

Report on Community Consultation Exercise with Roma Groups across Scotland

Report by West of Scotland Regional Equality Council

Research carried out by Marcela Adamova, Ovidiu Spatacian Tarnu and Eszter Tarcsafalvi

Report written by Eszter Tarcsafalvi

September/October 2013

1. The context

As part of a project aimed at informing the Scottish Government how resources available from the European Structural Fund / European Regional Development Fund (ESF/ ERDF) should be applied, in terms of priorities and needs, to Roma integration in Scotland, West of Scotland Regional Equality Council (WSREC) has been tasked with the delivery of three community consultation projects with members of the Roma community in Scotland. The aim of these projects was to gauge the experiences, service needs and aspirations of both Romanian and Slovakian Roma people living in Scotland, and this was meant to be realised through the delivery and analysis of a series of focus groups and engagement workshops.

The aim of this report is to present the findings from these projects, and provide a summary of the key service needs as they emerged from the consultation.

2. The research

This project had three major parts. It included engagement with Romanian Roma in Glasgow, Slovakian Roma in Glasgow, and Roma out of Glasgow. To this, the separate category of Roma beggars in Glasgow has been added, mainly because time and resource constraints made engaging with groups outwith Glasgow challenging, and it has also been noted that none of the standard focus group participants have declared engaging in begging, so the decision has been made that this is a topic worthwhile directing extra resources into.

In terms of the three contracts, WSREC has been awarded, this is the set up:

Contract one: Romanian Roma in Glasgow (3 focus groups)

Contract two: Slovakian Roma in Glasgow (3 focus groups)

Contract three – A: Roma out of Glasgow (1 focus group, 2 small group discussions)

Contract three – B: Roma beggars in Glasgow (3 individual interviews)

Participants have been recruited mainly through local contacts, and with the help of some other organisations, including The Space and The Big Issue (Glasgow and Edinburgh). Each participant has been offered a £10 shopping voucher for their time.

In total we have engaged with 76 of people, out of which 48 from Romania, 28 from Slovakia. Also, 65 were from Glasgow, 5 from the Rutherglen / Cambuslang area and 6 from Edinburgh. It is important to note that all the groups from out of Glasgow were from Romania. We talked to 37 women and 39 men, with the ages of the participants varying from 16 to 64. Please see the attached table for a description of individual focus groups and interviews.

The method of data collection consisted mostly of focus groups. These were relatively easy to set up in communities where we had direct contacts (mostly in Govanhill, Glasgow), or where a local organisation took over the responsibility of setting up this group (Big Issue, Edinburgh). At other times, we adopted a more flexible approach to suit the circumstances, using small group discussions and individual interviews where these seemed more appropriate. Due to this qualitative, largely group based method of data collection, the results focus on personal experiences and perceptions, rather than objective, statistical information, and patterns and trends rather than specific cases.

3. The research topics

The aim of the research was to address the experiences of life in Scotland, service needs, and aspirations. Relating to this, the following research topics have been established:

- a) Background and reasons for moving to Scotland
- b) First experiences
- c) Positive aspects of life in Scotland
- d) Difficulties
- e) Future plans and aspirations
- f) Service needs and suggested action

In the following, after some initial notes and general observations, each of these topics will be addressed, with most significance given to service needs and possible ways of addressing these needs. Finally, a summary will be provided, which will also details some of the priorities, as these emerged from the discussions.

4. Initial notes

The differences between the various groups included in the consultation exercise are significant. Ignoring these differences by practitioners, service providers and strategic planners can lead to inappropriate service provision and wasted resources. Throughout this report, these differences will be pointed out when relevant. However, some of the most important ones are between Romanian and Slovakian Roma, and Roma in Glasgow (especially in Govanhill) and those in other places around Scotland.

When it comes to the differences between Romanian and Slovakian groups, both differences in culture and language are relevant, thus people don't like it if they are being referred to as one group. But perhaps most importantly, the very different entitlements, including working rights and access to benefits, result in very different life experiences in Govanhill, creating different needs and changing the priorities of the two groups.

Also, it seems that Govanhill is very much in a special position, due to the very high numbers and density of people coming here, and the strong support networks that are built among the residents (mostly within own ethnicity). It seems that those who decide to move away, or settle somewhere else in the first place have higher levels of 'personal independence', and with the appropriate level of support (mostly language and skill related) they would be more ready to fully 'integrate' with the surrounding society, while some of those coming to Govanhill (not everyone, but more so, than in other places) chose the place because of the safety net it can offer, and are perhaps less ready to engage with mainstream services just yet. They might need additional support, both with immediate needs, as well as building up their skills and confidence.

5. The findings

a) Reasons for moving to Scotland

When asked about the reasons for moving to Scotland the participants homogenously pointed out bad conditions in the home country and the possibility of a better life here as the main reason for moving here. Common issues in the home country included lack of job opportunities, discrimination in the job market, very low pay, poverty and isolated living conditions (small villages, bad public transport link). Most of them followed members of their family or friends to Glasgow/Edinburgh.

They chose these places because they heard about people's better lives here, and they could get support from those who already settled here. A couple of participants mentioned free healthcare as an influencing factor, and some of the Romanians talked about the Big Issue, and how knowing that if nothing else works out, they can earn money though selling the paper, has also contributed to their decision. Overall, people came here with the belief that they can find a job and create a better life for themselves and their families.

Most of the people arrived after the EU borders have opened up, so after 2004 (Slovakia) and 2007 (Romania) respectively, although there are still new arrivals as well, especially with the Romanian

community. In general, however, it can be said that the Slovakian community has been here for longer, and thus has had a longer experience of life here and time to adjust.

Also, the majority of the migrants in Scotland are from approximately the same areas in their home countries, including Arad and Bihor counties in Romania, and the area around Michalovce in Eastern Slovakia.

b) First experiences on arrival

Most of the participants arrived directly in Glasgow, following family or friends who were already here. However, some of the Slovakian participants reported arriving in various parts of the UK initially (mainly England), then moving to Scotland, while a few Romanian participants reported living in other countries beforehand. Some of those currently living outside of Glasgow said that they first arrived in Glasgow, and then moved away. One family moving away from Glasgow, is sometimes followed by their immediate relatives, e.g. two sisters are living in Rutherglen / Cambuslang and a handful of families in Edinburgh. However, these new groups are not as significant conglomerations as is Govanhill (both much lower numbers, and wider distances between families).

When first arriving in the country, many found it difficult to find suitable, reasonably priced accommodation, and to find work. Romanian participants often reported first moving in with other families in order to be able to cover the rent, but with ultimate aim of getting a place of their own once they could afford it. (This could be a realistic explanation behind some of the stories about the significantly overcrowded flats.)

When they found some employment, initially this was through friends and family members as well, often in the grey economy, sometimes in severely underpaid conditions. People often try to make money through various means – for example busking or taking up casual jobs.

c) Positive aspects of life in Scotland

The participants have been asked about both the positive as well as the negative aspects of life in Scotland. The large majority claimed that “life is better” here, even with all the difficulties, they feel that it’s ‘easier’ here. Better employment opportunities have also been mentioned. Comparison has always been made to the home country. People feel that they are slightly better off financially here, they value the free healthcare, although some mentioned the long waiting times as a negative aspect. They feel that their children are well looked after in schools, and schools, as well as other amenities are close and easily reachable. Some participants pointed out good public transport, while others usually avoid the use of public transport.

While several Slovakian participants pointed out access to housing benefit as a great advantage, the inability to access this type of support was the cause of great difficulties for Romanian nationals. They on the other hand sometimes pointed out The Big Issue as a good source of financial support in times of need. Financial stability seems to be a very important issue for all the communities we approached, and it is on the top on their priority list. Many things depend on the availability of a

basic levels of financial security – including the continuation of studies for young people, and future plans. Several participants pointed out that they would stay in Scotland if they found a job – otherwise they will have to go back to their home countries (mostly Romanian).

Other positive aspects included access to parks, and especially young people in Glasgow were often aware of other local facilities, such as libraries, sports facilities, and youth clubs, while some adults pointed out the help of some drop-ins and interpreters. Having family around was also a very important positive aspect for most people.

Some aspects of local life divided opinions. Service providers were sometimes seen as very kind and helpful, other times people felt that they weren't treated fairly by them. Lack of interpreters, or longer waiting times due to having to wait for availability of interpreters (Edinburgh) was seen as a great barrier, and it made communication with various service providers more difficult. While some felt that police was very fair and helpful, others felt that they are being unnecessarily disturbed and/or fined by the police, even when they don't feel that they did anything wrong, for example, spending time with friends outside on the streets. Also, while in Govanhill participants liked the availability of public spaces, such as parks, some pointed out that there is not enough space for young children in the area, and the back courts are not child friendly.

d) Difficulties

Some of the biggest difficulties faced by the Roma people living in Scotland are however, financial and quite often work related. High rent puts significant financial pressure on families, and this is what often forces families in overcrowded accommodations. Also, in this aspect there a noticeable difference between the priorities of Slovakian and Romanian families, clearly originating in the different working rights and benefits available to the groups. While the Slovakian families had the most difficulty with finding work, were sometimes unsatisfied with the amount of help available in this aspect, and pointed out difficulties regarding their benefits getting cut, for the Romanian participants, getting National Insurance Numbers, figuring out self employment regulations, and often just finding money for rent and food were significant issues, due to the fact that they are not entitled to most benefits, and the support they can access is also more limited (e.g. Jobcentre Plus, JBG). The Romanian participants very often cited lack of right to work, and right to benefits as some of the biggest difficulties they face. Many are looking forward to the changes from January 2014, although there is a lot of confusion about what will these changes actually mean. Both ethnicities cited lack of work opportunities and difficulties in finding work among the most significant problems faced by the Roma in Scotland.

High rent and low standard accommodation, litter, dirty closes and back gardens were constantly emphasised by those living in Govanhill, and were quite often the cause of leaving the area by those who moved away from there.

Those who rely on exploitative informal work, begging, or even selling The Big Issue often emphasis the limited incomes these sources bring, and the difficulties in sustaining a family on this income. While some of the beggars and even some Big Issue vendors felt that these were 'not very decent'

ways of earning an income, others didn't have this attitude; to them this was work, as any other. Also, people often emphasised that it's better to sell the magazine or even beg for money than to steal. However, regardless of the way they felt about these sources of income from a moral point of view, the vast majority would prefer some regular, legal work, since they feel that that could provide better incomes.

Other significant difficulties were related to lack of language skills, and English classes that were not suitable for the people (as well as lack of interpreters). These often were far away, not taking into account that travelling is a big obstacle both financially, and also because the target group didn't speak any English, and they most often assumed literacy in own language, which is very often lacking among the people the courses were intended for, especially the Romanian Roma. Also, the fact that all courses were taught by native English speakers, and there was no translation available, often made learning very difficult for those who had no knowledge of English before, and even scared the majority of the possible learners away. Interesting information came from the Edinburgh group, where the local Big Issue office operates a "no English class, no badge" policy. The vendors recognised the benefits these classes bring to them, nonetheless they admitted that if they didn't have to, probably wouldn't make time for them, since immediate needs like earning money would take priority. Besides English, literacy also needs to be made a great priority, especially among the Romanians.

On more specific level, some talked about difficulties with getting insurance, and setting up self-employment. They felt that the regulations, various associated costs, such as insurance, and paperwork, including applying for bank account, and sending income declarations, made it impossible to be self employed in areas like construction or scrap metal collection.

Young people in Glasgow were more likely than any other group to name discrimination, negative attitudes from others in the area, and conflicts with other young people as significant sources of difficulties related to living in Scotland. Others, more generally pointed out prejudices in the media against the Roma, and emphasised that the negative images created are exaggerated, and have a bad effect on the way locals and service providers see the Roma.

e) Plans and aspirations

The majority of the participants seemed to have made Scotland their home, and had no plans of leaving the country in the foreseeable future. They feel that they have the possibility of a better life here than in their home country, and often point out that they can offer better opportunities to their children here. Younger people are sometimes more undecided, and they are thinking about exploring living in other places as well. A small minority expressed a desire to return home in a relatively short time (few months, a year), but they always added, that in case they would find good employment, they would stay longer.

As for plans in Scotland, most of those who don't work, would like to find work, although there are no real expectations about the type and quality of the work. Some however mentioned setting up a small business, and one person expressed interest in starting his own farm. Some young people had

specific ideas about what they want to do in the future, but a large proportion found it difficult to think about future plans beyond “finding work”.

f) Service needs and suggested action

Participants were also asked about what aspect of their lives would they need more support with, and if it was up to them, in what ways would they support the local Roma communities. Some of the most important needs are detailed below:

1. Information

It became obvious that there is a huge need for spread of information about rights, responsibilities, entitlements and service availability, including topics such as working rights, benefits, application procedures, housing, tenants’ rights, English, literacy classes and so on.

2. Direct, approachable, available support

Furthermore, the participants often pointed out that rather than just signposting, actual support in accessing services could be very beneficial, since people often don’t find the place they are supposed to go to, can’t make appointments, have significant difficulties due to language barriers and often are unsure about what they should do next after a meeting with a specialist service provider. A more open and approachable, one-door-stop style front end service provision is on the top of the priority list. This sort of service should be provided at an approachable location, open every day during normal opening hours.

This support should cover help with immediate needs, benefits and work advice, as well as more long term, strategic work with individuals and families. Bilingual staff is crucial, and ideally people from the community should be employed as well.

3. Employability support

This is one of the most crucial aspects, and it includes both practical help looking for a job, support accessing work agencies, as well as more general employability skills training.

4. Language and literacy support

There were very specific needs expressed regarding language support. First, it should be readily available, people should be supported in accessing it, at least the beginners level needs to be local, due to the various constraints travelling puts on the learners, and for beginners there should be a bilingual staff present. The reasoning behind this has been presented above. Additionally, a great barrier to accessing these types of services is childcare commitments, so ideally some of the classes would either provide some support with childcare, or would at least be child friendly.

5. Help with self employment and start ups

Several participants pointed out that they had significant difficulties meeting the requirements of self employment, and some had enquires about setting up a business. Those who are considering such an opportunity will often need support not only with legal requirements, but also full start up support, mentoring, as well as information about alternatives, such as social enterprises.

6. Youth activities

Young people mentioned that they would appreciate more after school activities, and more opportunities for sports. Young people often don't realise the opportunities that they could have and are often surprised when asked about future plans and ambitions. In order to help their development, priority should be given to confidence building and mentoring.

7. A community centre

As well as emphasising the need for a physical place where they can turn for help, participants also described needs, which can be best brought under the umbrella of a community centre. Participants expressed a desire in learning more about their own culture, as well as practicing various recreational as well as educational activities, sewing classes, music, art, history of Roma, Roma language lessons. Some considered that in the same place people should be able to access other services, such as English classes, and at least first point support for other needs as well. A place like this could also serve like a great first point of contact for newcomers.

8. Religious services

Religion plays an important role in the lives of the Roma communities in Scotland. People from the Slovakian groups in Glasgow expressed a desire to have a Slovakian Pentecostal church in Glasgow, and Romanian Roma are known to have their own, self organised religious groups. In Glasgow these are fairly formal and consistent, in the forms of two religious congregations, both Pentecostal, and in Edinburgh there is a Bible study group running as well. I would recommend that future service providers use these structures, as well as the people who are already devoted to serving others through these institutions, as a key pillar for community development strategies.

In a more direct level, people asked for support in finding adequate space available for their religious services and Bible studies, pointing out that combining the religious aspect with wider educational and cultural activities, could help reach out to a wider audience.

9. Roma groups, organisations, and community members involved in service provision

Besides the religious groups, several people, both Slovakian and Romanian, expressed interest in setting up Roma groups, organisations, or something they referred to as local "committees", who would take some level of responsibility for local issues and the delivery of some activities and services. Also, it has been mentioned that having local Roma people involved in the delivery of some services could make these more accessible to others.

6. Summary and final observations

It has been noted that there are large differences between the various groups involved in the consultation, and this has to be taken into account when planning and delivering future service provision.

While most of the Roma people coming here seem to be happy with most aspects of mainstream services, such as healthcare or education, they face some serious difficulties within several aspects of their lives. Some of the most pressing issues are lack of information and guidance about rights, responsibilities, entitlements and opportunities. This is true to all of the communities included in the conversation. People are unclear about their own legal status, working rights, social entitlements, responsibilities as citizens, as well as the ways of how they could access this information.

Issues of education, language, literacy, IT skills, employability all need to be tackled with a lot higher and more specialised service provision than what is available at the moment. People need to be supported through unfamiliar processes, rather than just directed towards them, in order to assure successful engagement with various services. Furthermore, special focus should be put on personal development and all-round support, because it has become obvious that people often fail to engage with some services, progress towards some opportunities, due to other issues, lack of skills or lack of confidence.

Perhaps most importantly, needs should be prioritised for the very same reasons, and tackled one-by-one, working towards the ultimate goal of full employment, inclusion in mainstream services, and complete independence. However, for many the first step is to make sure that they have access to adequate housing and food, for others, the journey might start with English classes, and perhaps for others, only some employability support is required.

At the same time there should be more community development and cultural development activities, which would help raise people's self esteem and cultural pride, and would allow them to contribute to the development of their own communities, as well as promote engagement with other local communities. For both of these aspects an actual physical, dedicated space could be very useful.

Contact Details:

West of Scotland Regional Equality Council Ltd,
39 Napiershall Street, Glasgow, UK, G20 6EZ.

Tel: 0141 337 6626 Fax: 0141 339 2647

www.wsrec.co.uk Email: admin@wsrec.co.uk

Report on Community Consultation Exercise with Roma Groups across Scotland

ATTACHMENT: Workshop and interview breakdown

Contract	Group	Description	Number of participants	Moderator/ Interviewer
1. Romanian Roma in Glasgow	A: Romanian, Adult, Female	Focus Group	Total: 14 Female: 14	O. S. & E.T.
1. Romanian Roma in Glasgow	B: Romanian, Adult, Male	Focus Group	Total: 8 Male: 8	O. S. & E.T.
1. Romanian Roma in Glasgow	C: Romanian, Young People	Focus Group	Total: 11 Male: 10 Female: 1	O. S. & E.T.
2. Slovakian Roma in Glasgow	D: Slovakian, Adult	Focus Group	Total: 10 Male: 3 Female: 7	M. A.
2. Slovakian Roma in Glasgow	E: Slovakian, Adult	Focus Group	Total: 9 Male: 3 Female: 6	M. A.
2. Slovakian Roma in Glasgow	F: Slovakian, Young People	Focus Group	Total: 9 Male: 6 Female: 3	M. A.
3.A. Roma out of Glasgow	G: Romanian, Rutherglen / Cambuslang, Adult	2 small group discussions	Total: 6 Female: 2	E.T.



West of Scotland Regional Equality Council Ltd

			Male: 4	
3.A. Roma out of Glasgow	H: Romanian, Edinburgh, Adult	Focus Group	Total: 6 Female: 2 Male: 4	O. S. & E.T.
3.B. Roma beggars	I: Romanian, Glasgow, Adult	Individual interviews	Total: 3 Female: 2 Male 1	E. T.

