Roma experiences of living and working in South Yorkshire

South Yorkshire Roma project
Report 2 of 7
- [Christina] It's good in this country because ... you still meet good people who can support you to achieve something in life, and this is how you become more and more empowered and your aspirations are higher - because of the people that you meet, I think.
- [Petr] Yes, yes, yes.
- [Christina] They make you believe you can make it, and actually you can.

(Dialogue between Christina and Petr, participants in the professionals’ focus group)

Acknowledgements

This report was part of a wider South Yorkshire Roma project funded by the Big Lottery Fund. It was written by Ewa Jamroz and Dr Pip Tyler in January 2017.

We would like to thank everyone who was involved in the project for their contributions. In particular we would like to acknowledge the following people:

- Our Roma champions: Michal Bily, OlinaFuseini and Terezia Rostas, as well as Phil Martin at the University of Salford who worked with them
- Members of Roma communities in South Yorkshire who participated in the project
- Staff and service providers across South Yorkshire who participated in the project
- Our steering group members: Professor Phil Brown, University of Salford and Colin Havard, Sheffield City Council
- Our team at Migration Yorkshire who helped us in many and various ways to deliver the project, in particular: Nahida Khan, Bill Dennis, Dave Brown, Nicola Baylis, Dinah Beckett, and Katie Deighton.

Migration Yorkshire is a local authority-led regional migration partnership. We work with national government, local government, and others to ensure that Yorkshire and Humber can deal with, and benefit from, migration. We work with agencies across the statutory, voluntary, community and private sectors to help support the delivery of high quality services to migrants in a way that benefits everyone living in local communities.

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Background to this report

Migrant Roma are one of the newest communities in South Yorkshire. Important work is already being done in some local areas to explore what this means and respond to the needs of whole communities where new arrivals are making their home. Migration Yorkshire has led a short project to bring policy makers, Roma, non-Roma people and organisations together to share information and discuss what’s working and what isn’t. We also explored what still needs to be done to reduce the exclusion of Roma populations and to foster positive integration across South Yorkshire communities.

This report is the second in a series of reports for the South Yorkshire Roma project (listed on the back page of this report).

This report focuses on the voices of Roma residents in South Yorkshire, their views and experiences of living and working here. Since the data collection and thematic analysis have been driven by what Roma participants have told us, we believe that this report has identified some key issues that develop our understanding of Roma perspectives in South Yorkshire, such as: intermediaries, Brexit and Roma priorities.

Methodology

This report is based on our qualitative research study exploring the experiences of Roma in South Yorkshire. The report is primarily based on information collected during five focus groups with Roma held in South Yorkshire. Three Roma ‘champions’ employed by the project were involved in the design of the focus group schedules, which was also guided by staff at the University of Salford. Four focus groups were facilitated by a Roma champion, who conducted the focus group in the first language of the group and then translated. The fifth focus group was conducted in English with a group of Roma professionals. Focus group discussions were transcribed and quotations from participants have been anonymised.  

29 Roma participants were recruited by our Roma champions to take part in focus groups, which were held in Barnsley, Doncaster, Rotherham and Sheffield. Participant characteristics were as follows:

- 11 participants were from Sheffield, 7 from Rotherham, 6 from Barnsley, and 5 from Doncaster
- 18 were female, and 11 were male
- Four nationalities participated: 18 Slovaks, 6 Latvians, 4 Czechs and 1 Romanian
- Participants had lived in the UK for between 1 year and 17 years.

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1 A further focus group was undertaken with 10 Romanians who work in Goldthorpe, Barnsley, but none of these participants were prepared to identify themselves as Roma. We have therefore excluded the data from this group from the analysis and report, except for a useful insight relating to community relationships in Section 5: Local places, social encounters and belonging.

2 Words in square brackets in quotations in the text of this report have been added subsequently to ensure the flow and meaning of the quotation. Three dots [...] indicate deleted words from the original transcript.

3 On occasions a pseudonym has been allocated without knowing the gender of the participant. We have not drawn any conclusions based on gender.
The timing of the data collection phase had an important effect upon the research findings. While the launch event took place in May 2016, focus groups took place between July and November 2016, that is, within weeks or months after the EU referendum vote in the UK on 23 June. This issue was forefront in the minds of those participating in the focus groups, and was a topic included in the question schedule at the request of the Roma champions. While this means that the focus groups were focused on the initial reaction of Roma and their experiences after the vote, it provides a unique insight into the immediate effects of this vote upon EU residents.

This report also draws on information from other sources. It includes information shared at local meetings and events that were part of the project; there was a launch event and two local meetings for service providers and Roma in each for the four towns of South Yorkshire. Roma attended all of these events and meetings. The report also draws on information shared by local services who participated in the research at these meetings and events, as well as a service survey and any local research that was particularly pertinent.

Findings from the research were shared at the second set of local meetings in order to ensure that they reflected understanding among both Roma and local services, and the findings were adjusted in light of this feedback.

Reflecting on Roma participation

It is clear that Roma involved in this research wanted to be taken seriously and be involved in decision-making that affects them, like any other service user group or residents. This is reflected in the participation of so many Roma in this project, despite having work and family commitments, the timings of many meetings during their working hours, and perhaps an unfamiliarity in participating in meetings with lots of officials that could have seemed intimidating. Some Roma took leave from work to attend, while others juggled appointments to be able to participate.

We hope that this report reflects a recognition of Roma participants’ efforts to take part, and provides a fair understanding of Roma perspectives about their lives in South Yorkshire. We also hope that this report will enable non-Roma in services and in local areas to improve their knowledge and understanding of Roma communities and to consider how they themselves might also be part of improving the inclusion of Roma in all aspects of our society.
What we know about Roma in the UK and in South Yorkshire

There is an increasing literature on Roma in the UK. Local and national research has provided evidence of exclusion of Roma in the UK and beyond, including from Migration Yorkshire’s Roma SOURCE and Roma MATRIX projects (2011-2015). They have shown that poverty is a central and recurring aspect of exclusion to Roma exclusion, exacerbated by lack of fluency in English, poor education, restricted access to public services and wider opportunities and limited integration in the local communities. Despite this accumulating knowledge and a variety of interventions at local levels, Roma exclusion persists.

We have identified a range of local information about Roma in particular localities in South Yorkshire. This tends to describe barriers to service access, and reflects service activity and engagement with Roma in the region, particularly around schools and health needs. Other issues covered include employment, engagement, integration and women. Roma tend to be discussed as one ethnic group, although at times the focus narrows to Slovak Roma, understood to be the dominant Roma nationality in some parts of South Yorkshire. This local information is described in more detail in the subsequent reports for this project.

Researchers, planners and practitioners have struggled to identify approximate numbers of migrant Roma living in their localities, for well-understood reasons relating to inadequate monitoring categories and an understandable reluctance among Roma to identify themselves by their ethnicity. The University of Salford surveyed local authorities across the UK and in 2013 estimated there were approximately 25,000 Roma living in the Yorkshire and Humber region. Others have looked at local level data within South Yorkshire. Despite a lack of reliable data, Roma have been characterised as settling in a small number of places in the UK in significant concentrations. Intense media attention in some of these areas, notably Page Hall in Sheffield, has led to the problematizing of Roma communities by focusing on social cohesion issues. Through our data gathering it has become clear that Roma have a more spread out geographical pattern of settlement across South Yorkshire, although it is understood that some areas remain more popular than others for newly-arriving Roma in particular.

Thus it was important that our project considered and included the voices of Roma who are living in different parts of South Yorkshire. Within a context of localised information, the remainder of this report shares some Roma views from Barnsley, Doncaster, Rotherham and Sheffield about living and working here, and their priorities for the future.

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Roma voices #1. Access to services

Confusion and comparison between services in different countries

Key message: Misunderstandings can arise when Roma access services, because Roma compare services in South Yorkshire to their countries of origin. These comparisons are often (but not always) favourable towards the UK or simply reflect difference. This can lead to different expectations by Roma about service provision or can lead Roma to believe they might be being treated differently to other UK residents.

Roma participants in this research often compared the systems in their countries of origin with their experiences in the UK. Overall, these were usually favourable comparisons, with Roma feeling that their lives in the UK were better than in their countries of origin, or just different. Some examples include the following.

I’m pleased that my children learn so many good things in school and they’re treated so well. In Slovakia, in school, they weren’t learning like that. I can see the difference in England. Everything has been improved. I’m happy that the teacher is always keeping in touch with me, always is keeping me up-to-date with their progress. (Renata, Slovak Roma participant, Sheffield)

One good thing what I like here in the UK, like children came let’s say 12 years old or 10 years old. Maybe he didn’t know any English yet, he came from Latvia or Poland or wherever. It’s a good thing that they tried to adapt him … not put in the first class. … Latvia is not like that … they put him in the first class with 6, 7 year old children. 10, 11 year old child, that’s no good. He doesn’t feel right, there’s something wrong. (Artis, Latvian Roma male, Barnsley, in the UK for 7 years)

While these Roma parents were appreciative of the differences they observed between the UK and their countries of origin, some parents were more mystified and surprised, as one parent explained in relation to the balance they observed between numeracy and literacy classes compared with physical education:

It’s a bit weird, the system in the schools in England, because I can see them doing lots of outside activities. However, I don’t see them doing lots of writing, reading and maths, so for me, it’s a bit weird at my children’s school. It’s a bit weird, the fact that even if it’s raining and it’s cold, they will go outside. They do lots of running and PE activities instead of doing more of reading and writing and maths. (Lucia, Slovak Roma participant, Sheffield)

While this particular parent was not complaining about such differences, there were many examples of other Roma being unhappy about incidents at school, how the staff dealt with these and communicated them to parents. A number of parents in the research described how they did not understand why their children were expected to attend school when unwell. They also felt that such decisions were taken out of their own hands, and thus their role and authority as a parent was diluted; this is significant in a culture that greatly values family. These suggest that the systems in the UK are different to what Roma have experienced in their countries of origin, and different to what they had expected of the UK. One parent described this in relation to their child who attends school in Sheffield:
We don’t understand the system of having to take the child in school ill. It’s not normal for the teacher to ask us to bring the child in school if he’s got the flu. We know what to do, we go to the doctor, we ask for the report, we go to school and tell them that our children are not well because, sometimes, over the phone they don’t believe us. However, sometimes, they send staff to our house and they just tell us that the children have to go to school even if they are not well, so for us, it’s very confusing, this thing. (Hanka, Slovak Roma participant, Sheffield)

This parent’s unhappiness with the school rules regarding attendance was compounded by having staff visits to their home. While this action might be usual policy for all pupils, Roma parents could infer that they have been targeted for the visit because of their ethnicity, particularly if they have not understood school policies on absence. Notably, the parent in this situation still tried to adapt to UK systems by getting a doctor’s note and taking it to the school in person to demonstrate their compliance.

The overall sense from the research was that Roma parents at best might be confused, and at worst, feel discriminated against because they don’t understand UK systems properly. This highlights a need for improved communication between service providers and Roma service users. It is also possible that some discrimination or prejudice might occur, partly because of a lack of knowledge about Roma communities on the part of service providers. This suggests that there is work to do in terms of improving service provider knowledge about Roma communities, even among services that interact with Roma frequently and feel that their knowledge is sufficient.

Trust in different types of service provider

Key message: Distrust felt by many Roma towards those in authority and services is particularly acute in relation to social services and the police. Trust is more variable in relation to schools, where Roma parents do engage. Some Roma are suspicious of the motives of certain organisations who they perceive may stand to benefit financially from working with their communities. This may undermine the efforts of other services to engage with Roma.

Our research confirms the general understanding that Roma often are wary of those in positions of authority, largely due to their experiences of acute discrimination and prejudice in their countries of origin. Many services understand this. Trust was mentioned in various local meetings as an issue, and one service in the service survey felt that ‘Roma seem to trust people on YouTube more than those in statutory services’.

Our research suggests more than this though - that Roma display nuanced distrust towards those in authority, rather than uniform fearfulness. Our research participants tended to describe differing levels of trust and distrust according to the service in question.

More acute distrust of the police and social services

Distrust among Roma participants (and observed by service providers) seemed particularly acute in relation to social services and the police. This is understandable given the
enforcement powers of these bodies, and Roma’s historical experiences of these institutions in their countries of origin and also more recently in the UK. Some service providers may be unaware of the level of distrust that exists towards them, either because they lack understanding of Roma backgrounds, or they feel they have done sufficient work on building relationships with Roma clients.

One Roma participant, Petr, provided several negative examples of his experiences with UK police officers. In one case, he felt that he was treated disrespectfully by a particular police officer at first, then when she realised that he was a working professional her treatment of him improved markedly. Petr also was reluctant to report hate crime following one experience using the 101 police phone number, as he explains in another example.

What’s the point of reporting it? I spent 45 minutes at 101 trying to report my daughter’s issue about the Facebook bullying. I was questioned. I felt like I was the criminal not the victim. (Petr, Czech Roma professional, in the UK for 16 years)

At some events there were discussions about encouraging Roma to join the police to help build positive relationships with Roma communities. South Yorkshire police have mentioned work they have already undertaken with young people in schools to build trust, and the Rotherham force has three Roma cadets. Training of service providers could also help to improve some of these more difficult relationships, as suggested by a community member at the launch event.

Maybe a CPD [continuing professional development] session will do for some of the police officers as well, about Roma culture, about our way of life and about our history, why we are in this way, why we are so in distrust with the police, there must be good reason; there is! Maybe a few CPD sessions to Sheffield, Doncaster, Barnsley, I don’t know, South Yorkshire. (male Roma community panel member, project event)

Distrust of the police and social care staff is likely to remain an issue for most Roma. It is important that such organisations are realistic about this outcome but not discouraged, and that they continue to invest in building those relationships.

Promising levels of trust in schools

In contrast, Roma parents seemed to feel significantly more trust in relation to schools. It was clear that Roma parents want to and frequently do engage with schools. They gave many both good and bad reports of incidents and relationships with staff, across different localities but largely more positive stories regarding primary schools compared to secondary schools. There were positive comments about individual teachers with whom Roma parents had developed good relationships, such as the following examples.

Everybody, teachers in the school they know every kid. Every kid’s name. ... We don’t know them, but they know everything about them. (Rita, Latvian Roma female, Barnsley, in the UK 7 years)

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7 For example, in summer 2012 a Slovak documentary claimed that UK social services were ‘kidnapping’ Roma children. This led to demonstrations by Roma in some areas, disengagement from services and reports that some families had gone missing. See also ‘Caring for Roma children’ Children’s Society Policy Blog 31.08.12 www.childrenssociety.org.uk/news-and-blogs/our-blog/caring-roma-children
We can see that the teacher is happy to talk to us about our child and the way that they look at us. I can see that she’s happy to speak to me. (Gabrilia, Slovak Roma participant, Sheffield)

There were also concerns among parents about the way that children’s health and safety issues are managed at school. Some examples follow in relation to how staff dealt with incidents at school and the lack of information passed on to the Roma parents.

The kids were fighting in school but the Head never did anything about it. Also, I have noticed that the children in school are now aware that we are Roma, and they target our kids to beat them. (Janko, Slovak Roma male, Rotherham)

I don’t understand if there’s anything wrong with my child. They don’t always ring me if he falls down. ... When I collect him, I see he might have a scar or he might have just fall, and I just see that when I pick him up. Other than that, they don’t ring me when this thing is happening. (Pavol, Slovak Roma participant, Sheffield)

I had to drag my 5 year old to school with high temperature, feeling so ill. And she tells me that I should bring his medication, that they will give it to him. But they did not. Also he was coughing so bad, he was vomiting, collapsed in the classroom. They laid him down in corridor and if my friend would not tell me as she saw him, I would have never known. No one has called me. (Anezka, Slovak Roma female, Rotherham, in the UK for 4 years)

It is important that good relationships with Roma families are encouraged and maintained through schools, given that many Roma children were traditionally excluded or sent to ‘special schools’ in their countries of origin. Schools can facilitate the development of trust between Roma parents and other service providers, as has been seen in some areas. The research found more reported success among primary schools than secondary schools in successfully engaging with Roma parents. The reasons for this are not certain, but it is possible that older children had already disengaged with school systems prior to arrival in the UK, while younger children do not have that history. In addition, we are aware of a number of primary schools employing Roma teaching assistants who might be helping to broker constructive, trusted relationships between Roma and schools.

Scepticism about service provider motives

A further trust issue concerns the relationship between Roma and some service providers. Some Roma were sceptical of the motives of some service providers, voicing suspicions that organisations might work with their community because of funding opportunities, rather than because they genuinely wished to improve outcomes for Roma. We picked up on this issue on a number of occasions, although we believe Roma usually did not want to make this point too overtly and risk negative consequences for their communities.

One individual at an event commented that services might overestimate the degree to which Roma communities trust them. Participants in a focus group discussion made the point more explicitly in their dialogue, and found parallels with their experiences in their own countries of origin:

- [Petr] There’s also people from British society who will ... use the opportunity to abuse the Roma people ... and have them as a puppet.
During this project we also witnessed a couple of occasions where unfortunately the attitudes of some staff seemed detrimental to encouraging trusting, positive relationships between services and Roma. These included, for example, an employee who challenged Roma contributions and prevented Roma service users from speaking freely. In another incident, there was a noticeable change in tone among some service providers once Roma participants had left a local event. At this point, these staff members talked in a more derogatory manner about Roma communities. These incidents reinforce reports from Roma about their experiences of some services being unapproachable and unsympathetic.

Such experiences may not mean Roma disengage with services (particularly given the lack of alternatives), but they may well not feel they can wholly trust them to work unchallenged in their communities. Disillusionment with a lack of tangible improvements in their lives is a related effect, as one participant stated:

*I have been sitting here for 10 years, talking, talking, talking to you important people. We need to see changes as well.* (male Roma community panel member, project event)

The potential for growing disillusionment with existing services, and the lack of discernible progress among some Roma communities during the past decade, means that future work might be compromised. Well-meaning projects and staff could find it increasingly difficult to work in Roma communities if those communities’ previous experiences have been negative or tainted with suspicion about the integrity of intervening organisations.

### Barriers to accessing services

**Key message:** Roma participants in this project wanted a single, local point of contact, access or information. Some third sector drop-ins fulfil this function. However, this can result in problems in transitioning Roma service users to mainstream statutory services. Roma would like to be trusted with resources themselves.

**Known but persisting barriers to service access**

Certain barriers for Roma in South Yorkshire to accessing services were raised repeatedly during this research. They included:

- form-filling multiple times in order to access services
- the range and complexity of services
- attitudes of particular (gatekeeping) staff encountered, such as receptionists
- the number of workers they need to engage with (too many)
- unavailable or inappropriate choice of interpreters for non-English speakers.
These kinds of barriers to service access are not unusual or unknown to local practitioners. At a local meeting, one staff member observed: ‘if 10 different people are involved with the family, people just withdraw.’

Some of these barriers have been raised elsewhere for a range of migrant groups⁸ and they echo issues that UK nationals also face in accessing services. Roma are likely to be unaware of these similarities and could interpret some barriers as a form of discrimination. That is also not to deny that mainstream services who try to engage with Roma can struggle with what they experience as unreliability of some Roma clients.

Potential solutions to these multiple barriers

Barriers to service access persist despite our knowledge of them. As a solution, Roma commonly proposed a single, local point of contact, access and information in the form of Roma community centres. The following quotations confirm some of the main reasons why Roma would find this useful.

*Is there a possibility of having one place where everything can be accessed rather than having small bits everywhere?* (paraphrased suggestion at a Sheffield local meeting)

- [Petra] They should open a community centre, because there are many people who need help with forms etc. because they don’t speak English.
- [Nada] We need Roma community centres. Because my English is not very good, when I came to the UK I have started my job and I didn’t have any time to learn English.
  (Discussion between female participants in Doncaster: Petra, a Slovak participant in the UK 4 years and Nada, Czech participant in the UK 17 years)

- [Renata] I would like the council to help us to become a strong community and to help us as a community like they do help other communities, and they have their own space and they gather together, and the council encourages and respects their traditions and they respect them as a community. We would like to be treated the same. I would like to be able to go in a Roma community centre and not to be shy to ask for any support and not to be shy to talk in our own language and to learn English as well. ...
- [Erik] Yes, I think the same. We would love to have a place where we could gather together and just not be afraid to ask for any services and to be open and to feel that it’s like our own community, but to be open to different communities as well. ...
- [Lucia] Yes, I think the same. I think it’s very important for us as a community to have our place and our space and to make things in the way that we know and in the way that we would like to, as long as it’s legal.
  (Discussion between Renata, Erik, and Lucia, Slovak Roma participants in Sheffield)

Roma participants often saw a Roma community centre as a single solution to many of their difficulties. Some were practical needs for new arrivals around understanding and accessing services through a single contact who speaks the Roma language. This would make many Roma feel more comfortable to raise questions about addressing their difficulties. Other reasons for wanting a community centre related to providing a social space where Roma could meet, socialise and feel free to celebrate their cultural traditions. When this suggestion was made at local meetings it was clear that some service providers were uneasy

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about such a proposal. From the Roma perspective, other minority groups have such facilities. It could easily appear inconsistent to Roma if they are denied such a resource.

One alternative already in place in some areas are third sector drop-ins which seem to fulfil these ‘one-stop’ functions fairly well. However, success seems to lead to over-subscription of these services and later problems in encouraging Roma to access mainstream services, since trust has been already established with the drop-in providers and Roma clients have been directed by other organisations to these agencies rather than to mainstream services. Thus while drop-ins seem successful, their success might create long-term dependency for which they cannot cater.

Trust is a reciprocal value. Not only has this project revealed some insights into Roma’s trust of institutions in the UK, but Roma also want to feel trusted. Local services frequently declare that they would like to work with Roma representatives, leaders or community groups, and many Roma would like to be in control of their own decisions and be able to run their own activities. Some Roma in this research have articulated this well:

*It’s a great feeling to see that the British society or any other community would trust you enough to put something in your hands and say, ‘Okay you can do whatever you like the way you think it’s going to work and I trust you’. If you said this to a Roma person who is trying to work with the Roma community I think they are going to try to show you that they are giving you their best and they’re going to try to make that project work. ... If they see that you are actually trusting them and you’ve got some high expectations of them they won’t disappoint you. ... You have to give them the opportunity to do it on their own and not tell them ‘This is the procedure and you have to do this’. Don’t do it like that. When it comes to community work you have to listen to their advice as well and to their way of work practice or approach or when they take decisions.*

(Christina, Romanian Roma professional, in the UK for 9 years)

*It’s very important for us to be able to do it as a community and us to decide how to do it and not everybody else to tell us how to do it and lead us. We would like to be able to decide and just to have the flexibility how to organise our own activities, ideally in a Roma centre.*

(Pavol, Slovak Roma participant, Sheffield)

*The council need to realise that if you want to try and sort some issues within the Roma community, give the opportunity to Roma. Maybe he is not educated as well as the Czech non-Roma or the Slovakian non-Roma, but [they will have] the skills or the language, the sense, understanding.*

(Petr, Czech Roma professional, in the UK for 16 years)

Several projects are trying to nurture individuals in this way, bringing Roma to meetings to encourage their participation, or providing volunteering opportunities as a way of developing their skills. Some Roma already are demonstrating these leadership qualities in different areas of South Yorkshire, even if they feel uneasy with the notion of representing their community. For example, one Roma individual has been running sport activities for young people in a voluntary capacity, but hopes to receive support from local institutions to recognise his efforts and to resource it adequately. Another participant planned to develop a Roma-led organisation. Roma participation and ownership of their own resources and projects is not simply about providing a dedicated community space, but also concerns demonstrating trust in Roma communities themselves.
Roma voices #2. Information and knowledge

A deficit of knowledge and understanding

**Key message:** Both Roma and services seem to lack accurate knowledge about Roma rights and entitlements. Demand for support will grow as Roma seek to document their residency before the UK leaves the EU.

Roma in this research frequently referred to not knowing their employment rights or service information, and services concurred that Roma lacked this understanding. In particular, Roma participants were very unclear about any rights they had as employees such as sick pay. This was important because they almost all worked through employment agencies and had an unreliable income since their hours were variable according to demand from their workplace. Roma tended to seek that information about work rights or opportunities through informal channels - through friends, colleagues, family or online - as one Roma woman explains here:

_I don’t know where to get all this information [about work rights]. I’m just talking with friends who working there and they would know what those rules are, they know it and they will tell me but if they doesn’t know, then I don’t get the information anywhere._ (Rita, Latvian Roma female, Barnsley, in the UK for 7 years)

The absence of accurate information and knowledge had significant consequences for Roma in this research. They gave examples of losing work contracts or being unable to find out if they were entitled to sick pay.

While there is recognition of the multiple barriers to work that new migrants face in the UK, a lack of knowledge about employment rights is not surprising among new arrivals to the UK, and information within Roma communities seems to be passed on largely by word-of-mouth. Since there seems to be an established route into low-skilled work for newly-arriving Roma through employment agencies, Roma communities have established few other means of gaining low-skilled work (particularly work that does not require good levels of English language). One participant explained that he felt there was little point trying to find employment through a different route.

- [Facilitator] Have you ever tried to apply for job straight through the company?
- [Onderej] No, it is not possible to get job this way. It may be 1% of people who can get a job like that but usually if you are not registered in agency, you have no chance.

(Discussion in the Rotherham focus group between the facilitator and Onderej, a Slovak Roma male)

There were one or two exceptions to this general pattern, where some Roma participants were working directly for an employer rather than an agency. However, for the majority it

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was easy to see how they could end up trapped in a cycle of unreliable work and pay that perpetuated financial and social exclusion of this community as a whole.

The confusion regarding EU residency rights adds to this problem for Roma. The right to stay in the UK became a concern amongst Roma communities immediately after the EU referendum, and will inevitably increase during the next few years. Even Roma with permanent residency in the UK (having lived here for five years) have concerns and will seek information about their rights to stay and work in the UK, particularly if they are unable to consistently document their time here.

Particularly worrying was that Roma did not usually consider approaching mainstream service providers for this kind of support. One Roma professional had many experiences with service providers and employers who did not understand her right to live and work in the UK, and after the EU referendum result her colleagues had assumed she would no longer be able to work in the UK.

[My colleagues asked] 'Oh until when are you going to work now? Because we will be out of the EU, so what are you doing next?' So it's a bit shocking that you hear this question from professionals that you work with in the inclusion department. ... It's a bit more than serious. (Christina, Romanian Roma professional, in the UK for 9 years)

There were one or two services in the project that provide some kind of assistance with employment skills (such as completing applications). Some local services suggested that welcome packs could help to overcome a lack of knowledge about services generally; some were being developed, some were no longer available but were mourned, and others were hoped for. However, it is not clear that written information like this would be used effectively by a community that shares information by word-of-mouth. Participants also suggested that training for services could improve staff knowledge about Roma rights (along with cultural information).

A lack of confidence and experience in persisting, complaining or challenging

**Key message:** A key gap in Roma knowledge is how to complain or challenge unfair practices. Many Roma do not have the confidence or experience to assert themselves or to persist in finding out information.

A lack of experience among Roma communities in navigating complex systems and their lack of confidence in speaking English has precluded many from asserting themselves. This point was raised several times in our research by service providers. As one Roma participant explained, the risks of challenging those in authority are too great:

*Me, I would just try to do my work because I'm a bit shy and scared to talk to my manager or to other people because my English is not very good, therefore I don't want to risk and to be thrown out.* (Bohush, Slovak Roma participant, Sheffield)

Some Roma explained how they need not only these skills, but also the confidence to persist in finding the right person or information that they sought. The following participants tried different ways of persisting in their quests:
When you have to find out something, I’ve had a few times that you’re ringing one instance like one place. You’ve found out the number and you’ve called them and then they can’t find the answer for you. They say, ‘There is another place somewhere you can call, they can try,’ and it’s non-stop. It’s really non-stop. (Artis, Latvian Roma male, Barnsley, in the UK for 7 years)

Community centre like yours [can help]. I remember I needed P45 and they took ages to send it to me. So I went to [name of facilitator] and she wrote me a letter that I brought personally to my work, and soon after that I received my P45. (Mirka, Slovak Roma female, Rotherham, in the UK for 8 years)

Unfortunately in these cases, the participants’ own efforts were either unrewarded or inadequate; in the first case the individual was disheartened about being unable to find out information himself, while in the second case the individual had to seek the assistance of another, more experienced contact to advocate on her behalf.

There are some important implications here. A lack of ability to challenge and a lack of confidence to persist in enquiries opens the door to potential exploitation of Roma, for example by employers and landlords. Tenants might not fully understand selective licencing rules, the standards that landlords should adhere to, for example. Some Roma described being required to pay bribes to employment agencies or staff in their workplaces to secure work. Exploitative activity is likely to make it difficult for individual Roma to overcome poverty and pursue their aspirations. By extension, we assume that any forms of exploitation within Roma communities could be even more difficult to address, given the unlikelihood of Roma who are subject to exploitation being able and willing to report it. Furthermore, it means that Roma communities are likely to be complained about rather than raising complaints themselves, and thus problematising Roma within the local area. The valuable role and need for those providing information and advocacy services to Roma is very clear from these examples.

Fewer routes into finding information and support

**Key message:** Roma communities often access advice and information services less frequently than other migrant groups such as asylum seekers and other non-EU nationals.

Since Roma currently exercise their EU treaty rights to move to the UK, it hasn’t yet been necessary for them to access legal services in their application to stay here. Unlike with third country nationals such as asylum-seekers, there has not been an outstanding need to provide legal aid or formal, OISC-accredited immigration advice for newly-arrived Roma. Instead, Roma frequently cited word-of-mouth and online searches as their principal means of seeking everyday information, and mentioned drop-in services or Roma workers as their only source of advocacy (see Intermediaries section below).

*We only see information on the TV, so what we hear there, this is what we believe and what we think. We discuss about it, whether it’s bad or good, only at the TV is what we see. That’s from where we get the information, from the television.* (Simona, Slovak Roma participant, Sheffield)

*I usually use the internet [for information on Brexit]. All the information you can find on the internet.* (Donnik, Latvian Roma male, Barnsley, in the UK for 11 years)
There was no mention by participants in this research of local councillors or MPs as a source of information, support or advocacy for Roma residents. Similarly there has been little mention of legal services. Interestingly, one focus group participant, Sabrina, mentioned her social worker as a source of information.

*This is where I find out information: ... we speak as well among family members, we change information that we know, and I have also a social worker who comes quite often, so we exchange information with her as well.* (Sabrina, Latvian Roma female, Barnsley, in the UK for 12 years)

This was not found elsewhere, but is important to acknowledge that some social workers are successfully building relationships with Roma families. Lowered barriers to trust in social care staff may be due to individual professionals who have put significant effort into their work with Roma.

Roma therefore may be less likely to seek help from elected members, legal experts and other professionals even when the need arises, since they do not have existing experience of doing so. This is an important concern at advice agencies (raised by such agencies in Rotherham and Sheffield already), particularly as the rights of EU nationals in the UK change.
Roma voices #3. Communication and engagement

Challenges and consequences of ineffective communication

**Key message:** Effective communication can be hindered by many factors. Appropriate translation and interpreting are important concerns for Roma. Everyday difficulties in communication for Roma can have serious consequences, affecting health and income security for example.

The barriers to effective communication are well-known for different newly-arrived migrant groups. Some common issues include migrants’ low levels of English and the use of children as interpreters as provided by the following Roma in examples about schools:

- [Gabrilia] Whenever I go to parents’ meetings, I’ve got an older child who comes with me and is helping me to tell the teacher … my point of view. However, he’s a child as well. … I do trust him, that he’s saying what he has to, what I’m telling him. However, he can still change some words.

- [Erik] Me too. I’m using my child as much as I can when the interpreter is not available.

(Discussion between Gabrilia and Erik, Slovak focus group participants, Sheffield)

- No, I don’t [understand the school reports] but they explain it to me, I use [name of grandson] as an interpreter. (Mirka, Slovak Roma female, Rotherham, in the UK for 8 years)

The use of children as interpreters was acknowledged not only by Roma in this project but also by services in informal situations. Other barriers to good communication included poor understanding among new service users of how systems work, the attributes of the individuals doing the communicating and more broadly the welcoming nature of the service setting itself.

Roma in this research had both good and poor experiences of communication with service providers across South Yorkshire, suggesting that some services manage communication issues better than others. This can be due to service inexperience, a lack of understanding amongst staff, or resource constraints within services, meaning, for example, that interpreters are not consistently available. Since the barriers to effective communication are numerous, it can be difficult to address them all simultaneously. Just one aspect of effective communication implemented poorly is powerful, and could lead a service user to become disengaged, although this did not seem to be the case in the examples above.

A particular issue around interpreting for Roma that arose in the research is worth highlighting. Some services believe they have taken an acceptable or the ‘correct’ approach to interpreting and translation according to existing guidance, by using interpreters from the same county of origin who speak that county’s first language (Slovak, Czech, etc.). However, this may not be working from the Roma perspective for two main reasons:

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- First, some Roma have explained that they do not always trust non-Roma interpreters who share their nationality, due to the discrimination they experienced in their shared country of origin. Roma participants in this research believed some interpreters were racist. Some Roma understand sufficient English to know when the interpreter did not translate precisely what they had said. This has parallels with practice experience with refugees and asylum seekers, who can also be known to be reluctant to use interpreters from their countries of origin.

- Second, some older Roma may not understand or be literate in the working language of their country of origin very well (such as Czech, Slovak, Romanian, Latvian). They may only speak the Roma language (which is not a written language) and have only picked up minimal English language since arriving in the UK. For these service users then, translated materials would not be effective. Some services in South Yorkshire who recognised this problem tried different approaches in order to genuinely communicate with Roma parents in this situation. Their more promising ideas included providing information in very simple written English (as translation was redundant) which was then supplemented by a verbal explanation in the Roma language either in person or through an audio-recording accessed via a QR code.

This poses a real challenge for services who may struggle to find interpreters who are trusted by Roma service users, and commissioning staff may be unaware that some Roma can only communicate effectively in the spoken Roma language.

Finally, while the effects of poor communication are most clear in times of crisis such as being unable to express oneself in an emergency, Roma in this research tended to talk about everyday situations where communication was difficult. These occurred at the GP surgery, in schools or at work. Everyday incidents had very significant consequences for Roma, such as being prescribed incorrect medication, losing a job, and parents being frustrated at being unable to discuss school actions in relation to their children in detail, exemplified by the following dialogues:

- [Simona] They [my employers] fired me. Why? I was not well and I didn’t go for a few days at work and they just fired me.
- [Facilitator] Did you try to phone them to explain to them?
- [Simona] I did, but my English wasn’t good enough for them to understand how ill I was.
  ...
- [Bohush] When there are any issues or argument ... it’s very frustrating because I don’t get my point to be understand or I don’t understand everything what my child has done. Therefore, it comes this frustration of not understanding why the school is taking some measurements on my child and I don’t understand everything.
- [Facilitator] Would the interpreter help you?
- [Bohush] If there’s an interpreter, yes, but if there isn’t, they will still take the same measures, which they think is right for their school.

(Discussions between the facilitator, Simona and Bohush, Slovak Roma participants, Sheffield)

In this latter example, the school does not seem to have adequately communicated its policies and the general approach it will take in relation to incidents involving pupils. It is not only the literal interpretation that is needed by the Roma parent in order for them to talk to
the school about their child, but a deeper understanding of school culture and a good relationship with the school and its staff.

**Promising engagement through face-to-face work**

**Key message:** Face-to-face contact appears to be a more effective way of engaging with Roma than other means. Drop-ins and outreach locations seem good sites for engagement. Engagement by different services may work well if located in places that Roma families access on a regular, frequent basis, such as school premises.

In a dialogue between a service provider and a Roma participant during the project, the service provider was keen to know the best way to engage with Roma. The response was clear, and was echoed by other Roma participants in the research.

- [Service provider] What’s the best way of communicating with the very newly-arrived, is it face-to-face? Is it pictures? Is it words? Is it leaflets? Is it something else?
- [Roma panel member] Face-to-face. I’ll tell you an example, if you come to my house, I wouldn’t let you remain outside my house, I would offer you a coffee or any drink. This is something that is a part of our culture. ... There are services that I found that they knocked on the door and they just stand outside and be so professional, not get to know, want to know the culture, not get to, want to know them, who they are, to communicate with a person that is from a different style of living and from a village, and from a different country. You have to know what’s behind, where is he coming from to get something new out of it.

(Discussion between service provider and Roma community panel member, project event)

Examples of face-to-face work through drop-ins and street outreach already exist in South Yorkshire (such as the Youth Association in Doncaster and Barnsley, and drop-ins in Rotherham and Sheffield) and services have found that face-to-face contact seems much more effective than written materials.

This approach to engagement and developing trust with Roma communities from a service point of view, of course, requires significant investment in terms of staff time and resources. This can be difficult to justify from a service point of view, particularly when they must not appear to favour one group over others, and in the context of austerity. However, Roma are not demanding this approach; instead this report notes that if services want to engage with Roma communities, then a face-to-face approach is likely to be more successful than more remote methods of contact.

Another facet of promising engagement is emerging from examples found in South Yorkshire: the siting of interventions and services in locations that are already used by Roma communities. Roma themselves have not described this link, but their attendance suggests they are ‘voting with their feet’. Examples include a baby clinic taking place in a Sheffield school, an ESOL class taking place timed to take place directly after a drop-in in Rotherham in the same building, and police engagement work with young people in schools. In the spirit of joint-working, services in these locations could offer a way for other services to build links with Roma communities who are now comfortable with these locations.
Variation across Roma communities means difficulties in representation

**Key message:** Local authorities would like strong Roma community-led groups to develop. Since Roma do not form a homogenous group, they can be reluctant to embrace the idea of community leaders to represent or speak on behalf of all Roma residents.

Roma in this research emphasised the heterogeneity of the Roma population and that different Roma communities may barely interact in the UK, despite living alongside one another. Some participants distinguished between Roma from different countries of origin, between those who have come from cities or Roma-only settlements (which might affect their understanding and use of different services), and whether or not they were considered to be ‘traditional’ Roma. Some participants described how they themselves find it difficult to identify other Roma locally in South Yorkshire due to the diversity in the UK. In central and eastern Europe the lack of diversity in the general population means it is easier to identify Roma based on their physical appearance, as Latvian participants explained in the Barnsley focus group:

> - [Artis] Actually we [Latvian Roma] don't have any contact with them [Slovak Roma with children at the same school]. Not because we don't like [them] or maybe they think the same but we never just spoke up or should have put that step or whatever. ...
> - [Facilitator] In Latvia are you easily recognised as Roma?
> - [Some agree]
> - [Facilitator] Like here, I wouldn't know who Roma is.
> - [Artis] No, Latvia we are more...
> - [Esma] You can tell.
> - [Facilitator] You could tell straight away?
> - Yes. [2 respondents]
> - [Donnik] Because there’s three publics - Russians, Latvians, and Roma. Here there are more.
> - [Esma] There's more kinds of people [here], yes.

(Discussions during the focus group with Latvian Roma in Barnsley)

It is perhaps, then, unsurprising that Roma participants had found non-Roma in the UK were unaware of any differences between Roma and non-Roma from the same country of origin, or the differences between gypsy, Roma and traveller groups. Examples included local residents and staff in schools as follows:

> In the area where I work where there are Roma people there, and they [local community] call them Slovakiens, so they don’t really understand which is which much. (Maruska, Czech Roma professional)

> My son has an English teacher and she is bad to my son. She didn’t know the meaning of Gypsy just Roma, he has been called Gypsy, so I have spoken to his teacher and complained and she said that she will sort this out later. (Nada, Czech Roma female, Doncaster, in the UK for 17 years)

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11 This point is further illustrated by the fact that one Roma champion recruited Romanian nationals to a focus group in the expectation that some were also Roma. None of the group identified themselves as Roma and in fact they were surprised to learn towards the end of the focus group that the facilitator herself was Romanian Roma; they had not realised her ethnicity was Roma. In their discussion, this Romanian non-Roma group also differentiated between Roma who they described as educated and having left Roma-only settlements, and those who had not.
This helps to explain, for example, why some services might believe that interpreters from the same country of origin are appropriate to use with Roma clients. Services and staff who do understand about the existence of Roma ethnicity have on numerous occasions during this project discussed the difficulties of identifying Roma service users, partly due to monitoring mechanisms that do not record Roma ethnicity (either because they only record nationality or because they use Census ethnicity categories that do not specify migrant Roma as an ethnicity).

This section helps us to understand why it might be difficult to develop Roma community organisations, since many Roma would not feel able to even identify, let alone represent, a range of different Roma communities. It also suggests why individual representatives or intermediaries, have become prominent in brokering engagement between services and Roma clients, due to their ability to communicate effectively. Such intermediaries are explored next.
Roma voices #4. Intermediaries

The emergence of intermediaries

**Key message:** Intermediaries are seen as beneficial both by Roma communities and service providers. They can build trust, help services to think about things differently, reduce the need for interpreting, and are role models. They also can advocate for Roma clients who are reluctant to push themselves forward.

Few people or services have all the attributes to be seen by Roma as a reliable source of information: trustworthiness, language skills, an understanding of UK systems and rights, and access to latest information. Similarly, services have expressed a desire for Roma community organisations to emerge to represent Roma communities. Consequently, we have seen the emergence of *intermediaries*; people who are go-betweens for services and Roma communities. They are often Roma employed as ‘Roma workers’, although some perform this function in an informal, voluntary capacity. Intermediaries can also include professionals such as health visitors and interpreters, who have developed a good understanding of Roma and have a trusted relationship with Roma service users.

These intermediaries often go beyond their professional remit to help individuals in need, such as with completing forms, giving informal advice on a multitude of issues, or making referrals to other services. Some intermediaries in South Yorkshire explained their roles:

*I do signpost them ... but they still feel they want to speak to somebody who is trustworthy that they know and they trust. So even if they go to that [advice] place they will still come back. ... It’s about both. It’s somebody they trust and the language is very important because when they talk to you in Roma they feel very close to you and they will tell you honestly, ‘This is what I want to apply for. These are the documents that I’ve got. What’s missing? What’s not missing?’* (Christina, Romanian Roma professional, in the UK for 9 years)

*Health visitors end up helping families with other issues such as school places, benefits etc.*
(Services survey)

*If they [Roma] have a problem with housing and they need to make a call and it’s not a form that needs to be filled in they probably have nowhere else to go they would have to call themselves and just try or ask friends to call. There’s really nowhere else to go. ... There’s nowhere else because citizen’s advice don’t have enough money, don’t have enough workers and even if you make the effort you just wait for weeks and weeks and weeks unless it’s an urgent issue.*
(Maruska, Czech Roma professional)

Intermediaries are undoubtedly valued by services and Roma communities alike. They are seen to build trust of Roma in services, improve service responses, and even reduce the need for interpreters. Roma workers are seen as good role models. Intermediaries understand UK organisations and structures, and are more able to navigate those structures and persist in enquiries than Roma clients. Many participants in this project supported more Roma being employed in mainstream services particularly. This model could be a means of improving Roma trust in services where distrust is most acute; South Yorkshire police already have three Roma ‘cadets’ who are hoped will help fulfil this function.
The dangers of viewing intermediaries as a perfect solution

**Key message:** There are dangers of relying on lone intermediaries as the solution to Roma engagement. This could be described as a short-term stop-gap, instead of developing cultural competence among service providers and long-term, stable employment for Roma communities.

There are a number of difficulties apparent in South Yorkshire in relying on an intermediary approach. First, intermediaries have found the role to be a large, lonely burden. Rather than colleagues learning about Roma and developing a whole service approach to Roma clients, it is easy for intermediaries to receive all queries about Roma and be seen as the sole person with this expertise. Intermediaries are also approached by Roma service users who expect this individual to help them, rather than other staff members. This perpetuates some difficulties of service access in the longer-term, since most staff members remain relatively unknowledgeable and inexperienced in working with Roma communities. Consequently, services are less well-equipped to work with Roma. Some intermediaries expressed resentment about this burden:

*We as Roma people are not in front. People [non-Roma professionals] come to us to ask for our advice constantly, but they are the ones who get paid. They are the ones who get the acknowledgement on many occasions. ... Like you were saying they used you.* (Maruska, Czech Roma professional)

With an unrealistic expectation of their role being able to ‘solve’ all issues relating to Roma clients, intermediaries can eventually experience frustration and burnout. However, since Roma worker posts have often been created specifically with one individual in mind, there are no clear alternative career choices available to Roma intermediaries. Roma workers often only have a temporary position, have been restricted to work only with Roma clients, and have not been able to accumulate qualifications that would enable them to move to another, more mainstream role. Several intermediaries described their experiences. Christina, for example, felt misled by her job description:

*I was restricted to working in our team for Roma families. For two years I was only working for Roma families. .... They made it like it’s a job for the new arrivals, but when I applied it was specifically for Roma.* (Christina, Romanian Roma professional, in the UK for 9 years)

She went on to describe the impact of this role on her personal life.

*I had to use the back door [at work] because the Roma families were coming to me with different requests ... and I wasn’t allowed to do it at work. In my own time I decided in my free time sometimes I helped them ... but instead of doing them a favour it became worse for me. .... In town as well I was always stopped and, ‘Could you do this? Could you do that? Could you do this?’ but sometimes I liked it and if I’m rushed I just try to explain to them I can’t do it and that’s it, but I don’t mind doing it.* (Christina, Romanian Roma professional, in the UK for 9 years)

It seems that Christina felt a certain level of obligation to help members of her community given her professional position, even when she was not paid to respond to their additional
needs. Similarly, Petr described his empathy towards newly-arrived Roma, but he eventually had to move house because of the effect of these expectations upon his family life.

I moved out from [name of town] just because it was a 24 hour job. So I moved out to [different town] and I didn’t tell anyone where I was going. … I used to live in [name of town] for about four or five years and I came home and sat on the sofa and thought ‘Well I don’t deserve this’ so I just moved. Yes, in the town centre no eye contact. … I know that people do need help and I was in the same situation when I came here. … When I started … it was very easy to abuse me. … It was ‘Could you do this? Could you do that?’ I couldn’t say no. Now this time it’s my personal space first, my family first and then you guys because you have to wait. … You have to learn the skill. … I think it’s time for Roma people to move and influence the decision and be on the strategic level. To be honest I worked for ten, eleven years … it was 24/7. … It’s like we are little puppets. (Petr, Czech Roma professional, in the UK for 16 years)

Both Christina and Petr at times had to withdraw from their communities, and it is easy to see how this burden they bear as intermediaries could develop into resentment in relation to their paid work that comes at a high personal cost.

Some services across South Yorkshire struggled to recruit Roma workers, both to voluntary and paid positions. If intermediaries leave, services can feel their investment in that individual has gone. Further, intermediaries are not easily replaced. Potential reasons for unfilled vacancies were clear from Roma in this project. Some illustrations follow.

Last year I remember we received some letters regarding that you can apply for like … school governors. … So everybody received that letter and actually I was thinking about that [being a school governor] and should I apply or not, maybe no, but then like you said, I start to feel or think maybe I will not be good enough there or maybe somebody else […] because I have not been here in any ESOLs, any education here in England so I thought maybe I’m not [good enough].’ (Artis, Latvian Roma male, Barnsley, in the UK for 7 years)

So when I was volunteering … I was asking for jobs there. Promises, promises, nothing happened, but I stayed because I was still learning. … [They] said, ‘No, you should apply for this. This is really good for you. You should be able to get it’ but the people who seem to get them was actually a non-Roma Czech or non-Roma Slovaksians which was really interesting to see, because I didn’t have enough experience.’ (Maruska, Czech Roma professional)

I have one-to-ones but I don’t think in real life I was encouraged to apply to be a team leader or coordinator. … I felt like I wanted to do it. I wanted to apply. It’s just I wasn’t brave enough. The person who took that job is asking me [for help]! … I was always asking for training and different things. I was asking about going higher like a team leader or a supervisor or a manager. It doesn’t happen in real life in your personal development. They write it down but when it comes to take action to send you to training it doesn’t happen because there’s no funding or things like that. (Christina, Romanian Roma professional, in the UK for 9 years)

The research suggests there seem to be several reasons why services have been unsuccessful in recruiting Roma workers. First, Roma seek paid work and often do not have spare time to volunteer. Second, many Roma do not have the confidence or experience to apply for positions, particularly outside of employment agencies. Third, some relevant vacancies do not explicitly state that Roma are the focus of the work, or that Roma are encouraged to apply. While the idea of Roma workers is appealing, it seems to be an option that can be difficult to implement well and sustainably.
Roma voices #5. Local places, social encounters and belonging

Contributing to local life

**Key message:** Roma have demonstrated many ways in which they have adapted to and contributed to their local communities in the UK. They also want British people to know and understand Roma culture and values. At times, Roma interpret ‘integration’ to mean they have to deny their own culture.

An important point about ‘integration’ arose early on during this project. It became clear that Roma have a different understanding of the term ‘integration’ than service providers who often understand it as a two-way process of a host community and new arrivals adapting to one another. Some Roma described ‘integration’ as meaning they had to give up their culture, be inauthentic and not true to themselves. This was summarised by a Roma participant:

> Don’t try to integrate them and turn them into somebody they are not.
> (female Roma community panel member, project event)

Such an interpretation is understandably problematic for a community that has historically been socially excluded and discriminated against across central and eastern Europe, and has developed a strong sense of identity and culture of which it is rightly proud. Thus Roma in this research also felt complimented and proud if they felt that other non-Roma people were interested in their culture and wanted to learn about them.

> If they [are] genuinely interested it’s a nice feeling. Don’t get me wrong. It’s a nice feeling when people are interested in the Roma community. In our country they are not interested.
> (male Roma community panel member, project event)

- [Service provider] What would most help Roma feel valued and included in South Yorkshire communities? What would help?
- [Female panel member] Oh celebrating, celebrating and helping them celebrate their culture.
- [Male panel member] I feel valued now to talk to you from this side, to be honest, that’s the thing. Voice of Roma people, I guess sometimes I mentioned this to loads of people, it’s about us without us. We need to be taken seriously. ... I have met loads of friends through my working years who does really care, like I was saying, and other people we need a passion from you as well.
> (Discussions between service providers and Roma community panel members, project event)

In contrast to their understanding of ‘integration’, Roma clearly had a strong sense of what it meant to be a good resident, neighbour or member of the local community in the UK where they now live. These were captured by Artis and Irena:

> I think that mostly people who were here for years, who didn’t have any criminal records or offences or not did anything wrong, who pay bills and are still doing everything right, kids in school, work, I think there’s no any point to kick them out [after Brexit]. (Artis, Latvian Roma male, Barnsley, in the UK for 7 years)
I’m here in this country for the last 16 years, she’s here for 17 years. … We [are] working and paying tax, but we can’t vote. (Irena, Slovak Roma female, Doncaster, in the UK for 16 years)

For Roma participants, a multitude of actions meant they were contributing to UK society, such as: obeying the law, working, paying tax, paying their bills, sending their children to school, and investing time in the community as a long-term resident - even if they were unable to enjoy the benefits of UK citizenship such as voting in UK elections. Others talked about not being noisy, cleaning the driveway, being honest, countering stereotypes of laziness or uncleanliness, and showing that they do not need to be feared.

From the Roma perspective, they are making real efforts to comply with things that matter to British people and things that are valued in British culture, despite at times feeling unwelcome or seen as a ‘problem’ to the community.

Belonging and transience

**Key message:** Many Roma have settled and are now rooted in UK localities. This contrasts with the perception of Roma as particularly transient. In fact, many Roma only consider moving when they feel compelled to do so. It is common for Roma to retain links to their country of origin as well as developing their ties to the UK, like many other migrants.

Stability and attachment to local places

Roma in the research often talked about being attached to their local area, having invested time there (some for nearly two decades) and having family ties and experiences that made them want to see their future there. This attachment and settling down is reflected in some services’ observations that some areas now seem to have more settled Roma populations than previously.

*We live here, this is our home.* (Anezka, Slovak Roma female, Rotherham, in the UK for 4 years)

*All of my family is here and we talked among ourselves that we will not go back to Latvia because we don’t have anything to return to, we don’t have anything there because within these 12 years that we’ve lived here, even if we had something there we have sold that. We have settled here; we don’t have anything back there. We don’t have a place to return, we have just only one country which is England.* (Sabrina, Latvian Roma female, Barnsley, in the UK for 12 years)

*We have settled in here, lots has changed and our children who growing up in here and can’t even speak their own language.* (Nada, Czech Roma female, Doncaster, in the UK for 17 years)

*Yes, I see my children, my family here in Sheffield, going to school here, having a future here.* (Jozef, Slovak Roma participant, Sheffield)

*I love this country because even though we see all these issues and everything, for me personally the level of discrimination or whatever is nothing compared what is happening in our country. … So yes if it wasn’t, then I think I would have gone a long time ago.* (Maruska, Czech Roma professional)
My mother has been buried here, she’s died here so if we have to leave I don’t know, I can’t imagine that. (Donnik, Latvian Roma male, Barnsley, in the UK for 11 years)

Moves into and around the UK

Roma have long been characterised as a transient culture. The particular pattern of chain migration by Roma seen in South Yorkshire during the past decade or so involves particular localities as the ‘first port of call’ for new arrivals, such as Page Hall in Sheffield, Eastwood in Rotherham and Hexthorpe in Doncaster, where Roma communities are described as being particularly concentrated in certain streets within a small geographical area. These areas may experience apparent instability and ‘churn’ as new arrivals take the place of other migrant Roma who have been there longer and just moved out of the area. In these areas certainly, some services expressed concerns about safeguarding issues, particularly if children were missing from schools where they had initially registered.

A secondary migration of Roma from first ports of call to elsewhere in the region (or even around the UK) is less well-understood or documented. Further detailed research would help to understand it better. We are aware of several reasons why Roma seem to move a second time following their initial arrival in the UK, as illustrated below:

- [Sabrina] Before, I lived in Derby .... Five years I working in one factory ... in Derby, but my daughter go, I go.
- [Facilitator] So because your daughter moved in Barnsley, you work in Barnsley as well?
- Yes, when she moved, I moved” (Sabrina, Latvian Roma female, Barnsley, in the UK for 12 years)

17 [years] I am here. So I could see my future here before for sure but after the referendum, I don’t think so. (Nada, Czech Roma female, Doncaster, in the UK for 17 years)

Some Roma talked of moving to be with family members who had work in another town or city. Some Roma (and services) described how they would move to where their landlords would accommodate them; this was sometimes in response to selective licencing schemes in the first ports of call. Many Roma talked about themselves or others who considered moving after the EU referendum result. These relocation triggers suggest that Roma can feel compelled to move, rather than choosing freely to do so.

Multiple attachments

Some Roma participants described a conflicting sense of identity and being settled in South Yorkshire. Petra, a Slovak Roma female in Doncaster who has lived in the UK for 4 years told us ‘I feel half English, half Czech’ and ‘We are Roma. We don’t have a nationality.’ Like other migrant groups, many Roma have important links both in the UK but also back in their country of origin. Some participants described regular return visits to visit family, to give birth, to attend funerals or to access health services, for example. Although attachment to the UK is slowly increasing among Roma, a continued sense of belonging in multiple places is likely to continue, as is common among transnational migrants.

Local services expressed concern about the impacts of travel when Roma spend significant amounts of time back in the country of origin, for example when children miss school for
extended periods or when Roma employees need to travel at short notice for family reasons. This has important implications for school places (some pupils have lost their school place as a result) or at work (as it will impact on Roma employees’ perceived reliability).

Social ‘problems’

Key message: Anti-social behaviour, rubbish and socialising on the street are commonly mentioned by services and the indigenous community as localised problems. There are concerns that drugs are becoming a significant problem among some young Roma. In contrast to this view of problematic behaviour exhibited by Roma communities, Roma themselves seek safe, local, social spaces.

Problematising of Roma communities

The media repeatedly report on small-scale community tensions where local residents complain about Roma regarding anti-social behaviour, incorrect disposal of waste and outdoor socialising. Unsurprisingly, these issues were also prevalent in discussions involving local service providers in South Yorkshire for this research, and some Roma referred to related incidents involving community disputes.

More concerning was that some service providers raised more serious social problems around hard drug use and sexual exploitation. This was raised most commonly in Rotherham, where there were also some services trying to tackle these issues, and was also mentioned in Doncaster and Sheffield. Unsurprisingly, given the reluctance of Roma to trust police or social services, Roma participants in the research did not readily discuss these issues, with one Roma person explaining that Roma families would be too ashamed to admit if their children were using drugs. Again, this is perhaps not so different from how non-Roma parents might react in similar circumstances.

Roma’s desire for safety

In contrast, there was a recurring theme among Roma participants concerning safety, security and decent treatment for Roma in South Yorkshire. One allusion to this came publicly:

*The hope for the community would be to feel safe, you know? And they don’t feel safe because they know the things happening and the police is just driving by.*

(female Roma community panel member, project event)

While not asked about these directly, both Roma and service providers raised the question of safety in a number of different contexts, with examples including the following:

- Roma wanting to feel safe in the community, including making parks and recreation spaces safe, and noting that hate crime towards Roma is prevalent but underreported.
- A need for safe, secure housing, yet some landlords exploit their tenants (e.g. bypassing utility meters, poor housing standards, moving them to properties outside of the regulated selective licensing areas)
• Roma wanting to feel safe and welcome in places of education. Some Roma children were reported to be afraid to attend school because of fights.

This all takes place within a context of Roma generally coming to the UK to escape intimidation, violence, discrimination and racism in their countries of origin. Given such a background, it is understandable that Roma might request a community centre in order to be able to gather safely together.

**Minimal mixing between different communities**

**Key message:** Occasional examples of successful mixing between different communities covered certain types of activity (sport and music) and particular settings (primary schools and churches). Unacceptable social behaviour by non-Roma towards Roma was reported. Projects hoped that Roma and non-Roma community members would mix further, but there seemed to be little desire for this by either Roma or non-Roma residents.

**Mixing between Roma and non-Roma**

Mixing between residents in particular neighbourhoods needs to occur through choice, rather than coercion. There were occasional reports of Roma’s successful interaction or mixing with different non-Roma communities prompted by service involvement. These include sport and music initiatives; one-to-one friendships or client relationships; in primary school settings particularly where classes and group work is mixed (whereas in secondary schools there have been examples of segregation along ethnic lines in group work for assignments) and in local churches. Evidence of this mixing was found in different areas, although many initiatives had ended.

- *Facilitator* Those of you who have been to school here, did you have friends from backgrounds, British, White British, Asian, mixed?
- *Donnik and Esma* Yes, a lot.
  (Discussion at the Barnsley focus group between the facilitator and Donnik, Latvian Roma male, in the UK for 11 years, and Esma, Latvian Roma female, in the UK for 8 years)

One of the Youth Board members … witnessed personally the struggle that young Roma experience at school. [The Board member] started to tutor and support his fellow student from a Roma background after discovering that he had difficulties completing his coursework due to language barrier. The friendship between [the Board member] and her classmate [name] was an inspiration for the project which aims to incorporate peer to peer learning, confidence building and integration. (Service survey)

We had 8 children performing the Roma music, first time in the class in Doncaster and they performed with loads and loads of British pupils, it was about 120 kids singing the Roma songs and I think that was a step forward. (male Roma community panel member, project event)

However there was a more prevalent perception that different communities tend to only infrequently interact, and do not seem to want to engage much further. Staff working in services tended to see this as a problem, while local communities did not to the same extent. A number of services reported, for example, that activities designed to bring communities together often resulted in one group electing not to participate. They
attributed this at times to physical segregation in communities, meaning that activities were located in Roma or non-Roma areas, rather than areas where communities live side-by-side.

Neighbours and friends

The experiences and relationships described by Roma in this project with their neighbours and people in their local communities were mixed but generally acceptable to them. This is partly because these relationships were comparatively much more positive than what Roma experienced in their countries of origin with non-Roma communities. A range of examples in relation to Roma’s neighbours demonstrate this:

The lady underneath [my flat] is Asian so she’s all right. We’re friends. The other neighbour who smokes marijuana is not all right with me at all. ... My neighbours are fine. I only moved in two years ago so in general it’s fine. I live in a nice area. I don’t have any problems with neighbours I have to say. (Maruska, Czech Roma professional)

No, I have no problems with anyone, not even with my neighbours or anything. (Mirka, Slovak Roma female, Rotherham, in the UK for 8 years)

I’m in a council house. On my right side I have a really good English bloke with his family. On my left side I have a really bad lady, [who says] ‘Petr is drinking every day and making noises’. Last time I touched alcohol I was 15 years old ... so I don’t know who is drinking in my house! And I am [apparently] making loud. ... So yes, a few complaints to the council ... but I’ve got a good neighbour on my right side. He’s a British guy. He’s got a family. He’s good with the children so yes I think I’ve got good neighbours. ... I have absolutely no problem with other parents. (Petr, Czech Roma professional, in the UK for 16 years)

Addressing disputes

It was established in section #2 (Information and knowledge) that Roma might avoid complaining or challenging unfairness. Artis, for example, wanted to correct his British friend’s stereotyping of Roma.

- [Artis] I’ve got a really good friend for about ... all this time while I’m here since 2009, about seven years now, and he’s still time after time attending my course as a friend. He’s a good person, he’s British and a few years ago, we were just spoken [sic] about some nationalities and something. I don’t know why we started to talk about Gypsies, about Roma. He said, ‘Oh, they are very bad people.’
- [Donnik] I had same experience!
- [Facilitator] So in that point, did you say anything?
- [Artis] No, I didn’t. I didn’t. I should. At the moment I should say, ‘I am [Roma]’ and I do [will] tell him one day. I’ve not told him yet but I will say, ‘Look, you’ve known me for eight years now, can you see any difference?’
(Discussion in the Barnsley focus group between the facilitator, Artis and Donnik, Latvian Roma participants)

Roma were disappointed when neighbours involved service providers in order to complain about their behaviour. One Roma participant explained they would prefer neighbours to talk directly to themselves. Another described police involvement in response to a neighbour’s unfounded complaint:
We have police popping in in different times and checking our house without knocking. Or they come in the evening, banging hard on the door and saying that the neighbour said that there were some 4 young men that were smoking marijuana, but they never found or even smelled anything. (Anezka, Slovak Roma female, Rotherham, in the UK for 4 years)

Given Roma’s propensity to be fearful of those in authority, this approach to services by unhappy neighbours would not be ideal and might exacerbate existing distrust of non-Roma. Additionally, some service providers acknowledged that local meetings that attempt to include Roma can be counterproductive if not facilitated carefully, as they can involve Roma being talked about or demonised, rather than genuinely enabling Roma voices to be equally heard and taken seriously.

**Professionals’ attitudes**

Roma also reported some negative instances of everyday social interaction with people who were professionals in school or work settings, as the following examples illustrate.

*The teacher told me at the reception that if I don’t like something, I can take the kids and go home. The problem was that our little boy kept on coming home with bruises and was upset - we were complaining about it, trying to solve the problem. The teacher got very angry and told us that we Roma people cause only problems. ... [After another incident] I have complained ... now the receptionist doesn’t even look at me.* (Anezka, Slovak Roma female, Rotherham, in the UK for 4 years)

*Primary school is fine, but secondary school is horrible. One teacher is racist.* (Petra, Slovak Roma female, Doncaster, in the UK for 4 years)

*If you get employed by agency, they will explain your rights but once they have you, all your rights are gone. I have worked for many agencies in the past in Rotherham, Sheffield. There is one factory where they treat you like a dog. When they see Roma person they will treat him like slave. They will ask you to be quiet and not say a word. Like you can’t even greet your friend!* (Danvor, Slovak Roma male, Rotherham, in the UK for 10 years)

**Mixing with other migrant groups**

Finally, several Roma mentioned that other migrant communities also demonstrated problematic social behaviour towards them. Some examples related to migrants who were managers in their workplace settings:

*My manager or my supervisor, sometimes, if it’s through the agency, they just send us home, so they don’t give us plenty of hours to work. They would rather choose people that speak better English or people from their home country like Polish people and offer them full-time employment. With us, we feel that they only call us whenever they are really busy.* (Hanka, Slovak Roma participant, Sheffield)

*Like where I work, there are mostly Polish people working. They don’t speak English, even the leadership was Polish but I didn’t know what language to speak to them, I don’t speak Polish.* (Danvor, Slovak Roma male, Rotherham, in the UK for 10 years)

An important insight on this issue also came from the Romanian non-Roma focus group, where they discussed their attitudes towards their Roma compatriots. It was clear that
some members of this group retained attitudes towards Roma that we would consider unacceptable. There was a fraught debate between participants, including the following exchange:

- [Mihai] Listen, say a Roma guy steals. Why does he steal? Because he doesn’t have anything to survive on and the system encourages him to do all these other things.
- [Andrei] No, he is stealing because this is what his family has taught him and this is what they’ve always been like, and they are stealing partly because they are lazy.
  (Discussion between Mihai and Andrei, Romanian non-Roma participants)

This suggests that perhaps some work needs to be undertaken with non-Roma communities, including non-Roma migrants, to counter negative social behaviour towards Roma and to challenge long-standing stereotypes that they absorbed in their countries of origin.

Now we will consider how these social relationships between Roma and neighbours, professionals and strangers were affected immediately after the EU referendum, and Roma reactions to these incidents.
Roma in this research described key turning points and changes in their lives as centring around physical moves: from their country of origin to the UK and now for some, a potential move away from the UK. Roma discussed Brexit as a potential turning point in this way, as it prompted them to consider a change in their living arrangements.

Observable changes in others post-referendum

Some Roma observed that the referendum led to some changes in behaviour towards them by members of the public and staff in local services. A number of examples are provided here due to this being a new issue and an insight into a very time-specific event.

*After a referendum people have changed. The attitude of some English people is different; they give us nasty looks, some of them swearing toward us, sometimes we are afraid to go out with our children.* (Petra, Slovak Roma female, Doncaster, in the UK for 4 years)

*There are lots of [Roma] people asking to get a job and they [employer/staff] say, 'Well you might as well take leave now' because they are working under the agency and I've heard people being told to take leave, take redundancy because they might not stay here for a long time anyway or not going everywhere now.* (Maruska, Czech Roma professional)

*The doctors who used to be very kind and friendly with me, I had an appointment after the referendum and he started to talk with me totally differently like short, quite sharp.* (Sabrina, Latvian Roma female, Barnsley, in the UK for 12 years)

*[After the referendum] we would go in the shops, same shops, the cashier - ... I know him, that guy, because all these years going in a shop and everything but when we came to that cashier, he changed his face like he doesn’t know us anymore. We came out and thinking, what's happening, why did they change their minds, they change their face?* (Rita, Latvian Roma female, Barnsley, in the UK for 7 years)

*Since the result from Brexit happened, my children have told me that in the park they've experienced some bad behaviour from different children, shouting and telling them that they will have to leave back to their home country. On the road and in the shops, I can see that they are watching us differently because they know we are Slovakian Roma. I am not crazy or stupid enough not to realise when somebody is watching me with his eyes, telling me through his eyes that I will have to leave this country.* (Hanka, Slovak Roma participant, Sheffield)

*What was surprising I guess was the change of the mood of people. The EU referendum gave some people a green light to be racist or openly talk about the issues in quite an offensive way. So that was my reaction. ... I think they held back before the EU referendum. ... When they were
given the opportunity to say something about the EU suddenly their views exploded and it was surprising, not shocking, surprising. (Petr, Czech Roma professional, in the UK for 16 years)

We have heard much more shouting on the streets and to Roma people like, ‘Go home you effing whatever’ and all these things. (Maruska, Czech Roma professional)

For some others, they had not noticed any differences in the way that they were treated. For example, a Slovak Roma participant in Sheffield stated ‘At work, I’ve not experienced any changes. I’m so pleased that my colleagues are so nice with me.’ Another participant in the focus group concurred, saying ‘No [bad experiences], not so far and I’m very happy about it.’

Changes in Roma actions post-referendum

Brexit led to three kinds of negative reactions by some Roma themselves. First, an emotional response; many participants described themselves or others as being scared, and how rumours were rife among Roma communities. Some had taken immediate action: some Roma knew of others who had already left the UK. Finally, many Roma discussed fearing the need to move again, or indeed being forced to move, and described preparatory action they had taken in case of a need to move in the near future. A selection of examples follow.

They were all packing, expecting to be deported. (Janko, Slovak Roma male, Rotherham)

I know people are scared. There are a lot of rumours going on about what’s going to happen and yes, there are people who are afraid and kind of saving up in case they will need to leave so that they won’t be empty-handed. I know people who didn’t go on holiday because of Brexit, they were afraid that they will not get back into the country. (Zanna, Latvian Roma female, Barnsley, in the UK for 4 years)

What can we do if they want us back in our home country? What can we do about it? There’s nothing we can do. We will have to go back. (Jozef, Slovak Roma participant, Sheffield)

I think it will get worse. My cousin lives in UK where they could see signs in Polish and English language saying go home. And he said that they are scared to live there now. There could be even civil war there. (Jan, Slovak Roma male, Rotherham, in the UK for 12 years)

Yes, I had colleagues from work, Roma, and from my family who returned in their home country after the result of the Brexit. (Gabrilia, Slovak Roma participant, Sheffield)

I made a decision I’m off to the Czech Republic. ... It is influenced by the [Brexit] decision yes. ... We’ve all got British passports. It doesn’t mean anything to me. Sadly it doesn’t now, because I know how these things will progress. In March we’re going to see even more people be more open, more racist because they are going to take Article 50 or whatever they call it. Those two years I think will be quite hard for people not just for Roma people. It will be hard for Polish people and for immigrants from the EU. ... Within two years hopefully we’ll move to the Czech Republic or the other option is move to Canada. ... but definitely not in the UK. (Petr, Czech Roma professional, in the UK for 16 years)

For other Roma, the Brexit vote had not led to any plans to move; in fact, it has cemented some individuals’ plans to stay in the UK and now to formalise their residency status.

I’m staying. They’re not getting me out anyway so I’m staying. I’m staying. ... Otherwise planning for the future I think I’m more than eligible to stay. ... It would be absolutely shocking if they said
that I’m not eligible to stay. ... For me personally the level of discrimination or whatever is nothing compared what is happening in our country. (Maruska, Czech Roma professional)

All of my family is here and we talked among ourselves that we will not go back to Latvia ... we have just only one country which is England. (Sabrina, Latvian Roma female, Barnsley, in the UK for 12 years)

They [other Roma] start thinking okay what do we need to do now? They need the [residency] forms. (Maruska, Czech Roma professional)

Perhaps for some Roma then, Brexit may have been a constructive psychological moment where they made a decision to stay in the UK in the long-term.
Roma voices #7. Youth

Expectations and hopes for Roma youth

**Key message:** There is an expectation that young people will get better jobs than their parents. Roma families have often put all their efforts into ensuring a better future for their children.

There was a clear understanding among different groups of research participants that Roma migrated to the UK in order to provide their children with a better future. Many times this point was referenced in their discussions, and highlights the centrality of children to Roma communities. Links were made by participants between their migration, their future and their children:

*I see my future here, I see my kids here studying in school and getting a good job.* (Artis, Latvian Roma male, Barnsley, in the UK for 7 years)

*[In the UK] they’re used to so many different races achieving and everything. So you have a chance. My children have a chance. My child. … Once they have become residents … there will be a new generation of kids who will actually come in and just have time to relax and actually learn something and just get on their feet.* (Matuska, Czech Roma professional)

*When we came here, we realised we would stay for long because the kids, they are very good in schools and they can learn everything to go to study up or somewhere to have a good job and everything.* (Rita, Latvian Roma female, Barnsley, in the UK for 7 years)

*The youngsters who went through this education, you know system, they develop opportunities so they can do miles better job than me. So they need to sit in here, not just in here, in different places, colleges, … and councils and try to influence the decisions, so we’ve got a future through our children.* (male Roma community panel member, project event)

Of course, Roma parents’ immense focus on improving their children’s life chances means that there could be great pressure upon young people in these communities, particularly when they are also expected to translate and interpret for their parents in different service settings. Expectations upon young Roma could be difficult to live up to. Pressures on young Roma might mirror some of the pressures faced by other migrant young people, such as: having a less-supported transition to adulthood (without the same network of support and possible pressure to become the breadwinner); being less well-equipped to integrate (if migration choices were made or influenced by others); and, greater vulnerability to risks (due to inexperience and uncertain social positioning in the UK). Roma young people could face more hurdles than other migrant youth, particularly as they have come from an educational environment that often excluded them from interacting with their non-Roma peers. Some education professionals in this research reported that while educational attainment is ‘extremely low’ among Roma, it is improving each year. There were also many

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12 These unique pressures upon migrant youth are discussed in this report that might have some parallels with the experiences of Roma youth: Integration up North (2015) Migrant youth. Introduction to Migration series, Guidance booklet #13. Migration Yorkshire: Leeds. [www.migrationyorkshire.org.uk/integrationupnorth](http://www.migrationyorkshire.org.uk/integrationupnorth)
references by participants to additional support and opportunities that are needed for older teenagers, such as apprenticeships and employment.

There were some mixed messages during the project regarding Roma parents’ attitudes to education. While the quotations above show Roma parents’ hopes for their children are directly related to education and opportunities to further themselves, some research participants referred to the older Roma generation as not valuing education. Services at times felt that pupils were kept at home for relatively minor health reasons, and that prolonged absences from school for travel purposes directly affect Roma attainment. Indeed some Roma parents themselves acknowledged that they struggled to help their children with their homework, and did not always attend parents’ evenings.

These conflicting messages are likely to be due to older generations’ own exclusion from education and a lack of experience or understanding in knowing what might be involved in their children’s education in the UK. Again, they may compare the UK favourably to their countries of origin and conclude that their children are fulfilling their expectations. These issues are likely to be sensitive and perhaps challenging to tease out, but they merit further exploration perhaps in future research.

**Roma youth becoming connected to the UK**

**Key message:** Some young Roma are becoming more connected to the UK than their family’s country of origin. Like in other second generation BME communities, this could create family tensions.

Young people in minority communities can easily disappoint their parents who migrated to the UK to improve their children’s chances in life. These young people do not have the same depth of attachment to their country of origin, have developed new attachments in the UK, have learned English quickly and perhaps have less command of their parents’ language. They can navigate UK systems more readily than their parents and may not wish to return to the country of origin with the same frequency as their family expects.

This issue was not directly referred to by research participants but occasional comments indicated it might be occurring among Roma communities, such as professionals who feel tensions between family and employer expectations, and the following examples:

*My father ... wants to move [because of Brexit] and he’s telling me to come with him as well, but I’m not going.* (Donnik, Latvian Roma male, Barnsley, in the UK for 11 years)

*More young women are choosing to have their babies in England than returning to Slovakia to deliver.* (Services survey)

Some young people who do not live up to parental expectations could cause great disappointment to their families. This might lead to family tensions over time as generational differences become more apparent, and especially as culture is so fiercely protected among Roma communities. Again this may be an issue to anticipate in the near future as young Roma spend increasing proportions of their lives in the UK.
Conclusion: Roma priorities as opportunities for engagement

**Key message:** Roma tend to prioritise work and the wellbeing of their children over other competing goals. They are also concerned with feeling safe, and being able to communicate effectively with trustworthy staff in local services. These priorities may not precisely match service priorities, but provide an opportunity to think creatively about how to engage Roma and where to locate services in the future.

The main purpose of this report was to present Roma perspectives as new residents in South Yorkshire about their experiences of living and working here. These views were also really important in influencing the recommendations of the wider project about improving Roma inclusion in South Yorkshire. These recommendations are outlined in our companion report 3, *Roma in South Yorkshire: mapping services and local priorities.*

**Roma priorities**

The Roma participants throughout this report have demonstrated that they have some clear priorities. Roma are primarily concerned with their families. This means that they will prioritise earning an income immediately upon arrival (and ideally, followed by permanent, secure employment) and engage with services directly related to their children’s wellbeing, most commonly health services and schools.

Other important considerations for Roma in South Yorkshire include having secure housing and living and socialising in an environment that feels safe, whether that means their neighbourhood, the shops and services that they use, or the schools that their children attend.

When asked about using services, Roma had a clear preference for having a single, local point of contact with service providers, with staff who are trustworthy and who can communicate effectively with them. For many, an obvious way of putting all these attributes together would be in a local community centre that is intended to be used and perhaps run by Roma themselves.

**The gap between Roma priorities and service or strategic priorities**

Having considered these concerns, it becomes apparent that Roma priorities can be quite different from service priorities. In many arenas where services discussed their Roma service users for this research, they described their hopes that Roma will attend ESOL classes, will make efforts to integrate (or even volunteer) with the local community, that they will develop Roma-led civic organisations, and report hate crime more frequently.

While it is likely that Roma would also welcome these developments in the long-term, Roma in this research did not concur that these were the most salient issues. As one Roma participant summarised, people must secure their basic needs: a form of income to provide for their families, and then feel secure (in terms of their immigration status or residency);
only after this point will they be ready to consider other aspects of their lives such as taking ESOL classes, as Maruska aptly summarised:

*If everything calms down and everyone starts getting used to the new rules [after Brexit] and whatever I'm hoping people will get permanent residency - and start being eligible for more things and have more breathing space for learning English and doing stuff - rather than [as they do initially] hunting jobs quickly to put money on the table.* (Maruska, Czech Roma professional)

**Moving forward: building practice that is informed by Roma perspectives**

Having a good understanding of Roma priorities enables us to think creatively about how best to direct local resources to improve outcomes for Roma and their local communities in South Yorkshire. This might involve interventions that are clearly linked to employability and employment opportunities beyond low-skilled and unreliable work through employment agencies. It might involve engaging with Roma communities in the places and services where they are more comfortable, such as schools, on the street, or voluntary sector drop-ins, and siting services in these locations through joint working with other organisations. In some parts of South Yorkshire this happens with some success.

Directing resources to non-Roma communities is another approach that might be effective. There are some significant difficulties in the ways that services engage with Roma, and it may be worth investing in interventions with mainstream services. For example, increasing staff knowledge and understanding about Roma communities could help improve accessibility, whilst also reducing the burden on any intermediaries who currently are seen as the only individuals able to interact successfully with Roma service users.

The lessons from this report have directly influenced the nine key recommendations of the wider project for working with Roma communities in South Yorkshire. In brief, the recommendations are as follows:

1. Prioritise employment interventions
2. Use interventions with young people to engage with other family members
3. Aim to encourage mixing or interaction between communities
4. Aim to empower Roma communities as a project outcome
5. Use locations that are already trusted by Roma communities
6. Support (statutory) staff to gain more knowledge, understanding and confidence to work with Roma service users and to communicate with them effectively.
7. Think through any relevant conundrums that affect local services. For example, the fact that Roma can have different priorities to services, and that while Roma want to have a say in decision-making that affects them, they may be reluctant to be seen as formal representatives for their communities.\(^\text{13}\)
8. Share practice knowledge among services in relation to Roma residents.
9. Tailor new work for the local context.

\(^\text{13}\) Examples of these conundrums are discussed in Report 3 for the whole of South Yorkshire: how can we take one approach with a diverse group like Roma?; are Roma a completely unique client group?; reconciling the need for safe social spaces and for 'mixing'; interpreters and communication in the Roma language; spokespersons for Roma; tackling ‘difficult’ issues around safeguarding and exploitation; different priorities for Roma and services.
A more detailed explanation of these recommendations is found in Report 3, *Roma in South Yorkshire: mapping services and local priorities*.

Finally, it is important to consider how the world is changing around us, so that we can anticipate Roma needs and priorities in the future, as well as at present. Services in South Yorkshire have described an increased diversity among newly-arrived Roma, with a broader range of backgrounds and countries of origin than previously. They have also described an increased precariousness among Roma, in terms of their job security, income, and the welcome that they receive in local areas amid increasing uncertainty and fear in relation to the EU referendum vote. Again, perhaps there are opportunities for engagement amongst these changes; for example, as Roma are increasingly likely to want to document and apply for permanent residency in the UK, services could use this demand as a means of engaging with new service users from Roma communities.

In the UK we may be facing a social turning point as the fallout from the EU referendum vote becomes clear. The ideas contained in this report reflect the views and perspectives of Roma in South Yorkshire who participated in our project. They are resilient people who value family life, but have learned not to readily trust those outside of their ethnic group. Many Roma have already made a life in South Yorkshire and are committed to settling here permanently, raising their families here and being part of the local community. It is possible for us to build on these achievements, continue to welcome Roma into our communities and encourage them to fulfil their potential.
The series of reports for the South Yorkshire Roma project

This report is the second in a series of reports for the South Yorkshire Roma project:

**South Yorkshire reports**

- Report 1: *Executive summary*
- **Report 2: Roma experiences of living and working in South Yorkshire**
- Report 3: *Roma in South Yorkshire: mapping services and local priorities*

**Local reports**

- Report 4: *Roma in Barnsley*
- Report 5: *Roma in Doncaster*
- Report 6: *Roma in Rotherham*
- Report 7: *Roma in Sheffield*

These are available to download from [www.migrationyorkshire.org.uk](http://www.migrationyorkshire.org.uk)