

**Briefing for Parliamentarians and local authorities: The EU Settlement Scheme and the Roma community
Panel discussion with Roma Support Group and APPG for Gypsies, Travellers and Roma
17 November 2020**

Since the EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS) opened in March 2019, Roma citizens of Eastern European countries¹ have been identified as one of the most vulnerable communities in the UK affected by the end of free movement. The Roma Support Group (RSG) has helped more than 2,000 people with their applications and engaged with over 30 organisations on Roma communities' experience of the scheme.

There is inadequate data on how many Roma EU citizens have applied for EUSS so far, and how many still need to apply. Some people are still unaware they have to apply for settled status, or are unable to make an application. Home Office campaigns are not reaching the Roma community - they hear about the scheme through community organisations or media from their country of origin.

It will be challenging to get 100% of the Roma community engaged and through the application process by the deadline. Government, local authorities and community organisations must ensure that Roma people have a safe passage from EU rights to a new status under the UK immigration system, and are supported to access their rights.

There are significant barriers to Roma people accessing and managing status under the EUSS:

- Limited access to reliable, trusted sources of information and support
- Digital exclusion and language barriers: **only 3% of Roma applicants have the confidence and skills to submit the EUSS application without support**
- Lack of valid ID or proof of five years' residence due to informal work /unstable housing
- They often rely on a national ID card rather than a passport, and are reluctant to send this non-biometric document to the Home Office.

Some barriers are caused or increased by the Covid-19 pandemic:

- Face to face support is unavailable – telephone and online services are harder to access, eg. for elderly people
- ID documents are harder to access with reduced hours and staff at embassies
- Returns from abroad are restricted during lockdown: some may break their continuity of residence in the UK or be unable to return to their country of origin to renew passports
- Lack of attention to EUSS in the news and communication channels.

¹ Estimates of at least 200,000 Roma in the UK in 2012, originating mainly from Romania, Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Poland.

Groups at particular risk of not securing their immigration status are:

Children have a lower application rate than adults: 15-25% of Roma children are not making applications, according to an RSG survey². Many parents don't know whether their child is a UK citizen or can register as one - the law in this area is complex - and many Roma parents lack the digital/language skills and resources to ensure their children apply. Children and young people in the care system are especially vulnerable, as many who need to apply have yet to be identified: of an estimated 9,000 EU citizen children and young people in care, UK local authorities had secured status for fewer than 500 by July 2020³.

Rough sleepers: the majority of rough sleeping Roma are not making applications, due to difficulty obtaining valid ID documents and widespread fear of detention and removal.

Pre-settled status holders have fewer entitlements (e.g. a higher burden of proof for access to universal credit) and face an individual cliff-edge where the holder must reapply within five years or lose their status altogether. RSG estimates that 62% of Roma applicants (against an average of 42% of EU citizens overall⁴) have been granted pre-settled status⁵. Many Roma women tend to accept pre-settled status if they are asked for additional evidence of residence, even when they are actually eligible for settled status. The risk of losing immigration status will be higher for Roma and other applicants with low digital literacy and language barriers, who already have difficulty managing their status online.

How the Government can improve the EU settlement scheme:

- Provide assurance for EU citizens who miss the 30 June 2021 deadline through no fault of their own that there will be no interruption to their rights (eg. healthcare free of charge) until they apply and are granted status.
- Grant settled status as the default option for children in care and care leavers, where the child is not eligible for citizenship.
- Address increased practical barriers to applying during the Covid-19 pandemic, such as discounting interruptions in continuity of residence due to travel restrictions.
- Increase support for local authorities and community organisations to identify and reach vulnerable groups, advise on complex cases and help people manage their status.
- Give clearer signposting on the reapplication process for holders of pre-settled status.
- Provide a physical backup to digital-only proof of settled status for those who need it.

² Brexit, EU Settlement Scheme and the Roma communities in the UK (June 2020):

https://www.romasupportgroup.org.uk/uploads/9/3/6/8/93687016/roma_brexit_euss_report_16.06.2020_final.pdf

³ <https://www.childrenslegalcentre.com/promoting-childrens-rights/policy/brexit-childrens-rights/children-left-out/>

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/eu-settlement-scheme-statistics>

⁵ Brexit, EU Settlement Scheme and the Roma communities in the UK p.22

How local authorities can help Roma people to secure their immigration status:

- Make targeted efforts to raise awareness and support EUSS registration among the Roma community, with particular focus on vulnerable children
- Safeguard children in care: prioritise finding and supporting every eligible child and young person to apply for EUSS
- Work with community organisations to develop and distribute best practice on outreach.

A case study of EUSS support for the Roma community:

Darnall Well Being and Sheffield Council EUSS project

Sheffield community health organisation Darnall Well Being has continued to deliver services throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, with a dedicated EUSS phone line used by 59 new clients (July-Sept 2020). Four workers with language skills relevant to the community continued working from home, making new applications remotely and liaising with the Home Office Resolution Centre.

Workers followed up with clients who had more complex needs, helping them to finish their applications or referring to partnership agencies for immigration advice. By the end of September 2020, 32 families were on a waiting list for an appointment once that becomes possible. The centre also integrated health messages and guidance on staying safe during the pandemic.

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