

## ICAR signpost No. 4

April 2004

### Roma asylum seekers and refugees in the UK



Roma flag approved at the first World Romani Congress in London in 1971

ICAR



the INFORMATION CENTRE  
about asylum and refugees  
IN THE UK

## Background

Roma, also sometimes referred to as Gypsies, are Europe's largest ethnic minority community. Traditionally a nomadic group, they have been in Europe since around the 10<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup> century A.D. and came originally from northern India, although perceptions that they came instead from Egypt led to the use of terms such as Gypsy, Tsigan, Zigeuner, Gitano, etc. Estimates vary as to the exact size of the Roma population in Europe – it is considered to be between 7<sup>1</sup> and 12<sup>2</sup> million, most of whom live in Central and Eastern Europe. Over the centuries, Roma have faced discrimination and prejudice – including being subjected to policies of forced settlement, having their traditions, language and way of life outlawed, and being mistrusted and rejected by local communities. During the Second World War, large numbers of Roma residing in Nazi-occupied Europe were killed or transported to concentration camps. For example in the Czech Lands, it is estimated that only between 500 and 600 Roma survived out of a pre-War population of around 6,000.<sup>3</sup> Roma faced further discrimination in the Communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe during the post-War period, including policies of forced settlement and assimilation. After the end of the Cold War, Roma have remained marginalised relative to the majority ethnic populations, both socially and economically, and have been subject to discrimination in the areas of employment, education, and housing, although steps have been taken by their national governments to address this. Most recently, an estimated 80,000 Roma fled conflict in the province of Kosovo.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Save the Children (2001) *Denied a future: the right to education of Roma/Gypsy & Traveller children in Europe*, London: Save the Children.

<sup>2</sup> Dimitrina Petrova (1999) 'Roma of Europe', *Minorities Rights*, vol. 14, no. 2 & Rudko Kawczynski (2000) *Report on the Condition of Roma in Europe*, Report commissioned by the OSCE for presentation in October 2000. Available online at: <http://www.romnews.com/a/RKreport.htm>

<sup>3</sup> Donald Kenrick & Grattan Puxon (1995) *Gypsies under the Swastika*, University of Hertfordshire Press.

<sup>4</sup> Ilona Klimova (2001) 'The 30<sup>th</sup> Romani National Day: 8<sup>th</sup> April 2001', Posting to the MINELRES discussion list: <http://lists.partners-intl.net/pipermail/neww-rights/2001-April/000499.html>

Since the 1990s, a number of Roma have claimed asylum in the UK. It is not possible to give an exact figure, as asylum statistics record the number of claims from nationals of a particular country, and do not identify how many of these people were Roma, or from other ethnic groups. Organisations representing asylum seekers in the UK estimate that the majority of claims from many Central and Eastern European countries were made by Romani people<sup>5</sup> and Home Office country reports identify Roma as a significant minority group facing discrimination.<sup>6</sup>

8<sup>th</sup> April is Romani National Day. It has been celebrated since 1971 and is marked by cultural events held in a number of countries in North America, Europe, South America, and Australia. For some groups the day also has a political focus, as part of campaigns to promote the observance of human rights for Romani people and to support the movement for the recognition of the Roma as a non-territorial nation with the right to a seat at the UN General Assembly.

## Resources

This section contains references for useful resources on the Roma population in the UK. If you would like to suggest a resource to be included in the list, please contact [rachel.henson@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:rachel.henson@kcl.ac.uk)

### Audio-visual - photography

#### Photo Mythology – Romani Gypsies

A series of pictures taken over a 25-year period of photographic research and oral history with Romani communities in a number of countries, including Romani fleeing the conflict in former Yugoslavia who had sought refuge in Italy.

<http://www.photomythology.com/pages/home.html>

#### Photo report of the Kosovo crisis

Documenting the destruction of Ashkaelia property during March 2004.

[http://www.errc.org/publications/photos/kosovo\\_2004.shtml](http://www.errc.org/publications/photos/kosovo_2004.shtml)

#### Romani News – photographs from Kosovo by Theodor Freundt

[http://www.romano-nevipe.netfirms.com/photos\\_main.htm](http://www.romano-nevipe.netfirms.com/photos_main.htm)

#### The Roma of Central and Eastern Europe

Online photography exhibition by Rolf Bauerdick.

<http://www.osi.hu/exhibition/bauerd/rbm.htm>

#### Challenging Segregation

Photo essay by Joseph Orton featuring the *Kedvesház Kollégium* in Nyírtelek, eastern Hungary, a school which forms part of an innovative educational program directly challenging the widespread prejudice that Roma children are educationally inferior and need to be segregated from non-Roma children in the school system.

<http://www.osi.hu/exhibition/bauerd/rbm.htm>

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<sup>5</sup> Refugee Council (1999) *Unwanted Journey: Why Central European Roma are fleeing to the UK*, London: The Refugee Council.

<sup>6</sup> See for example the Country Information Policy Unit country reports, from October 2003. Available online at: <http://www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk/default.asp?pageid=88>

## Publications

### **The Roma: A Nation Without A Country? - University of Hertfordshire Press**

The Press has a major publishing programme on social, cultural and political aspects of the Roma both in the UK and elsewhere in Europe. These are organised under a number of thematic headings, including scholarly accounts of research in Romani studies, the language, literature and culture of the Romanies, and the Roma of Central and Eastern Europe.

<http://www.herts.ac.uk/UHPress/Gypsies.html>

### **Gypsy collections at the University of Liverpool**

The collections of books, manuscripts, prints, photography, sound recordings, and press cuttings relate primarily to Gypsies/travelers in the UK between the mid 19<sup>th</sup> and mid 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

<http://sca.lib.liv.ac.uk/collections/gypsy/intro.htm>

### **Romani Studies**

An international, interdisciplinary journal published twice a year, Romani Studies publishes modern scholarship in all branches of Romani/Gypsy studies. It features articles on the cultures of many peripatetic groups, including those who refer to themselves as Ludar, Rom, Roma, Romanichels, Sinti and Travellers.

<http://www.gypsylloresociety.org/journal.htm>

## News and information sites

### **Open Society Institute EU Accession Monitoring Program**

Reports on Minority Protection in the ten countries acceding to EU membership in May 2004.

<http://www.eumap.org/reports/2002/content/07>

### **Patrin Web Journal**

Patrin aims to serve as a learning resource, and information centre about Romani culture and social issues. The site is divided into a number of thematic sections, each providing excerpts from a variety of articles highlighting particular aspects of Romani culture and history. French and German versions of the site are also available.

<http://www.geocities.com/Paris/5121/index.html>

### **Romani Forum**

The Forum is hosted by Cyba City, a web service which present information to support local community political affairs. The Forum's aim is to assist Roma in gaining independence and freedom of choice: short briefings are posted on the website, to discuss issues including education, training and employment.

<http://www.cybacity.com/romaniforum/>

### **Romani.org**

A website launched in 1998 to provide accurate information about the Roma, and to serve the needs of organisations by hosting their websites.

<http://romani.org/>

### **Romani World**

Covering a wide range of issues relating to Roma in Europe, including political and legal representation, and development, with a particular focus on campaigning to end the policy of segregated schooling for Roma children in Central Europe.

<http://www.romaniworld.com/index.html>

### **Romani Studies at the University of Greenwich**

Provides a brief history of the Romani population in the UK, and gives details of academic research and publications in the form of a reading list formerly used for the M.A. in Romani Studies and Social Science, within the department of Sociology.

<http://www.gre.ac.uk/~at02/>

### **RomNews**

A Hamburg-based society, promoting information exchange to combat prejudice towards Roma. The site includes a searchable database of articles relating to Roma issues, and a list of FAQs. It also provides links to news reports about Roma in many countries, policy documents, and details of initiatives from non-governmental and governmental organizations addressing discrimination against Roma.

<http://www.romnews.com/>

### **Transitions Online**

Transitions Online is an NGO which seeks to use internet technologies to help strengthen the professionalism, independence and impact of journalism in post-communist Central and Eastern Europe, the Balkans, and the former Soviet Union. It includes news reports on the EU accession states, and country-specific resource pages.

<http://archive.tol.cz/>

## **Projects**

### **Roma Culture Initiative (RCI)**

The RCI was launched in 1999 and focuses on supporting Roma efforts towards self-reliance and providing information material about Roma culture to the general population in Central and Eastern Europe.

[romaculture@osi.hu](mailto:romaculture@osi.hu)

[http://www.soros.org/initiatives/roma/focus\\_areas/culture](http://www.soros.org/initiatives/roma/focus_areas/culture)

### **Roma Film Productions**

Roma Film Productions was founded in October 2002 by Lubomir Zubak, a human rights activist and filmmaker and is based in the Republic of Ireland. Its cinematic project, 'Circus Europe' is a multi-cultural film directed jointly by Roma and Czech directors, involving actors of a number of different nationalities. The film aims to recount the history of Roma persecution, though the story of a Romany Circus before, during, and after the Second World War. Funding is currently being sought to develop the project, and interested individuals are invited to become friends of Roma Film Productions.

88 Navan Road

Dublin 7

Ireland

T + 01 8387 350

F +01 8387 350

E [info@romafilmfund.com](mailto:info@romafilmfund.com)

<http://romafilmfund.com/>

### **Roma Programs of the Open Society Institute**

The OSI's Roma Programs are aimed at improving the social, political and economic situation of Romani populations in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. They address a range of issues relating to the direct and indirect discrimination faced by Roma, including legal and education reform, media access, youth outreach, and women's empowerment. The Programs have six main focus areas: the [Roma](#)

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[Culture Initiative](#), [Roma Education Initiative](#), [Romani Health](#), [Romani Women](#), [Roma Participation Program](#), and the [Roma Memorial University Scholarship Program](#).

Roma Program  
Open Society Institute  
1120 19<sup>th</sup> Street NW  
8<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Washington, DC 20036  
USA  
T + 1 202 721 5600  
F + 1 202 530 0128  
<http://www.soros.org/initiatives/roma>

#### **Roma Protest Network**

A project established by Valeriu Nicolae, Romani activist for over 11 years and Deputy Director of the ERIO in Brussels, and Hannah Slavik, director of educational programs at the [DiploFoundation](#), with the aim of raising funds to build a centre to assist the children living in the waste dump at Mofleini, outside Craiova, a large city in southern Romania.

<http://www.romanetwork.org/>

#### **Roma Rights and Access to Justice in Europe (RrAJE)**

RrAJE is a three-year programme (2001-2004), funded by the UK government's Department for International Development (DfID) to tackle the social exclusion of Roma in Central and Eastern Europe. It provides support for local Roma NGOs in building formal partnerships with municipal authorities to address Roma communities' lack of access to models of good practice in implementing national strategies for the integration of Roma and the fulfilment of EU accession criteria, by transferring best practice in Race Equality from the UK. RrAJE is managed by European Dialogue, an independent membership organisation, launched in 1990, that provides a forum for debate on the future shape of post Cold War Europe.

European Dialogue  
175 Goswell Rd  
London, EC1V 7HJ  
T 020 7253 3337  
F 020 7253 5790  
<http://www.rraje.org/>

#### **Video Diaries Project**

An offshoot of the Roma Rights and Access to Justice in Europe programme, the video diaries project brings together disadvantaged young people from the Roma communities in the UK and Bulgaria. It includes activities such as video workshops, meetings and interviews with important Roma figures, and visits to schools, a children's home, and community projects. The project's website includes comments by both the British and Bulgarian participants.

<http://www.rraje.org/diary.html>

## Contacts

This section aims to provide contact details for organisations whose work relates to Roma refugees and asylum-seekers in the UK. It also features some contacts for other organisations that work on Roma issues in other European countries.

The list will be updated as other useful links and contacts are identified. If you would like to add details of your organisation to these pages then please email [rachel.henson@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:rachel.henson@kcl.ac.uk)

### Europe Roma

Europe Roma is a community organisation that works with Roma from Eastern Europe. It has a range of activities, including providing advice and support, organising arts and music activities, giving English lessons, promoting awareness of Roma culture, and political campaigning.

280 St Ann's Road  
Haringey  
London, N15 5BN  
T 020 8802 7496  
F 020 8442 8019  
E [europaeroma@hotmail.com](mailto:europaeroma@hotmail.com)

### Roma Support Group

The Roma Support Group provides advice, organises youth and children's activities, promotes understanding of Roma culture, and publicises Roma issues.

P.O. Box 23610  
Newham  
London, E7 0XB  
T 07949 089778  
E [roma@supportgroup.freemove.co.uk](mailto:roma@supportgroup.freemove.co.uk)  
[www.romasupportgroup.org.uk](http://www.romasupportgroup.org.uk)

### All Parliamentary Group (APG) on Roma Affairs

The APG was launched in May 2003, as a joint initiative of European Dialogue and Paul Stinchcombe, Labour MP for Wellingborough, with the support of the Save the Children (UK). It aims to inform British parliamentarians about the situation of Roma in Central and Eastern Europe and to put pressure on the British government to ensure that the accession countries adequately address discrimination against the Roma. Its first year was focussed on 'stage one accession countries' – those that will join the European Union in May 2004 (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia). A fact-finding mission to eastern Slovakia took place in December 2003 to allow members of the group to observe Roma living conditions at first hand.

Mr Paul Stinchcombe MP  
House of Commons  
London  
SW1A 0AA  
T 020 7219 4066

Stage One Accession Countries: Background Report 2003, published by European Dialogue, February 2003  
<http://www.rraje.org/APG/apg.pdf>

(News report) 'MPs attack removal of Roma asylum seekers', Tania Branigan, Guardian, 27 February 2003  
<http://politics.guardian.co.uk/homeaffairs/story/0,11026,903715,00.html>

## Organisations concerned with Roma issues

### European Roma Information Office (ERIO)

ERIO is an international NGO, based in Brussels, which was founded in 2003. It is an advocacy organisation which promotes Romani rights, and their participation in decision and policy making, and campaigns for improvements to their living conditions throughout Europe. The organisation acts as a focal point for the activities of diverse Roma organisations at the EU level. Their website includes a series of responses to recent anti-Roma reports in the UK media in relation to EU accession.

<http://www.erionet.org/>

### European Roma Rights Center (ERRC)

The ERRC is an international, public interest law organisation, based in Budapest. It monitors the human rights situation of Roma and provides legal defence in cases concerning human rights abuses, and receives time, money and expertise from Romani organisations and Romani individuals throughout Europe. ERRC is a cooperating member of the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights and has consultative status with the Council of Europe. Its website provides links to publications on Roma, organised by country and theme, and to organisations concerned with Roma issues.

<http://www.errc.org/>

### Helsinki Citizens Assembly – Roma section

The Roma section represents Romany issues within the Helsinki Citizens Assembly, a human rights organization, based in Brno in the Czech Republic. It aims to organize international conferences on Romany issues and human rights, to establish an information and documentation centre about Romany, and to carry out local-level, multi-cultural projects targeted at the Romany community. During 1998 a series of newsletters were published by the organization, with financial support from the PHARE programme of the European Commission. The website also has a significant volume of resources in Czech.

<http://www.czechia.com/HCAROMA/>

### Minority Rights Group International (MRG)

MRG is an international non-governmental organisation which works to secure the rights of ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities and indigenous peoples worldwide, and to promote cooperation and understanding between communities. It has consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and observer status with the African Commission for Human and Peoples' Rights. MRG seeks to raise awareness of the situation of indigenous peoples among the general public. To this end, it publishes reports, training manuals, briefing papers and workshop reports covering a broad range of issues concerning the rights of minorities and indigenous peoples, and runs training events on international minority rights standards and advocacy techniques. It organises forums where minorities and indigenous peoples can meet with decision-makers and members of majority communities to open constructive dialogue.

54 Commercial Street

London E1 6LT, UK

T 020 7422 4200

F 020 422 4201

E [minority.rights@mrgmail.org](mailto:minority.rights@mrgmail.org)

<http://www.minorityrights.org/>