

Addressing poverty among Roma must take a cross-sector and long-term approach.

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Roma are the largest ethnic minority in Europe and multiple studies have shown that Roma have experienced a history of marginalisation, exclusion and persecution across Europe, leading to lower life expectancy as well as lower levels of education and higher incidence of unemployment, poverty, and poorer health than non-Roma populations.

I conducted in-depth long-term research among migrant Roma in the UK in 2013 and 2014, when I spent 12 months with migrant Roma, observing their daily lives and taking part in their day-to-day activities. I observed interactions between Roma and a range of frontline services, including healthcare, job centre staff or home visiting services (Dolezalova: 2018). Research was continued by follow up visits and during the pandemic by ongoing regular online contact with research participants.

Due to a lack of data, we do not know the exact number of Roma in the UK, a study from 2013 estimated around 200,000 migrant Roma (Brown et.al: 2013), however the actual number is likely to be higher. As a result of the long history of marginalisation and persecution, Roma face significant obstacles to upward social mobility.

Key findings:

- Language is a key barrier to accessing services and to upward social mobility. Providing interpreters for appointments works for some issues, but many Roma have complex needs, and do not understand complicated forms, or the roles of different service providers. Targeted and individualised support is needed to address this.
- Frontline workers do not have the time to explain complex issues or complicated forms. There is a lack of information sharing between professionals which can result in duplication of work that has already been done.

- Roma parents want their children to go to school, but communication barriers can have a negative effect on the relationship between parents and schools. Children's reports of discrimination or bullying are not always taken seriously. This consequently can have a negative impact on attendance and education.
- Due to limited English, Roma parents may not be able to help children with homework, and children may rely on phones for internet access, instead of a computer.
- Roma women tend to be the main childcare providers, and consequently not be in paid employment for several years. A proof of continuous employment is necessary to apply for the settled status under the EU Settlement Scheme.
- Roma often feel negatively stereotyped by professionals and do not feel included in decision-making. This has negative impact on the perception of and engagement with services.
- Many Roma families live in inadequate housing and have predatory landlords. The reasons for this may be limited English, lack of awareness of one's rights and where to get help, and financial insecurity.

Impact of Covid-19 and of the UK's departure from the EU on Roma

The Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing health, educational and economic inequalities, with Roma working in sectors such as cleaning, food packing or building work, where furlough schemes often were not available. Parental lack of English can have a negative effect on home schooling and lead to a long-term impact on children's education. In addition, some Roma support organisations report that many Roma have still not applied, or have not received, their settled or pre-settled status under the EU Settlement Scheme. If they do not have this status by the 30th June 2021, they will not be able to work or claim benefits. This could further increase inequality and lead to poverty.

Recommendations:

A long-term approach is necessary in order to address the longstanding discrimination and

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marginalisation that Roma experience and to increase the standard of living and better health among Roma. Below is a summary of key recommendations:

- Holistic and long-term approach. To address poverty, lower educational levels and other issues that Roma experience and that are discussed in this brief, it is necessary to take a long-term approach. Helping adult Roma to employment and into better housing, will have positive impact on Roma children.
- Awareness training for relevant staff to increase awareness that discrimination and racialisation can take subtle forms.
- Correct language provision and the use of clear jargon free language on forms and from service providers.
- Support for relevant services to ensure that they can provide support to resolve complex issues and address complex needs.

Bibliography

Dolezalova, M. (2018). Escaping Exceptionality, Remaining Roma: Czech and Slovak Roma in Leeds. PhD Thesis, University of Manchester.

Brown, P. et al. (2013). Migrant Roma in the UK: Population size and experiences of local authorities and partners. Final report.