



Local Engagement for Roma Inclusion

(LERI) Project

Community Summary

Medway, United Kingdom

This community summary forms part of FRA's **Local Engagement for Roma Inclusion** (LERI) project. LERI is a qualitative action research project under [FRA's multi-annual Roma Programme](#). It was developed in response to the [European Commission's](#) Communication on an [EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020](#). LERI brings together local authorities and residents, in particular Roma, to investigate how they can best be involved in Roma integration actions, and identify which aspects of these actions work, which do not, and why. The aim of the project is to facilitate the engagement of all local stakeholders, including Roma, in joint efforts to enable Roma inclusion. The experience gained and the lessons learned during the process will help improve the design, implementation and monitoring of Roma integration policies and actions at the local level.

LERI is the first FRA project to test participatory action research methodology. By identifying the key factors that lead to the success or failure of local integration activities, the project is helping to improve the planning of effective integration programmes for the future. At the same time, facilitating engagement at local level empowers all those involved, building their capacity to participate as equal partners with local administrations and civil society, and enabling a shared understanding of which measures need to be taken and how their implementation can be monitored. The project is being carried out in 21 localities across 11 EU Member States (Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Finland, France, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Romania, Slovakia, Spain and the United Kingdom).

LOCALITIES

Pavlikeni,	Bulgaria
Stara Zagora,	Bulgaria
Brno,	Czech Republic
Sokolov,	Czech Republic
Helsinki,	Finland
Jyväskylä,	Finland
Lille Metropole,	France
Strasbourg,	France
Aghia Varvara,	Greece
Megara,	Greece
Besence,	Hungary
Mátraverebély,	Hungary
Mantova,	Italy
Bologna,	Italy
Aiud,	Romania
Cluj-Napoca,	Romania
Hrabušice,	Slovakia
Rakytník,	Slovakia
Cordoba,	Spain
Madrid,	Spain
Medway,	UK

Medway, United Kingdom

Overview of the country context

Although Gypsies and Irish Travellers have lived in the UK for centuries, the first authenticated record of their presence dates back to 1514.¹ In the 2011 Census 58,000 people recorded their ethnicity as Gypsy or Irish Traveller thus, comprising 0.1 per cent of the resident population of England and Wales.² More recent sources, however, estimate a much larger figure of 200–300,000.³ Indigenous Gypsies and Travellers tend to be concentrated in the East and South-East of England.⁴ In more recent waves of migration, a substantial number of Roma from Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) have also moved to the UK. For instance, at the end of 2012 it was estimated that there were approximately 200,000 newly arrived Roma in the UK.⁵ Settlement patterns for indigenous Gypsies and Travellers and Roma from CEE vary significantly. The former, live in caravans and on sites that tend to be physically separated from the majority population or in public housing that is

physically but not necessarily socially integrated within the wider population. In contrast, Roma from CEE tend to reside in private sector housing in ethnically diverse, but uniformly poor inner urban areas in London and urban areas in the North-West of England.

Both indigenous Gypsies and Travellers and Roma from CEE fare poorly in terms of health (i.e. higher mortality rate than the general population) as well as lower school attendance and educational outcomes than any other ethnic group.⁶ Furthermore, Gypsies and Travellers have low levels of access to appropriate accommodation while community cohesion with the surrounding population is generally lacking.⁷ They also experience more discrimination than any other group.⁸ The media have exacerbated anti-Gypsy and anti-Roma sentiments with overwhelmingly negative press reports that focus on unauthorised encampments, criminality, begging, and welfare fraud.⁹

The UK has no specific Roma strategy as Gypsies, Travellers and Roma are already covered by existing legislation such as the EU Race Directive 2003 and the Equalities

¹ Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) (2006), 'Chapter 1: Introduction' in: *Common ground: Equality, good race relations and sites for Gypsies and Irish Travellers (Report of a CRE inquiry in England and Wales)*, London, Commission for Racial Equality, available at:

www.compas.ox.ac.uk/media/ER-2005-Gypsies_Irish_Travellers_Equality_CRE.pdf (All hyperlinks were accessed on 22 February 2016)

² Office for National Statistics (ONS) (2014), *What does the 2011 census tell us about the characteristics of Gypsy or Irish Travellers in England and Wales?*, 21 January 2014, available at: www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171776_349352.pdf

³ Brown, P, Scullion, L. and Martin, P. (2013), *Migrant Roma in the United Kingdom: population size and experiences of local authorities and partners*, Manchester, University of Salford, available at:

www.salford.ac.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0004/363118/Migrant_Roma_in_the_UK_final_report_October_2013.pdf

⁴ Office for National Statistics (ONS) (2014), *What does the 2011 census tell us about the characteristics of Gypsy or Irish Travellers in England and Wales?*, 21 January 2014, available at: www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171776_349352.pdf

⁵ Brown, P, Scullion, L. and Martin, P. (2013), *Migrant Roma in the United Kingdom: Population size and experiences of local authorities and partners*, Manchester, University of Salford,

available at:

www.salford.ac.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0004/363118/Migrant_Roma_in_the_UK_final_report_October_2013.pdf

⁶ Cemlyn, S., Greenfields, M., Burnett, S., Matthews, Z. and Whitwell, C. (2009), *Inequalities experienced by Gypsy and Traveller communities: A review*, London, Equalities and Human Rights Commission, available at:

www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/documents/research/12inequalities_experienced_by_gypsy_and_traveller_communities_a_review.pdf

⁷ Smith, D. and Greenfields, M. (2013), *Gypsies and Travellers in housing: The decline of nomadism*, Bristol, Policy Press at the University of Bristol.

⁸ Cemlyn, S., Greenfields, M., Burnett, S., Matthews, Z. and Whitwell, C. (2009), *Inequalities experienced by Gypsy and Traveller communities: A review*, London, Equalities and Human Rights Commission, available at:

www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/documents/research/12inequalities_experienced_by_gypsy_and_traveller_communities_a_review.pdf

⁹ Smith, D. (2014), 'Roma migrants, the EU and the politics of integration in the UK' in Hara, A. and Taya, S. L. (eds.), *Proceedings of the 5th International Conference on International Studies (ICIS) 2014: Globalization and Nation States*, Malaysia, Universiti Utara Malaysia, pp. 1224-1246, available at: <http://gala.gre.ac.uk/13627/>

Act 2010.¹⁰ In response to the European Commission's framework on national Roma Integration Strategies, a set of policy measures within the UK's social inclusion policies was submitted. As a result, the UK's national strategy was published in 2012 and it was reviewed twice by the European Commission in 2012 and again in 2014. Service provision and Roma focused programmes in health, education, accommodation, employment and community cohesion are largely the responsibility of local authorities, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the voluntary sector.

Locality background information

Medway is a unitary authority in Kent, 50 km from London, with a population of 264,000. It is the largest urban area in the South-East outside of London. Historically, Medway was associated with the Chatham Dockyard and a large proportion of the local population was employed in shipbuilding and associated industries. The closure of the dockyard in the 1980's led to high levels of local unemployment and a decline in the area's fortunes. Since then, the region has recovered somewhat, however, there are still areas of high deprivation with some neighbourhoods ranking among the 20 per cent most deprived in the country.¹¹ Recent years have also seen increased ethnic diversity in the area with 11 per cent of residents being born outside the UK and a large increase of residents identifying as 'other white' (largely EU migrants), 'African' and 'Indian' groups between 2001 and 2011.¹²

Kent has the highest number of Gypsies and Travellers in the UK. Medway has approximately 1,500 residents who are largely residing in conventional housing in a close knit community consisting of several extended family networks in the

area. There is also a local authority owned camp site in Medway that contains 11 plots occupied by 10 families including occasional unauthorised temporary encampments by nomadic families.¹³



Unauthorised Traveller site, Medway 2014

In recent years, Medway (Chatham in particular) has received a significant number of Roma residents originating mostly from the Czech Republic and Slovakia. Although there are no published official figures, the local authority estimates a population of 4000-5000 people residing mainly in cheap and low quality private sector housing in the Luton and St Mary neighbourhoods of Chatham. Overcrowding is a particular problem among the Roma in the area, and the area has been subject to housing regeneration efforts through the EU funded URBACT programme.¹⁴ Interviews with local authority officials indicate that few Roma engage with statutory services, however, local schools, in particular the Bishop of Rochester Academy (BORA), have made determined efforts to engage Roma pupils and families. The school employs dedicated EAL (English as an Additional Language) teachers and other support, including a dedicated liaison officer funded by the local authority who works closely

¹⁰ Council of Europe (2014), Council conclusions on an EU framework strategy for Roma integration up to 2020: United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, available at: http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/files/roma_uk_strategy_en.pdf

¹¹ Medway Council (2012), *Delivering fair and responsive services*, Kent, Medway Council, available at: www.medway.gov.uk/pdf/Fair%20and%20Responsive%20Services%202012.pdf

¹² Medway Council (2013), *2011 Census key statistics – Medway summary*, Kent, Medway Council, available at: www.medway.gov.uk/pdf/2011%20Census%20Key%20Statistics%20Jan13.pdf

¹³ Local authority officer, 11 January 2014, Interview.

¹⁴ URBACT and Medway Council (2011), *Local Action Plan – Medway*, available at: www.urbact.eu/file/1830/download?token=Hmb2aHSD

with the families of Roma pupils at the school.



Luton Road, Chatham where most of the Roma from the Czech Republic and Slovakia live.

Gypsies and Travellers in the area tend to be self-employed. Unemployment levels are higher than average, which is made worse by low levels of education and literacy.¹⁵ The position of Roma is more challenging due to their poor language skills and due to the fact that many are engaged in undocumented "cash in hand" work. There is no Roma community spokesperson in Medway and there is little interaction outside of the community. It was noted in interviews however, that they tend to engage better with Punjabi/Sikh service providers and community members of which there is a large population in Medway. In addition, local authority personnel, Medway police and some grassroots and voluntary sector organisations with a detailed and nuanced understanding of the local Roma population have been identified. There have been community tensions between Roma and other communities in Medway, which are exacerbated by the lack of Roma community leadership to mediate such tensions.

Medway has mainstreamed strategies for the integration of minorities, including EU programmes such as *Achieving the integration of migrant communities and ethnic residents* (AIMER)¹⁶ and *Action to Generate Inclusion for Residents of Migrant Background* (AGIR)¹⁷ as well as a

¹⁵ David Coultie Associates (DCA) (2006), *North Kent Gypsy and Traveller study: Final report 2006*, available at: www.medway.gov.uk/pdf/north_kent_gypsy_traveller_study-3.1.pdf

¹⁶ See about Achieving the integration of migrant communities and ethnic residents (AIMER) Project

number of programmes for addressing wider inequalities. Furthermore, there is a significant amount of ad-hoc work being carried out at the community level, both by public agencies, voluntary sector organisations and local churches. For instance, the local Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) has trained East and Central European and Roma personnel as advisers/outreach workers.

Objectives and thematic focus of the LERI project

There are low levels of engagement with health services and education (particularly among adults) among indigenous Gypsies and Travellers and Roma from Eastern Europe. Besides lacking the relevant knowledge of available services and how to access them, CEE Roma lack the necessary English language skills in the communication with community spokespeople who might act as mediators and advocates where necessary.

Education and more specifically, development of language skills among adults will be the intended focus of LERI. Poor English language skills and low levels of literacy among English Gypsies and Travellers was identified by stakeholders and community members as a key barrier in relation to accessing statutory services, labour market opportunities and integration in general. The LERI project will work with the local authority, other service providers and particularly the BORA school who have established links with the local Roma community.

LERI will build on these networks and relationships with the local Gypsy and Traveller and Roma communities in order to develop capacities and increase the involvement of Roma in the implementation of educational activities, monitoring and evaluation of these projects. The lack of a local Roma-led organisation and identifiable community spokespeople was also identified as a key

at: www.interreg4a-2mers.eu/admin/page_ext_attachments/37

¹⁷ See about Action to Generate Inclusion for Residents of Migrant Background (AGIR) Project at: www.sfdeurope.com/resources/Agir-leaflet.pdf

issue contributing to the poor knowledge and low levels of engagement with services. Focusing on identifying and training community spokespeople from the local Roma and Gypsy and Traveller communities, with the aim of forming a Roma led community group along the lines of Romano Lav in Glasgow, will be a further aim of LERI. This will provide a forum and a reference point upon which further activities will be built.

Activities implemented and actors involved in the needs assessment phase

The needs assessment will build on the participatory methods employed in previous studies, such as the Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment (GTAA).¹⁸ This will involve action focused research from the perspective of different institutions: communities, local government, service providers and voluntary sector organisations.

The local authority will play an important role in the research and developmental activities of LERI. The authority has successfully delivered EU projects, such as AIMER and AGIR, both of which support the inclusion of migrants. Therefore, the local authority has the necessary knowledge and expertise. The BORA school will be a key actor in assisting with the needs assessment phase and in the development and implementation of planned projects. This is due to the large number of Roma pupils attending the school and the extensive networks the liaison officer has developed with the local Roma community. In other words, the liaison officer could act as an effective facilitator.



Free Roma Day organised by Medway Ethnic Minority Forum May 2012

Medway Ethnic Minority Forum will be consulted in regards to the assessment of needs as they have a wealth of experience in working with a diverse range of local ethnic minority groups and identifying the needs and gaps in local services. They will also assist in providing expertise in setting up a Roma led organisation. In addition, a community leader has been identified to liaise with the local Gypsy and Traveller communities in the needs assessment phase. The community leader has a long history of campaigning for the Gypsy Council (a national organisation), they have acted as an advocate and spokesman for the Gypsy and Traveller community and conducted several surveys and needs assessments with Gypsies and Travellers.

Expected outcomes of the participatory action research

Planned activities will provide educational opportunities to Gypsy and Traveller and Roma community members and a platform for enhanced dialogue and communication with the local authority and service providers. This will build capacity and an enhanced awareness of the needs of these communities in the area of housing, health, education, employment and community cohesion which were identified as core problems during the preparatory phases of LERI.

¹⁸ Richardson, J., Bloxson, J. and Greenfields, M. (2007), *East Kent Gypsy and Traveller accommodation assessment report (2007-2012)*, Leicester, De Montfort University, available at: www.shepway.gov.uk/media/2905/East-Kent-

[Gypsy-and-Traveller-Accommodation-Assessment-Report-2007-2012-Doc-Ref-A7/pdf/East_Kent_Gypsy_and_Traveller_Accommodation_Assessment_Report_\(2007-2012\)_ \(Doc Ref A7\).pdf](http://www.shepway.gov.uk/media/2905/East-Kent-Gypsy-and-Traveller-Accommodation-Assessment-Report-2007-2012-Doc-Ref-A7/pdf/East_Kent_Gypsy_and_Traveller_Accommodation_Assessment_Report_(2007-2012)_%28Doc_Ref_A7%29.pdf)

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