



## Parallel Lives Roma Project

### Scoping Phase – Overview of outcomes of scoping interviews across Cambridgeshire, Central Bedfordshire, Essex, Ipswich, Luton, Norfolk, Peterborough and Southend.

Interviews took place October 2017-March 2018 inclusive with a range of frontline staff and Roma people.

#### 1. Knowledge/Understanding

- There are examples of very good practice regarding Roma integration across the East of England, but there is also limited knowledge and understanding amongst professionals
- There is little sharing of knowledge and best practice across the region – hence the regional learning and networking event run by the Parallel Lives Project Team in March 2018
- Frontline staff often confuse Roma communities with gypsies and travellers
- There are concerns about Roma communities, trafficking and modern day slavery – more training opportunities would be beneficial
- Different parts of the region are supporting Roma in different ways according to their resources. No systematic support
- Those Roma communities engaging with professionals are not necessarily those with greatest needs

#### 2. Roma Community Life

- Children are seen as a blessing, women are reluctant to allow their children to attend school from five years of age, and they rarely attend nurseries
- However, the Roma Health Clinic in Ipswich has noted that women are becoming more confident. There are more discussions regarding contraception, and women are saying that they no longer want families of ten children for example
- Boys will often leave school early to support their fathers with the ‘family business’
- Education and literacy has generally not been considered important, but is improving with trust and regular attendance at school. Parents may have limited literacy themselves, and a possible distrust of the education system
- Marriage at an early age is important<sup>1</sup>, with some girls being taken back to Eastern European countries to marry from fourteen. Schools are working hard to emphasise that marriage should not take place before sixteen.

<sup>1</sup> One Roma project contact in the region has said on more than one occasion that understanding the context for Roma early marriage is important. In his view there is an element of it which is about avoiding discrimination arising from rape of Roma women by European males. There is, however a tradition in some Eastern European countries, of holding bridal fairs – eg amongst the Kalaidzhi Roma in Bulgaria whose

### **3. Community Tensions**

- The social, economic and political situation in the country can create community tensions and race hate
- Community tensions & scapegoating large Roma families/neighbour harassment
- This, and historic persecution can make people reluctant to disclose their Roma ethnicity. Some are more reluctant than others<sup>2</sup>
- Reluctance to engage with ‘authorities’ – especially uniformed officers
- Some non-Roma Eastern Europeans can be particularly negative towards the Roma community, particularly if they perceive them to be causing problems which might reflect negatively on them. Examples include incidences of Roma people emptying oil into the street drainage system, failing to insure vehicles, unsafe driving
- Lack of knowledge about, and understanding of Roma people can make host communities feel intimidated and escalate tensions. For example the collection of large groups of men in public places creating noise, crowding, and littering
- Ongoing issues to do with Houses in Multiple Occupation, school attendance and accessing healthcare - although these are improving

### **4. Inadequate data collection systems**

- Data not gathered systematically, so accurate numbers of Roma people in region not known. Schools and other organisations suggest that numbers are significantly higher than estimated
- Most schools use SIMS (School Information Management System) as their pupil database. Its efficacy in terms of helping schools fully recognise Roma ethnicity is questionable, as it relies on the information extracted on admissions day from parents who don’t speak English. It records first language, home language and ethnic data. But one Academy discussed finding it difficult to distinguish Roma and Romanian pupil data from these fields. There are other systems, such as GO 4 School.<sup>3</sup>
- We only have organisations’ views as to countries of origin – i.e. Southend Roma people are largely from Czech Republic and Poland followed by Slovakia. Peterborough is Czech Republic, Slovakia (Sinti Roma from CR & Slovakia), Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria. Luton is Romania – particularly from Arad (wealthier area with traditional dress) and Bacau (poorer families) as there are direct flights to Luton airport
- Professionals often guess that individuals are Roma, using surnames as guidance

### **5. Social Exclusion, Insularity & Transience**

- Often due to the media, Roma people maybe thought to be here seeking jobs, benefits, education, and health care
- Don’t appear to be “outgoing” and don’t volunteer. But are gregarious in their own communities and some good examples of community festivals where Roma people have enjoyed sharing their music, dance and costume (e.g. Peterborough, Southend)
- Lots we don’t know from ‘the outside’ – e.g. is there scope for using social media to engage with Roma people?

---

traditional living as coppersmiths is dying out and it is felt that the marriage fair works as a way of keeping communities and extended families intact for generations.

<sup>2</sup> Staff at a Peterborough Academy : “Romanians tend not to identify as Roma, but Czechs and Slovaks do”

<sup>3</sup> A Roma Education Champion in the region talked about one family who one day enrolled two of their children as Romanian Roma and on another day enrolled another of their children as just Romanian. He put this down to different admissions officers being on duty on the different days, also to the degree of confidence of the parents in being dealt with by different officers – ie sometimes disclosing their Roma ethnicity, sometimes not

- Importance of building trust to encourage Roma people to integrate, take up services and opportunities<sup>4</sup>. There is a genuine desire amongst frontline service providers to engage with Roma communities, and it is important to learn from good practice here – for example, working groups which have Roma representatives are showing signs of real progress. The IRIS<sup>5</sup> Group in Ipswich is working in a productive, sustainable manner
- Transience<sup>6</sup> – “Roma come and go. They have a transnational life”, although at the same time there is a fear of Brexit, many having come here as Asylum seekers. Some are worried about going back to Czech Republic, homelessness, discrimination etc. Others are less concerned, as they are not ‘on the radar’ in the first place
- “They feel at home here – they don’t stand out compared with where they’re from, where they look different and face discrimination”
- Arrival in the UK can be a culture shock to less well-travelled Roma who may not have experienced other cultures – “I had my induction to the Asian culture here”
- Roma are a particularly independent people – they have developed survival techniques. Encouragement to integrate is a new experience
- It is important to recognise that Roma communities need to be ‘engaged with’ over time – a trust and learning process for all involved. For example in Ipswich schools have tried running literacy classes for women over a number of weeks. At first these were successful, but women soon stopped attending. One school spoke to the women about this, and were told that they wanted shorter sessions where they could learn key phrases for daily living. Using this insight, more schools are starting to run ‘crash’ courses.

#### **6. The importance of family and kinship**

- Larger than average nuclear families
- Family life is very important and childless women find it difficult to identify their place in society
- Women can be ostracised if they marry outside the community, but not to the point of HBV
- Women run the home but men will speak for the family at meetings and public events
- Women are gradually becoming more emancipated
- Before burial, the dead are visited at home. There is a period of solemnity during which distractions, such as TV are not permitted and an extended period of grieving is observed. Other family milestone events such as weddings would be postponed at this time

#### **7. Education**

- Fragmented education – some have never been to mainstream schools on their journeys across Europe before arriving in UK
- Transience<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> ‘Stay and Play’ sessions, Beech Hill. Luton Roma Trust workers take families along – Romanian and Roma mothers have started mixing.

<sup>5</sup> Ipswich Roma Interagency Support Group (IRIS)

<sup>6</sup> Roma Teaching Assistant: “It’s difficult. They often go back home, but then in a couple of months they’re back here again. The main reasons they go back are to see a dentist or doctor, or go to weddings, funerals and other family events like celebrating Christmas on 24<sup>th</sup> December. One family’s going back to Slovakia to renew their passport. I’ve told them they can do it at the Embassy in London but I think they are really going to get their daughter married within the family group. The Sinti Roma have pre-arranged family meetings with cousins to keep the money within the family.”

<sup>7</sup> Academy EAL Lead, “They can arrive at the beginning of year 8 (age 12-13) for example, stay a term, move without being in education for a year, then come back again. So they’ve missed a whole Key Stage 4 year”. A teacher in Southend talked about a child being move to Romania for six months, returning to the UK and then

- Children can be fluent in several European languages when joining schools here<sup>8</sup> apart from English
- Link between levels of English and behaviour in schools<sup>9</sup>
- Many are not benefitting fully from educational opportunities. Some parents fear letting their children go, and may see the education system as a threat to Roma culture. Some of their fears are more practical/day-to-day – eg travelling to/from school. Some Roma young people are also kept from school to act as carers, particularly for younger siblings.
- However, Roma children and young people want to learn, and often attend schools with a good reputation for support and encouragement
- School staff misunderstanding Roma culture – e.g. Roma hairstyle (new pupil), ‘challenging behaviour’ e.g. loud, jewellery, makeup
- However, engaging EAL teachers are creating a new and positive learning environment for Roma pupils
- Importance of working with the community – e.g. outreach visits to homes by trusted school staff

#### **8. Language Barriers & Need for Information**

- “How to” sessions needed to inform and empower Roma people – e.g. “How to register for a council house”. Put the spotlight on key issues
- Some support services. e.g. Southend BC Roma clients bring issues re debt, parking fines, welfare benefits and penalties due to misunderstanding systems, pensions
- Typical story of a four-and-a half year old child trying to learn English in reception class, but mother only speaks Roma and Polish
- One Academy had experienced Roma pupils speaking Romani to each other “as a secret language”
- Evidence of young people accompanying parents to appointments to interpret, and common for parents to struggle with English, and bring in letters to schools (for example) to be translated
- Parents value support where there are Roma TA’s in schools<sup>10</sup>

#### **9. Health**

- Health issues often relate to a lack of good healthcare access in previous countries and a dependency on antibiotics as a cure for everything.
- Roma generally have a younger than average demographic.<sup>11</sup>
- Mental Health – concerns re Brexit, suicide risk, family/friends unsure where or how to seek help

moving elsewhere in the UK without the school being informed. Some pupils are starting to ‘look out for each other’, informing the school if one of their peers returns to the UK but is not attending school. And a High School EAL Coordinator in Luton talked about Birmingham being a particular draw for Roma families (scoping interview May 2018) due to them having extended family networks there.

<sup>8</sup> Some schools try to get multi-lingual pupils through language GCSEs quickly before they lose these skills

<sup>9</sup> Sheer numbers struggling can drive innovation – e.g. training sixth form students as volunteer classroom assistants to support pupils with phonics, reading, handwriting, conversation and peer role modelling

<sup>10</sup> “Low English is a problem, for example filling in forms, school applications, making phone calls, dealing with rented accommodation”

<sup>11</sup> This doesn’t mean that all young Roma people are in good health. One EAL Coordinator in a High School talked to the project team about a pupil who had gone to her with a ‘bright red arm’ which was getting very sore. He was taken to hospital with sepsis. His family hadn’t known what to do, and he hadn’t talked to anyone about it until ‘the last minute’

- Women’s bodies are taboo and they are wary about where to go for healthcare – might not want a male GP. And there can be general barriers accessing GP services for Roma people including literacy and language
- Childhood obesity, diabetes, smoking, alcohol dependency, immunisation rates<sup>12</sup>, dental health, Hep B are all issues amongst the Roma communities
- Teenage pregnancy – used to get 13-14 year olds and the teenage pregnancy team would be involved, but now it’s more 16-17 year olds.<sup>13</sup>
- With support Roma communities are beginning to access health services

#### **10. Low income & Welfare Benefits**

- Lack of qualifications directly impacts on to job market (taken together with the lack of language proficiency) and hence slows down integration
- Pupil premium is important but Roma people can’t demonstrate income because of working cash-in-hand, modern slavery and not being able to access benefits, so a school cannot access funding
- Food poverty<sup>14</sup>
- Little understanding of the benefits system and how to access it can lead to some people trying to access benefits inappropriately
- Roma people sometimes using ‘Community Advocates’ to speak for and help them, but have to pay for the service
- Roma engaged in scrap metal dealing can be making a decent living – ie an exception to the general low wage/benefit dependent Roma. They take their sons out of school into the business at a young age. Many of these types of Roma families have been in the UK for several years and know the system

#### **11. Inadequate housing**

- Mainly private renting – poor state of repair, landlord prosecutions. One school home visitor found families without electricity using candles, no hot water for up to three months.
- Difficulties finding deposit and first month’s rent
- Some Roma people are in hostels waiting for accommodation
- New Roma arrivals go to family members till they find housing, but this can risk the host family’s tenancy agreement
- Roma families can leave an area overnight
- Homelessness can be due to rent default
- Some use of hostels
- Occasionally found on caravan sites in extremely poor/unfit conditions
- Often living in Houses in Multiple Occupation
- Inadequate toilet facilities, men using gardens causing health risks
- Lack of understanding regarding food/kitchen hygiene

<sup>12</sup> The same EAL Coordinator talked to the project team about unanimous refusal by Roma parents to get children immunised, for fear that they would ‘get paralysed’

<sup>13</sup> One EAL Lead had become aware of the need for some form of sex education support for a group of Roma teenagers but hadn’t known where to get this kind of help. Healthwatch stepped in after a meeting facilitated by the Parallel Lives Project

<sup>14</sup> Example of a Healthwatch project “Better health through better food choices” instigated by a Flying Start Diet & Nutrition Lead. Community cooking at a Primary school, free for 5-14 yrs. x 36 families involving British Dietetic Association and Children’s Food Trust. Borough Council gave funding via the “Your Say, Your Way” fund.

- Children unsupervised on streets/roads
- Leaving houses unlocked and at risk of intruders

#### **12. Cultural Difference**

- Significant Roma community differences – clan, language, class
- Customs, dress, morality, language, shame & honour. Differences between Roma groups – e.g. Slovak modern dress
- Young people/adolescents looking for marriage partners – dress and behaviour in school. And Roma teenagers and Eastern European teenagers having relationships at high schools causing concern amongst some Eastern European parents
- Community elders watching over young people and their behaviour – imposing a Roma ‘code of conduct’. Reputation is important
- Trust in their ability to be educated is starting to impact on Roma children and young people going through the education system. This is helping them recognise a wider range of opportunities in addition to marriage and parenting
- Role of the Bulibasha (Pastor of the church) peace keeper of the community

#### **13. Risk**

- Young women may be at risk of CSE (Child Sexual Exploitation)/coercion/prostitution<sup>15</sup>
- Victims (and occasionally perpetrators) of trafficking – e.g. for welfare benefits such as child benefit
- Possible risks of Modern Day Slavery and Trafficking – but more research needed
- Underage marriage

#### **14. Religion**

- Faith is an important aspect of Roma life, and people tend to adopt the religion and denomination of their host country<sup>16</sup>
- Religion is important, Roma churches often run by Roma people who see themselves as leaders, but may not have any religious training or qualifications

#### **15. Loss of status**

- Story of a Polish Roma male professional violinist who ended up working in a car wash in Southend

<sup>15</sup>Head Teacher, Fenland: “Roma girls are at risk of CSE. One girl here was fourteen and very beautiful. She became involved in prostitution. They are prone to abuse from the rest of the EAL community because their own community see them as the lowest of the low.”

<sup>16</sup> Slovak Roma church services held Sundays Peterborough International Christian Centre.