £1.1 billion in European structural funds for the 2014–2020 period were available to be used for Roma-focused integration initiatives – local authorities with significant Roma populations should rally together to make the case to national government for national funds to replace this funding.

For the full report, including all references, data sources and notes on methodology, see:
<http://www.ippr.org/publications/roma-communities-and-brexit>

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