

# Roma communities in the UK: the EU Settlement Scheme and post-grace period situation

Report on an All-Party Parliamentary Group on  
Gypsies, Travellers and Roma roundtable event  
held on 29 March 2022

---

August 2022



THE ALL-PARTY PARLIAMENTARY GROUP  
Gypsies, Travellers  
and Roma



University of  
**Huddersfield**  
Inspiring global professionals

# About this report

Written by Professor Philip Brown from the University of Huddersfield. The report was funded by the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust and the Barrow Cadbury Trust.

Special thanks go to all who contributed to the event, to the speakers and to Abbie Kirkby, Policy and Public Affairs Manager, Friends, Families and Travellers.

This is not an official publication of the House of Commons or the House of Lords. It has not been approved by either House or its committees. All-Party Parliamentary Groups are informal groups of Members of both Houses with a common interest in particular issues. The views expressed in this report are those of the group.

# Summary of key points

The EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS) was designed in order to offer leave to remain under the UK immigration system to eligible citizens. Those people who work with Roma communities have continually highlighted their concerns that Roma appear disproportionately disengaged and disaffected from the EUSS.

On 29 March 2022 a special roundtable was convened by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Gypsies, Travellers and Roma to re-examine the implementation of the EUSS. This roundtable carried forward the attention of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on this issue and provided a forum to hear about the experiences of Roma when engaging with the EUSS. Invited speakers and contributors recounted their reflections and experiences of working with Roma communities. The following are the key points arising:

- The support that has already been provided by the Government to assist people to make applications to the EUSS has been vital. This has helped to ensure that a large number of people have been provided with more certainty with regard to their residency.
- A range of partners are required to engage in the EUSS due to the implementation challenges involved.
- The engagement by a range of partners across the statutory and voluntary and community sectors throughout the period of the EUSS has resulted in many thousands of applications by Roma being made. This has resulted in some impressive and effective collaborations. These collaborations should be supported to continue in order to meet the respective needs.
- Individuals are being prevented from leaving their departure countries to travel to the UK if they cannot provide evidence of EUSS status. This was reported as a feature of those travelling from Romania and Slovakia in particular. Similarly, individuals are being prevented from entering the UK by the UK Border Force. This is resulting in a great deal of confusion, upset and separation within families and across communities who already face significant inequalities.
- As resources provided by the Home Office begin to be withdrawn, there will be fewer and fewer groups and organisations that are able to support applications.
- Roma appear more likely to receive pre-settled status in comparison with their non-Roma counterparts.
- There remains a lack of clarity for families about the EUSS system and process. This has been compounded due to the lack of resources available to enable organisations to support applications.
- There should be ongoing assistance and resources provided to ensure Roma are supported when they need to update their status to avoid a loss of rights and the creation of additional responsibilities for overstretched local authorities and welfare services.

# Introduction

We are now a significant way into the UK's post-Brexit journey. Over the last 18 months, since our previous roundtable on this matter, it is clear that the UK Government has stepped up its support for those most vulnerable to new regulations, such as members of Roma communities who face considerable barriers in their day-to-day lives.

It has been encouraging to see Roma exercising their rights under the European Union Settlement Scheme (EUSS). However, there remain ongoing inequalities. It seems Roma people are more likely to apply for or receive pre-settled status as opposed to full settled status. Whilst the rights for each are similar, pre-settled status imposes some limits on travel outside the UK in order to qualify for settled status in the future. Similarly, applying for settled status will entail engaging with the process once again within a specific timeframe. It also appears that a range of actors are scrutinising Roma and denying them access to facets of life that they could previously access freely, including housing, employment and a right of return to the UK after an overseas stay.

Such restrictions are overlaying further disadvantage on existing disadvantage. More needs to be done to ensure that people and families are protected, that organisations have the support they need to assist Roma in the EUSS process and that additional burdens are not placed on already overstretched services run by local authorities and frontline organisations.

The UK Government remains keen to ensure that in a post-Brexit world the UK is seen as an open and diverse place, and we are seeing signs that this will indeed include members of Roma communities, who can play a full part within our communities. We call on the UK Government to reaffirm its commitment to this vision, recognise the ongoing challenges that exist for some people and communities in engaging with the EUSS and make concrete and ministerial-led changes to the system in order to enable those who want to stay and contribute to the UK to realise their rights and dreams.



**Martin Docherty-Hughes MP,**

Co-chair of the APPG on Gypsies, Travellers and Roma



**Baroness Janet Whitaker,**

Co-chair of the APPG on Gypsies, Travellers and Roma

# Overview



Mihai Bica



Martina Stipakova



Alexandra Bahor



Denisa Gannon

Over the last few years studies have usefully illuminated the experiences of different people who arrived in the UK from states within the European Union (EU) with respect to the EU Referendum.

**These studies have highlighted how the decision to leave the EU has been a source of anxiety and anguish for many who had made parts of the UK their long-term home.**

The All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Gypsies, Travellers and Roma has heard, over a series of public consultations, how these feelings have been particularly acute for members of Roma communities.

Whilst the motivations of people from Roma communities to travel to the UK shared many characteristics with their non-Roma counterparts, such as employment and education, their migration was often punctuated by pre-migration experiences of discrimination and marginalisation whilst in their countries of origin.

Despite the uncertainty caused by the EU Referendum, Roma communities remain established members of the population in the UK. Previous consultations, undertaken in the form of roundtables, have helped to shed light on the challenges faced by Roma communities by sharing

the experiences and concerns of parliamentarians, academics, civil society, public authorities and expert members of the public, including a number of Roma people. This report is the third such report in a series of reports on this issue and, in particular, the EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS).

The report is based on a roundtable convened in March 2022 to analyse and discuss the ongoing impact of the scheme. Following the previous events, the roundtable foregrounded the experiences of experts from the Roma community, who are working with community members within the context of the EUSS. The event consisted of presentations from a panel followed by questions and contributions from the audience.<sup>1</sup>

**Mihai Bica** Policy and Campaigning Coordinator and community representative, Roma Support Group

**Martina Stipakova** Family Support Worker, Clifton Learning Partnership

**Alexandra Bahor** Community Project Officer, Granby Toxteth Development Trust

**Denisa Gannon** Immigration solicitor

The APPG event was chaired by **Martin Docherty-Hughes MP**. This report provides an overview of the key issues discussed at the event and identifies future steps that need to be taken forward in order to continue to support Roma with respect to the EUSS.

<sup>1</sup> A full video of the event is available: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S4uhcbIOFI4>

# Background

The UK ceased to be a member of the EU on 31 January 2020. Following this, a new legal framework, which addresses the movement of persons from the EU/European Economic Area (EEA), Swiss nationals and their family members, was introduced.

The EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS) was designed in order to offer leave to remain under the UK immigration system to eligible citizens. Government policy stated that an EU/EEA/Swiss national (or qualifying family member) who was living in the UK was eligible, depending on supplying proof of their identity and undergoing a criminality check.

The UK-EU withdrawal agreement included a six-month 'grace period' for applications, meaning that the final deadline for securing EUSS status was at the end of June 2021. A number of documents, including the previous report by the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Gypsies, Travellers and Roma,<sup>2</sup> have already provided an overview of this scheme with particular reference to its implementation.<sup>3</sup>

Research published in 2022<sup>4</sup> described how the impact of the withdrawal from the EU has not only entailed 'fundamental shifts' in the way people feel a sense of belonging to the UK; it has also led to many current and emerging practical challenges. This research, which was focused on EU nationals from across many groups, reaffirmed that those affected reflect many different groups, some of which display particular vulnerabilities that impact on their engagement with the EUSS.

In 2013 it was estimated that there were approximately 200,000 members of Roma communities living in the UK, which at the time exceeded the official estimates of the population.<sup>5</sup> People from Roma communities are of particular interest due to the myriad inequalities they have faced and continue to face.<sup>6</sup>

Such inequalities are seen in terms of how they have accessed the housing market, labour market, healthcare, education and so on.<sup>7</sup>

---

**2** Brown, P. (2021). Falling through the gaps: the EU Settlement Scheme and the case of Roma communities in the UK. Report on an All-Party Parliamentary Group event held on the 17 November 2020. Friends, Families and Travellers. <https://www.gypsy-traveller.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/SM03-EUSS-Report.pdf>

**3** See also Barnard, C., Fraser Butlin, S., & Costello, F. (2022). The changing status of European Union nationals in the United Kingdom following Brexit: The lived experience of the European Union Settlement Scheme. *Social and Legal Studies*, 31(3), 365-388 <https://doi.org/10.1177/09646639211032337>

**4** Ibid.

**5** Brown, P., Martin, P., & Scullion, L. (2014). Migrant Roma in the United Kingdom and the need to estimate population size. *People, Place and Policy*, 8(1), 19-33.

**6** The Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) undertakes surveys of Roma populations and regularly monitors their situation: see <https://fra.europa.eu/en/themes/roma>

**7** See, for example, Brown, P., Allen, D., Czureja, S., Dinu, L., Glowacki, S., Hesk, G., Ingmire, S., Martin, P., Orsos, O., Palmi, M., & Rostas, T. (2016). Supporting Roma Voices. University of Salford. <https://huddersfield.box.com/s/6plba5dh55q8h5jqvdmixuzc0n9tiu1>

The engagement Roma have had with the EUSS is yet another issue that has presented challenges for members of the community. The roundtable undertaken in 2020 provided a platform to hear about the encounters Roma were having with the EUSS. Over one year on from this event, a follow-up roundtable was held on 29 March 2022 as part of the ongoing commitment of the APPG on Gypsies, Travellers and Roma to members of the communities.

Once again, working with organisations across sectors, we invited testimony in order to understand and document the experiences of Roma in engaging with the EUSS. The remainder of this report outlines the experiences of community-based practitioners who are working with members of Roma communities across the UK.

# Working with organisations across sectors

We invited testimony in order to understand and document the experiences of Roma in engaging with the EUSS.

The remainder of this report outlines the experiences of community-based practitioners who are working with members of Roma communities across the UK.



# Presentations by the speakers

## Mihai Bica

Policy and Campaigning Coordinator and community representative, Roma Support Group

**Mihai provided the attendees at the roundtable with an update on the work that the Roma Support Group have been undertaking to document the experiences of Roma people who were engaging with the EUSS.**

Mihai drew on the findings from two surveys that brought together the experiences and views of 93 Roma people.<sup>8</sup> Whilst it was acknowledged that the sample sizes of these surveys were small, it was thought that the responses were compatible with those working to provide support to Roma across the UK.

**The highlights of these surveys include the following:**

- Roma were more likely to receive pre-settled status in comparison with their non-Roma counterparts. Some 62% of Roma people had received pre-settled status in comparison with 41% of non-Roma people.
- There is a lack of knowledge about how to update immigration status from pre-settled status. Only 25% of those surveyed in 2022 reported that they knew when and how to update their status.
- The support provided by the Home Office and the efforts made by frontline organisations had considerably increased the likelihood of Roma community members successfully navigating the EUSS process.

- There was a lack of ongoing support provided to Roma who experienced ongoing challenges in accessing their EUSS account through the 'View and Prove' Home Office digital immigration system (61% of those surveyed needed help in July 2020, rising to 71% in early 2022). The lack of ongoing support provided was seen to increase the likelihood that Roma would lose access to their EUSS account and be unable to access their rights.
- Roma have had their immigration status increasingly checked by moneylenders, health services and public authorities.
- Roma were experiencing problems in proving their immigration status, particularly via digital means. This was seen as causing significant issues in relation to the welfare system and created financial precariousness.
- The charity sector was reaching out to support the majority of Roma surveyed to help prove their immigration status.
- Only 29% of those surveyed in 2022 knew how to prove their immigration status.
- A total of 69% of those surveyed were able to prove their status when asked; however, there were 31% who were still unable to prove their status, which represents a significant and ongoing problem for public authorities and Roma communities. Importantly, a total of 15% of those who were able to prove their immigration status confirmed they had paid a third party to assist them in the process.

Mihai concluded by noting that there had been successful collaboration between central government, local authorities and charity organisations, which had led to successes in the delivery of the EUSS. This had enabled millions of EU citizens, including thousands of Roma, to go through the scheme successfully. However, it was emphasised that a great deal more needed to be done.

---

<sup>8</sup> These surveys consisted of research the Roma Support Group had undertaken with New Europeans, which looked at the implications of EUSS digital status for EU citizens in the UK, and a survey undertaken by the Roma Support Group between February and March 2022.

# Martina Stipakova

Family Support Worker, Clifton Learning Partnership

## **Martina works within an organisation that provides advice and support to members of Roma communities within an area of Rotherham in South Yorkshire. Drawing on their frontline experience, Martina raised four main issues.**

Firstly, people with pre-settled status were having challenges in the housing system. There were instances of people being prevented from accessing temporary accommodation due to only being able to prove pre-settled status. Those people with settled status had, or were granted, more rights in the housing system.

Secondly, people who applied for settled status after the deadline were being prevented, or restricted, from returning from overseas. Border officials were providing time-limited rights to people who were attempting to re-enter the UK if they had applied for pre-settled or settled status after the deadline.

Thirdly, family joiners have experienced challenges. Martina provided a detailed case of a 16-year-old girl who had come to the UK to live with her older sister because her mother had died in Slovakia. She had applied for EUSS status, and her application had been refused because she could not link her status to her sister. The Home Office advised that she could stay in the UK for six months, after which she would have to leave, or be removed.

Finally, Roma clients were experiencing ongoing challenges in being able to contact support via the EU Settlement Resolution Centre, which was leading to anxiety within the communities.

# Alexandra Bahor

Community Project Officer, Granby Toxteth Development Trust

## **Alexandra drew on their experience of providing support to Roma communities within the context of Granby Toxteth Development Trust at the intersection between communities and public authorities.**

Alexandra's experience reinforced the experiences shared by previous speakers that there had been a significant and pressing need for more support on the part of members of the Roma communities in respect of the EUSS.

Alexandra underlined the vital linking work that organisations in the charity sector were undertaking to meet the needs of community members by connecting with organisations that had capacity and/or resources to support the community. Alexandra recounted an example of supporting families by using church premises to provide a drop-in session to help resolve EUSS issues.

Alexandra raised two main issues they were facing in their day-to-day work. Firstly, there was a lack of awareness about how status was, and was not, transmitted to new-born children. Whilst the settled status of parents was shared with newly born children, this was not the same for the children of parents with pre-settled status, who had to apply within a set time period. Secondly, people were experiencing challenges in the labour and housing markets if they were waiting for a decision on their status. Whilst a code was available, which showed that an application was pending, it was felt that this did not provide assurance for employers and landlords. This was despite the guidance being clear that an applicant could exercise their rights whilst the application was being considered.

Finally, Alexandra reported how they were very worried about the additional challenges that will arise when community members need to upgrade from pre-settled status to settled status.

# Denisa Gannon

Immigration solicitor

**Denisa is an immigration solicitor and Roma. She has worked with Roma in various capacities since 2006 and has been working on issues relating to the EUSS since 2019.**

Denisa drew on an extensive range of casework experience with supporting Roma through the EUSS process to illustrate some of the operational experiences of living with the EUSS, particularly in respect of moving to and from the UK.

There were several key issues that Denisa raised at the Roundtable grounded in her casework experience. Firstly, she reported concerns that Roma individuals had been increasingly racially profiled by border officials who were asking questions relating to the residency of Roma who were re-entering the UK.

Denisa recounted a case of a Roma woman who had lived in the UK prior to December 2020. Despite struggling with a lack of English and IT skills, this person had made an application for EUSS status, which had been refused on the grounds of insufficient evidence, as had the application made for her six-year-old son. She was unaware that the application had been refused, and, upon attempting to return to the UK, she was refused entry to the UK and was returned to Slovakia with her son. This raised a number of issues as her family could not afford to apply for an administrative review to extend her rights to return or submit an appeal. Her partner was in the UK, and the family was separated. Denisa supported the family to resubmit applications for EUSS status.

There are issues relating to Child Arrangement Orders (CAOs), which were seen to cause confusion for applicants. Whilst the digital version of CAOs states that applicants can travel to the UK and list their rights under the EUSS if a holder made a late application (submitted after 30/6/2021), the rights are restricted unless the status is granted; therefore, people with such applications should not travel into and out of the UK unless the status is granted. This is not widely understood and leads to difficulties and separations for individuals and families.

Denisa has also started to see an increase in applications for families to be joined in the UK by elderly parents. These are leading to a new series of challenges due to the need for these applications to be made out of the country, ongoing issues associated with digital accessibility and evidence requirements. These are particular issues for Roma populations who tend to live as large extended families.

# Comments and concerns from the audience

## Following the panel speakers, a number of questions and concerns were raised by a range of participants representing organisations across different sectors, as well as individuals.

The views and experiences of the audience were remarkably similar to those of the main speakers at the event. The impacts experienced by Roma related to impediments to travel were shared by those in attendance. One such example was of people being detained at the border by the UK Border Force and the impact this had on family separation as a result.

Roma have typically experienced challenges in accessing appropriate identity documents, as highlighted in previous reports from this group, but this remains an ongoing struggle for some, which continues to hamper their engagement with the EUSS.

The lack of funding made available for organisations who support Roma communities to engage with the EUSS, particularly with updating their status, was seen as a significant source of concern by a number of members of the audience. Whilst funding had been made available to support the application process in the short term, there were no resources available for anything in the longer term. It was made clear that lots of work is still being undertaken to support families making late applications. Perversely, it is the applications that are made later that are more complex and, as a result, more resource-intensive.

Attendees were clear that there needs to be more funding available in order to help organisations address this unmet need amongst the communities.

Nicu Ion, an elected member within Newcastle City Council and the UK's first elected member from a Roma background, provided a detailed description of his engagements with Roma community members who were subject to restrictions upon re-entering the UK:

'As a councillor working with the local community, I get many phone calls in the middle of the night from people from different countries in the European Union being detained at the borders... this Saturday someone rang me at 3am in the morning saying they had been detained at the UK-France border and they didn't know what was happening. The way people are treated by the border police is horrific. This man had his family in Darlington, and he had gone to France for a job, and when he was returning he wasn't allowed in. I get phone calls like this on a weekly basis, and people are given different reasons as to why they can't enter such as "your application is still pending, you can't travel", which I consider an abuse.'

# Summary and next steps

## **The challenges experienced by Roma communities with regard to accessing, updating and proving their EUSS immigration status are putting significant pressure on organisations that are providing assistance through the EUSS system.**

Organisations providing EUSS services to Roma are still reporting high levels of demand for support. This is especially from families who need to make EUSS applications for children but also from adults making late applications, those who are still awaiting a decision, those updating from pre-settled status to settled status and those joining family members.

There are also additional challenges arising related to community members who attempt to re-enter the UK at the border.

UK Government funding for organisations that provide assistance to vulnerable EU citizens has been extended to September 2022, but no confirmation has been received as to whether this will be extended further, at the time of writing. While the number of people needing to obtain EUSS immigration status is declining, the challenges arising from the EUSS are increasing each month. Further challenges will arise when greater numbers need to update their pre-settled status to settled status in the years to come.<sup>9</sup>

Collaboration between central and local authorities and charity organisations has proved to be the crucial element in the success of EUSS service delivery. This has enabled millions of EU citizens, including thousands of Roma, to go through the scheme successfully.

To ensure success in the long term, this collaboration needs to continue, and local authorities should establish long-term EUSS support centres for their EU residents. Not taking action at this stage will lead to increased pressure on local public services, as time will need to be devoted to assisting those unable to access their rights. Inaction will also be likely to lead to further challenges for local public authorities, who will have to deal with the consequences as people lose access to their EUSS account and their rights if they fail to update their pre-settled status. These impacts will continue to put an unnecessary, and avoidable, burden on the welfare and associated support systems.

The event on 29 March 2022 (and this report) marks the ongoing commitment of the APPG to support the Roma community through the issues relating to the EUSS. The APPG will continue to work with organisations within civil society, lawyers and the UK Government to monitor the effectiveness of the EUSS process and bring matters concerning Roma to the attention of the UK Government.

---

<sup>9</sup> Fernández-Reino, M. & Sumption, M. (2022). How Secure is Pre-Settled Status for EU Citizens After Brexit? Migration Observatory report, COMPAS, University of Oxford. <https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/MigObs-Report-How-Secure-is-Pre-Settled-Status-for-EU-Citizens-After-Brexit.pdf>



