

Romani



The Romani people are a wide spread ethnic minority group, who usually migrate to the UK from Eastern Europe, particularly from Slovakia, Poland, and Romania. They are often denied basic social rights, such as work, education, and equal opportunities, and face discrimination and racism in their country of origin. The Roma community is one of the most disadvantaged in the UK today.

A brief background

It is believed that the Romani people originated from India around 1500 years ago. They have migrated across Europe for over a thousand years, with evidence of the first Roma communities being established in the UK during the 15th century. Today, it is estimated that between 200,000 and 300,000 Romani people are residing in the UK however, the exact number is not known.

The word “Roma” is what a lot of Romani people chose to refer to themselves as. This literally translates as “people” in English. They are traditionally a nomadic people, a lifestyle that was adopted due to the constant need to flee from persecution and discrimination.

They are often portrayed in a negative light and a regularly denied basic social rights, particularly in Eastern European countries. Many Roma people have now begun to settle and form communities.

Language

The Romani language is the most wide spread language of the Romani people. It is closely related to Hindi, Punjabi, Urdu, and Bengali. “Romani” can be used to refer to many varieties of the language and many oppose a standardization of the language. The language also borrows words from other languages, such as English. The language itself is a largely verbal language, making written translation difficult. Many Romani speakers are multi-lingual and will speak the language of their country of origin or the country they have settled in. Common languages are Slovakian and Polish.

Culture & Religion

What we know about the Romani culture and history is usually derived from story tellers and singers due to the oral nature of the culture. Traditionally, it is honourable to display wealth and prosperity, with Roma women typically wearing gold. Generosity is desirable within the social networks and is seen as an investment for support during troubled times. There is no set religion within the Romani culture, although many follow Christianity and Islam, with some still practising traditional Hinduism, adopting the religious beliefs of where they have settled.



Education

Due to the nomadic lifestyle, Roma people do not tend to formally learn literacy and maths. Within the UK, Roma children are one of the highest under-achieving groups within the education system. Almost a fifth fail to achieve a “good level of development” within early years and only 14% achieve the minimum GCSE expectation, compared with 60% of white children. Roma children are also 4 times more likely to be excluded from school and 5 times more likely to have Special Educational Needs.

Family Life

Family is important within the Roma community and is often considered to be central within their culture. Typically, members of extended families all live together within the same community. Marriages arranged by parents however it is not common practise to force the marriage, although being married by their mid-twenties is regarded as the norm. Romani customs dictate that the groom’s family pay a bride price to the family of the bride.

There are conflicts around child marriages within the Roma culture, with some self-styled Romani leaders prohibiting marriage below the legal age of the country the family are residing in. Nevertheless, child marriage is still practised by some families, with children being reportedly married as young as 12 years old. Bride kidnapping has also been known to take place within the culture, with girls as young as 12 being kidnapped and married to teenage boys. This tradition has normalised kidnapping and puts girls and women at risk of human trafficking. Again, this is a practise many within the culture seek to eliminate.



The Care System

There is widespread distrust of the UK social care system amongst the Roma community, with several people feeling that they have had their children removed due to discrimination and a lack of understanding on the Roma culture. Since 2009, there has been a 733% increase in the number of Roma children being taken into care. Despite this fear, recent finding suggests that this increase is due to deep and persistent poverty or due to families being identified by social workers as “under stress” or to have been neglecting their children.

For more information

Further information about Romani culture and about supporting Roma children and young people can be found at the following sites:

www.migrationyorkshire.org.uk

Provides information and resources to help and support Roma in Yorkshire.

www.refugeecouncil.org.uk

Provides information and resources to help and support Roma, including young people under 18.

www.travellermovement.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/TTM-The-care-system-and-Gypsies-Roma-and-Travellers_web.pdf

Provides further information regarding Roma children in care.

www.romasupportgroup.org.uk

Provides information regarding working with and supporting Roma people who have come to the UK.