LIVERPOOL JOHN MOORES UNIVERSITY

REPORT ON THE REESTABLISHMENT OF THE NATIONAL ROMA NETWORK (NRN) 2022

PRODUCED BY FOUNDING MEMBERS OF THE NRN & LIVERPOOL JOHN MOORE'S UNIVERSITY

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The aim of this report and its findings through the Renewed National Roma Network (NRN) survey explored whether there is a need and/or energy to re-establish the NRN and, if so, what the renewed NRN aims/objectives be. This report uses the term Roma to describe migrant and settled Roma communities throughout the United Kingdom (UK). Roma is a specific ethnic minority group and is used in line with the terminology of the Equalities Act (2010). The findings are that there is a need for a Roma support network for knowledge sharing, learning from other Roma and influencing government policy and practice. Our recommendation is to form a support group for Roma through a bid.

1.0 ROMA IN THE UK

THE UMBRELLA TERM ROMA IS AN ENDONYM ADOPTED BY THE FIRST WORLD ROMANI CONGRESS IN LONDON IN 1971. LINGUISTIC AND GENETIC ANALYSIS SUGGESTS THAT THE ROMA ARE ORIGINALLY A HINDAVI PEOPLE FROM NORTHERN INDIA (HANCOCK, 2002).
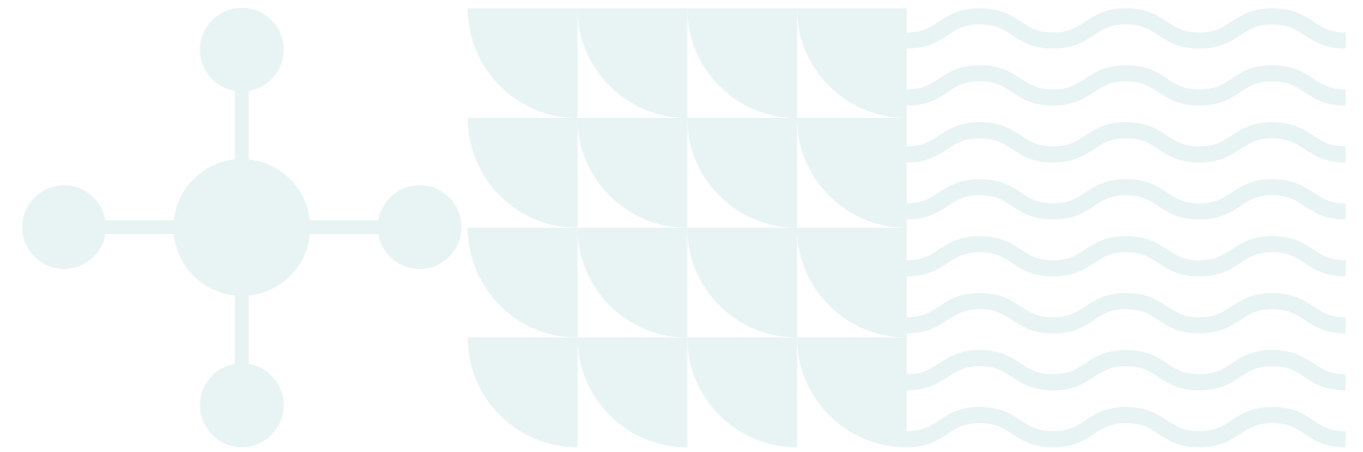
Roma is the largest ethnic minority group in Europe, and following EU accession of several Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries in 2004 and 2007, the number of Roma in the UK has grown (Popoviciu et al., 2019). In 2016 The Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) highlighted what it called "a triple whammy of risks facing Roma: uncertainty over their legal status, rising concerns about hate crime, and a potential loss of EU funding for integration and support services" (p. 4). There is substantial evidence of marginalisation of Roma in the UK (House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee, 2019): poverty is a central, recurring aspect of Roma exclusion, exacerbated by lack of fluency in English, poor education, restricted access to public services and wider opportunities. Further, there is limited integration in local communities, manifest in Liverpool where most Roma live in the poorest parts of the city.

1.1 ABOUT THE NATIONAL ROMA NETWORK

The National Roma Network (NRN) was established in 2015 to improve migrant Roma integration across the UK for the benefit of all communities. The NRN was a partnership of voluntary and community organisations, Roma community groups, individual representatives from local and central government, statutory organisations, universities, and researchers. The aims of the NRN were as follows:

- To enable and support a national strategic approach to migrant Roma integration in the UK;

- To ensure a more joined-up approach to migrant Roma integration across sectors including Central Government, Local Government, other statutory organisations, the voluntary sector, Roma groups and individuals;

- To increase Roma participation and involvement in policy across the UK;

- To ensure a strong united voice in influencing policy and practice affecting migrant Roma at national and local level;

- To enable exchange of information and share good practice.

The NRN focus was on migrant Roma, rather than the wider EU definition of Roma, and all events organised by the NRN were migrant Roma focused. However, as there was and still is recognition that some issues faced by migrant Roma in the UK are similar to those experienced by Gypsy and Traveller groups, the aim of the NRN was to also work collaboratively with others to achieve best outcomes for migrant Roma. The NRN was committed to working in partnership with other GRT groups whenever beneficial for both groups. The NRN disbanded back in 2017 due to a lack of funding.

1.2 ABOUT LIVERPOOL JOHN MOORE'S UNIVERSITY

Liverpool John Moore's University (LJMU) is a public research university in the city of Liverpool with a heritage that stretches back to 1823. LJMU is now one of the largest and most well-established universities in the UK. Within five faculties, LJMU research is influencing policymakers, improving people's lives, and finding solutions to the problems of the 21st century.

In 2016, in partnership with Granby Toxteth Development Trust (GTDT), two researchers from LJMU formed the Liverpool Roma Employability Network (LREN) to support Roma employability and in 2017, with UK Government funding, we developed Roma Education Aspiration Project (REAP) to support Roma education. In 2021 we developed an interdisciplinary team including professional and academic LJMU staff to increase access to Higher Education (HE) (only 1% of Roma nationally attend HE) and to achieve the GTRSB pledge. The internal inter-disciplinary group connects stakeholders in HE, Further Education (FE), High Schools and the local community to raise aspirations and enrolments at FE/HE from marginalised groups.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

Founding members of the National Roma Network and Roma community members collaborated with Liverpool John Moore's University, to co-design and develop through open consultation a 'Renewed National Roma Network Survey'. The consultations took place over several weeks through online meetings and sample questioning.

The aim of the survey was to; first, find out if there is a need and energy to re-establish a national network; second, if there is a place for the network, what should its main mission/focus be?

The survey was directed at organizations and individuals in the UK that work with or have previously worked with migrant or settled Roma people/communities.

The survey used a mixed-method approach to capture both quantitative and qualitative data. We used mixed methods to provide the strongest evidence and improve the limitations of one individual method allowing us to capture the voice of individuals/ organizations alongside numeric statistics.

The construction of an extensive database that was built around both local and national Roma professionals/organizations allowed for clear direction when distributing the survey.

The survey was launched online through direct email and social media on the 28th June 2022 and closed on the 1st August 2022, and completed by 47 individuals.

Survey questions were established to determine the awareness of the former National Roma Network, what has been missed since the NRN disbanded and how best would it support the Roma community if it was to return. These include:

• What have you missed since the NRN disbanded in 2017 OR if the NRN was re-introduced what should the focus be?

• Is there sufficient capacity in your role/organisation to effectively support the Roma Community?

• How much is in place to support you in your role/organisation with the Roma Community?

• What difficulties do Roma experience in accessing support?

For the first time ever the 2021 Census has included the category Roma, thus making data collection and in turn, response more accurate

3.0 OVERALL RECOMMENDATION

To reform, create and implement the National Roma Network (NRN) with specific emphasis on Knowledge Sharing and Networking.

4.0 KEY POINTS

To create an NRN strategy, structure and implementation plan encompassing our six themes: digital literacy; language and cultural barriers; trust/discrimination; poverty and structural support.

4.1 DIGITAL LITERACY

Digital literacy is the capability to comprehend and understand the use of technological devices/ technology systems. The capabilities of digital literacy mean the necessary knowledge to navigate online interfaces in a helpful and safe manner.

Roma communities have low digital literacy levels and are more likely to face significant barriers to employment, this can affect the overall welfare and increase levels of poverty among its people. Low-level digital literacy can also result in fewer opportunities to actively seek desired employment, resulting in Roma being forced to take lower income or less stable employment. The effects of low digital literacy can also extend to reduced self-esteem/ poor mental health in the community.

We believe more can be done to help Roma communities to increase digital literacy skills, and or to make systems Roma-friendly. This includes such services as NHS online and the DWP.

4.2 LANGUAGE & CULTURAL BARRIERS

A significant consideration when supporting Roma communities on a local and national level is the knowledge surrounding the many variations of Roma culture, cultural norms and sub-groups that exist within the UK. Moreover, although Romani is the most common language spoken, there can be many variations of the Romani language, often used in unison with other languages spoken. This is due to Roma arriving in the UK from different countries across Central and Eastern Europe. Therefore, there should not be a singular approach but an open approach to engaging the communities.

Within our survey, most people mentioned language and cultural barriers with a substantial lack of translators/ training in place for organisations to support the community. This finding exposes the detrimental risk for the community in getting basic access needs, including education, health care and the know-how to successfully navigate bureaucracy.

4.3 TRUST/DISCRIMINATION

The Roma community have been subject to oppression, discrimination, and prejudice for many generations. This includes distinct social exclusion, hate speech, and hate crimes committed against its people; such atrocities often undertaken by the institutions / governments that were placed in power to protect. Unsurprisingly, and in part due to this it is often stated Roma's distrust of organisations/ institutions as a major barrier to engaging with the community.

All services aiming to engage Roma people must prioritise building trusted relationships as a necessary prerequisite. To build trust with Roma, it is important for the community to be able to lead its right to access services, and the voice and culture of the community must be championed and celebrated, with the right to self-identity without stigma or fear. A respondent reports on this issue in the survey saying "In some spaces, it may feel that Roma individuals cannot identify as they do not feel safe to do so which creates a barrier to support"

4.4 POVERTY

Many Roma in the UK live in areas of extreme deprivation and are thus less able to build individual and community resilience that weathers economic and social disadvantage. Overrepresented in precarious and insecure work, many Roma find it difficult to build economic capital to reach and achieve their aspiration. Stuck in a cycle of poverty, living beyond catering for basic needs is very difficult. Interventions to support individuals and communities to be lifted out of poverty is a fundamental need for too many members of the Roma community. This was indicated by the survey which outlined the biggest risk of not engaging with Roma community in the future is funding, with over 70% suggesting a need for more funding.
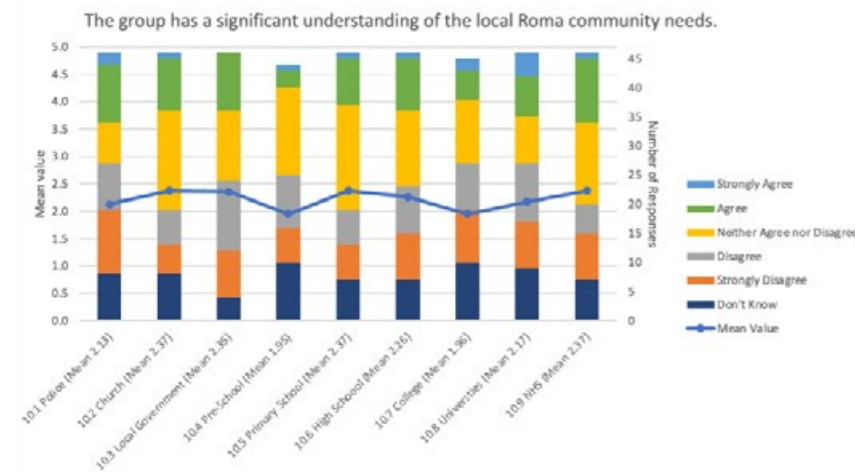
4.5 STRUCTURAL (E.G., POLICE) SUPPORT AND PARTNERSHIPS

"It is difficult to get services to understand the cultural and lived experiences of Roma."

A mean value of less than 2.6 (see fig 1) for all organisations demonstrates that there is a lack of understanding by all the groups (Police, Church, Local Government and Educational Institutes) of local Roma community needs. In fig 1 the number of respondents is on the right axis and the mean value is on the left. The line on the graph displays the fluctuation of the mean value, with each data label (strongly agree, agree etc) being given a numeric value of 1, except the data label 'Don't know' which was given the numeric value of 0 or no score to generate accurate data.

FIGURE 1: SIGNIFICANT UNDERSTANDING OF LOCAL ROMA COMMUNITY NEEDS

The result for how much support is in place (see figure 2) for those working with the Roma elicited a slightly higher mean, although still under 3.

FIGURE 2: SUPPORT FOR THOSE INDIVIDUALS/ORGANISATIONS HELPING THE ROMA COMMUNITY

5.0 NRN DESIGN

6.0 IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

STEP (WHAT)	ACTIONS (WHAT AND HOW)
NRN Strategy	NRN Committee – Create Roma-led Committee including wide ranging supporters e.g., government, public, FE and HE
NRN organisation	Community-led committee Research Special Interest Groups (SIG) Policy, campaigns and lobbying Communications - website, social media and news bulletins Organisation and relationships
NRN Roles	**Community-led committee** – Leadership and drive from community. Role is to maintain key relationships within and outside community Research Conduct and share research. **Special Interest Groups (SIG)** Establish, appoint and coordinate the groups. **Policy, campaigns and lobbying** Influence government decisions by petitioning government and lobbying firms. **Communications** – website, social media and news bulletins Create engaging text and image, manage website and social media platforms. Create resources. **Organisation and relationships** Build, maintain and connect individual Roma and organisational representatives. Create and build community champion program, working with Roma community members across the UK
SIG 1 Digital Literacy Criteria Flexible e.g., evenings and weekends Different languages Access to equipment	• Digital Literacy • Courses (online/face-to-face) • Digital buddies • Equipment – laptop 'borrow my laptop' • Language apps multilingual
SIG 2 Language and Cultural barriers Criteria Flexible e.g., evenings and weekends Partnership working	• ESOL provision • Local organisations develop partnerships and sharing platforms to meet SDG 17 • ESOL provision integrated with education • ESOL buddies drawn from local partners • Employer-supported ESOL provision • Roma cultural events celebrated in city diversity calendars

STEP (WHAT)	ACTIONS (WHAT AND HOW)
SIG 3 Trust/ discrimination Criteria Partnership working Community Champions	• Build networks of Roma community champions and role models • Actively promote EDI to Roma and about Roma to non-Roma communities • Facilitate nationwide discussions/ awareness on the inequalities Roma communities face • training for local Government representatives
SIG 4 Poverty Criteria Lobbying	• Improve skill eco systems in local communities to enhance job prospects for Roma • Ensure that benefit information is provided in Romani and /or enable translators to support applicants • Facilitate nationwide discussions/ awareness on the inequalities Roma communities face and influence equitable policy change. • Create a database to be shared with Roma organisations to help with funding avenues and lobby the government to make more funds available.
SIG 5 Structural and Partnership support Criteria	• Roma representation in 'structural' positions such as the Police, Probation Service, Housing Associations • Training and development for key personnel in structural support positions about Roma • Work with FE/HE to encourage Roma onto 'structural' positions • Develop and deliver training for local Government representatives
Other	• Produce and provide list of translation services • One-day annual face to face conference for knowledge sharing and networking • Build an active network of Roma organisations, local councils and universities who all aim to support Roma communities to allow for knowledge sharing and best practise. • Build a Plug-in on a reformed NRN website that allows organisations to upload policies, papers, and funding opportunities (Example, SCUDD) • Universal credit needs to become more accessible for Roma. • Develop a community champion program, working with Roma community members across the UK to remove barriers when accessing the community and the community getting access. • Create resources that can be shared UK wide e.g., employment right leaflets in different languages • Create and offer translation services that could be used to create private income too.

6.0 APPENDIX

APPENDIX 1: DEMOGRAPHICS

Through the NRN Survey we were able to contact and start a conversation with 20 regions in the UK (see below). Thus, a wide range of Roma support organisations/ individuals that are actively working alongside Roma community members.

Additionally, we contacted and had significant feedback from larger organisations that operated nationally to support Roma. These included the Roma Support Group, Traveller Movement and ACERT. Moreover, we had responses from individuals working for local councils including Bradford City council and Sheffield City council, in addition to responses from representatives of Leeds Becket University, Anglia Ruskin University and the University of Huddersfield.

Through this active networking, we were able to collect data with a range of responses from throughout the UK. However, there are still gaps in knowledge and connections we were unable to make during the allocated time frame of the survey. Through the connections we made and data we received it become evident that connecting local and national organisations, universities and councils has the power to generate knowledge that ultimately advance practice and enable shared information.

APPENDIX 2: KEY FINDINGS

- 72% state they miss the collective knowledge sharing provided by NRN. Since the NRN Disbanded in 2017 most people miss the collective knowledge sharing and networking. Furthermore, respondents miss the opportunity to learn from other Roma communities in the UK.

- 59% miss the NRN best practice models and 51% miss the collective Lobbying of the Government.

- Most respondents believe there is a clear barrier for the Roma community when getting access to support/ basic access needs.

- Most respondents believe language is the largest barrier with very few translators in schools/health care.

- Further barriers include literacy, digital exclusion, poverty, discrimination/trust.

- 70% of people believe funding is the biggest barrier to supporting the Roma community in the future.

- 48% of respondents said there is a barrier to engaging with the Roma community

- 61% of respondents believe it is difficult for Roma to access Universal Credit.

- Most people believe the local government does not have significant understanding of the local Roma community community's

- 26% of respondents believe there is not enough in place within their organisation to support the Roma community.