

Luton Roma Trust Evaluation



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**Steps
to Recovery**

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1. Introduction

Luton Roma Trust is a registered charity based in Luton with a mission to help Roma migrants to build their lives in the UK.

The organisation is increasing its capacity to respond to the day-to-day needs of Roma families in Luton, with plans to employ additional staff members and create a community drop-in centre. This evaluation serves to measure the impact of Luton Roma Trust's work to demonstrate value and impact in order to gain additional funding to develop a long-term strategy.

This evaluation was conducted by not-for-profit Community Interest Company Civil Society Consulting (CSC) with the assistance of Dan Ciobanu, who engaged with the Roma community in Luton over the course of two months. Margaret Greenfields, Professor of Social Policy at Anglia Ruskin University, internationally renowned expert on co-production with communities at risk of marginalisation and many years of experience of working with Gypsy, Traveller and Roma populations, contributed to the analysis of findings.



2. Executive Summary

This evaluation report assesses and demonstrates the impact that Luton Roma Trust (LRT), a charity that provides holistic support to the local Roma community, has had on its beneficiaries and the wider community over the last decade. The evaluation aims to provide recommendations for LRT's future programmes, as well as policy recommendations for organisational development. This independent evaluation was carried out by Civil Society Consulting CIC (CSC).

Roma are one of the largest and most marginalised ethnic minority groups in both their countries of origin and post-migration. LRT seeks to address the challenges that the community faces, particularly in accessing public services including government support, education and employment, healthcare, as well as advocating for Roma on local and national platforms.

This report demonstrates that LRT's work has led to a number of improvements in the quality of life and the social integration of individual beneficiaries. It has also shown LRT has successfully partnered with other community organisations to contribute to social development in Luton on a community level. The report reflects that LRT's model of practice is effective at providing much-needed support to people from disadvantaged backgrounds, equipping them with the skills and confidence required to support their own life in Luton.

97% of participants said that LRT represented them in the Luton community, praising the charity's capacity to protect their rights and bring issues forward, such as discrimination in the workplace, and solve them.

The evaluation adopted a people-centred, consultative approach. CSC carried out qualitative and quantitative research to collect the views from the Roma community with the support of a Romanian-speaking research consultant to facilitate outreach and assist in data collection. From November 2021 to January 2022, the research team conducted 13 structured interviews and collected 50 survey responses (scaling down from the planned 150 responses due to Covid-19-related challenges). Professor Margaret Greenfields (Anglia Ruskin University) contributed to the analysis of the survey results, case studies (derived from the interviews), and interviews with local organisations.

Key findings:

Challenges facing the Roma community

The survey provided an opportunity to gain deeper insights into challenges facing the Roma community in Luton:

- **Racism and discrimination** emerged as the most important issue, with **90%** of the survey respondents identifying it as very important.
- Other key challenges were: **sense of identity** (88%), **difficulty accessing local public services** (79%) and **rent arrears and housing problems** (71%).
- Women were more likely to report **social isolation** and **loneliness** as an important issue to them.
- There are serious implications for the Roma community's educational inclusion: **33%** of adult respondents were only educated to primary school level; **40%** were educated to pre-16 (secondary school) level. **8%** reported that they had received no formal education.
- Only **15%** of respondents reported their level of English to be 'very good'; the older population also reported lower English ability. According to survey data, lower English ability has negative implications for participants sense of belonging as well as exacerbating other challenges they face.
- Covid-19 vaccination rates remain low, with **96%** of respondents not yet vaccinated, and 87% saying they would not consider getting vaccinated. This is consistent with the picture across UK and Europe.
- Whilst recognising that the sample size is small, respondents who engaged with LRT are more likely to consider getting the vaccine than those who have not.

The impact of Luton Roma Trust

- LRT provides a high quality service to the Roma community in Luton, with **100%** of survey respondents reporting that they are 'very likely' or 'likely' to recommend LRT to other members of the community.
- **97%** of respondents agree that **LRT represented them in the Luton community** through advocating for the needs and interests of the Roma community.
- One of LRT's aims is to help beneficiaries become independent of the organisation's support. LRT are making excellent progress with this goal, with **50%** of respondents reporting **they feel confident navigating life in Luton** without the support of LRT.
- Survey respondents who have engaged with LRT for a longer period of time also tend to report better outcomes (e.g. greater sense of belonging, understanding of life in the UK, feeling more proud of their identity)
- Those under the age of 25 - typically having at least partially accessed education in the UK or working in mainstream employment, and those over the age of 46 were most likely to report contact with LRT on at least a weekly basis.

Since receiving support from LRT:

- **63%** of respondents said their mental health has improved;
- **78%** of respondents said they 'agree' or 'strongly agree' that they had received useful information on how to stop the spread of Covid-19 and about the Covid-19 vaccination;
- **78%** said they had a better understanding of the UK job market, and **63%** said that LRT helped them seek employment or gain skills that made them more employable;
- **84%** said that they have a better understanding and/or feel more proud of their Roma identity;
- **72%** respondents reported that LRT helped them to access government support;
- **81%** of respondents either 'strongly agreed' or 'agreed' that they had a better understanding of their rights in the UK;
- **78%** of respondents either 'strongly agreed' or 'agreed' that they feel a greater sense of belonging in the wider Luton community.
- **All** participants reported that they interact more regularly with people outside of the Luton Roma community after receiving LRT's support.

The qualitative interviews generated valuable insights into Luton Roma Trust's impact.

Strong themes include:

- Participants' social wellbeing improved through engaging with LRT, resulting from feeling more secure and a greater sense of belonging, as well as through having more ties with other people in Luton as a result of employment or education.
- Participants who were parents reflected on their children's enjoyment of and achievements in education, thanks to LRT's support with enrolment and access to schooling.
- Consistently, participants agree that LRT is important for the Roma community and is the reason for their continued residence in Luton, given the organisation's support in helping them integrate into the local community:

"I feel safe and feel like I have found my place. This is due to LRT being located here and offering support every time we have an issue...If I have a problem, I know I can always count on LRT and the wonderful people who work there."



Recommendations summary:

Programmes

- **Focus on increasing the scope and volume of English-language learning/ESOL provision.**
 - Classes should be tailored to **accommodate older members** of the community (45+) as this demographic generally tend to have **weaker language skills**;
 - It was identified that weaker English speakers have more trouble accessing public services, therefore ESOL classes should focus on giving beneficiaries the **language tools to communicate with English-speaking service providers**. **Creative English** – a scenario-based English-learning programme led by volunteers – could be adopted for this purpose. Focusing on communication in particular scenarios helps language-learners to develop the confidence to communicate even when they don't have the right vocabulary – further instilling confidence in their language ability.
- **Develop follow-on programmes to support community members to gain 'functional skills' qualifications in particular English and Maths.** This is important when English language attainment is improving and a beneficiary is ready to move into employment as these are typically the minimal level of qualifications required for employment and accessing training opportunities.
 - Providing information about apprenticeships and linking beneficiaries with apprenticeship providers will be key in demonstrating the value of such qualifications.
- **Develop new programmes and initiatives around issues of racism/discrimination, identity, accessing local services, and rent/housing.** These were identified as the most pressing problems in the community. Survey data also showed **increased confidence** leads to better outcomes in these areas; therefore confidence-building activities should be integrated into all programming.
 - Examples of **'confidence-building' activities** could be information sessions and 'meet and greets' with specific public service providers to build relationships and rapport, so that the community find them more approachable.
- **Target male audiences with outreach work and programming**
 - Consulting with Roma men will enable LRT to understand which interests or aspects of male identity can be leveraged to elicit more engagement from men. Male-focused initiatives should start with such a consultation. LRT could investigate the potential of more activity-based, rather than conversation-based initiatives (for example use learnings from 'Men's Sheds' and adapt for the Roma community) and leveraging men's identities as fathers.
 - On the other hand, women were less likely to seek support for **social isolation** and **accessing government support**, despite generally having a greater understanding of their rights than men. Therefore, information sessions and activities on these topics tailored to women could be impactful.
- **Support and initiatives should accommodate, and to some extent be geared towards, older community members.**
 - Older Roma people could provide talks in schools or community centres, for example they could speak about their lived-experience during the Communist era;
 - They may want to reflect on life in the country of origin in a social setting which could be a way to get people together to cook, watch old films, and sew or engage in other crafts
 - Intergenerational activities: sessions where older people can share knowledge with and young people; groups where grandparents drop in with their grandchildren.
- **Continue and develop work engaging with schools.** Since **18%** of survey respondents' children were not enrolled in school, the ongoing appointment of LRT's schools liaison officer will be an invaluable asset.
 - Improving the relationships between schools and parents, through information sessions with schools is impactful since respondents' children exclusively attend mainstream schools;
 - Co-learning: schools and libraries can also be used as sites of learning for parents, so partnerships and collaborations could take place here (for IT lessons, reading and writing).

- Although the course of the pandemic, and subsequently future vaccine booster programmes, is uncertain, if vaccines are continued to be needed, **LRT should focus on the following areas in their vaccine advocacy work** (as Roma communities often have hesitancy in uptake of childhood vaccinations too, so this model of engagement will apply beyond the pandemic):
 - Informing beneficiaries on how to get the vaccine;
 - Providing up-to-date, accurate information about vaccines to combat misinformation/disinformation (for example, vaccine leads to infertility);
 - Communicating case studies of members of the Roma community receiving vaccines and benefiting from it
- **Develop a systematic approach for identifying new arrivals, and provide them with a support package that signposts services and help to settle them in.** Evidence shows that more recent migrants need urgent support to settle and integrate. Now that Ukrainian Roma are beginning to come to the UK, this is especially important given the traumas they have experienced.
- **Develop existing initiatives increasing interactions with the wider community:** participants reported an increased sense of wellbeing when having interaction with the wider community on a more regular basis.
- Respondents had ideas for particular services they would like to see. These include:
 - **More flexible and varied translation** services for beneficiaries: respondents specifically expressed a demand for mobile translation services for GP appointments
 - More frequent social gatherings and clubs, activities for children including music events, educational courses etc.

Organisational development

- **Increase capacity.** A large number of beneficiaries suggested LRT needed to increase their capacity; they pointed to a need for more staff and/or extended opening hours.
- **Invest in promoting services and support** – both beneficiaries and other stakeholders consulted suggested LRT could make their services more well-known.
- LRT's part-time Communications Officer could be converted into a full time role.
- Develop marketing strategies, i.e. online campaigns, physical advertisements and community outreach work.
- **Develop advocacy function.** Luton-based organisations were of the view that LRT should focus on developing the advocacy 'arm' of the organisation, which reflects LRT's own ambitions. Specific suggestions included:
 - Hold regular **'town-hall' style meetings** with the Roma community – an open forum where beneficiaries can express their concerns and problems – which will aid LRT's monitoring of the needs of the Roma community.
 - Leverage LRT's strong relationships with local schools to encourage them to take steps to support GTRSB students into higher education, by participating in the GTRSB into Higher Education Pledge. There is a Schools Pledge in development specifically for schools working with and supporting GTR children, expected to launch for GRT History Month in June 2022.
- Organisations working with LRT suggested, although recognising the importance of crisis intervention work, **a shift of focus to community development work with a long-term view of equipping the Roma community with the tools to become independent of LRT's support** being an activity which could have the most impact.

Partnership working

- **Convene a monthly meeting with other Luton-based voluntary and statutory organisations** to discuss issues affecting the Roma community and initiate more collaborative working. There is an appetite for engaging with LRT's specialist knowledge and language skills within the Luton voluntary sector, therefore ample opportunity exists to co-produce immigration advice and integration projects.
- **LRT should nurture relationships with local commissioning groups and local authorities to enhance collaboration**, since their work can be equated to social prescribing activities. Collaborative projects and knowledge-sharing would be beneficial for both parties and in turn these bodies could also be a source of funding for LRT.



3. About the Evaluators

Civil Society Consulting CIC (CSC) is a not-for-profit with a mission to strengthen the social sector by providing high quality and people-oriented consultancy to civil society organisations, at a not-for-profit price.

Thanks to our academic and multidisciplinary team, we have an extensive track record assisting organisations large and small to evaluate their organisation and demonstrate value and impact. Since 2011, the CSC team has collectively carried out over 100 evaluations on complex issues ranging from modern-day slavery, perinatal mental health, and the pandemic's impact on minority-led civil society organisations.

Professor Margaret Greenfields specialises in the field of social inclusion, with an emphasis on collaborative research with marginalised communities. She is an advisory partner on this evaluation project, lending her expertise to advise on the evaluation process and research methods from an academic and ethical standpoint, as well as providing a broader perspective and analytical support with the findings, and feeding into policy recommendations.

4. About Luton Roma Trust

Working in partnership with statutory agencies, Luton Roma Trust helps the local Roma community, many of whom have migrated to the UK in recent years, to establish their lives in Luton and integrate holistically into life in the UK. With lived experience as its heart, the organisation works with the Roma community delivering **three pillars of support**:

1. Empowering the Roma community in Luton

LRT supports members of the community to access accommodation, education, welfare, health care and employment. In doing so, the Roma community are engaged more actively in the life of the town, are empowered to seek employment, and have a better understanding of their community and their rights in the UK.

LRT provides advice and acts to represent beneficiaries in the following areas:

Housing: providing information and access to housing as well as support on receiving housing benefits; assisting beneficiaries to find suitable homes for their needs; facilitating communication with landlords; preventing homelessness; and working closely with the housing support team at Luton Council.

Education: advice on school registration; school absence/exclusions, and post-16 education with finding; assistance finding suitable schools; completing school applications; facilitating dialogue between teachers and parents; acting as a conduit between beneficiaries and schools; and collaborating with the 'Access to Education' team at Luton Council.

Employment: advice on obtaining a National Insurance Number (NINo); signposting beneficiaries to employment agencies in Luton according to their needs; providing support with CV writing; assisting beneficiaries to apply for jobs online; and support with receiving sick pay.

Financial advice: advice on opening a bank account, keeping personal data safe, and self-employment rights and obligations, as well as assistance with annual tax returns.

Claiming benefits: advice on housing benefits; child benefits; and universal credit.

Accessing healthcare: providing support with GP registration; providing translation services within GP services as necessary; and working with Luton and Dunstable hospitals to provide translation services. During the pandemic LRT also communicated accurate public health messaging information to the community, both face-to-face and through social media.

Immigration and residency rights: LRT has in-house accredited Immigration Advisors (OISC Level 1) who provide advice on the EUSS scheme. LRT is also partnered with a local law firm who visit the office once a month to offer pro bono advice.

2. Advocating for the Roma community in Luton

To complement work empowering members of the Roma community, LRT supports the wider community to be inclusive of the Roma community. They do this by raising cultural awareness and advocating for Roma needs, including in public sector and third sector organisations.

LRT is part of Luton Council's Eastern European Network, which meets monthly to discuss concerns on behalf of the community and to find solutions for inclusion.

3. Developing a sense of cultural identity

LRT fosters wellbeing of the Roma community through the celebration of Roma culture, language, and heritage and nurturing community-led development initiatives so that the unique Roma community thrives both currently and for future generations. LRT participates in Luton's annual High Town Festival and organises singing events for care homes as well as supporting Romanians arriving into the UK.

History of the organisation – a timeline:

2009: Rev. Martin Burrell set up LRT in 2009, using his decade-long experience working with Roma communities across the UK.

2011: LRT's weekly meetings, which provided practical assistance to the Roma community in Luton, gained popularity within the community to the extent mini-buses were deployed to provide transport for families coming to the meeting.

2012: A team was formed to grow the organisation, which included several members of the Roma community. An organisational mission was concluded: to empower future generations to embrace their education and heritage.

2015: LRT gained charitable status with Rev. Martin Burrell, Bishop Richard and Chris Neilson acting as trustees. The organisation operated two branches: daily crisis intervention, which involved monitoring the progress of each family, and ensuring that children were in full time education.

2017: The number of Roma families in Luton reached over 700. By this time, LRT represented beneficiaries at the town hall, banks, letting agencies, doctor's surgeries, hospitals, courts, education and welfare services. LRT began working with local mainstream schools, who actively approached the organisation to assist the raising of educational standards and integration of Roma pupils.

2018: Through a successful funding bid from the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local government, LRT were able to secure their own premises and opened the Roma Community Centre. Soon after, the organisation registered their 1000th beneficiary.

2019: LRT secured a grant from the National Lottery Community Fund which allowed them to hire more staff and continue expanding to support the community even more effectively.

2020: LRT continued to support Roma migrants in Luton, particularly through advice-giving on the EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS). The organisation started disseminating information about EUSS online in various languages (including Romanes dialects), partnering with other charities. LRT continued to deliver services over the phone and via the internet during the Covid-19. The organisation also produced videos about safety measures and rapidly changing lockdown rules.



5. Background: The Roma Community in Luton and Beyond

Roma migration in the UK: An Overview

Throughout Europe the phrase 'Roma' is widely used an umbrella term encompassing a variety of historically itinerant, ethnically distinct communities including Roma, Sinti, Kale, Romanichels, Boyash/Rudari, Ashkali, Egyptians, Yenish, Dom, Lom, Rom and Abdal, as well as Traveller populations. In the United Kingdom, Roma communities have distinct histories and identities, yet they are frequently conflated with long established indigenous ethnic groups such as Romany Gypsies (with whom they share a degree of heritage) and the unrelated population of Irish and Scottish Travellers.

Political shifts catalysed by the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 saw a significant number of Roma coming to the UK as asylum seekers. But the main expansion of the European Union into central and Eastern Europe in 2004, followed by the accession of Romania and Bulgaria in 2007, saw a substantial rise in the migration of Roma communities from new member states in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), including the Czech Republic, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia. As a result, the vast majority of Roma now living in the UK will have arrived from 2004 onwards – but not always for the first time as a number of Roma people have lived in the EU, practiced home migration to countries of origin or subsequently moved elsewhere in the EU for work, before returning to Britain.

Roma migration has been said to be broadly motivated by structural issues such as a lack of employment opportunities and prejudice in their home countries, as well as improved job opportunities and a perception of greater tolerance in the United Kingdom. On the other hand, simple push-pull factors may not fully represent the complex and specific conditions of Roma emigration (Smith, 2018).

Counting Roma

It has been particularly difficult to count the Roma population in the United Kingdom due to the absence of formal data collection and the impossibility of disaggregating data about this population from Romany Gypsy groups resulting from the away administrative data is collated in Britain.

Given the lack of adequate and reliable data, there have been local estimates of the size of the migrant Roma population in the UK (European Dialogue, 2009; Equality, 2011; Craig, 2011). Yet, these estimates have been largely based on analysis of existing large-scale datasets, obtained from community-based studies, or emerging from a set of relatively untested assumptions.

In 2014, Philip Brown, Philip Martin and Lisa Scullion proposed a more pragmatic approach to addressing the population size of migrant Roma in the UK; by using a self-completion questionnaire that was sent out to all local authorities. Their results provided an estimated migrant Roma population size of 197,705 individuals, with populations concentrated in the North-West of England and London. The House of Commons Committee Report (2019) also reproduced these statistics, but this is still considered a "conservative estimate" (Brown et al, 2014).

The UK School Census provides more up-to-date and nuanced data although this inevitably only captures children of school age. Out of 8.9 million students in England, 26,045 students in the ethnicity group 'White - Gypsy/Roma' were counted in 2020/21.¹ It should be noted, however, that the term 'Gypsy/Roma' naturally includes pupils of English Gypsy origin as well as students of migratory Roma heritage. Additionally, school figures are thought to be significantly understated due to a fear of stigmatisation if Roma people identify as being members of these communities.

In 2021, 'Roma' was included in the list of ethnic communities for the first time in the UK Census, following in the inclusion of a 'Gypsy and Irish Traveller' a decade earlier. The first univariate results are due to be published in late Summer 2022 and it is anticipated that this dataset will provide us with a greater level of information than currently exists. The addition of 'Roma' as a subcategory in the 2021 Census has been praised as a step forward in addressing Roma marginalisation and invisibility, which will hopefully allow for more efficient resource allocation by public services. As Patricia Stapleton, former policy manager for The Traveller Movement, remarks: it was also an opportunity for Roma people "to take ownership of their identity and to take pride in their ethnic heritage"²

1 <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-pupils-and-their-characteristics>

2 <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-pupils-and-their-characteristics>

"We have been moving for hundreds and hundreds of years, and trying to adapt into societies, but now it's time for society to understand us."

– Marius Daniel Banceanu, campaigner and project advocate for the Roma Support Group

Attitudes Toward the Roma

Roma are the largest – estimated at around 12 million – and most marginalised ethnic minority group in Europe. They have been systematically disempowered and subjected to sustained persecution throughout history, including genocide under Nazi occupation and forced integration alongside other mainstream populations under Communist rule. The extent of the persecution of the Roma in the 20th century can be evidenced by the fact it is estimated that between 500,000 to 2.5 million Roma were killed in the Holocaust.

In contemporary society, Roma people still experience widespread exclusion in many European countries. Despite similarity of experience, Roma are however far from a homogenous group: indeed migrants have come to the UK from a range of Central and Eastern European countries, speaking a variety of Romani dialects and practising a number of different faiths. Unlike Romany Gypsies who have been resident in the UK for centuries, many Roma are not UK citizens but more recent migrants – they tend not to have longstanding geographical ties to particular places and communities in the UK and generally use English as an additional language. Having said that, there is a significant divergence in structures of belonging and attachment demonstrated between older and younger generations of Roma migrants to the UK.

Anti-Roma prejudice has existed for centuries, and despite international efforts to protect Roma from racism, cultural stereotypes and ignorance persist. Numerous instances can be found in hate speeches made by politicians across Europe, discriminatory measures targeted at Roma communities, and widespread media representations of Roma as anti-social, culturally backward, or as a threat to social order (Breazu, 2020; Crețu, 2014; Tremlett et al, 2017). Compounding vitriolic political and media outbursts, Roma communities face institutional racism throughout the Europe. The population's experiences of social isolation and poverty, however, are framed as resulting from their 'difference' or an inability to adapt to contemporary demands, rather than identified as the results of structural discrimination. Anti-Roma racism is also found in the form of racial violence, as evidenced by the numerous reports of violent attacks against the Roma across Europe received by the European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC), and identified as particularly common in Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia (Špela Humljan Urh, 2014). Despite the growing visibility of Roma across Europe with increasing policy attention, discrimination continues towards these populations in multi-faceted forms in what McGarry describes as "the last acceptable form of racism" (McGarry, 2017).

The Eurobarometer Discrimination Report for 2015 presents the UK in a favourable light with regard to the treatment of and attitudes towards Roma people, in comparison to other European countries. However the blurring of "Roma" categories with Gypsy and Traveller ethnicity suggests that the conclusions of a relatively well integrated population do not fully reflect members of the communities' lived experience which may in practice contained far greater challenges than is apparent is broad-ranging analysis of data.

A report commissioned by the UN in 2019 found that Roma and Gypsies living in the UK have long endured a "state of invisibility, marginalisation and exclusion" and that this marginalisation pervades almost every area of their lives. In light of recent events such as the 2015 "refugee crisis", Brexit and the pandemic, Roma individuals are once again becoming targets for covert racism and scapegoating and it is of concern that Ukrainian Roma refugees may also experience additional barriers to reaching safety, including accessing the UK when compared to other refugees, based on emergent evidence of discriminatory practices at border crossing points in Europe.

Roma needs and integration

Roma populations face a unique set of challenges related to migration and past experiences of discrimination meaning that migrants are confronted with multiple and intersecting barriers to integration and inclusion.

3 <https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/203/education-committee/news/159482/educational-challenges-faced-by-children-from-gypsy-roma-and-traveller-backgrounds-committee-launches-call-for-written-submissions/>

vidence exists of widespread poverty, including difficulties seeking employment and accessing welfare benefits (NRN, 2017c). According to the literature, many Roma have turned to the informal economy because they are only able to access low-paying, low-skilled and insecure employment in the informal sector (Horton and Greyson, 2008; Brown et al, 2015; Greenfields and Dagilyte, 2018).

Housing issues facing Rom migrants in the UK have also been widely reported as impacting on health and wellbeing. Some of the challenges Roma experience in acquiring accommodation include overcrowding, variable housing quality, and problems accessing Housing Benefit (Brown et al, 2016; Greenfields and Dagilyte, 2018).

Education and inclusion

According to the 2019/20 school census, just 8.1 % of Gypsy/Roma students received a grade 5 (gold standard expected level of qualification) or above in English and Maths GCSE, compared to 49.9% of all students. Additionally several schools claimed that Roma children were ineligible for free school means because their parents were unable to claim on of the so-called "passported" out-of-work benefits.³

A report into inequalities experienced by Gypsy, Roma, Traveller communities published in 2019 by the Parliamentary Women and Equalities Committee, found that "Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people have the worst outcomes of any ethnic group across a huge range of areas, including education, health, employment, criminal justice and hate crime."

A major factor behind the lack of social progress in the UK's reluctance to develop a National Roma Integration Strategy. In 2011, the European Commission called on all EU Member States to adopt the Framework for National Roma Integration Strategy (NRIS). Instead of developing a National Roma Strategy, the UK Government however lobbied to use existing mainstream policy and legal mechanisms to fulfill the minimum requirements of Integration activities rather than developing new dedicated streams of activity (Ryder and Cemlyn, 2016)

In April, 2012, a progress report exploring how successful the National Roma Integration Strategy had been in meeting its targets in the UK produced 28 recommendations.⁴ However the context of this document focused predominantly on inequalities and other issues impacting on indigenous UK Gypsies and Travellers; whilst the attention upon Roma arriving, typically from Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) was minimal. The report was heavily criticised by GRT NGOs and subsequently despite intensive lobbying and the 2019 Women and Equalities Committee report which decreed lack of progress, there is no clear strategy or systematic mainstreaming of Roma inclusion within central Government policy.

Brexit

Following the referendum result in 2016, concerns have been raised about migrant Roma's 'Settled Status' and the procedure for ensuring their right to live in the UK (Institute for Public Policy Research, 2016). According to Mihai Bica, a senior Policy representative from the Roma Support Group, the Roma are some of the "most vulnerable when it comes to accessing their future settled status."⁵ An event hosted by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Gypsies, Travellers and Roma debated the post-Brexit impact back in 2018, when a final Brexit deal was still being negotiated. Issues were raised in three areas:

1. Evidence of identity: Roma experience problems in obtaining documents to prove their status
2. Residence: worsened relationships with HMRC or the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), leading to difficulties in obtaining evidence of labour and payment of taxes to support applications
3. Communication: a lack of digital skills and resources to complete the settled status application online.

"It's highly important that the Home Office understands that people are working and not stealing. We need to be understood and allowed to stay here."

– George, Romanian Expatriate In The UK Of Roma origin

On wider scale, there is also a concern that Roma integration will be dropped from all political agendas, especially since social inclusion goals in general have slipped off the political radar.⁶ This is particularly troubling given the reports of rising hate crimes against the Roma in recent years (Ansell, 2016).

4 Progress report by the ministerial working group on tackling inequalities experienced by Gypsies and Travellers, Department for Communities and Local Government (2012)

5 <https://www.ein.org.uk/blog/what-will-brexite-mean-roma-community>

6 Pauline Lane & David Smith (2021) Mid-term review- UK Roma national integration strategy: Roma at the intersection of ethnic-inclu-sive, post-racial and hyper-ethnic policies, Journal of Contemporary European Studies, 29:1, 80.

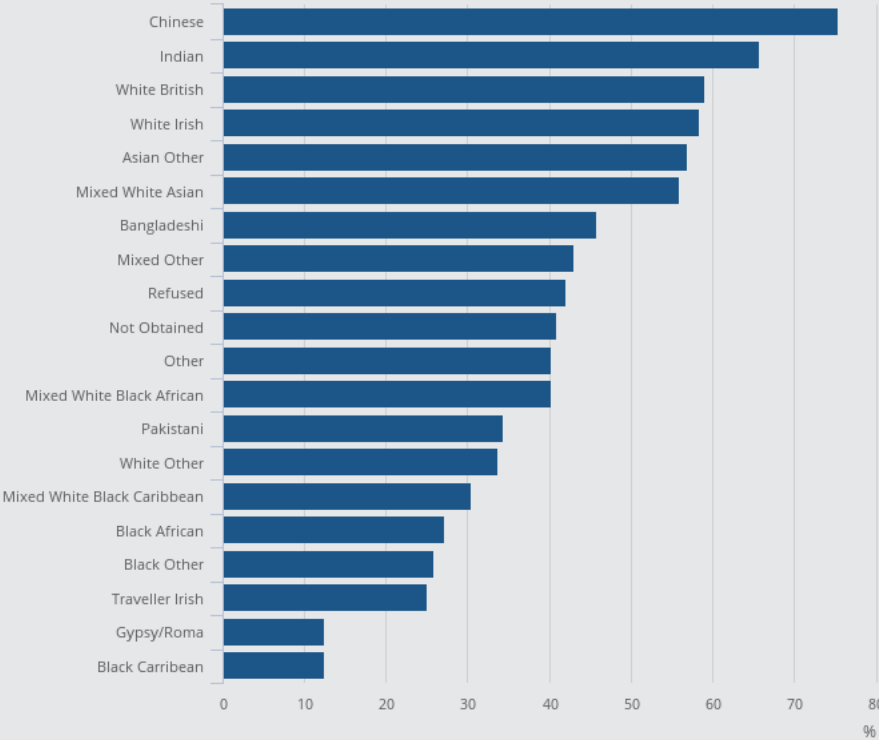
Covid-19 and Vaccine hesitancy

Across Europe, Covid-19 has had a disproportionate impact among the highly marginalised Roma population. While official data does not exist, the Lancet reported in July 2021 that Roma are significantly affected by the disease both directly (rates of deaths and hospitalisations) and indirectly (increased inequalities in access to support and services).

Additionally, it has been recognised there is low vaccine uptake among Roma communities in the UK and more widely. In February 2020, the ONS reported that pupils from Gypsy/Roma backgrounds, alongside Caribbean ethnic groups, were least likely to have been vaccinated.

Pupils from the Gypsy/Roma and Black Caribbean ethnic groups were least likely to have been vaccinated

Percentage of pupils (aged 12 to 15 years) in state-funded schools who have received at least one vaccine dose by ethnicity, England, up to 9 January 2022



Source: Office for National Statistics linked English Schools Census (Department for Education) and National Immunisation Management System (NIMS) dataset

A number of factors have been attributed to this, including a history of vaccine hesitancy in Roma communities; susceptibility to misinformation e.g. the perception that Covid-19 is a low risk disease or that infection confers permanent immunity; and mistrust of healthcare systems and authorities, which is linked to historical violations of health ethics coercion and involuntary sterilisation of Roma women in a number of countries of origin in Eastern Europe. Additionally, vaccines can be harder to access for Roma citizens who are undocumented or who have poor English language skills.

In the United Kingdom, Roma populations have a lower level of interactions with basic and secondary health care than many other migrant groups. Several studies have found negative perceptions in the Roma community towards vaccines more generally. Uptake of vaccinations generally is thought to be lower than average (Smith and Newton, 2017).

A 2020 study found that factors related to access and acceptance of vaccines, such as language and literacy skills, ease of registering with a general practice, and trust in health services were the main barriers to vaccination among GRT communities (Bell, Saliba, Ramsay et al, 2020).

Roma community in Luton

The persistent persecution, social marginalisation, and discrimination experienced by many Roma groups in their countries of origin drive a surge in Roma migration to the UK in 2004 and 2007 following on from EU accession changes. According to studies into the 2004 and 2007 migratory waves many Roma were seeking asylum in the UK, with the country being attractive as an ethnically diverse and prosperous nation state.

Because of difficulties and injustices they have experienced in countries of origin, some Roma in the UK are reluctant to publicly identify as members of their communities. Therefore, whilst there is an estimated number of 3,000 to 5,000 Roma in Luton, the exact figure is unknown (Luton Roma Trust, 2022). These figures can be compared with an estimated 19,853 Roma population in the whole of the South East of England (Women and Equalities Committee, 2019) indicative of both a substantial population and wider issues around undercounting of the population nationally.

As a result, of concerns over self-identification and resourcing concerns, Luton's education healthcare, and family support programmes have all reported a lack of Roma engagement raising the risk of reduced integration and cohesion challenges for this highly vulnerable community.⁷



6. Methodology

CSC's approach to evaluation is people-centred, therefore the team set out to collect the views of as many beneficiaries as possible. Several steps were taken to ensure views were collected from a wide number of members of the Luton Roma community – identified (above) as a particularly marginalised group – in a meaningful, sensitive, and independent way.

Research design

The CSC team utilised inclusive methodologies to design an accessible and culturally sensitive survey for beneficiaries; consulting with Roma members of LRT to ensure that lived-experience was incorporated as well as taking external advice from advisors such as Professor Greenfields. The surveys were enhanced by face-to-face structured interviews, guided by a topic guide which explored care areas of interest. Finally case studies were undertaken to enrich and deepen the evidence gathered in earlier elements of the evaluation.

The research framework (surveys, interviews and case study selection) was designed to assess LRT's achievements in the following areas:

1. **Providing quality services** to improve the lives of the Roma community in Luton;
2. **Advocating for the needs and interests** of the Roma community;
3. **Empowering** the community by supporting them to a point where they can be **independent** of Luton Roma Trust's services;
4. And subsequently, **improving socio-economic outcomes** for the Roma community in the following areas (health, education, welfare, and employment), as well as supporting their **integration into mainstream society**.

The survey and interview process also presented an opportunity to collect information on the demographic profile of beneficiaries and the most pressing concerns of the community. In turn these elements are used to inform recommendations for future service design. Due to the sensitive and personal nature of some of the themes that interviews aimed to draw out, the research team opted for one-on-one interviews over focus groups to collect deeper levels of data.

Data collection and study limitations

As we were aware that many individuals in the Roma community in Luton experience digital exclusion and have low levels of English language proficiency, a Luton-based, Romanian-speaking 'Research Consultant' – Dan Ciobanu – was contracted to support the project. His role was to engage with the community over a two month period. The Consultant's role including conducting outreach, organising and conducting interviews, and assisting Roma community members to complete the survey. Dan's identity as Romanian, helped to foster a sense of trust among beneficiaries, who would otherwise be sceptical of a complete 'outsider' approaching them to ask questions about their lives and struggles. Having said that, Dan is not from the Roma community and does not speak Romani – perhaps a limitation in trust building with beneficiaries and potentially affecting the quality of response. Another potential limitation is that the project did not benefit from a female researcher, which may have restricted interactions with some women from the community given a typically gendered community structure.

Over the course of two months, Dan was able to conduct 13 individual interviews with beneficiaries and assisted beneficiaries to complete a further 50 surveys. Surveys and interviews were administered to adults over the age of 18 and limited to one respondent per household. All participants were of Romanian Roma origin (they key demographic supported by LRT).

The interviews were predominantly conducted over the phone due to the surge of the Omicron variant at the time of data collection (November to December 2021). The online survey was translated into Romanian so that beneficiaries could complete it independently where possible. Dan assisted beneficiaries to complete the survey where applicable (e.g. capturing their responses to questions). The research team initially set a target of 150 surveys; however due to Covid-19 challenges, this was scaled down in consultation with the commissioning agency LRT) to 50 survey responses.

Data analysis

Our findings and conclusions have been drawn from both quantitative and qualitative data, derived from the online survey and interviews. The qualitative interview data has been collated into case studies. Professor Margaret Greenfields has provided a further review and more in-depth analysis of the findings drawing on her expertise of GRT communities, and from a social inclusion Perspective based on knowledge of the populations and literature more broadly. Professor Greenfields' secondary analysis draws on the case studies and survey data cross-tabulated against categories including demographic breakdowns, to identify key areas of interest, observations and reflections on aspects which are experienced more acutely within different demographic group across Roma society.

7. Findings

The following section presents findings from our beneficiary survey, case studies derived from interviews and findings from interviews from Luton-based organisations that work with LRT on an ongoing basis. These findings contribute to the wider analysis and recommendations in subsequent sections.

a. Demographics

The survey collected demographic data to determine the profile of LRT beneficiaries to understand trends in responses. The data also provides an insight into which demographics are not being reached or supported by LRT's service provision.

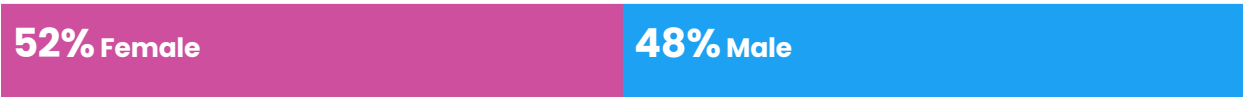
What type of service user?

56% of respondents were beneficiaries of LRT on an individual basis.	28% of respondents were beneficiaries of LRT, along with their children	4% of respondents were parents of children benefiting from LRT's services	12% of respondents were members of the Luton Roma community who have not engaged with LRT so far
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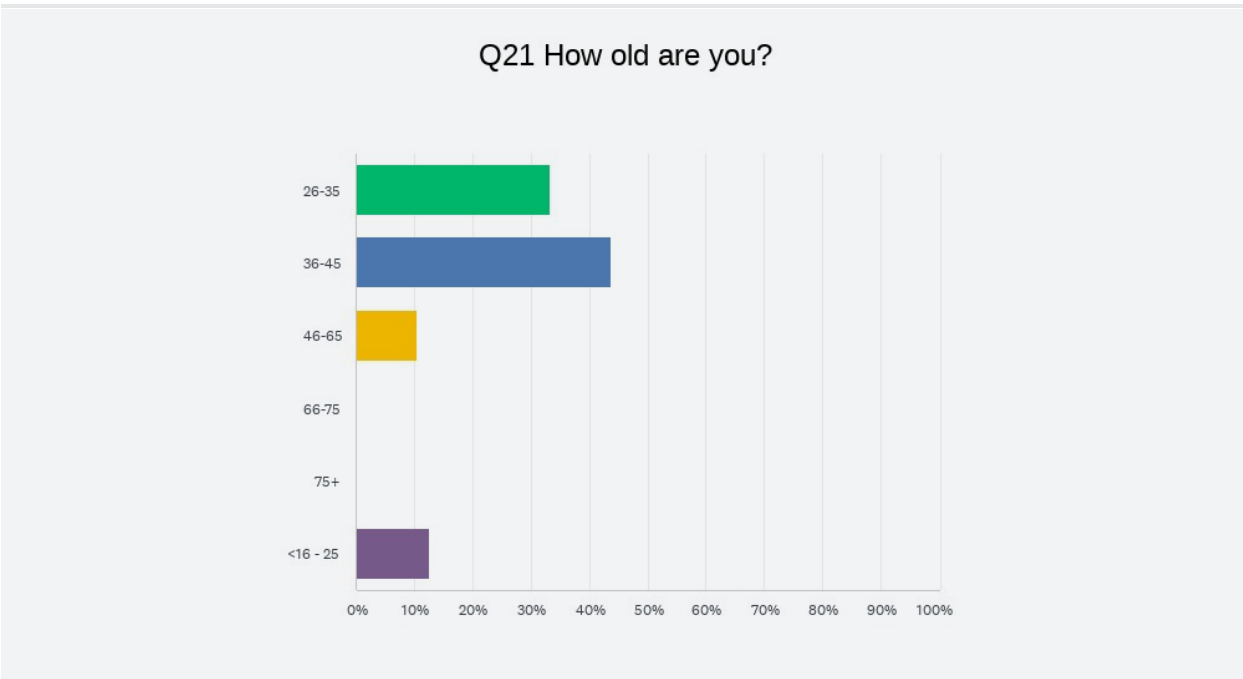
Length of time engaged receiving LRT's support

More than four years	25%
One to four years	54%
Less than a year	21%

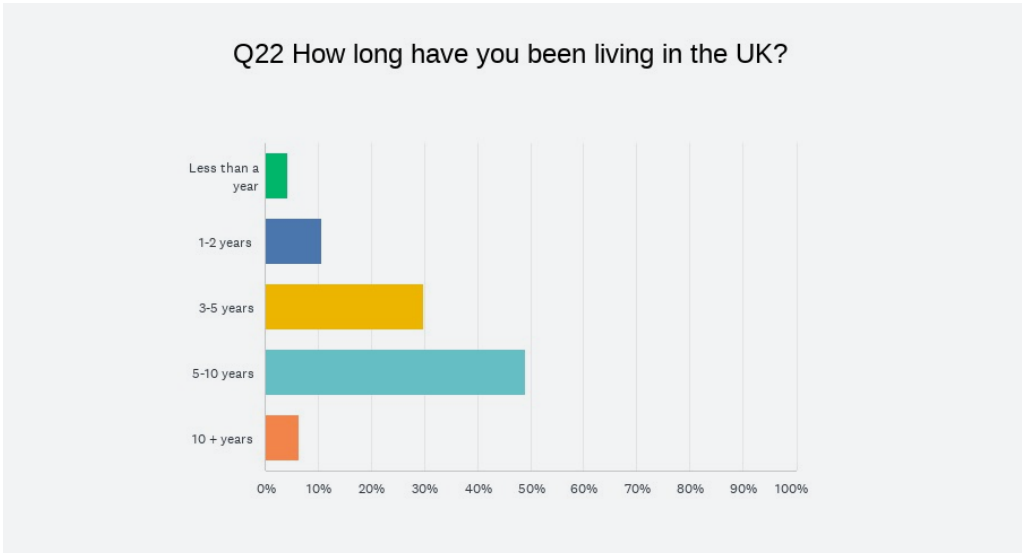
Gender of respondents



Age



Length of time in the UK



Employment

Full time work	58%
Part time work	18%
Unemployed	13%
Full time carer	9%

Note: A greater proportion of men are in full time employment than women; similarly, no male respondents reported that they were a full-time carer or not currently in employment or in training

b. Challenges facing the Roma community

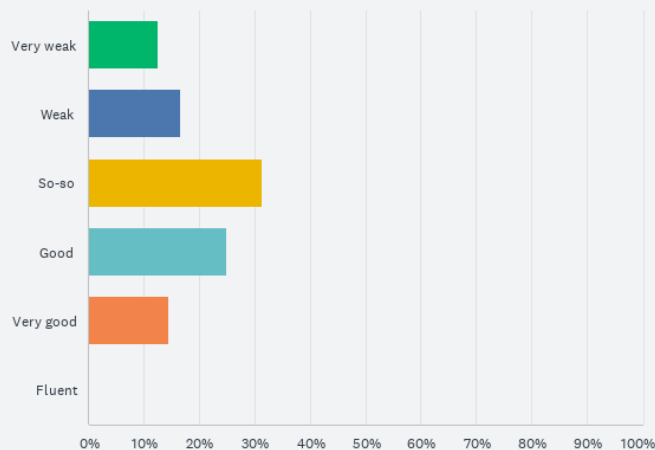
The survey presented an important opportunity to gain a deeper insight into the challenges facing the Roma community in Luton. The questionnaire asked beneficiaries to rate how important a number of identified relevant issues were to them in relation to their daily lives.

Racism/discrimination emerged as the most urgent issue facing respondents, with 90% of LRT’s beneficiaries identifying it as very important to their quality of life. A **sense of identity (88%), difficult accessing local public services (79%)** and **rent arrears and housing problems (71%)** were also identified as pressing issues. Women were more likely to report **social isolation and loneliness** as an important concern than were men, as well as reporting more challenges and difficulty in accessing government (public sector) support.

The survey suggests that there are serious implications for the Roma community’s social inclusion across Luton. Educational attainment remains low: **33%** of respondents were educated to primary school level; whilst **40%** were educated to pre-16 (secondary school) level. Only **19%** were had received education beyond post-16; whilst **8%** of participants reported that they had not received any formal education. Similarly, **18%** of survey respondents’ school-age children were not in school which is of major concern. Interestingly, survey respondents who have engaged with LRT have in general a lower educational attainment than those who have not yet engaged with LRT although this may be indicative of lower levels of English language skills or confidence in seeking assistance or engaging with services without support from a trusted agency.

English language attainment remains a barrier to the Roma community’s integration into mainstream society. Only **15%** of respondents reported their level of English as ‘very good’ and no respondents reported themselves as being ‘fluent’. These results demonstrate a trend that older respondents tended to have weaker English skills than the younger respondents. The difference in English ability also led to different outcomes: those with stronger English skills generally reported a greater improvement in their sense of belonging in Luton after engaging with LRT, than those with weaker English language abilities. People with weaker English skills are also more likely to identify that they are experiencing rent arrears/housing problems and difficulty in accessing government (statutory services) support as an important issue impacting their lives, than are those with stronger English language skills.

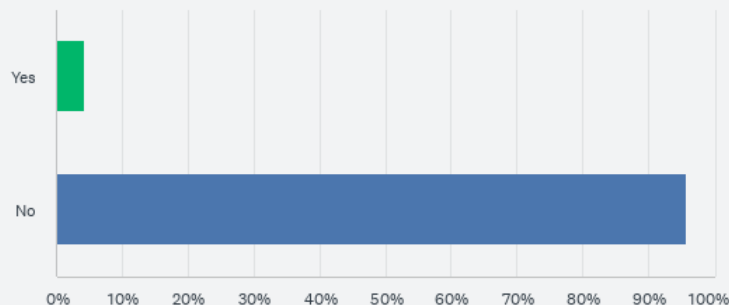
Q26 How would you describe your level of English at this moment?



Covid-19 vaccination rates remain low in the Roma community in Luton and this is consistent with trends across the UK and Europe. **96%** of the respondent sample have not received a Covid-19 vaccination. The survey also prompted respondents to consider whether they would consider getting the vaccine in the future, to which **87%** said they would not consider it. When participants were asked why they had refused the vaccine or would not consider receiving it the most common responses were that they were 'afraid to have it', they don't 'trust it', or they don't believe that the vaccine is safe.

A number of respondents said they did not know how to get it, that it was against their faith, or that they would only receive the vaccine if others they knew did so too, highlighting the importance of trust in relation to public health engagement for Roma communities locally. Despite the limited sample size, the only survey respondents who have received the vaccine, as well as those who stated they would consider getting one, had used LRT's services, demonstrating the effectiveness of LRT's targeted vaccine advocacy initiatives.

Q27 Have you had a Covid-19 vaccination?



c. Impact

The following section of the report assesses LRT’s success in relation these areas:

- 1. **Providing high quality services** to improve the lives of the Roma community in Luton;
- 2. **Advocating for the needs and interests** of the Roma community;
- 3. Empowering the community by **supporting** them to the point where they can be independent of LRT’s services and support;
- 4. And subsequently, **improving socio-economic outcomes** for the Roma community in the following areas (health, education, welfare, and employment), as well as supporting their **integration into mainstream society**.

Impact Area 1: Providing quality services to improve the lives of the Roma community in Luton

LRT is self-evidently a lifeline for the Roma community in Luton who rely on the organisation to help them with a wide range of problems.

100% of service users said they were ‘very likely’ or ‘likely’ to recommend LRT to other members of the community.

It was also clear that LRT was the only organisation in Luton providing holistic support for the Roma community. This was confirmed by our interviews with Luton-based organisations working on similar issues to LRT (e.g. housing and access to services). When asked where they would go for support if LRT was not operating in Luton, 37% of Roma respondents mentioned that they would seek advice

from an accountant (the reason for this according to Roma colleagues at LRT is that many of Roma are self-employed and thus trust their accountants to provide high quality advice); 28% said ‘I don’t know’; 26% mentioned going to friends and/or family for advice; 23% of respondents mentioned seeking help from the Citizens Advice service; 14% mentioned going to the local council; 5% said they would go to another charitable organisation; and 5% of responses mentioned that they might seek advice from a solicitor. There was no evidence of any other organisation working with the Roma community who had the same holistic support capabilities as LRT.

Examining the survey results led to the conclusion that women were more likely than men to say that they would seek external sources of help if LRT wasn’t providing services (e.g. accountant, Citizens Advice Bureau, solicitor), while men were more likely than women to say that they will seek advice and support from friends or family. Additionally, when asked where they could go to support if LRT was not operating in Luton, those with weaker English skills are much more likely to respond with friends or family, while those with better English skills were more likely to respond with ‘citizens advice bureau’, ‘local council’ or ‘accountant’. This finding suggests that LRT fills a gap in service provision for people who find it difficult to communicate with English-language service providers such as statutory services.

When asked what the best thing about LRT has been for beneficiaries, responses were overwhelmingly positive. Survey respondents commented on LRT’s ability to solve problems and their excellent working relationship with clients and manner of providing support. Selected comments from beneficiaries give a flavour of these responses:

‘[With the help of Luton Roma Trust], I was able to sort out my financial situation.’

‘We are no longer stressed... they solve our problems and we can always count on them.’

‘They solve all our problems.’

‘They treat people with kindness and respect.’

‘They help us all the time and keep us informed. They are very welcoming people.’

‘They listen to your needs, they have a lot of patience and they solve issues as quickly as possible.’

‘They help people and they speak many languages so it’s easy to talk to them’

Impact area 2: Advocating for the needs and interests of the Roma community

An important pillar of LRT’s work is supporting the wider community to be inclusive of the Roma population in Luton, by raising cultural awareness, amplifying Roma voices, and representing Roma in public or third sector settings. Beneficiaries overwhelmingly agreed (97%) that LRT represented them in the wider community, particularly praising LRT’s ability to look after their rights and take forward issues of concern, for example relating to racism and discrimination in the work place, and solving problems which arise for their clients

Impact area 3: Empowering the community by supporting them to a certain point where they can be independent of LRT’s support

One of LRT’s aims is to help beneficiaries become independent of their support. LRT are making excellent progress with this goal, with 50% of respondents reporting they now feel confident in navigating daily life in Luton without the support of LRT. In relation to this particular impact area, respondents to the survey provided comments that reflected how support from LRT has led to an increase in confidence, which has ultimately led to their new found independence:

“I have learnt a lot from them and I feel I can handle most issues myself”

“I feel more confident due to attending school and the help that I have received from LRT”

“I believe I can navigate better through life in the UK”

Survey respondents who have engaged with LRT for longer periods of time tended to report better understanding of their rights in the UK, a greater sense of belonging, enhanced knowledge of the job market, as well as reporting knowing more people in the wider community, an improved sense of wellbeing, and a better understanding of, and more pride, in their Roma identity.

However, navigating language barriers is still seen as problematic, representing a threat to the Roma community’s independence, and significantly increasing local Roma community members dependence on LRT. One respondent commented, “I still need their help due to language constraints”.

Impact Area 4: Improving socio-economic outcomes of the Roma community

To assess how LRT’s work has improved socio-economic outcomes for the Roma community, CSC’s research design probed how LRT has supported the community in the following areas: health, employment, wellbeing, children, and integration into mainstream society. The results of these assessments are as follows:

- Health**

LRT has made an impact on the Roma community’s health in a holistic manner, improving mental health, public health awareness and access to healthcare. Since receiving support from LRT, **63%** of respondents said their mental health has improved; **78%** of respondents said they ‘agree’ or ‘strongly agree’ that they had received useful information on how to stop the spread of Covid-19 and in relation to accessing and the importance on the Covid-19 vaccination; and **63%** of respondents reported that LRT had helped them to access healthcare (ie. Through GP surgeries, pharmacies, and vaccinations). While no male survey respondent has received the vaccine, some female respondents have had it; and women are also more likely to consider receiving the vaccine than men, although this result is limited by a small sample size amongst both genders.
- Employment**

Similarly, LRT has been shown to have improved employment outcomes for the Roma community in Luton through providing holistic support for job-seekers; predominantly by developing respondents’ confidence in entering into the the job market. **78%** of respondents either ‘strongly agreed’ or ‘agreed’ they had a better understanding of the UK job market and what is required to get a job in the UK after contact with LRT. **63%** said that LRT helped them seek employment or gain skills that made them more employable; and **60%** reported LRT helped them to seek educational and training opportunities. Amongst verbatim answers, quotations indicated a trend towards emphasising how LRT’s model of employment support develops confidence in beneficiaries.

- **Wellbeing**

'Wellbeing' is not a concrete term nor one which is particularly common amongst Roma populations, and therefore after consultation we elected to define it as a strong sense of identity, and feeling connected to others in the local community, including those with similar and different views. From the survey it is clear that LRT plays an instrumental role in improving beneficiaries' sense of wellbeing. Since receiving support from LRT **84%** said that they have a better understanding of, and/or feel prouder of their Roma identity; **84%** 'strongly agreed' or 'agreed' that they had met more people within the wider community; and **72%** 'strongly agreed' that LRT has helped them to connect to others of the same faith/belief. One survey participant commented on LRT's ability to help them and their family 'to find a balance in life', which attests to the dept of the pastoral care LRT provides. Survey respondents who engaged with Luton Roma Trust more recently (i.e. less than 2 years ago) are more likely to report loneliness and isolation to be important issues in their life, suggesting that LRT may play a role in supporting individuals to be better connected and less isolated in their daily lives.

- **Integration into mainstream society**

Integration into mainstream society is a major challenge for many Roma migrants, compounded by discrimination and language barriers. Supporting the Roma community to integrate into mainstream society is a principal mission for LRT, and all of its advocacy and support work feeds into this goal.

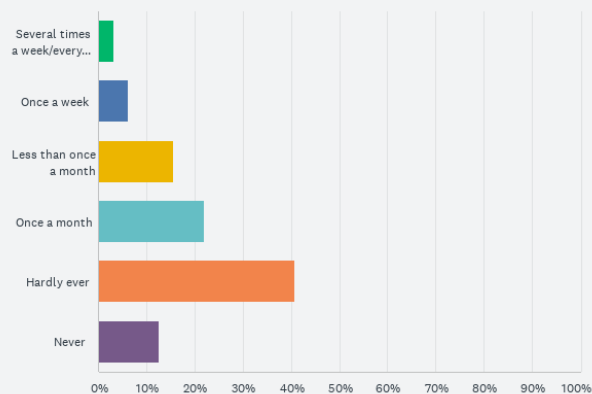
The survey results indicated that the Roma community is responding well to LRT's integration-focused services. Attesting to the impact of LRT's support services which support the community to access the welfare benefits system and signposting to advice: **72%** of respondents reported that LRT helped them to access government (public services) support; **31%** noted that this was in relation to accessing children and family services (ie. advice on perinatal mental health; support for older relatives; broader social services); and **81%** of respondents either 'strongly agreed' or 'agreed' that they had a better understanding of their rights (ie. legal entitlements around benefits, work, debt/money, consumer rights, housing, family, law/courts, immigration and health) and where they can go for support and advice as a result of support from LRT. Survey participants have also been responding well to LRT's English learning provisions: **65%** of respondents said that LRT helped them improve their English language skills.

As a result of LRT's integration-focused activities, there is strong evidence that the Roma community has benefited from greater exposure to the wider diverse populations and communities in Luton. The survey results provide evidence that after receiving support from LRT, beneficiaries experience increased interactions with the wider community in Luton:

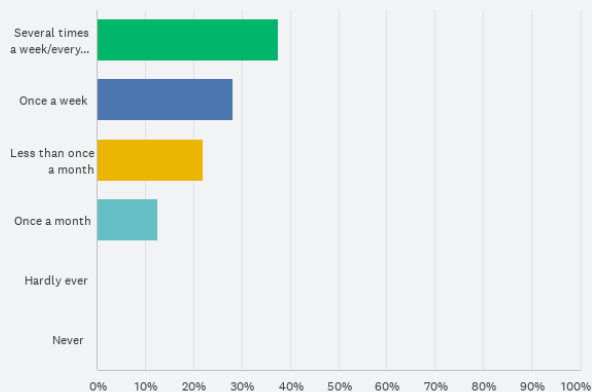
- Before receiving support from LRT, **53%** of respondents reported that they 'never' or 'almost never' interacted with people outside of the Roma community; but after receiving support from LRT, this decreased to **0%** who did not have such contacts;
- Since receiving support from LRT, **78%** of respondents either 'strongly agreed' or 'agreed' that they feel a greater sense of belonging in the wider Luton community;
- Before receiving support from LRT, only **3%** of survey respondents reported that they interact with people outside of the Roma community several times a week or every day; after receiving support, this increased to **38%** of people having regular interactions with non-Roma people;
- The number of respondents who interacted with people outside of the Roma community at least once a week increased from **6%** before accessing LRT to **28%** after receiving LRT's services.

These findings demonstrate LRT acts as a conduit – through their integration-focused activities – to the Roma community's participation in Luton's community life and engagement with public services. This increased interaction has had a positive effect on the Roma population's sense of identity and belonging to the UK, with **78%** of respondents reporting they either 'strongly agreed' or 'agreed' that they feel a greater sense of belonging in the wider Luton community after contact with LRT. Respondents also commented that the LRT has been instrumental in helping them to adapt to English culture and customs.

Q4 Before receiving support from Luton Roma Trust, how often would you talk to and get involved in activities with people outside of the Roma Community?



Q5 After receiving support from Luton Roma Trust, how often do you talk to and get involved in activities with people outside of the Roma Community?



While there is a general trend of respondents of all English language abilities who are in contact with LRT becoming more involved with interacting with people outside of the Roma community, those who were more confident in English showed a greater improvement (i.e. more frequent interactions) as a result of engaging with LRT.

• **Children**

Improving socio-economic outcomes for the next generation of the Roma community is a priority area for LRT. The organisation recognises the wellbeing and mental health challenges that exist for Roma children, and works to alleviate this. LRT’s work with children centres on supporting their integration into the English education system through working directly with children, parents and schools. The survey produced evidence that LRT’s support is improving Roma children’s educational outcomes: **82%** of parents reported that after contact with LRT, their child finds more enjoyment in learning and a further **82%** of respondents ‘strongly agreed’ that their child is more confident and self-assured than prior to having contact with LRT. Additionally, **73%** of respondents ‘strongly agreed’ that their child is receiving better grades and behaving more positively at school since engagement with the service.

A greater proportion of women reported improvements to their understanding of their children’s education and the schooling system than do men, which is likely to reflect the gendered division in childcare responsibilities and engagement with schools and educational processes.

- **Room for improvement and the future**

This evaluation presented an opportunity for LRT to collect feedback about their services, including what they have done well and what they could improve about their service delivery when designing future programming.

Beneficiaries had strong and insightful views of what LRT could be doing better, including hiring more staff to reduce queues for services, promoting their services better, and extending their 'office hours'. Overcoming the language barriers, a priority to the Roma community, is reflected in the widespread demand for more English language courses for both adults and children and additionally mobile translation services, particularly to support those accessing health appointments. One participant thought that LRT could be monitoring the needs of the Roma community more consistently through a monthly 'town hall' providing an opportunity to meet with the majority of the community and discuss arising or existent problems.

Respondents were also asked what new services they would like to be offered at LRT. While many expressed that they are satisfied with the services on offer currently, there was a demand for frequent social gatherings and clubs, activities for children (including music events, educational courses) and ever-popular English classes.



d. Beneficiary case studies

Through conducting and reviewing the case studies, the evaluators identified several common threads and themes in the participants' responses.

Overall, there is a sense that LRT has played an important role in integrating the Roma community into the wider community in Luton. In general, participants expressed contentment with their life in the UK, as compared to their life in their home country. Whilst the older demographic rely more heavily on LRT's support, especially with language skills and for accessing government (public sector) support, the younger demographic appeared to be better adjusted to life in the UK and more active in seeking employment or education. Encouragingly, all interview participants who have children said that they are happily enrolled in school.

As noted above, participants recounted diverse ways in which LRT has helped them resolve specific issues, ranging from gaining employment and accessing education, accommodation and healthcare. Many reflected on an improvement to their wellbeing, resulting from a greater sense of security and belonging, as well as through having more ties with other people in Luton as a result of employment or education. Some commented emphatically on their children's enjoyment of schooling, which contrasted with their own educational experiences growing up in countries of origin.

In terms of participants' views on Luton Roma Trust's services, most are content with its quality and happy with their support. However, a number of responses convey that LRT would benefit from employing more staff, as the beneficiary base is growing in number as the Roma population expands in Luton.

Older participants tended to express a greater level of concern when prompted to think about where they would access support if they could no longer access LRT, given their lower English language skills. Consistently, participants agree that LRT is important for the Roma community and factors into their continued residence in Luton, as the organisation has helped them integrate into the local community.

Case study 1: beneficiary D

D came to the UK at a young age with her family, over ten years ago. When they arrived, her parents struggled to enrol D into a local school due to language barriers, and turned to LRT for help. LRT welcomed the family and helped her and her siblings access schooling. As a result of LRT's continued support, D has also chosen to continue with her studies and she plans on enrolling on a university programme next year. LRT has also helped her better understand her rights as a future student. Having received part of her education in the UK, D is capable of accessing local public services and healthcare, so she has not needed help from LRT in this regard. However, she appreciates that LRT has continued to provide guidance to her family, including recently during the Covid-19 pandemic.

"I appreciate that LRT has some of the same values as the ones in my family. Perhaps this is due to them imparting these values to my family as my parents have changed for the better since first coming to the UK..."

Case study 2: beneficiary L

When L came to the UK seven years ago, she struggled to understand the language and communicate – this led to difficulties in securing employment and finding a place to live. Her mental health and overall morale suffered – she struggled with loneliness and isolation, as well as being away from her family.

After L was introduced to LRT, she was given support to secure employment and housing, and attended courses on language and general competencies. L began to feel more secure in her life in the UK, socialising with co-workers and other beneficiaries of LRT. With LRT's help, L's child was enrolled in a local school – and she noticed that he has become more engaged with other children of his age, and finds more enjoyment in learning. L is more settled and happier now. Although she still struggles with issues from time to time, she knows that the LRT team is available to advocate for and support her when she requires assistance.

"[LRT] makes a good case when it comes to sticking together as well as in the case of roots and connections between beneficiaries, our culture and our identity"

Case study 3: beneficiary M

M moved to Luton seven years ago with her husband and two children. It was difficult for her family at first – the children had to adjust from one education system to another, and the family did not have a stable place to live. After getting in touch with LRT, M’s family was able to secure accommodation after the organisation vouched for them and supported access to housing. Since then, they had two more children and all four children are currently attending school and enjoying it, thanks to LRT’s help. LRT has also helped the family register with a GP. M now feels more relaxed and less stressed in her daily life, knowing that she is able to safely look after her children and worry less about the issues the family has had in the past.

When asked if LRT represents her in the community, M responded: “I think so, as they help all people of Roma origin and culture, and it is a place where we can bring our collective problems and be given a voice. They take these problems and present them further.”

“I also feel safe and feel like I have found my place. This is due to LRT being located here and offering support every time we have an issue...If I have a problem, I know I can always count on LRT and the wonderful people who work there”

Case study 4: beneficiary B

B started using LRT’s services around 5 years ago, a few years after he arrived in the UK. He initially had trouble communicating with people and finding a job, so he attended some courses that LRT offered to improve his English and gain employment skills. Now, with a job, B’s challenges have changed, and his main concern is taking care of his family. LRT registered his family with a GP, enrolled his children in school, and helped his children access public services. Now, B finds Luton to be welcoming, especially knowing that LRT is there to help. His children are also happier and more settled.

Case study 5: beneficiary V

V is a more recent arrival to Luton, coming to the UK around 2-3 years ago. He has only been engaging with LRT for a few months. V intends to continue his studies, and LRT supported his application for further education. His child also accessed LRT’s support and V notes that he is happier and more motivated to study, especially through following his father’s example. As a result of LRT, V says that his life has improved – and he knows where to go if any issues with his studies arise in the future.

Case study 6: beneficiary C

C has been accessing Luton Roma Trust’s services since she first arrived in the area with her two children, two years ago. She struggled with the English language when she came to the UK, but LRT has helped her with accessing public services and enrolling her children into school. The children also learned to play the violin through music courses in the past – and they have continued the hobby to the current day.

“I think Luton is a very nice city. It has become easier for me to navigate through life due to help from LRT...”

Case study 7: beneficiary R

When R came to the UK almost three years ago with his wife and two children, he had issues finding work, accommodation, English language skills, and dealing with paperwork. Through accessing LRT a few months later, he was able to receive support with all of these challenges. R attended LRT courses to improve his employment skills and to help him prepare for job interviews – he has now found secure employment. LRT also vouched for them so R family could access rental accommodation, and helped the family access relevant public services. When R had a dispute with a colleague at work, LRT also signposted him to legal advice services.

R’s mental health has improved significantly as a result of LRT’s support – he is able to worry less about everyday living situations. He also feels a greater sense of belonging to Luton, and has significantly fewer challenges in his life.

“Thanks to LRT [R’s children] are both attending school now. They feel very proud of going to school and are very help[ful] around the house. They have also made lots of friends and are always talking among themselves about what they want to become when they grow up. This makes me very proud of them, as they have high aspirations.”

Case study 10: beneficiary R

When R first came to Luton four years ago, she struggled with English and with finding a job. She started engaging with LRT a year after arriving, and has felt more at home as a result. LRT helped enrol both her and her children in education – her eldest child is now in the process of applying to university. LRT also guided R in finding employment that suited her needs. R now has greater social ties to others in Luton as a result of attending LRT’s events and through meeting colleagues at her work; she also feels more confident and proud of her culture and identity.

Case study 11: beneficiary A

A has been living in the UK for 5 years now, with his family. When he first arrived, A had issues with continuing his education and finding a job, and experienced language barriers. LRT helped A with paperwork to continue his studies, and advocated on his behalf when he ran into issues. LRT also helped A access benefits when he needed it, and when he strove to find employment, the organisation helped him prepare for work, including registering him so that he could access a library card to help him research different areas of employment he was interested in. As a result, A was able to find a stable job, and he now feels more secure and better integrated in the Luton community. A reported that he thinks highly of LRT’s services:

“[LRT’s services] are tailored to the individual, they are very discreet and inclusive...They go to great lengths of effort to help us, and paint the Roma community in a very good light”

Case study 12: beneficiary I

I struggled with many issues in his daily life when he first arrived in the UK 8 years ago – struggling with the English language and completing paperwork to access services. However, this changed after he started accessing LRT’s services. The organisation helped him to enrol in school, which has made him more confident in his skills and abilities. Through their support, I also found a part time job that allows him to balance his studies with employment. Through school and work, I knows more people within the Roma and in the wider community – he also feels more in touch and proud of his community and identity.

Alongside his own education, I’s son was also supported by LRT to enrol in school. I is happy that his son’s studies will not be interrupted as his own education was, and notices that his son is becoming more independent everyday through his schooling.

“I was very lucky to be recommended to them early by my friends and they helped me a lot in the beginning. Now, I try to recommend other people to them.”

Case study 13: beneficiary L

L came to the UK six years ago, and he lives with his wife, two children, and his parents. Initially, he felt many limitations in his life due to his language ability, and understood very little about his rights in the UK and how to access public services. After he started engaging with Luton Roma Trust's services, his family was able to overcome many of these issues. Through English courses and employment training, L's employability increased and he was able to secure employment. With LRT's guidance on paperwork – to enrol his family to public services and school, the GP, and find accommodation– L has slowly learnt the skills to deal with them on his own. L feels less of a need for LRT as he becomes more settled and confident in his life in Luton, but is reassured that he can turn to LRT for support if any new issues arise.

"I have found work, a place to live, I feel at home in Luton. I am happy that my children can attend school, although I was not able to finish high school. I am proud of them."

e. Other community perspectives

The evaluators felt it was important to collect the perspectives of organisations who collaborate with LRT on migrant integration and/or migrant assistance projects in Luton, or have collaborated with LRT in a more general sense. This additional research provided us with external insights into the impact of LRT's work and also created suggestions for how LRT could improve partnership to strengthen collaborative working in the future.

The three organisations that we consulted agreed that LRT is an extremely valuable asset to the Luton Roma community as the only organisation in the area providing holistic support to the population. Two of the organisations have benefitted from LRT's translation services to and from Romanes , which has subsequently improved communication with Roma individuals they assist. The organisations all had similar perspectives on the main challenges facing the Luton Roma community – namely lack of English language skills – to which they at least partially attribute the community's ongoing reliance on LRT.

David Brewer – Senior Advisor, Community Voluntary Service Bedfordshire (CVS Beds)

Community Voluntary Service Bedfordshire is an infrastructure organisation which provides free support to local grassroots organisations in areas such as funding advice, governance and trustee development. David started working with LRT when they approached him for support in order to move to CIO status. Since working together, David has supported LRT on a number of fronts including developing their strategy, sustainable development, and grant-writing.

David told the evaluators it has been a pleasure to work with LRT as they have an incredibly skilled and knowledgeable workforce that understands the Roma community's needs and the barriers they face in accessing support. He maintains that staff are impressive and selflessly committed to the charity – 'sometimes at a personal cost'. He particularly praises Crina (the LRT Charity Manager) , who has a strong connection with and empathy for beneficiaries.

From David's perspective, LRT's most impactful work is assisting young people to get access to education so that they can aspire to more in their future. Helping young people access education enables interaction with real-life role models in the community, which can be powerful for social mobility. This is particularly important for the Roma migrants, as they have been marginalised in their country of origin – therefore 'aspiring to more' is not necessarily in their mindset. Part of LRT's job is to help the Roma community know that they can work for what they want.

Despite acknowledging their impactful work, David offered some perspectives to how LRT could develop as a charity. LRT is often consumed by important crisis intervention work; however the organisation must find time to focus on long-term, developmental work with the community to support beneficiaries to become more self-sufficient in the long-term. LRT themselves have recognised that they need to devote more time and resources to professionalising and developing as a charity, activities which they are currently investing in. David recently conducted a strategy away day with LRT: one of the main outcomes is that one of the Trustees will work with Crina to strategise sustainable growth. David also comments, in line with LRT's own aspirations, that an area to focus on in the future would be to improve their profile, nationally and locally. LRT are passionate about migrant-specific advocacy but are currently not as proactive in partnerships and advocacy as they want to be.

When asked what the main problems and barriers are for the Roma community, David points out the language barriers and illiteracy levels, and therefore their dependence on LRT. In this way LRT's work is vitally important, otherwise the Roma community would be unable to access public services. Compounding this issue, as David describes it, is that mainstream public service providers 'have a long way to go' in understanding and engaging with Roma communities.

These public services do not have a track record in engaging the community and there has been a marked lack of progress to date.

Nela Mazilu, Welfare Centre Outreach Worker & EUSS Lead, Noah Enterprise

Nela is an outreach worker and immigration officer at Noah Enterprise, a homelessness prevention organisation based in Luton. As an immigration advisor she helps EU citizens to apply for settlement status and right to work after Brexit. In Luton, the Roma community make up a large part of the caseload due to language and literacy barriers. Before the pandemic, LRT would provide translation services when Nela was supporting Roma migrants. This collaborative work has slowed down as less migrants have arrived during the pandemic. Nela also refers Roma families to LRT, due to LRT's local reputation in providing quality holistic support to Roma families.

Nela believes the work of LRT is extremely important because there is no other agency supporting the Roma in Luton. She praises the organisation's strong relationship with the community, and has witnessed their work in helping the Roma people settle in Luton including their efforts in tackling isolation and loneliness by motivating people to build connections and develop their skills and capabilities. Nela recognises LRT's translation services as extremely valuable in helping the Roma community engage with local services and organisations. Nela suggests that a monthly meeting, where organisations might exchange information on difficulties affecting the Roma community and how they've been supporting individuals, could be one strategy to promote partnership-working between organisations and agencies working with the Roma community in Luton.

According to Nela, the main challenges for the Roma community is their lack of English and literacy skills, which prevents them from applying for benefits and gaining employment. Therefore, the lack of state-funded ESOL provisions is a problem. Roma clients' lack of knowledge about the rules for accessing services in the UK – written and unwritten – is a further disadvantage. She also reports that the Roma community suffers from poor mental health and wellbeing, as well as low self-esteem, because have not had a formal education in their country of origin. She often finds children of migrants, the second generation, are the most well-educated sections of the community, with the potential to integrate more successfully, as they have attended school in the UK.

Norah Kitimbo, Deputy Service Manager, Penrose

Penrose is a 'floating' service which supports people with social and housing related problems. Penrose works with people in their homes and also has an office-base which beneficiaries can attend. Penrose works with LRT hand-in-hand to match Roma families with schools.

LRT assists Penrose by identifying people with the need for support and providing translation services. Penrose has also received annual training from LRT to help them understand the needs of the Roma community and their cultural nuances, for example why Roma are reluctant to enrol in nurseries). Penrose and LRT have also collaborated to provide support on the EUSS and developing EDI strategies in the wider community.

Norah cites that the LRT as being a friendly and helpful organisation with a keen focus on community engagement. Before Covid-19 they would organise cultural exchange events. She is of the view LRT has a great impact on educational outcomes for Roma children, thanks to their education liaison officer, who supports families to find school spaces. The officer also supports families when a child is having problems at school. Norah also praises LRT for their outreach work and accessibility to Roma communities; for example, they have held evening sessions in McDonalds where beneficiaries can bring their phones and get assistance with paperwork. She also recognises the importance of LRT's work in supporting the community to access and enrol with GP services. According to Norah, a way in which LRT could develop organisationally would be to make their presence more known. Although their office is in a prime location, LRT could invest more time and resources in promoting themselves.

For Norah, the main problems for the Roma community in Luton is accessing services because of a sense of pride and also concerns about the stigma associated with seeking help. She suggested that LRT should keep up their good work, and look for new ways to access and engage with communities.

8. Analysis of findings

– Professor Margaret Greenfields

In this section, Margaret has provided an in-depth analysis of the primary data gathered via the survey, taking an objective, critical view of the data. She draws on her extensive knowledge and experience of GRT communities to identify similarities and differences to other available data on Roma communities in the UK.

Secondary analysis of survey data – cross-tabulated by personal characteristic, e.g. age, gender, duration of contact, strength of English language skills, types of services accessed – gathered for the purposes of this evaluation indicates a pattern of engagement with the agency which would strongly bear out the premise that the organisation offers a highly valued service across the community, but one which has the most impact in relation to supporting older migrants. This demographic, compared to younger migrants, have lower English language attainment and are less well adjusted to life in the UK. Similarly there are markedly positive trends and impacts on service provision delivered to those beneficiaries with dependent children and individuals who are relatively unfamiliar with UK administrative systems.

The following brief summary focuses particularly on the most striking elements of this evaluation in relation to access to services, social integration and age-related well-being for Roma populations in contact with the Luton Roma Trust.

Whilst LRT currently deals only with Romanian Roma – who thus form the entirety of respondents to this survey and follow-up interviews – it is widely recognised that Romanian Roma are often less well integrated into receiving countries, have poorer pre-existing health and education status and experience greater levels of poverty than other migrant Roma populations in Western Europe, with their extreme levels of social exclusion in their country of origin acting both as an explanatory factor for this status and as a strong driver for migration (e.g Kostka, 2018; Szabo, 2018; Cretan and Light, 2020; Matache and Barbu, 2021).

Accordingly, access to services such as those provided by LRT are key to leveraging integration and successful post-migration settlement as well as supporting families to achieve to the best of their ability, whilst enhancing their wellbeing. As can be seen from the data summarised in the report, there is a noticeable trend in recent migrants accessing the service to receive support in relation to employment seeking, access to language acquisition and other statutory services. Health-seeking behaviours and support in accessing medical and social care for the individual and their immediate families, for the younger age group, declines noticeably (circa 4 years post initial contact with LRT) as the person of reference become more settled into Luton, indicative of enhanced levels of knowledge and transmission of such information intergenerationally and trans-communally as the community becomes more established. Thus we can see that support in accessing education and schools for children peaks in the first year in which a participant comes into contact with LRT and by the fourth year is at a low. In contrast, support in accessing welfare benefits to which a person is entitled or other services provided by the state remain fairly constant, indicative of the complexities of negotiating complex bureaucracies.

Participants also recorded an upward trend in accessing LRT services in relation to enhancing educational skills and training to support employment throughout their years of contact with LRT. Given that this is a primary service accessed in the first year of contact by 60% of respondents, peaking at 70% of respondents who have been accessing the service for between 2-4 years it would appear likely that LRT acts as a conduit for further information and linkage to development opportunities for longer-term service users. At no point, and for no age group, does engagement in relation to skills development fall below 50% of service users. Support with seeking employment stands at 40% of respondents within their first year of contact with the agency, coinciding with a peak of accessing entitlements and advice as they become established in Luton, with employment seeking support mapping year-by-year against the increase in those seeking to improve their English language skills and utilising the services to increase their educational and training access and opportunities (as an adult).

Interestingly, seeking legal advice – a service which is supported by LRT – remains relatively low as an activity pursued only until respondents have been in contact for around 2-4 years, indicative perhaps of gaining greater knowledge of their legal and social rights in the UK and the confidence to independently seek legal advice, which would for the vast majority of Roma in countries of origin be both unaffordable and potentially expose them to greater discrimination and racism (see for example the European Roma Rights Centre report of April 2019 in which they published the finding from the European Court of Human Rights which found that Romanian Roma were subject to institutional racism in policing and legal services.) Similarly, although further analysis by date and nature of contact with legal services would be required, a potential exists that such contacts also pertain to post-Brexit settled status applications.

Noticeably, regardless of duration of contact with Luton Roma Trust, age of respondent or gender there is little variance (80–85% of respondents) who report that they participate in cultural engagement and community networking to enhance their understanding of and relationship to their culture and community, (building bonding capital as well as bridging capital to external agencies) through their contact with LRT. This finding is particularly indicative of the value of the service to participants in improving their wellbeing and sense of inclusion within Luton, a point underpinned by the finding which strongly indicates engagement with LRT has enhanced cross and inter-communal contacts outside of their community for Roma participants.

Strikingly, we can see a sharp decrease across time for those respondents utilising LRT services who report living exclusively with, or having contact purely with, Roma community members at each time-measure point (<1 year, 2–4 years and 5 years+) indisputably indicating a greater degree of contact with other communities over time, which appears to be explicitly linked to contact with LRT. The pattern of such engagement across genders and age ranges suggest strongly that this is not simply an artefact of residence in the UK, given that inevitably there is likely to be contact in school or employment settings with non-Roma colleagues or parents, as both extent and frequency of contact indicate an upward trend – frequency of contact over each time-period, (week, month etc), over a period of years pre-and post contact with LRT.

Further analysis by age bears out this finding as when one explores the data by age-band it is noticeable that older individuals (46–55 and 56–65) are the most likely to report/strongly agree with the statement that they feel they have a greater sense of belonging to the wider Luton community; whilst the oldest age-group (56–65) report the greatest increase in their mental health as a result of wider contacts made through LRT, as well as noting that they are also more networked within their own Roma community as a result of engagement with the service.

Further the older age-groups are more likely to note that they feel more informed about their rights and how to access both services and employment opportunities than are younger service users – who may of course have grown up for at least part of their lives in the UK and hence share a sense of belonging and awareness of their legal rights with other young people from diverse communities.

Increasing age of respondent is also linked to a greater likelihood of reporting that contact with individuals with a similar religious belief and cultural identity – brokered by LRT – has enhanced their wellbeing. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the younger generation of respondents who have been in contact with LRT for a longer period of time feel more confident in negotiating services across Luton without the support of the Trust, and whilst all age groups highly commend the fact that LRT supports and represents their community, those recipients who are the clearest beneficiaries of services and who report the most impact are perhaps by definition those who would be most vulnerable should such a service not exist. Thus recent migrants, those who have experienced poor health (including mental health); with limited English language skills and with dependent children as well as older adults with poorer language acquisition and who had been most isolated prior to engaging with LRT are clearly the individuals who report the greatest impact on their day to day life as a result of the services of the Trust.

For younger adults, regardless of how long they've been in contact with the service, there is generally a decreasing reliance on the service. Despite this, they sustain selective access to highly relevant services such as support in accessing employment and training or legal advice.

In relation to the youngest generation (ie. dependent children), as evidenced both through the survey and case study evidence – the value of LRT in supporting families to access schools, providing or supporting and creating understanding of expectations and rights pertaining to education – are clearly evidenced by the findings in relation to the percentage of children who are attending school.

Although not clearly evidenced in relation to question coding, based on extant internal evidence from interviewers and case studies, it would appear that given only the age-category 16–25 stated 'no' when asked if their children are in school, this is indicative of children of respondents in this age group either being too young for compulsory schooling or potentially that some respondents who could have answered 'not applicable' if not yet parents simply responded in the negative. In retrospect, it might have been helpful to have asked about access to pre-school and nurseries to highlight attitudes towards use of such facilities and accessibility for Roma parents but such work is potentially something which can be followed up subsequently, given that the limited evidence which does exist in the UK suggests that there is low take up of nursery and early years provision amongst Roma parents. Whilst parents indicated that children had been in education for an average of 8 years, there is a wide range of such responses from between 1 and 10 years, with parents (by calculation of mean) having been in the UK for either the entire time, or the majority of the period, when their children were in education.

Unsurprisingly, all children included in this data were in 'non-segregated' schooling and all were in mainstream education without evidence that any were in 'special schools'. This is potentially noteworthy given a slightly higher than average percentage of Roma or Romani Gypsy children enumerated in 'special schools' which support children with physical or intellectual disabilities, when considered across the UK as a whole.

When findings are considered by gender we can see that the impact on women's lives of access to the LRT services have been profound. Not only is there clear evidence from the evaluation data that women report feeling supported and represented by LRT; a factor which is of particular importance given the disproportionate impact of intersectional exclusion experienced by Roma women in countries of origin occasioned by racism and sexism, as well as the burdens of poverty and poor access to healthcare (see further: European Fundamental Rights Agency (2019); Degani et. al. 2018, and Banica, 2020); but 87% (rounded) of women respondents versus 76% of men indicate that they have a greater understanding of their legal rights and where to access advice, information and support as a result of their contact with the Luton Roma Trust. Given what is often a culturally standardised pattern of women dealing with 'authorities' in Roma community, this finding is important indication of the enhanced level of agency experienced by female respondents, as is the finding that following support from LRT 87% (rounded) of women compared to 59% of men report that they have been supported in engaging with statutory services and government agencies. 67% of women versus 47% of male respondents reported having received support from the LRT to enrol their children in schools. Interestingly the percentage of service users being supported to access legal advice was reversed, amongst males (53%) compared to females (40%), but of those seeking support to improve their English language skills there was only a very slight preponderance of female to male (67% and 65%) service users, indicative of an eagerness to enhance integration and employability across all respondents with both middle generation, older and younger respondents of both genders keen to access such services. Figures for both genders were broadly comparable in relation to seeking access to training and employment (with women responding slightly more positively than men to this question) with the main analytical variable pertaining to age and potentially child caring responsibilities, but overall, very high levels of engagement by both genders and across age ranges were found with only the oldest category of respondents indicating that accessing training and employment were not major priorities for them. Accommodation advice was accessed by slightly more males than females (88% versus 80%) with all respondents to this question clustered around the age range of 26-45 years.

Gender and age were also pertinent variables when considering access to information and advice on accessing health care for themselves and their household, with perhaps surprisingly slightly greater numbers of males than females taking responsibility for this activity in collaboration with LRT; and males being more inclined to ask LRT to support them in obtaining support to assist with older relatives or access to perinatal or mental health care, than women. This finding is somewhat unusual and is suggestive of high levels of engagement with men around health and access to services being undertaken by LRT – given that such activities are traditionally within the purview of Roma women. Again we can see that respondents aged 26-45 years of age are those taking the greatest responsibility for seeking advice and support in this area of LRT activity.

There is one remarkably striking finding in relation to social contact with people who are non-Roma and this is the change in levels of contact between Roma men and non-Roma communities. There has been a dramatic change in regular contact with non-Roma networks which is gendered in an unusual manner and again this is suggestive that LRT are engaging closely in areas of both social integration and leveraging access to employment, training and education for Roma men who had not previously had any significant level of contact with non-Roma populations. Thus we see a change in percentage of contacts with non-Roma community members amongst males from 76% reporting social or other forms of contact with non-Roma people at least once a week after engaging with LRT but prior to accessing LRT services this stood at 6%. For women, the percentage who reported at least

weekly contact or participation in activities with non-Roma wider society was perhaps inevitably higher, as a result often of contact in school or other settings but again a remarkable change was recorded from 14% prior to accessing LRT services and 54% after they became service users of the Luton Roma Trust. Strikingly those aged under 25 – typically having access at least partial education in the UK or who are working in mainstream employment, and importantly those

over the age of 46 were most likely to report inter-community contact on at least a weekly basis. For those of the younger generation whilst there was a change in such contact and all reported daily contact or at least several times a week after engaging with LRT, for the older generations the change was most stark from the majority reporting no or very limited contact prior to engaging with LRT, to all aged from 46-65+ stating that they had some form of social or other contact with non-Roma people after accessing services.

Accordingly there is exceptionally strong evidence of the value of LRT service to older respondents in particular, both in relation to mental health, wellbeing and social integration across various domains; all indicative of the service supporting increased resilience amongst the aging population within this ethnic group. Indeed the networks and contacts which are identified within the case studies collated for this evaluation as well as the survey evidence suggests that LRT is in essence involved in low key 'social prescribing' activities and it is suggested that if they are not formally linked to such networks via clinical commissioning groups and local authorities that their work should be drawn to the attention of such commissioners.

In conclusion, deeper dive analysis on an intersectional basis has found some extremely important findings in relation to added value afforded by LRT in both enhancing social inclusion within Luton and increasing access to information on social rights and enhanced confidence in engagement with services, evidencing the benefit of the service to a broad range of clients, but most importantly those at greatest risk of social exclusion and isolation e.g. older and female clients. Importantly those at greatest risk of social exclusion and isolation e.g. older and female clients. These findings are enriched and borne out by the case study narratives provided elsewhere in this evaluation.



9. Recommendations

Based on the analysis of the survey findings, case studies, and community perspectives the evaluators have developed a series of evidence-based recommendations for LRT to improve their programmes, organisational development and partnership working.

Programmes

- **Focus on increasing the scope and volume of English-language learning/ESOL provision.** Our data shows English language attainment is arguably the greatest indicator of Roma's integration into mainstream society: respondents specifically requested **more English classes**; this view was supported by Luton-based voluntary organisations.

Key considerations:

- Classes should be tailored to accommodate older members of the community (45+) as this demographic generally tend to have weaker language skills;
- It was identified that weaker English speakers have more trouble accessing public services, therefore ESOL classes should focus on giving beneficiaries the language tools to communicate with English-speaking service providers
- **Creative English** – a scenario-based English-learning programme led by volunteers – could be adopted for this purpose. By focusing on **communication** in particular, and use of common scenarios this method helps language-learners to develop the confidence to communicate even when they don't have the right vocabulary – further instilling confidence in their abilities.
- **Develop follow-on programmes to support community members to get 'functional skills' qualifications, in particular English and Maths.** This is important when English language attainment is improving, and a beneficiary is ready to move into employment
Key considerations:
 - Providing information about apprenticeships, and linking beneficiaries with apprenticeship providers and employers, will be key in demonstrating the value of such qualifications to the local Roma population.
- **Develop new programmes and initiatives around issues of racism/discrimination, identity, accessing local services, and rent/housing.** These were identified as the most pressing problems in the community. Our data also showed **increased confidence** leads to better outcomes in these areas; therefore **confidence-building activities** should be integrated into all programming.
Key considerations:
 - Examples of 'confidence-building' activities could be information sessions and 'meet and greets' with specific public services to build relationships and rapport, so the Roma community find services to be more approachable. See also description of Creative English services above.
- **Target male audiences with outreach work and programming.** Our research found that men were generally less engaged with LRT's services – across the board, although particularly in the areas of health and education. Programmes need to be designed to accommodate this demographic. Key considerations:
 - Consulting with Roma men will enable LRT to understand which interests or aspects of male identity can be leveraged to elicit more engagement from men. Male-focused initiatives should start with such a consultation. LRT could investigate the potential of more activity-based, rather than conversation-based initiatives (use learning from initiatives such as 'Men's Sheds' and adapt these for the Roma community) and leveraging men's identities as fathers.
 - On the other hand, women were less likely to seek support for **social isolation** and **accessing government support**, despite generally having a greater understanding of their rights than men. Therefore, **information sessions and activities** on these topics tailored to women could be impactful.

- **Support and initiatives should accommodate, and to some extent be geared towards, older community members.** This demographic are most in need of support and are benefiting from LRT the most; survey data also showed that older members of the community have less contact with the non-Roma communities. Some ideas include:
 - Older Roma people provide talks in schools or community centres; for example, they could talk about their lived-experience during the Communist era in countries of origin
 - Older Roma people may want to reflect on life in the country of origin; this could be a way to get people together to cook, watch popular old films in their first language, and sew or engage in other craft activities
 - Intergenerational activities: sessions where older people can share knowledge with young people; e.g. groups where grandparents drop in with their grandchildren
- **Continue and develop work engaging with schools.** Since **18%** of survey respondents' children were not enrolled in school, the ongoing appointment of a schools liaison officer is an invaluable asset.
Key considerations:
 - Because respondents' children exclusively attend mainstream schools, improving relationships between schools and parents through information sessions with schools is impactful. Co-learning: schools and libraries can also be used as sites of learning for parents, so partnerships and collaborations could take place here (for example IT lessons, reading and writing)
- Although the course of the pandemic, and subsequently future vaccine booster programmes, is uncertain, if vaccines are continued to be needed, **LRT should focus on the following areas in their vaccine advocacy work** – as the Roma community have often hesitated to take up childhood vaccinations too, thus such engagement practices will apply beyond the pandemic. Initiatives to reduce vaccine hesitancy may include:
 - Informing beneficiaries on how to get the vaccine
 - Providing up-to-date, accurate information about vaccines to combat misinformation/disinformation (for example, vaccines to lead to infertility);
 - Communicating cases studies to members of the Roma community about their community receiving vaccines and benefiting from it
 - Our data showed that no male respondents have received a vaccine, so public health messaging initiatives should be particularly geared towards male audiences.
- **Develop a systematic approach for identifying new arrivals, and provide them with a support package that signposts services and help to settle them in.** Evidence shows that more recent migrants need urgent support.
Key considerations:
 - Now that Ukrainian Roma are beginning to come to the UK, this is an especially important consideration..
- **Develop existing initiatives increasing interactions with the wider community:** participants felt an increased sense of wellbeing when having interaction with the wider community on a more regular basis.
- Respondents had ideas for particular services/activities they would like to see. These include:
 - More flexible and varied translation services for beneficiaries. Respondents specifically expressed a demand for mobile translation services for GP appointments
 - More frequent social gatherings and clubs, activities for children including music events, educational courses etc.

Organisational development

- **Increase capacity.** A large number of beneficiaries suggested LRT needed to increase their capacity; they pointed to a need for more staff and/or extended opening hours.
Key considerations:
 - Increased capacity will allow a shift of focus to community development work with a long-term view of equipping the Roma community with the tools to become independent of LRT's support, in addition to important crisis intervention work
 - Evidence gathered found that only half of respondents reported that they feel confident navigating life in Luton without support, suggesting more emphasis on this area of work could be useful
- **Invest in promoting services and support** – both beneficiaries and other stakeholder consulted suggested LRT could make their services better known. Key considerations:
 - Expand LRT's part-time Communications Officer post into a full-time role. Develop marketing strategies, i.e. online campaigns, physical advertisements and community outreach work.
- **Develop advocacy function.** Luton-based organisations were of the view that LRT should focus on developing the advocacy 'arm' of the organisation, which in turn reflects LRT's own ambitions. Key considerations:
 - Hold regular **'town-hall' style meetings** with the Roma community – an open forum where beneficiaries can express their concerns and problems – which will aid LRT's monitoring of the needs of the Roma community.
 - Leverage LRT's strong relationships with local schools to encourage these schools to take steps to support GTRSB students into higher education, by participating in the GTRSB into Higher Education Pledge. There is a Schools Pledge in development specifically for schools working with and supporting GTR children, which will launch during GRT History Month in June 2022.
- Organisations working with LRT suggested, although recognising the importance of crisis intervention work, **that a shift of focus to community development work with a long-term view of equipping the Roma community with the tools to become independent of LRT's support** could have the most impact.
 - The evidence that only half of respondents reported that they feel confident navigating life in Luton on their own, suggests more emphasis on this area of work could be particularly impactful.

Partnership working

- **Convene a monthly meeting with other Luton-based voluntary and statutory organisations** to discuss issues affecting the Roma community and initiate more collaborative working. There is an appetite for LRT's specialist knowledge and language skills within the Luton voluntary sector, therefore there is ample opportunity to co-produce immigration advice and integration projects.
- **LRT should nurture relationships with local commissioning groups and local authorities to enhance collaboration**, since their work can be equated to social prescribing. Collaborative projects and knowledge-sharing would be beneficial for both parties; further these bodies could also be a source of funding for LRT.

10. Conclusions

Evidence collected through the beneficiary survey, interviews with beneficiaries, and interviews with Luton-based organisations confirms that Luton Roma Trust is truly exceeding expectations and making a real difference in the lives of the local Roma community.

LRT's work on enhancing the Roma community's social inclusion within Luton and providing information and advice on social rights has empowered beneficiaries to access the services they are entitled to, and is undoubtedly improving their outcomes in terms of health, wellbeing, and employment. LRT have undertaken vital work during the pandemic advocating for the vaccine and communicating accurate public health messaging. Their support services are inclusive of all ages, but benefit those most at risk of social exclusion ;for example, older and female members of the community. This evaluation has found that LRT is achieving the goals that it sets out to achieve, including; providing quality services; advocating for the needs and interests of the Roma community; and improving socio-economic and integration outcomes for the Roma community. LRT have recognised the importance of integration to the community's well being and sense of belonging in Luton and many of their programmes and support organisations are designed in pursuit of this goal. However, this evaluation has highlighted a number of areas which LRT should continue to develop. The ongoing growth of ESOL and English learning provision is essential to LRT's integration endeavours in engaging older audiences, but also to develop engagement with male audiences. In terms of organisational development, LRT could shift their focus towards communications and marketing and develop the advocacy 'arm' of the organisation.

In conclusion, LRT is an invaluable resource – a lifeline – for the Roma community in Luton as the only organisation to provide holistic support to this population. The organisation's specialist knowledge and understanding of the community have enabled them to create meaningful programmes for the community, which have undoubtedly improved the quality of life in the UK for their Roma clients, by empowering them to access public services and integrate into the wider Luton community.

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