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Llywodraeth Cymru
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Consultation – summary of responses

A call for proposals on a migrant Roma strategy for Wales

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1. Introduction

On 5 October 2015, the Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty launched a call for proposals on a migrant Roma strategy for Wales. The call for proposals sought views on whether there is a need for a dedicated strategy for the inclusion of migrant Roma.

Various research reports suggest migrant Roma communities are socially excluded in a number of areas, including employment, education and healthcare despite being afforded equal rights in law. Specific detailed proposals for measures to improve social inclusion were encouraged.

Social inclusion policies should follow the European Union's 10 Common Basic Principles for Roma Inclusion:

1. Constructive, pragmatic and non-discriminatory policies
2. Explicit but not exclusive targeting
3. Inter-cultural approach
4. Aiming for the mainstream
5. Awareness of the gender dimension
6. Transfer of evidence-based policies
7. Use of European Union instruments
8. Involvement of regional and local authorities
9. Involvement of civil society
10. Active participation of the Roma.

The Welsh Government will continue to analyse the consultation responses and will consider whether specific proposals to support Roma inclusion are necessary to support the community. The final decision on a migrant Roma strategy will not be taken until a new Government is in place in the new Assembly term.

In this consultation, the term 'migrant Roma' refers to those Romani groups who had previously settled for a period in Central and Eastern Europe and have recently migrated to Wales (largely since the expansion of the European Union in 2004).

2. Context

In Wales, '*Travelling to a Better Future: A Gypsy and Traveller Framework for Action and Delivery Plan*' encapsulates the Welsh Government's commitment to indigenous Gypsy and Traveller communities. Meanwhile, there is no dedicated strategy to support the inclusion of the migrant Roma community in Wales. Instead, these community members are provided with equal treatment when accessing services under the law. Nevertheless, the consultation sought views in relation to any disproportionate disadvantages experienced by migrant Roma which may undermine the concept of equal access to services in Wales.

As a Member State of the European Union, the UK (and, by extension, Wales) must promote the social inclusion of Roma. This can be achieved through a dedicated National Roma Integration Strategy or through an integrated set of policy measures. Currently, the Welsh Government supports the inclusion of Gypsies, Roma and Travellers through social inclusion policies which apply to all communities, in addition to dedicated proposals to support Gypsies and Travellers through '*Travelling to a Better Future.*'

Section 77 of the Government of Wales Act 2006 requires the Welsh Ministers to exercise their functions with due regard to the principle of equal opportunities for all people. Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 requires the Welsh Government to have regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

3. Consultation

The consultation period ran from 5 October 2015 – 10 January 2016. Online versions of the consultation document and response forms were provided.

Five questions were set out in a document which was available online and which could be returned either in hard copy or by email. Key stakeholders known to have worked with migrant Roma were directly invited to participate in the consultation.

We received 26 written responses to the consultation from organisations and individuals, including:

- 6 Local Authorities (including 2 Education services)
- 6 Gypsy, Roma and Traveller support organisations
- 4 Individual members of the public
- 1 Police Force
- 1 Health Board
- 1 Dental surgery
- 1 GP surgery
- 1 University
- 1 Housing organisation
- 1 Inspectorate
- National Assembly for Wales
- Wales Strategic Migration Partnership
- Welsh Local Government Association

Written Respondents (organisations)	
Roma Support Group	Romani Cultural & Arts Company
Save the Children's Travelling Ahead Project	Wales Strategic Migration Partnership
University of Salford	Cardiff EMTAS
Tai Pawb	Flintshire County Council
Aneurin Bevan UHB	Welsh Local Government Association
Gwynedd Council	Unity into the Community
Newport Council Flying Start	Dyfed-Powys Police
Estyn	Powys County Council
Newport GEMS	National Assembly for Wales

Where comments in written responses have been referred to throughout this document, the name of the respondent is included in italics and sometimes in brackets.

In addition to the written responses detailed above, we conducted consultation sessions with Roma community members in Newport and with another support organisation in Cardiff.

We also undertook a stakeholder workshop in Cardiff. This workshop was intended to increase understanding amongst delegates to ensure well-informed written responses were submitted. The workshop also provided general comments regarding the consultation. A list of the organisations which sent representatives to the workshop can be found in **Annex A**.

This document summarises the responses to the consultation questions. It aims to give an overview of the breadth and depth of responses, and to provide an indication of the issues which were raised most frequently. While this document can only provide a short summary of the responses, each of the responses has been a vital resource for the Welsh Government in developing the final guidance.

Though several attempts were made to engage migrant Roma community members face-to-face, only one focus group was successfully held. If specific policy proposals are subsequently developed for inclusion in a strategy, the active participation of more Roma community members will be necessary to ensure the proposals are fit for purpose. Nevertheless, 7 Gypsy, Roma and Traveller support organisations were engaged through this consultation process who were able to offer insights drawn from their experience supporting this community.

4. Responses to proposals

These responses to proposals summarise comments from the written responses, on-site consultations and the events held across Wales.

4.1 Is there a need for specific proposals aimed at improving the social inclusion of migrant Roma in Wales?

Summary of written responses:

68% of respondents who responded directly to this question thought there is a need for specific proposals to improve the social inclusion of migrant Roma. 20% of all respondents explicitly stated their belief these measures should be included within a revised '*Travelling to a Better Future*' Framework for Action. Only one response felt the need for a standalone migrant Roma strategy.

Summary of community member responses:

During the focus group with Roma community members there was disagreement regarding the need for separate strategies for their community. Some community members did not want to be identified as a separate community due to fears this would impact negatively on them. However, some community members thought a strategy was required to ensure new arrivals could properly integrate into Welsh society.

Focus group members also disagreed over the format of a strategy as standalone or combined within a refreshed '*Travelling to a Better Future*' as the commonality between communities was not universally accepted.

Nevertheless, the focus group felt specific measures were required to support social inclusion of the Roma community.

4.2 What are the barriers to migrant Roma social inclusion and how should these barriers be addressed?

Summary of written responses:

There was a high level of consistency in answers provided to this question, with respondents highlighting common issues experienced by Roma. One of the most significant barriers to social inclusion in Wales was deemed to be generated elsewhere, as *Roma Support Group* noted, “many migrant Roma in the UK are escaping both economic exclusion (in common with other EU migrations), but also institutional oppression (in common with other refugees from outside the EU).”

42% of respondents highlighted the fear or mistrust of statutory services in Wales which has been generated by past experiences of ‘authority’ in the country of origin of many Roma migrants. This fear was seen by respondents as manifesting itself in a number of ways which prevented social inclusion of Roma. For example, a reluctance to self-ascribe ethnicity as ‘Roma’ (where the choice is offered on official forms) was seen as a product of being afraid of being identified and victimised (*Newport Council Flying Start*). Furthermore, one respondent highlighted a Slovakian TV documentary which had allegedly made claims regarding the UK care system’s propensity to remove children as another reason for mistrust.

Nevertheless, some respondents identified examples of discrimination experienced within Wales, such as the “prejudicial attitudes of primary care staff” (*Roma Support Group*), continuing discrimination from other migrants of the same nationality (*Romani Cultural and Arts Company*), and stereotypes perpetuated by the media (*Flintshire County Council*).

46% of respondents referred to language or literacy barriers which are affecting inclusion. These barriers generally related to the consequences of educational exclusion or segregation of Roma in their countries of origin which means there are high levels of illiteracy amongst Roma resident in Wales. Therefore, existing translation services into the written language of the country of origin are unlikely to be of use to Roma. Furthermore, Language Line was deemed to be inappropriate by *Aneurin Bevan Health Board*.

29% of respondents commented on problems of overcrowding or poor housing experienced by the Roma community. Some of these issues were deemed to be the result of poor literacy, others due to poverty.

25% of respondents made reference to significant levels of poverty experienced by this community due to a combination of more impoverished backgrounds in their country of origin, poor literacy, a lack of qualifications and the resultant marginal position in the labour market. A number of organisations (*Roma Support Group, Travelling Ahead, Tai Pawb*) referred to poverty levels being exacerbated by the removal of passported benefits, such as Free School Meals, due to unemployment leading to the removal of ‘Treaty rights.’

Other barriers identified included attitudes towards education by Roma themselves, a perceived incompatibility between a nomadic lifestyle and social inclusion and a lack of knowledge of British culture.

Summary of community member responses:

During the Roma focus group, a lack of information regarding Welsh public services was identified. Focus group attendees had lived in Wales for 3-5 years, however, school admission and attendance processes were not properly understood. Similarly, the operation of the NHS was poorly understood. It is clear a lack of information is preventing families such as these from becoming more integrated into society.

The Focus Group facilitator, *South East Wales Regional Equality Council*, noted they could not refer Roma community members to Citizens Advice Bureaux effectively due to language barriers. Furthermore, discrimination perpetrated towards Roma by other migrants from the same country of origin actively worked against Roma attendance at advice sessions.

Community members expressed fears regarding disclosure of their ethnicity in schools in case it lead to explicit bullying or less obvious lowering of teacher expectations of Roma children, including placement in special classes.

Community members stated they were very happy to be living in Wales and did not want separate services, however, there was support for the idea of a dedicated Roma advocacy and advice worker. This worker would support Roma community members to understand how systems in Welsh society work.

Some benefits, such as Free School Meals, were not claimed due a misunderstanding that social workers would interpret receipt of these benefits as evidence these families could not look after their children.

Finally, concerns were raised regarding unemployment as a lack of literacy and qualifications made it difficult to seek and maintain jobs.

4.3 What proposals do you think should be developed?

Summary of written responses:

Although the identified barriers in question 4.2 were similar for many respondents, there was a greater degree of difference in the proposed solutions to these issues.

38% of respondents thought the development of some form of dedicated support for the Roma community, providing advice and advocacy was important. This was the most common proposal suggested by respondents. The rationale for providing dedicated support was the multiple disadvantages experienced by Roma, such as continuing discrimination, low literacy and the legacy of their situation in their country of origin, meant this community was considered to be particularly vulnerable.

The next most common responses (29% respectively) was for cultural awareness training to be delivered to professionals whose work impacts upon this community and for the education of Roma community members on various aspects of life in Wales.

Training for health, teachers, welfare rights, housing, police, probation, youth work, and social services officials was specifically mentioned as being required.

Education of Roma community members would include information regarding how education and health services operate in Wales, as well as information relating to the local culture. One respondent referred to the required sessions as “Citizenship style classes for parents.”

A quarter of all respondents thought data collection and analysis in relation to migrant Roma communities needed to improve to ensure services could be effective. *Estyn* felt the use of attendance, exclusions and attainment data needed to be improved to ensure Roma pupils can receive quality education. The *Welsh Local Government Association* felt a better evidence base is required to support Roma inclusion. Similarly, *Flintshire County Council* stated robust equality monitoring was required. *Cardiff Council EMTAS* also suggested the Welsh Government and Local Authorities should utilise the same ethnicity categories to support better data analysis and improved service provision.

21% of respondents felt the promotion of Roma community advocates and improved family engagement was important. *Newport GEMS* noted many children speak Romanes as a first language so recruitment of advocates from within the community itself is important, though this does incur expense and takes significant time. Similarly, *University of Salford, Romani Cultural and Arts Company, Roma Support Group and Cardiff Council EMTAS* saw advantages in the recruitment of community advocates to help foster trust between public authorities and the migrant Roma community and spread awareness messages within the community.

Cardiff Council EMTAS and *Newport GEMS* also noted the importance of liaison work with parents to smooth introductions into education settings. Better

family engagement was seen as important to ensure the legacy of disadvantages experienced by Roma could be challenged in Wales.

A number of other proposals were suggested, including 13% of respondents identifying the need for improved information for migrant Roma settling in Wales, more flexible availability of ESOL services, a specific focus on the needs of young Roma women, and the establishment of a consultative body to support policy development with the migrant Roma community. *Tai Pawb* suggested the development of a consultative body should follow the principle of “nothing about us, without us” to encourage active participation and build trust with the Roma community.

Some respondents raised significant concerns relating to child safeguarding procedures, including the adequacy of the standard parenting assessment in the context of the multiple disadvantages experienced by Roma.

Summary of community member responses:

During the focus group, community members thought the need for a dedicated advice and advocacy worker was important to help Roma to understand how Welsh society works and to provide an opportunity to get accessible information. Face-to-face communication was considered to be far more effective than written communication due to literacy issues.

Community members thought cultural awareness training for teachers was a good idea, including ways to support parents to understand how they can enhance their children’s education.

Adult literacy classes were also seen to be a good way of promoting social inclusion. Measures to support Roma employment were also suggested.

4.4 Are there examples of good practice relating to targeted services provided to Roma which could be replicated elsewhere?

Summary of written responses:

67% of responses to this question highlighted particular examples of perceived good practice supporting Roma inclusion. The most commonly referred to examples of good practice were advocacy and advice services set-up to support Roma inclusion, which include Roma community members as employees. These included *Roma Support Group* and *Roma Community Care*.

Similarly, the employment of Roma community advocates within existing statutory services (such as at Lliswerry School, Newport, and Fitzalan School, Cardiff) was highlighted as an effective way to engage the Roma community. *Aneurin Bevan Health Board* and *Roma Support Group* both referred to other programmes aimed at engaging members of the Roma community to act as advocates providing an outreach or bridging service between statutory services and the Roma community.

Examples of effective ethnicity data use in schools were highlighted by *Estyn* and *Cardiff Council EMTAS*.

Dyfed-Powys Police referred to the introduction of Hate Crime support officers whose role it is to provide greater understanding of hate crime experienced by Roma.

Flintshire County Council also referred to Migration Yorkshire who host the National Roma Network and Roma MATRIX programme.

Summary of community member responses:

During the focus group, community members had mixed opinions regarding the use of Roma advocates to support enrolment into schools. Some thought this was a great idea, whilst others felt this would not be effective in most cases.

Maindee Primary School (Newport) was perceived to be an example of good practice due to a weekly two-hour session which had been running to support parents to understand the education system. This face-to-face opportunity for parents to ask questions and learn more was considered invaluable to those who had taken part. However, funding for this programme had now come to an end.

A service / worker devoted to providing face-to-face advice and advocacy for Roma community members was considered to be good practice, such as the service offered by *South East Wales Regional Equality Council*, who had organised the focus group.

4.5 Have we asked all the important questions? If not, on what other issues should we be seeking views?

Summary of written responses:

Most respondents did not provide further comments on this consultation. However, *People Around Here* stated any migrant Roma strategy needs to dovetail into the Welsh Government's wider community cohesion strategy.

Newport GEMS asked how Roma could be presented in a more positive light to dispel harmful myths and stereotypes which impact negatively on community members.

Estyn asked additional questions relating to how the Welsh Government can support the education of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils.

One respondent thought the consultation should have asked what similarities and differences existed between indigenous Gypsies and Travellers and migrant Roma communities.

University of Salford referred to the need to consider safeguarding issues as equally important as developing health, housing and education provision.

The *National Assembly for Wales* referred the Welsh Government to the recommendations of the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly 'Travellers, Gypsies and Roma: access to public services and community relations' report (October 2014). This report will be included in considerations of future proposals for Roma inclusion.

Summary of community member responses:

There were no specific additional points raised from the Roma community member focus group.

5. Concluding remarks

The consultation responses demonstrated a clear desire for Welsh Government leadership in supporting the social inclusion of Roma. The preferred approach appears to be the development of specific proposals to support this community within the wider '*Travelling to a Better Future*' Gypsy and Traveller Framework for Action. Stakeholders expressed their view that the Roma community faced multiple disadvantages which require targeted support to provide equal opportunities to access services.

The difficulties engaging migrant Roma community members expressed by stakeholders were mirrored in attempts to engage the community in this consultation exercise. Further work will be required to ensure subsequent policy proposals are developed in conjunction with Roma community members themselves.

A number of respondents highlighted case studies of good practice or recommendations from reports and studies. These will be included in considerations regarding the type of measures which may be feasible to support Roma.

Although a minority of the received comments offered contradictory suggestions regarding the need for a strategy, there was a significant degree of consistency related to the perceived barriers and solutions to Roma inclusion.

We would like to thank everyone who has taken the time to respond to the consultation by sending in a written response, participating in a focus group or by attending a consultation workshop. We are very grateful to everyone for their contributions. Thank you especially to *South East Wales Regional Equality Council* for helping to facilitate the focus group.

6. Next Steps

A copy of this consultation summary will be sent to each of the respondents to the consultation.

The Welsh Government will continue to analyse the consultation responses and will consider whether specific proposals to support Roma inclusion are necessary to support the community. The final decision on a migrant Roma strategy will not be taken until a new Government is in place in the new Assembly term.

A full public consultation will accompany the development of any specific policy proposals, including engagement directly with migrant Roma community members and other stakeholders.

Annex A

The table below shows the organisations which attended the consultation workshop held in January 2016.

Cardiff – 7 January 2016
South East Wales Regional Equality Council
Travelling Ahead (Save the Children)
Wales Strategic Migration Partnership
Tai Pawb
Aneurin Bevan Health Board
South Wales Police
Children’s Commissioner for Wales
NHS Centre for Equality and Human Rights