



Report on the Meeting
of UK-based members of the European Academic Network on Romani Studies
with the UK National Roma Contact Point, held on 5 June 2014 at the
University of Manchester

Prepared by Professor Yaron Matras

Present:

Network members and associate members: Thomas Acton, Sarah Cemlyn, Colin Clark, Celia Donert, Judit Durst, Martin Kovats, Daniele Viktor Leggio, Aleksandar Marinov, Yaron Matras (Chair), Aidan McGarry, Joanna Richardson, Annabel Tremlett, Violeta Vajda

Department for Communities and Local Government: Ian Naysmith, Miriam Light

In attendance: Hazel Gardner, Alex Robertson (University of Manchester)

Items for discussion:

1. Which local areas have been most successful in integrating Roma migrants, and how can we ensure that other local areas learn from them?
2. How can we most effectively transfer knowledge and understanding gained in the UK on equality and integration to other European countries with large and disadvantaged Roma populations?
3. 3. Q&A session with DCLG representatives

Ian Naysmith reported that the DCLG is interested in collecting examples of good practice in Employment, Education, Health, Housing. It is also interested in the wider integration challenges - is it true that in some areas tensions are developing? If not true, how do we dispel this myth and if it is true, how do we diffuse these tensions? The DCLG reports on behalf of UK as a whole, and the UK is also represented on CAHROM. DCLG is interested in collecting examples in writing, and is

establishing a dialogue with experts. So far, there have been meetings with NGOs and local government, much of it centred in Yorkshire, but not much exchange with experts.

Points raised in an introductory discussion included mention of a report commissioned by the Decade for Roma Inclusion on the effectiveness of the National Strategy, which mentions examples of good practice in Belfast and Derby; the Scottish government moving forward with Scottish Gypsy Traveller Integration Strategy, with the aim of targeting fairground travellers and Central Eastern European Roma in 2015, once the strategy is in place; and the specific profile of Hungarian Roma migrants (who face issues as Hungarians rather than as Roma). The discussion continued around the specific themes flagged by the National Strategy agenda:

Housing

Local Authorities appear to not be fulfilling duties in regards to housing - although it is often in the hands of private landlords, Local Authorities have a responsibility to prevent overcrowding, poor standards of living etc. National Government could encourage Local Authorities to take more responsibility here. In Glasgow, private housing providers are being threatened by City Council with removal of their licenses if their standards fall and social housing is being renovated and provided by Council. There has been some mainstream media backlash about social housing provisions for Roma. Interim reports from MigRom project suggest striking difference between UK compared to Italy, France, Spain, for Roma migrants - evictions in these Western European countries but different experience in UK. Stability of housing has direct link to education standards and ability of Roma to attend school. Children who have experienced these evictions have low attainment levels at school, no steady education experience.

Education

Historically, Scotland encourages a broad knowledge at all educational levels - democratic intellect and tradition. One primary school in Glasgow, 80-85% Roma - these children encouraged to go to secondary school, followed by university. Educational problems deep-rooted, continuing for decades. TES continues in Wales and Scotland, but has been decimated in England. In this connection, while acknowledged that the current focus of the discussion with NCP is on Roma migrants, it must also be acknowledged that issues of Roma migrants and Travellers are interconnected and that education services for Roma draw on the established TES. It was also pointed out that the needs of Roma migrants and Gypsy Travellers are very different - Roma migrants require support that any other migrant group requires, whereas (non-migrant) travelling populations may not. With the arrival of Roma migrants, actors involved in giving support to traveller groups etc (eg TES) - risk assigning particular narratives to migrants, keeping them in a cornered position of being dependent on support groups. Outsourced interventions are not monitored. Reports are sometimes commissioned and compiled by same actors who are lead the intervention. The objective of TES was integration since 1980s, but on the ground, actors may be teachers who were forced into the role of overseeing Gypsy integration and who do not embrace the ideology. Currently, the existence of Roma and Traveller undergraduates will feed back into communities and facilitate aspiration. There is a key issue surrounding language - Roma migrants in UK sometimes cannot speak English and find themselves subject to oppression due to this. Free services to learn English have been cut, often people are capable of employment but language is an obstacle. Also caught in criminality due to

misunderstanding of English laws. English Language provision could help, Government could help to boost this. Adult Education is as important as child-oriented Education.

Good practice examples were mentioned: Hampshire Ethnic Minority and Traveller Service - awarded for their good practice for Peer mentoring system in schools. Art - in Portsmouth, invited artists to work with social work students and report experiences, and artists reported feeling as if they carried out a social work role. Examples include artists going in to schools to help integration in individual schools. At the same time it was noted that the voluntary sector often shows lack of coordination and fragmented research, haphazard and inconsistent methods. Artists are not social workers, and cannot deal with serious care issues that may be missed. Social work has a front-line role and should be maximised with links to Education. Cases of segregation were noted, carried out by those directly or indirectly supporting Roma - intended to integrate Roma and support them, but by taking them out of the classroom, it perpetuates their exclusion and delays their progress. Children with low English levels are put in separate classrooms and then cannot catch up once reintroduced to mainstream classes. It was noted that OFSTED has been carrying out a report commissioned by DfE and authored by Mark Sims on Education of Roma migrants.

Employment

Reports from Manchester show that jobs are available and are being taken up by Roma. There is a lot of optimism about employment. The language issue was noted for Hungarian Roma - private language tuition is expensive, state-provided ESOL tuition is not thorough and some migrants find it not useful. At the same time migrants who acquired English through private language tuition benefited from not requiring translation, saved money, and are now making money by translating for others. It was noted that under new regulations, EU migrants can stay for 3 months in UK, further stay is conditional on employment status - hence the focus is increasing on external agencies (Job Centres, universities etc) checking immigration status and deporting rather than encouraging migrants to increase their employability, e.g. by investing in English language support. IT would be useful for economically successful Roma role models to share experience, but difficult to access self-employed Roma 'role models'; also noted was the absence of economists in Romani Studies. It was noted that but lines are blurred between education and employment in connection with apprenticeships. In general, in the Eastern European community, the aspiration is for self-employment rather than employment. Supporting people in self-employment could be beneficial. It is not just about accessing employment, but employment support services - is the incentive really there to support migrants?

It was noted that access to Health care was not perceived as a problem; on the other hand, the discussion identified other useful themes that deserve attention in addition to those that have been flagged by the EC:

Support Networks

Natural 'allies' in local areas include churches, faith-based organisations, particularly Evangelical churches. Roma will often turn to these organisations for help, and the community helps them. Faith movement should be used more when working with Roma. Community artists have often connected well with Roma communities, as well as diaspora media - eg Romanian media published in London. Primary Schools are community spaces that are safe for Roma families and young people, an oasis

where parents are welcome. These structures are not focused on changing policy but they are community spaces that exist where Roma may find a welcome or support.

Social Care

Concerns were raised over the repeated flagging in connection with Roma of 'Safeguarding', as in the case of Manchester City Council which provides grants to external agencies to look at early marriage and poor school attendance among teenage girls - although there is no evidence to suggest these problems are Roma-specific. Agencies seem to have moved on from idea of Roma as a threat to others, but now seem focused on Roma being a threat to themselves and victims of their own culture. There is a fear, in the Roma community, of contact with Social Services (fuelled by cases of removal of children from Roma families, with return and apology - but suspicion is clearly there). Are Roma being singled out, and is this institutionalised prejudice? It was suggested that the European Roma discourse does not reflect reality, instead the 'Roma card' is played among political actors and agencies. National and regional bodies of social workers need to be informed and should be helped by academics to reform attitudes that exist within professional services. A fear of social workers exists among Roma communities. Good practice exists among social workers but it is not consistent, and there are also cases of very bad practice. Some research has been carried out on experiences of Gypsies and Irish Travellers who had been in care at a young age. SOME Roma children will need safeguarding from their families, as in any community. But a good practice guide is needed for working with Gypsy and Roma families - encouragement of fostering and adoption within Gypsy and Roma communities by British Association of Adoption and Fostering.

It was suggested that child protection officers have lower levels of understanding and knowledge than other areas of Welfare State - the problem of confidentiality is an obstacle to spread of good practice which is not present in other areas. Information is vital in calming rush to protect Roma from themselves, and in sharing good practice - but confidentiality is restricting. Heavily anonymised cases are difficult to use and, despite learning a lot from them, it is extremely difficult to spread this knowledge. From an academic point of view, there is a need for a safe place to discuss individual cases without prejudice and indications of inevitability of problems in Roma community. Investigation into why Councils etc fund voluntary sector organisations to 'safeguard' Roma does not compromise confidentiality – we need to examine the broader perspective rather than individual cases, investigate the mechanism. A dedicated workshop for practitioners, thinking about ethical issues but not comprising individual cases, would be beneficial. Information can counteract myths of rife young marriages etc. In practical terms, academics would have to initiate an exchange forum for national groups related to crime, child protection etc

Discussion Summary and practical measures

It was agreed that Network members/experts have access to information on good practice; and that we are able to establish that there are numerous cases of good practice in the UK and that it would be valuable to share them with a European discussion context. In addition to providing information under the four established headings - Education, Employment, Health, Housing - we see the value of suggesting further themes, namely Support Networks including community engagement and civil society; inclusion in Education of Adult Education (with a direct link to Employment); inclusion within Employment of Self-Employment; Social care and 'safeguarding' (implying that 'safeguarding'

issues might be re-considered as discrimination issues); and issues of data Quantification surrounding Roma communities (in light of pressure surrounding quantification in Britain, and the need for academics should to explain issues with quantification of Roma communities, and the availability in principle of data on ethnicity in the UK).

The government's deadlines to provide annual reports at the European level is around November/December. It was suggested that experts/network members would be invited to prepare Evidence Based Examples of Good Practice in the form of one side of A4, with key bullet points on individual areas, additional contact details and reading suggestions. It was emphasised that as an 'incentive' for contributors, DCLG should commit itself to a) forwarding the material to the EC, and b) publishing (while avoiding duplication) the material received from UK experts. RAN will also publish the examples on its website (DCLG could provide a link), and forward them for inclusion in the Council of Europe database of best practice on Roma. DCLG representatives also emphasised that there is interest on the part of UK embassies abroad to hear from academics; RAN would need to receive concrete requests and would be happy to try and respond.

ACTIONS:

- **Ian Naysmith will forward guidelines detailing what DCLG requires, and how the information will be used (by the end of June, to ensure distribution of the call to members before the summer)**
- **Martin Kovats will forward ideas regarding content to be addressed (same deadline)**
- **Judit Durst, Colin Clark, and Yaron Matras (as members of the SC) will serve as ad hoc secretariat for this exercise: they will collect information for inclusion in the Examples, agree on a Call to be sent to the network membership, distribute the call in early July and ask for submission by the second half of September.**

Q&A session

The Issue of labelling Gypsy/Traveller/Roma was addressed. European institutions group together Roma, Travellers, Gypsies - definitions are specified within European documents. The main issues have historically been around sites and planning so most relevant to Gypsies and Travellers, not Roma. Domestically, departmental practice varies - in schools, for example, it is often found to be useful to distinguish these groups as they have very different needs. We should not feel forced to combine them to the convenience of European recipients. In the above research exchange, there should be a focus on Roma migrants, since this is where information is typically missing so far - but Gypsies and Travellers should be included as reports to European level include these groups too. DCLG is cautious about including information on freedom of movement, and reluctant to make that a 'Roma issue'. In response to a question on the Salford study (Brown, Scullion, Martin; Oct 2013), Ian Naysmith clarified that the Government's position is there are no official figures to quantify Roma migrants, and figures from the Salford study must be used with caution due to incomplete returns from Councils, and the anecdotal basis of those returns. It was also noted that those returns that were referred to in the study remain unverifiable.