



Belfast Health and
Social Care Trust

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COVID-19 THEMATIC FUNDING

ROMA HELPLINE

EVALUATION REPORT

August 2020

COVID-19 THEMATIC FUNDING: ROMA HELPLINE EVALUATION REPORT

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Education and Development
August 2020*

INTRODUCTION

Many research reports have been published during the Covid-19 crisis evidencing that BAME communities, and especially the Roma Community, have been adversely affected and more at risk during the pandemic. Covid-19 exacerbated the already precarious situation facing the Roma Community in Belfast.

Prior to March 2020, Forward South Partnership (FSP) supported the EUSS Advisor for the delivery of the European Settlement Service through the Stronger Together Network; with the EUSS Advisor working from the FSP offices in University Street. FSP, a community backbone organisation, is also active in the regeneration of the Holylands (where many of the Roma community in Belfast live in privately rented accommodation). Another of the FSP managed programmes, STEP, funded by the Department of Education, delivers the Roma Baby Café through South Belfast SureStart (a weekly drop-in Café for Roma families with babies and toddlers, where families could socialise with other families and gain reliable advice and support from the SureStart team – the Café has been closed since mid-March due to the pandemic).

As such, understanding the need for support for the Roma Community was not a new consideration for FSP. In addition, FSP managed and delivered a Telephone Helpline for a residents living in South Belfast (outside the two Neighbourhood Renewal Areas in South Belfast); and also managed and monitored community supports for those living in the same area, including food parcels, social prescribing, assisted shopping, and gas and electric top-ups. These two programmes (funded by Belfast City Council and the Department for Communities) both required prompt response and robust monitoring.

The Letter of Offer for the delivery of 'Community Support for Roma Community during Covid-19 Pandemic' was received from Belfast City Council (BCC); and the Project became operational on the 22nd April. The Letter of Offer noted that "prior to the pandemic, the Roma community had been identified as a vulnerable group as outlined in the Council's Good Relations Audit and in the PEACE IV Local Action Plan. Agencies, particularly in the South of the City, have been engaged in trying to ensure that the community have been able to access the correct services with limited success". The Letter of Offer highlighted that "current circumstances [Covid-19] have exacerbated this vulnerability and it is important that support be provided to ensure that contact is made, and ongoing engagement is available which directs the community to the appropriate services".

The Roma Helpline started on the 22nd of April 2020; funded by the BCC Covid-19 Thematic Fund until the 30th June. At the end of July 2020, FSP delivered the required Roma Helpline Monitoring Report for the period of the 22nd April to the 30th June (presented in Appendix One). However, in May it was agreed that there would be benefit in undertaking a fuller Evaluation Report, presenting both quantitative and qualitative data. FSP commissioned Education and Development to undertake this independent Evaluation.

EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

The aim of the Evaluation Report was four-fold:

1. To comply with the monitoring information required by BCC as outlined in the Letter of Offer
2. To present a fuller picture about the issues and needs of the Roma community as captured through this service
3. To undertake a limited literature review to ascertain whether there are any examples of good practice across the UK or Ireland that are delivering an appropriate support service for the Roma community that has been funded over a longer period of time, allowing for the building of trust and relationships
4. As an influencing paper for FSP to make the case that there is the need for a sustained service to support the Roma community.

The Evaluation proposal specified that the content of the Monitoring Report, which would draw on the Weekly Monitoring Reports produced by the FSP Strategic Health and Wellbeing Officer and the Roma Helpline Coordinator / Advisor, would include:

- Progress on implementation
- Any changes to the nature or scale of the Project
- Progress towards achieving performance targets
- Costs incurred – including any unanticipated factors that impact on costings
- Outline of outputs, activity and expenditure
- Other relevant information

The Evaluation process included:

- Review Roma Helpline weekly Monitoring Reports
- Attending a Saturday morning monitoring Zoom session with the FSP Strategic Health and Wellbeing Officer and the Roma Helpline Coordinator
- Conversations with the Roma Helpline Coordinator
 - to understand the issues of concern in more depth
 - to present the bigger picture, whilst taking into account sensitivities
 - to develop Brief-but-Vivids, ie people's stories and the impact of the Roma Helpline
 - to discuss longer-term opportunities
- Consultation with key stakeholders
- Financial overview from the FSP Finance Officer
- Small literature review of models of good practice supporting the Roma Community in the UK and Ireland.

CONTEXT

Roma communities in Europe face a much higher risk of death from COVID-19, as their situation, already marked by extreme racism and poverty, has been worsening in the last decade. 80% of Roma consulted in a recent European survey live below their country's threshold for being at risk of poverty¹.

A recent House of Commons Committee report² (August 2019) highlighted that Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller people have the worst education, health, employment, criminal justice, and hate crime outcomes of any ethnic group. The Tackling Inequalities Inquiry found that “while many inequalities have existed for a long time, there has been a persistent failure by national and local policy makers to tackle [inequalities] in any sustained way. This failure has led to services that are ill-equipped to support Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller people to use services that they need and are entitled to”. Sarah Champion, MP, stated (in a video included in the Report summary) that of all these groups “we know least about the Roma community and their needs”.

All migrants to Northern Ireland are subject to UK immigration law, policies and procedures. Legislation and policies at regional level and beyond underpin civic and national objectives to ensure an integrated, vibrant population within Northern Ireland, able to integrate socially, economically and able to engage with service providers (see Appendix Two: Policy Context).

The Roma Community have been identified in Northern Ireland (and elsewhere) as a vulnerable group with very specific language and cultural needs. A significant issue is the difficulty – due in part to low levels of spoken, let alone written, English – in accessing accurate advice and information to keep themselves safe and well. This is exacerbated by a lack of trust of Statutory Agencies; with many anecdotal stories about being treated badly and discriminated against.

Additional challenges facing the Roma Community, in addition to language and cultural issues, include transient living, a lack of understanding of bureaucratic regulations, low levels of literacy (in their own language as well as English), patriarchal hierarchies, accessibility and mobility, and discrimination. The Social Attitudes Survey, launched by the Equality Commission NI in January 2018³, reported that people's attitudes were much more positive than in previous surveys. However, the five most negatively viewed groups are all based on race or nationality and include the Roma Community (alongside Travellers, asylum seekers and refugees, migrant workers and minority ethnic groups).

¹ <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Roma%20in%20the%20COVID-19%20crisis%20%20An%20early%20warning%20from%20six%20EU%20Member%20States.pdf>

² <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmwomeq/360/report-summary.html>

³ <http://www.equalityni.org/Footer-Links/News/Delivering-Equality/Equality-Awareness-Survey-A-Question-of-Attitude>

The Belfast Health and Social Care Trust Migrant Health Strategy found that Roma people are the most socially and economically deprived minority in Romania, with high illiteracy levels. The Strategy states that “it is difficult to determine exact numbers for the Roma community living in Northern Ireland, because there are no Roma registered in the Worker Schemes, they have a low uptake of Health Card Registration and they do not have National Insurance numbers. They are a marginalised and vulnerable community, with very complex health and social care needs, and are hard to reach with existing services. The majority of health issues centre on lack of access to services and language barriers with high illiteracy levels and poverty⁴”.

In 2019 the NI Housing Executive carried out a Scoping Review of the Roma Community⁵. The Report highlighted that members of the Roma Community often live in poor and deprived areas. “For a number of reasons including shortages in social housing and high levels of illiteracy and associated difficulties with bureaucratic processes, they tend to live in the private rented sector, often experiencing high rents and sub-standard conditions, and without tenancy agreements”. The Review also considered employment trends within the Roma Community living in Northern Ireland, noting that the Roma generally work in the informal sector, selling flowers, magazines and newspapers, or working as car wash attendants. It is thought that some still return to their country of origin for seasonal work, so numbers in Northern Ireland may vary during the year.

The Coronavirus outbreak and resulting economic crisis has widened long-standing exclusion, poverty and discrimination against some of the disadvantaged and rights deprived groups; including (unsurprisingly) the Roma people across Northern Ireland, the UK, and Europe. Reasons for this, highlighted in the Overview of the Impact of Coronavirus Measures on The Marginalised Roma Communities in the EU Report⁶ (published in April 2020) include living conditions, health, employment, education, and welfare support and social protection.

Living Conditions: many members of the Roma Community live in cramped, overcrowded Roma neighbourhoods, which makes physical distancing, a key element of preventive public health measures, next to impossible. Overcrowding is an issue for many Roma, with considerably less space per person than the national average. Additionally, Many Roma live in shared houses with no security over their accommodations⁷. There are concerns that Roma will face problems securing their tenancies in the event that they lose their means to pay rent. If this happens, they will be left without the ability to follow social distancing or self-isolation measures. They are also a group less well able to access the IT complexity of the

⁴ <http://www.belfasttrust.hscni.net/pdf/Migrant-Health-Strategy.pdf>

⁵ [https://www.nihe.gov.uk/Documents/Research/Shared-Communities-Page/Roma-community-Northern-Ireland-and-Housing.aspx?ext=.](https://www.nihe.gov.uk/Documents/Research/Shared-Communities-Page/Roma-community-Northern-Ireland-and-Housing.aspx?ext=)

⁶ https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/overview_of_covid19_and_roma_-_impact_-_measures_-_priorities_for_funding_-_23_04_2020.docx.pdf

⁷ <https://www.gypsy-traveller.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/NRIS-CSMR.pdf>

government programmes designed to prevent eviction and secure assistance with paying rent.

Health: Existing social exclusion and segregation additionally cause unequal access to primary healthcare, despite a high proportion of longstanding chronic illnesses amongst the Roma community. Members of the Roma Community are amongst those who experience difficulties registering with a GP, as identified in a review that the BHSCCT did in partnership with the Patient Client Council (2018). They may encounter a number of different barriers, including documentation, language, knowledge, and / or attitude. The process of registering with a GP can seem unduly complex, with a range of documents that seemed to exceed those required simply to establish the right of residency and the right to access Health and Social Care Services – particularly GP registration. The disproportionate poor health of Roma people has resulted in Roma communities in the UK being particularly vulnerable to developing severe illness from COVID-19⁸. The Roma population across Europe has a considerably shorter life expectancy compared to the non-Roma population. Roma people aged over 65 years report a much steeper increase in chronic disease related problems (70% compared to 56% for non-Roma).

Employment: many Roma work in unskilled roles and in the sectors where job and income security are weakest, and existing low employment rates among marginalised Roma are likely to decrease further in the wake of the Coronavirus crisis. The social measures applied by governments across the UK and Europe refer only to people who lost formal and regular jobs. However, many Roma livelihoods depend on daily or occasional work in the informal sector (including seasonal jobs and unregulated contracts), hence they are the first to remain without jobs and unable to access unemployment benefits. This reality has also led to many Roma working in Northern Ireland returning to their home countries, where they face insecurity, online and offline hate comments and scapegoating. The Roma Support Group in London believe that the economic effects that the outbreak of Covid19 is causing, we believe that Roma in the UK will be put under severe and disproportionate financial strain⁹.

Education: including lack of digital equipment and limited internet connection means that home study is difficult.; and poorly educated or illiterate parents cannot provide the necessary support. Moreover, the closure of schools has deprived children of free daily meals, thus creating additional burdens on their families' strained budgets. In addition, the absence of the school and class environment reflects in children's social deprivation.

Welfare support and social protection: many Roma families find it challenging to access Universal Credit or other welfare benefits. This may be because they do not understand the paperwork (language and literacy levels), they do not have the necessary paperwork, or they are not aware of benefits that they are entitled to. Furthermore, for those who wanting to

⁸https://www.romasupportgroup.org.uk/uploads/9/3/6/8/93687016/covid_19_roma_letter_to_local_authorities.pdf

⁹https://www.romasupportgroup.org.uk/uploads/9/3/6/8/93687016/covid_19_roma_letter_to_local_authorities.pdf

make a Universal Credit application, there are examples of people within their own community who charge them (anything from £150 to £250) for completing the paperwork for them. Without an income or social support, there are households who have been left without the means to purchase food.

The Roma Support Group in London, who wrote outlining some of the significant challenges facing the Roma Community during the Coronavirus pandemic identified three areas as demonstrative of good practice – communication, education, health. In terms of communication they advise that it is critical that there is support for communications channels that promote information on health guidelines and other COVID-19-related supports in appropriate ways and in local languages.

It is also noted that the Children's Society¹⁰ recommended that the No Recourse to Public Funds condition be suspended during Covid-19, so that all children and families can access vital benefits and crisis support. This should involve lifting the NRPF condition for all children, young people and families so they can access vital benefits and ensuring that this is communicated to DWP/JCP/HMRC/local authority housing decision-makers deciding on benefits claims as well as those providing local welfare assistance schemes.

¹⁰ <https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-children-and-young-people-briefing.pdf>

BELFAST – EVIDENCE OF NEED

FSP has been made aware that there has been a lot of Covid-19 cases amongst the Roma Community in Northern Ireland, with a number of people needing medical support in intensive care. Anecdotal evidence, received by the BHSCT, is that high numbers of people who returned to Romania, were quarantined. FSP, BHSCT and others are aware that many in the Roma Community lost work because they or someone in their family had Covid-19 (resulting in a loss of their contract of employment). Additionally, many people in the Roma Community worked without a contract or on zero-hour contracts; and were amongst the first wave of those who experienced financial hardship from the outset of coronavirus.

During the Evaluation and Review process, stakeholders were asked why they believed the Roma Helpline was necessary for the Roma Community living in Belfast.

“The Roma community are a vulnerable group who have very specific language and cultural needs. Many are not be able to communicate proficiently in English and most are illiterate in the Romanian language. This makes it difficult for them to access accurate public health advice and information about keeping themselves safe and well during the emergency and beyond. As such it is necessary to develop targeted intervention for the Roma Community”.

Roma Helpline Stakeholder Organisation

Other Stakeholders consulted confirmed the language and cultural challenges to accessing mainstream services. One Stakeholder said, “there needs to be an understanding of the culture and the level of step by step help they need to access services”. Due to exploitation of the Roma Community across many countries “without access to trusted services with language and cultural understanding this community appears to be particularly vulnerable”.

Stakeholders agreed that there is a need for access to Roma-specific support to advocate and advise the community, to build meaningful relations and trust, and to ensure that they have access to advice structures and are not at risk of exploitation. They also felt that whilst this Helpline was established in response to Covid-19, a sustainable service is required, that provides not just ‘one-off’ support; but additional follow up advice and advocacy.

“Covid exacerbated precarious situation in which a lot of Roma people live – they work in non-traditional, non-regulated and insecure employment. The Roma Community are vulnerable to destitution, and that leads to whole cycle of exploitation. It is important they are getting correct advice and legitimate advice from professionals”.

Roma Helpline Stakeholder Organisation

The Roma Helpline was established in April 2020 primarily for the Romanian speaking Roma community in Belfast; representing the Roma community most prevalent in the city.

PROCESS

Belfast City Council recognised that required targeted interventions to several vulnerable communities during the Covid pandemic were needed, in part to ensure that accurate messaging was disseminated, and vulnerable communities could be supported. The Roma Helpline service, managed by FSP, was delivered by the Roma Helpline Coordinator / Advisor (hereafter referred to as the Roma Helpline Coordinator). Prior to Covid-19 the Roma Helpline Coordinator was the EUSS Advisor, located in the FSP offices. As such she was already known and trusted by some people from the Roma Community who had previously sought advice; which is very important within the community. The Roma Helpline Coordinator speaks Romanian.

FSP's role was primarily the employment and management of the Coordinator providing Helpline support and advice in a culturally competent manner. Additionally, FSP oversaw the weekly monitoring, facilitated the stakeholder Zoom meetings, and commissioned the evaluation. FSP colleagues were available as additional support to the Roma Helpline Coordinator, which also meant that she was not working in a vacuum.

The Roma Helpline Coordinator worked together with a member of staff from BHSCT, who has been involved with the Roma Community for over ten years. The BHSCT worker made a number of introductions for the Roma Helpline Coordinator within the community; both during the EUSS support programme, and with the Covid-19 Response. These introductions were invaluable in building trust with the Roma community.

The Roma Helpline was created as a bridge for the community and links into support services. This included emphasising and teaching the community that these services are free and to be trusted. Members of the Roma Community have accessed and learnt to trust statutory and community services.

Monitoring and Review

From the outset, FSP felt that it was essential to develop a robust monitoring process in relation to the Roma Helpline enquiries. FSP was already managing the South Belfast Helpline (from early April, as part of the initial Covid-19 Response); and built on and extended the monitoring procedures that had been developed for this service.

The Belfast Roma Helpline Referral Form included recording the Caller's name, address and postcode, contact number, nationality, URN/ID Number, number of people in the household (names, ID and children's ages), reason for referral, and the number of people benefitting from supports. It was noted that some Callers did not know their date of birth. The Call Monitoring Form was updated in mid-May to include a record of 'return callers'. The reasons for this were not only to continue to improve the data recorded, but also to evidence that

when people from the Roma Community trust a service, they will return to use it again. Caller's consent was requested in terms of recording personal information in line with GDPR.

"I was impressed with the detailed records kept which enabled not only the level of need to be accurately assessed but also how effective the referral had been and if more needed to be done to ensure a satisfactory outcome".

South Belfast Foodbank

The FSP Strategic Health Officer and the Roma Helpline Worker met on Zoom every week to monitor the previous week's calls and issues. In addition, a Zoom meeting was held fortnightly with representatives from the three Belfast Foodbanks (South Belfast, the Larder, and Storehouse), Belfast Health and Social Care Trust, Housing Rights, Advice NI and Belfast City Council; who were the core organisations that Callers were referred to. The Zoom meetings were managed and coordinated by FSP, throughout May and June to ensure connectivity, review the Project, and discuss response and impact. These meetings supported collaborative working and reinforced the collective impact. They also enabled adjustments to be made, taking into account that the Roma Helpline was a pilot project.

"The Stakeholder Zoom meetings meant that we could all learn together and brought everyone to the table under this new arrangement. It is the first time I have known people to come together like this for a common project for the Roma Community; with the Helpline providing a central point of contact".

Stakeholder

FSP completed and returned the Belfast City Council Monitoring Return at the end of July 2020. The narrative required in this Monitoring Return is presented in Appendix One.

Promotion

Information about the Roma Helpline was promoted and shared with the Roma Community through:

- Belfast Intercultural Romanian Community
- PSNI handed out Roma Helpline promotional leaflets
- FSP Facebook Page
- FSP Newsletter
- The FSP Twitter account
- Communities NI (when doing a web search for 'Roma Community Belfast and Covid' this is the first website that is given)
- Belfast City Council website
- Other Facebook Pages of organisations with whom members of the Roma Community and Romanians are known to engage.

In addition to 'formal' promotion, many Callers heard about the Roma Helpline by word of mouth; with the added credibility from those who had accessed the service that they had found it useful.

"All the community are happy with her [the Roma Helpline Coordinator] work. She is there for everyone, a lovely woman. We see that she believes in her work, she is glad to help, and it makes her happy".

Member of the Roma Community supported by the Roma Helpline

Social Media Content

As noted above, Social Media was a valuable resource in terms of raising awareness about the Roma Helpline. The Roma Helpline Coordinator developed short videos that were uploaded onto Social media sites, providing content relevant to the Roma Community. This includes short videos on:

- Travel advice
- Quarantine measures
- Wearing masks
- Staying safe during Covid.

"Sometimes the video content would be developed in response to a particular issue. For example, this year the Romanian Easter was celebrated a week after the 12th April Easter Day. It is a big celebration for the Roma Community and Romanians, where people get together. The video I loaded onto Social media in April tried to explain that this year we had to do things differently because of coronavirus, and that households should not get together to have barbeques in the back alley or parties. I emphasised that people should stay at home and follow coronavirus safety guidelines".

Roma Helpline Coordinator

Focus of Supports

Initially it was anticipated that the focus of the Roma Helpline would be on food parcels, and financial advice and support. However, in practice, along with these needs, families also sought advice on the EU Settlement Scheme; travel and immigration; housing; employment, business, and tax; nappies and toys; health; and utilities. Further detail is provided in the Statistical Data section following.

At times the Roma Helpline Coordinator talked with more than one person during the telephone call. Issues and needs that Callers wanted to talk about (in no particular order of weighting) included questions about Food Parcels, Welfare Benefits and Social Support,

Advice on documentation, Employment, Travel and Health. Under each of those topics, examples of questions asked, and issues addressed are given below.

Food Parcels

- The need for a food parcel
- How to access formula milk

Welfare Benefits, Social Support, and Housing Rights

- Applying for Universal Credit
- Housing and housing rights
- Eviction (due to non-payment of rent)
- The right to reside in Northern Ireland
- A lot of pressure on the need for temporary accommodation

Advice on documentation

- EUSS Applications and documentation required
- What to do if a passport, birth certificate or driving licence has been lost or confiscated by someone they had trusted
- Opening a bank account – very difficult

Employment

- Advice on the implications of a zero-hour contract
- Availability of 'humanitarian flights' (only available from London or Dublin, and very expensive)
- How to safely meet someone at the airport
- Where to get buses to Romania (a two- or three-day journey, run by two different companies)
- Furlough scheme entitlement, including that the employer has to give them a letter; the furlough payment was not automatic
- Employment rights
- Employers terminated contract when they heard that someone in the household had Coronavirus
- The rights of those who are self-employed

Travel

- How to get buses to and from Romania – and how to travel safely on the buses during Covid
- Needing proof of EUSS outcome or contract of employment to be able to purchase the bus ticket
- Quarantine advice and regulations if travelling
- NI, Romanian, UK, and Irish legislation and guidelines about Covid-19 (different regulations depending on 'stop-offs' during travel)

- Explanation and reason for travelling during Covid-19 (for example family members or seeking employment in Romania or Northern Ireland)
- The need for a contract of employment to travel and be eligible to enter the country
- Families have been split up, and those who were providing for the household are unable to re-enter Northern Ireland
- How many people can travel together in one car to work or across the borders
- Documentation required at different borders
- Border control regulations between Northern Ireland and Ireland
- Safe travel procedures.

Health

- Health related Covid-19 issues
- Advice on travelling whilst pregnant
- How to register with a GP in an emergency
- Explaining Covid-19 advice and guidelines on social distancing measures:
 - Video content of different messages and shared through PHA and BHSCT
 - Messages shared on Social Media through different community groups that the Roma Healthline Coordinator was aware that the Roma Community have access to
 - Messages shared with different groups who engage with the Roma Community
- Domestic abuse
- Quarantine and Lockdown measures, and how to keep safe during the pandemic.

The Roma Helpline Coordinator also contacted agencies to whom she referred households. These conversations included explaining complex cases, ensuring that there would be support for those with low levels of spoken and written English, and advocacy. She noted that “a lot of information can be lost through the translator, especially if they do not have a comprehensive understanding of welfare benefits”.

Connectivity

The Roma helpline connected the Roma community with wider community projects and supports including:

- Foodbanks: South Belfast, the Larder, Storehouse
- Belfast Health and Social Care Trust
- Housing Rights
- Advice NI
- Belfast City Council

As noted above, representatives from these organisations met regularly through Zoom meetings, managed and coordinated by FSP, supporting collaborative working and reinforcing the collective impact.

In addition, Callers were referred to the Romanian Embassy in London or the Romanian Consulates in Edinburgh or Dublin (dependant on the documentation required), NIACRO, the Law Centre NI, the Education Authority, EUSS Step, travel associated organisations, NI Direct and HMRC websites, and foodbanks outside the City Centre. Some Callers were supported directly by the Roma Helpline Coordinator; who has worked over a number of years providing advice and support to the Roma Community in Belfast. The Roma Helpline Coordinator would complete Food Support Referral Forms, and referrals to Housing Rights or Advice NI, accompanied by a short assessment of need.

Stakeholder Engagement

The Roma Helpline Coordinator was asked 'how do you identify the best contacts at different places'. She explained that this is achieved in different ways, including:

- The Roma Helpline Stakeholders (regularly through the Zoom meetings)
- Through the database from the FSP South Belfast Helpline and building the Roma Helpline database as new support organisations developed
- Connections in Belfast City Council
- FSP colleagues' linkages across the community, voluntary, and statutory sectors
- Romanian Embassies and Consulates in London, Edinburgh and Dublin "with whom I have long-term contacts"
- National Rumanian Cultural Institute in London
- Information on social media
- The Social Media Facebook page - Belfast intercultural Romanian Community I "that I started prior to Covid-19 in 2018, on a voluntary basis"
- Dublin Airport flight companies in Dublin Airport: "this was important for different reasons; for example, if people have booked flights they have been cancelled because of legislation in different countries. I had to have an understanding of Covid legislation in Many countries".
- Checking flight companies in Dublin Airport and London Airports "you can't fly to Romania directly from Belfast without a transfer".

"We had been serving the Roma community at the Foodbank for some time. We had also at times been overwhelmed by the number of referrals as many agencies just didn't know what to do with those that were asking for foodbank vouchers due to language issues, so wrote out a voucher without being able to really assess the need. Furthermore, different agencies were issuing to the same people. We knew in Covid times that we needed a route for the Roma to be able to access help for food; but that we also needed

robust referrals and had been trying to find one organisation to take on the role (with limited success before the Roma Helpline). We were also working with CRRAG, who were the one point of contact for Asylum Seekers and Refugees and really wanted a similar system for Roma. So, when the Forward South Roma Helpline was established contact was made and a way of working together established”.

South Belfast Foodbank

Safeguarding

The Roma Helpline Coordinator and FSP colleagues received Safeguarding Training from Volunteer Now. This element was added to the contract in June 2020, in order to ensure safeguarding of staff and best practice.

Added Value

In addition to the significant number of individuals, families, and households directly benefitting from the Roma Helpline; additional funding applied for and received by FSP through the BCC / DfC FSP Covid Response initiative, was allocated to the Roma Community. Through this funding, the Roma Helpline Coordinator purchased 500 facemasks, which were distributed across the Roma community along with a flyer on mask use, washing and hand hygiene and some bottles of sanitiser. The Foodbanks delivering to the Roma Community supported the distribution of the facemasks, as did BHSC. Small hand-sanitiser bottles, recommending that children keep these in their Schoolbags.

Additionally, the FSP STEP project (funded by the Department of Education) purchased baby playmats through the initial STEP response to Covid-19. These were distributed to Roma families, known to the STEP delivery partner, South Belfast SureStart, who deliver the Perinatal programme, including the Roma baby Café. Included with the baby playmats were flyers, translated into Romanian with a lot of visuals, providing guidelines about social distancing and handwashing.

COVID-19 THEMATIC FUNDING BUDGET

The table below presents the budget spend of the Covid-19 Thematic Funding allocation, managed by FSP.

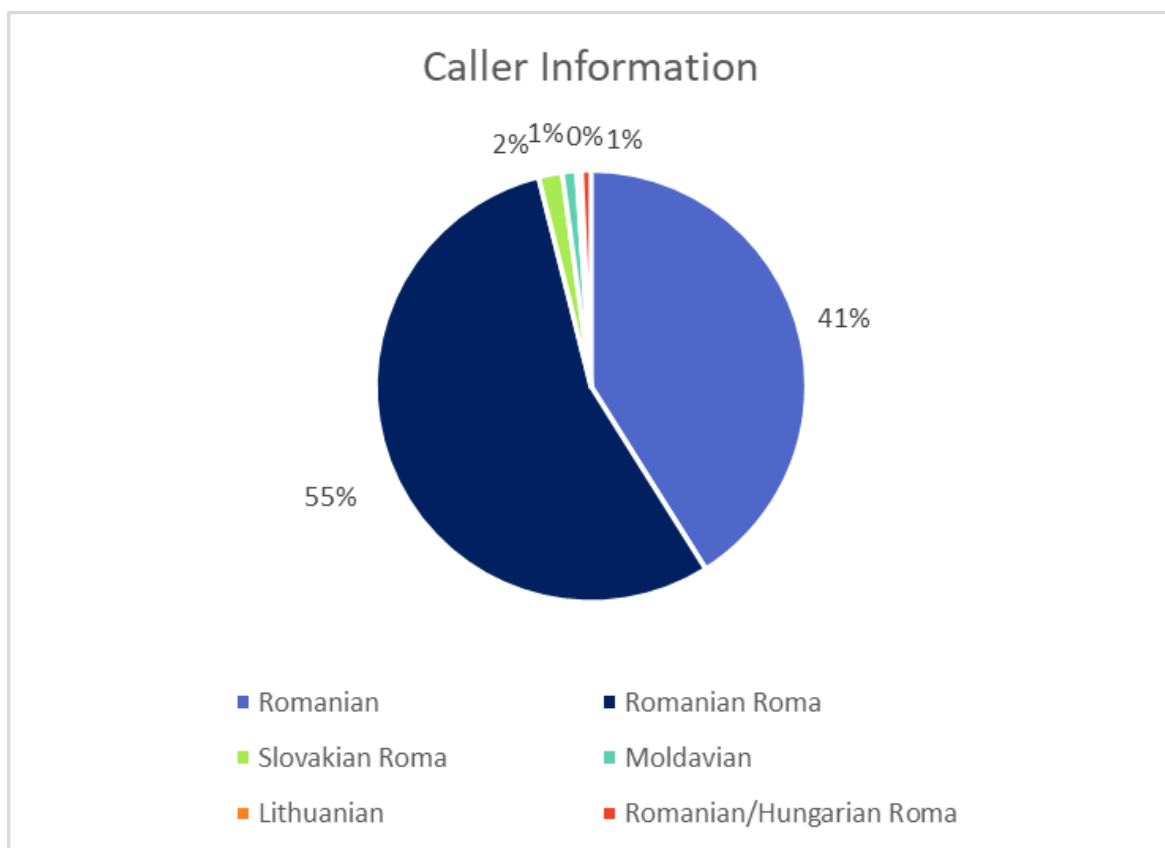
Element of the Budget	Financial Allocation	Expenditure: 22.04.20 to 30.06.20
Connectivity / Food Supply: Provision of outreach and interpreting costs for 288 hours @ £25 per hour: 5 sessions per week and Saturday relief.	£7,200.00.	£7,200.00
Connectivity: Provision of dedicated Mobile Phone and technology resource with digital infrastructure for contacting Roma community for 6 sessions per week until 30 June 2020. Support for emerging contingency plans.	Original Financial Allocation: £800.00 Reduced to £120.00 per change request submitted 2 June 2020	£102.00
Connectivity: FSP purchased safeguarding training for ROMA helpline staff and colleagues from Volunteer Now to ensure that if potential risks emerge via helpline, staff can respond appropriately and understand clearly protocols as per FSP policy.	£200.00 +VAT of original £800 budget allocated per change request submitted/approved 19 June 2020	£240.00
Connectivity: Purchase of mobile phone top ups for members of the Roma Community was also approved	Change request to use £440 of original connectivity budget of £800 submitted/received 2 June 2020	£440.00

STATISTICAL DATA

The data presented in this section are taken from the final Roma Helpline Monitoring Report, prepared by the FSP Strategic Health and Wellbeing Officer; supported by the Roma Helpline Coordinator. Weekly Monitoring Reports presenting statistical data were prepared each week and shared with those attending the fortnightly Zoom meetings. In addition, the Evaluator also had access to the Spreadsheet, which was updated on a weekly basis, providing additional detail.

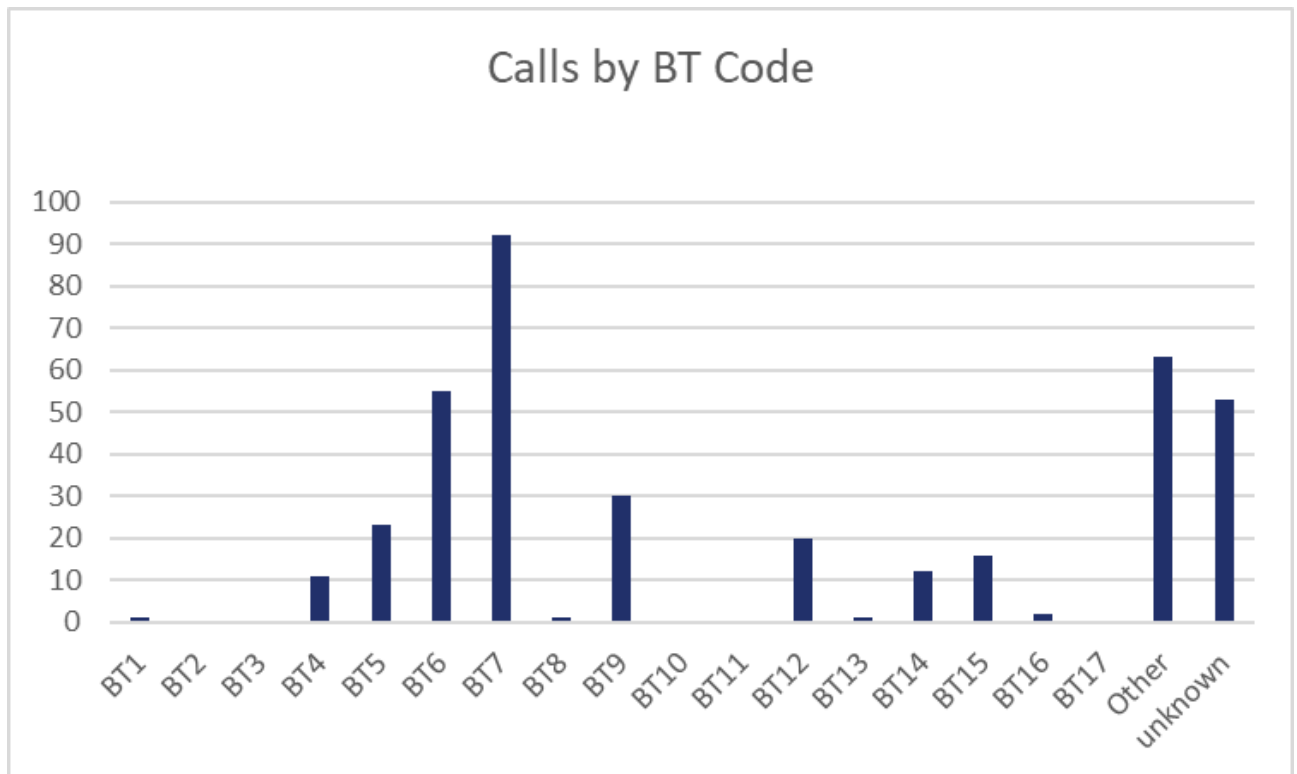
Caller Profile

The Roma Helpline service was delivered for ten weeks, from the 22nd April to the 30th June 2020. A total of 582 individuals living at 346 different addresses were supported up to the 30th June. Whilst the Roma Helpline was initiated to support the Romanian Roma Community, in practice calls came from a broader spectrum, as shown in the table below.



As the table shows, the majority of Callers were from either Romanian Roma or Romanians. It is noted that since July, the number of Romanian Roma has increased to 65%, demonstrating the importance of relationship and trust with members of this community. Whilst the Roma Helpline was established primarily for the Romanian speaking Roma Community living in Belfast this was not exclusive, and no Callers were turned away.

The Roma Helpline was established as a Belfast-wide initiative. The table below presents the known BT postcodes of Callers.



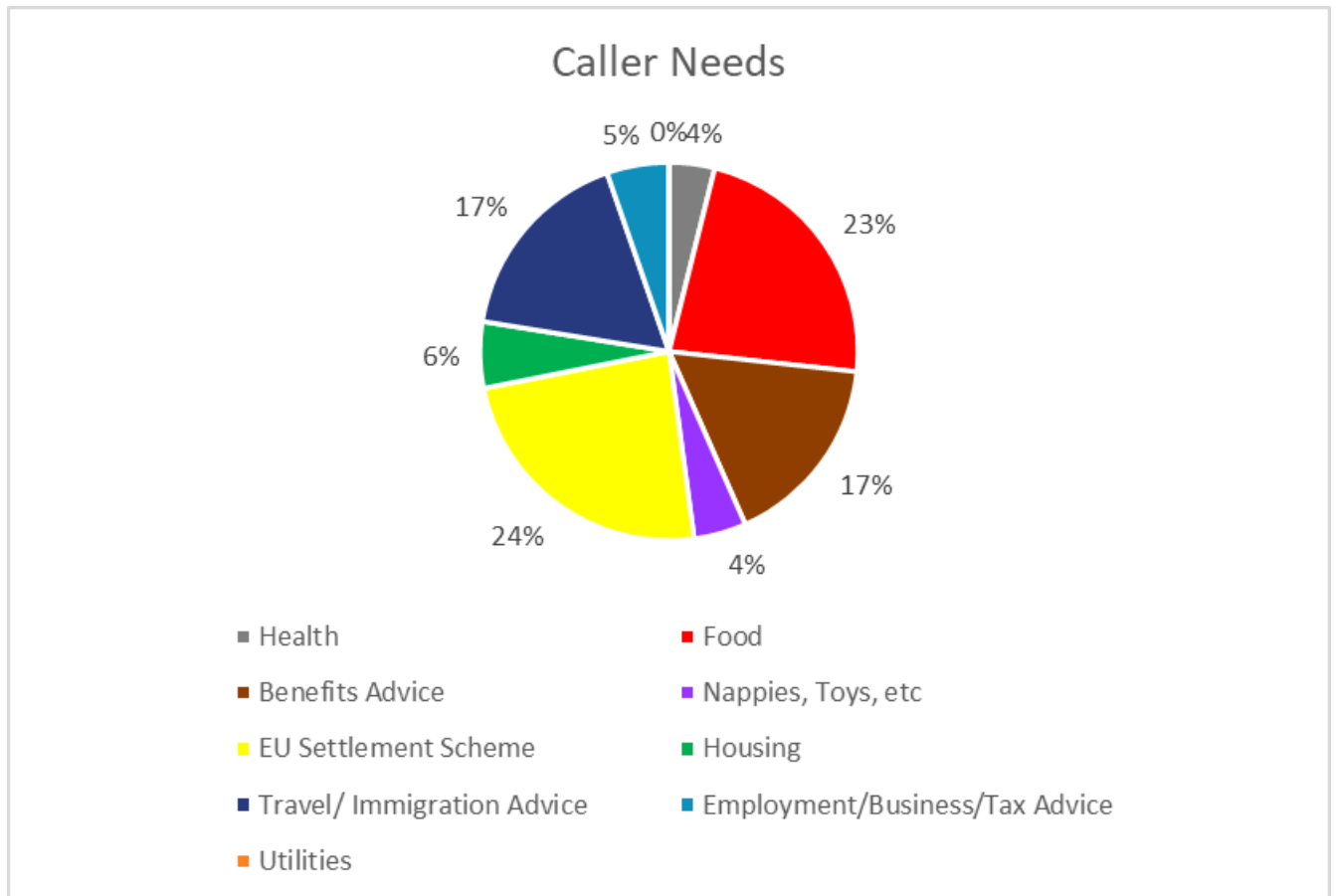
The table shows that the highest number of calls came from those living in BT7, followed by BT6; and then BT9, BT5, and BT12. This gives further insight into where the Roma and other vulnerable communities are living across Belfast; with the majority of Callers living in South Belfast. The 'other' postcodes included callers from across Northern Ireland; particularly areas with large Roma populations such as Ballymena, Newtownabbey, Downpatrick and Portadown. This demonstrates how word of mouth raised awareness of the service and attracted a significant number of callers who were then signposted to supports in their area where possible.

Telephone Calls – Caller Needs

The average length of the telephone calls was between 40 and 60 minutes (the average length of time spend on telephone calls decreased in June). Initially many phone calls lasted over an hour. It became evident during the phone calls that many of those contacting the Roma Helpline had very complex needs, in addition to the issue they first contacted the Helpline about. Approximately 50 Callers contacted the Roma Helpline on more than one occasion.

As noted earlier, it was anticipated at the outset that the focus of the Roma Helpline would be on food parcels, financial advice and support. However, as the table below shows, in

practice there were many other needs and issues, with the greatest number of individuals enquiring about, and benefitting from support and referrals in relation to the EU Settlement Scheme.



Several callers discussed more than one area of need and more than one family member. All of these have been recorded in the chart above. EUSS = EU Settlement Scheme

23% (representing the second most common issue) of Caller Needs related to food. In total 88 households were referred to Food Supply organisations, with 256 individuals benefitting from food parcels. Most families and individuals received food parcels on more than one occasion, but only the first referral has been recorded. Those accessing the Roma Helpline were signposted to one of three Foodbanks in Belfast - South Belfast, the Larder, or Storehouse – and other food parcel suppliers outside the City Centre throughout the ten-week service. Representatives from the Belfast foodbanks attended the regular Zoom meetings. A Foodbank Referral Form (different for each Foodbank) was completed by the Roma Helpline Coordinator. The Referral Forms included questions as to whether households were receiving food parcels from other agencies. An example of a Food Support Referral Form is given in Appendix Four.

“We were involved in the early meetings to develop a robust referral process. The Roma Helpline Coordinator has helped us with Recorded messages to inform clients of the delivery processes and protocols etc”.

South Belfast Foodbank

Given the complexity of Caller needs, 216 referrals were made to different support services, benefitting 704 individuals (some people benefitted in more than one way from the Roma Helpline). A further 61 referrals were addressed by the Roma Helpline Coordinator, benefitting 146 individuals. These data are presented in the table below.

Referral organisation	Number of referrals	Number of Individuals Benefitting
EUSS Step	116	201
Embassy / Consulate	74	131
Addressed by the Roma Helpline Coordinator: no referral or signposting needed	61	146
SB Foodbank	32	133
NI Direct / HMRC websites	27	47
Advice NI	22	59
The Larder	17	26
Food/Advice Provider outside Belfast	16	25
Storehouse	15	43
Airlines/Airports/Travel Agents	12	20
Housing Rights	10	20
BHSCT	9	8
South Belfast Community Group Food Parcel	8	29
Belfast City Council	8	7
Law Centre	7	5
Education Authority NI	2	3
TOTAL	277	850

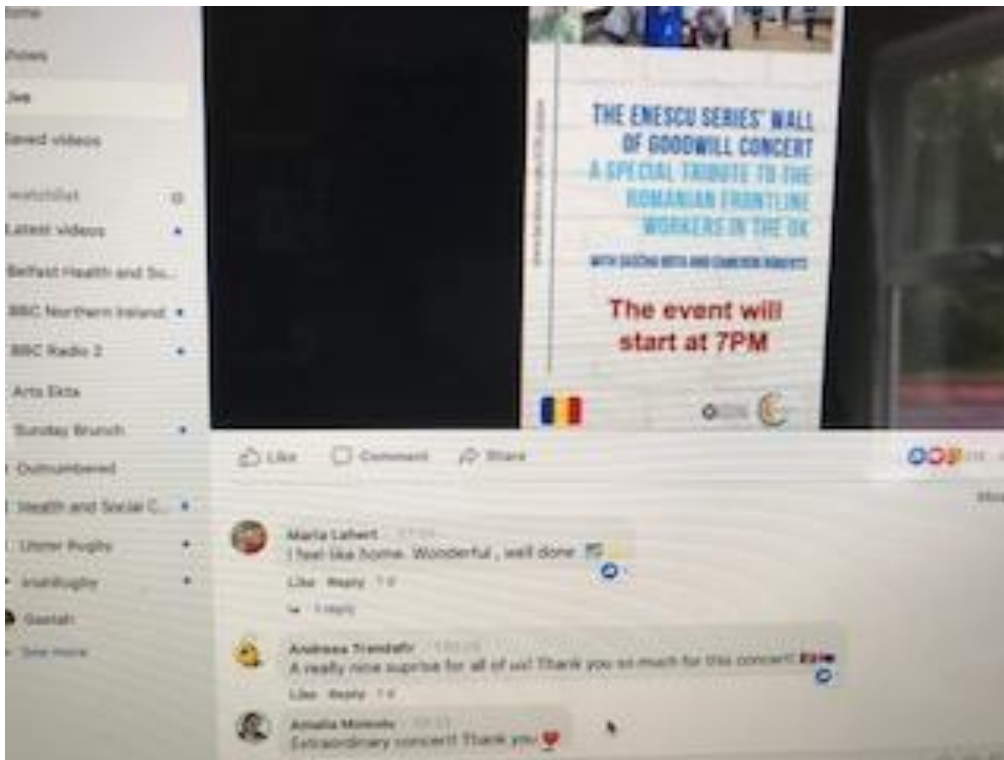
Achievement and Recognition

Romanian Concert

The ENESCU Series Wall of Goodwill Concert, billed as a ‘Special Tribute to the Romanian Frontline Workers in the UK’, was broadcast live on social media on the 4th June 2020. The introduction, made on behalf of the Romanian Cultural Institute in London and the Romanian Embassy in the UK, broadcast from Belgrave Square the audience was told that “the silver lining to this unusual concert” was that “we can reach a larger audience”. It was anticipated

that the concert would reach 100,000 people through organisations streaming the broadcast. The concert was a tribute to Romanian frontline workers who had been working during this time of uncertainty, about whom the presenter said, “we are very humbled to meet some of them during this evening”. One of those invited to present their work was the Roma Helpline Coordinator / Advisor.

Her presentation included the words: “I work for an NGO, Forward South Partnership, funded by Belfast City Council to host a Helpline during this pandemic for all Romanian speakers who are in need of food packages, health packages, masks, benefits, welfare advice. I have helped until now more than 400 people. I am more than happy that I was able to help people during this crisis period. We will be continuing to support them Thank you very much for having this concert. I am very proud to be a part of the Romanian community who is working in the voluntary community helping others during this pandemic”.



The Belfast Intercultural Romanian Community was among the organisations who screened the concert on the 4th June; which may still be viewed at <https://www.facebook.com/ICRLondon/videos/357048421936845/?v=357048421936845>.

The Romanian Ambassador's Award

One of the Romanian Ambassador's Award for Romanian Frontline Workers who helped others during the Covid-19 crisis was awarded to the Roma Helpline Coordinator at the Romanian Embassy in London. She was recognised for her work in staffing the EUSS Step

Project and the Roma Community Covid-19 Helpline for Belfast, run by FSP since April. Ambassador Dan Mihalache presented the Awards during a special ceremony at the Embassy in London on the 17th July, which was held to recognise and celebrate Romanians across the UK who helped their compatriots during the Covid-19 lockdown restrictions.

“I am very pleased with how the helpline developed and became an important presence within the community. Since April we have helped over 700 individuals, with many calling multiple times. We have been able to direct them to support at what has been a particularly difficult time for those facing language barriers”.

Roma Helpline Coordinator

“Everyone at Forward South Partnership is extremely proud of the difference that the Malina has made. This is a very well-deserved award; I am delighted that [the Roma Helpline Coordinator] has received this recognition from her national Embassy. We are delighted that the Belfast City Council and Belfast Health and Social Care Trust have extended the funding for the Roma Helpline until the end of this year at least, in recognition of the positive outcomes from this work”.

CEO, Forward South Partnership

The Roma Helpline Coordinator has also made recommendations for the recognition of others who are doing excellent work to support the Roma Community and Romanians.

Romanian Consulate Opening in Belfast

This month (August 2020) it has been confirmed that there will be a Romanian Consular Office opening in Belfast. There is a consulate in Edinburgh (which requires a ferry journey or a flight to attend in person); and members of the Roma Community and Romanians in Northern Ireland cannot currently attend the Romanian Consulate in South Ireland because of legislation requirements. The Roma Helpline Monitoring Reports were included in the documentation forwarded, which has demonstrated the huge need for support for the Roma Community and Romanians in Northern Ireland.

It is recommended that this Evaluation Report be forwarded to those who were involved in the decision about opening a Romanian Embassy in Belfast.

Ambasada României în Regatul Unit al Marii Britanii și Irlandei de Nord

Facebook page: Excerpts

21st July 2020

🇷🇴👏 #UnitedWeStand #DividedWeFall the Romanian Ambassador to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Dan Mihalache:

I was especially happy to meet the members of the Romanian community in the United Kingdom and to thank all those who, during the difficult time I lived, proved solidarity and supported Romanians in the limitations caused by the COVID-19. pandemic.

This difficult period meant for some of the Romanians who live, work or study in UK personal drama. Some lost their jobs, others lost their homes, some had nothing to return to Romania with.

👏 This period taught us all one very important thing: solidarity, unity, common action. We are many, we are diverse, we have different opinions - inevitably working in a great community.

👏 I want to thank everyone who made an effort in your free time to help those members of the Romanian community who were in need.

We have had during this period - from March to now - 1272 requests for consular assistance. For a number of 1418 Romanians, we assured repatriation or assisted them in the repatriation process. These results would not have been possible without your contribution. Each one with what they could - some helped with food, others paid for accommodations, others helped with plane tickets. Thank you!

11th August 2020

For us, it is a priority to open @Consulatului from Belfast, because it is folding on a real need for Romanians in Northern Ireland, who, at the moment, for a passport, a procurement, a birth certificate or for other consular services, we must make a long trip, including crossing the Irish Sea, to get to Scotland, to Edinburgh.

➔ The operation of the Belfast Consulate is part of a larger project, which I started during my mandate as an ambassador to the United Kingdom, namely to bring the consular network to the level of the size and needs of consular services of a community Romanians who have grown up in the last 10 years.

12th August 2020

Romanian Ambassador to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Dan Mihalache: I had a very good discussion with Mr. Declan Kearney, Junior Ministry Executive Office of Northern Ireland government during a visit we made o to Belfast

We exchanged an exchange of evaluations about the developments of the situation generated by the Covid-19. pandemic.

Another important point on the agenda of the meeting was the Romanian community in Northern Ireland, well integrated into the local society and with a consistent contribution to the North Irish economy.

I appreciate the support of the Government of Northern Ireland and the other local authorities for our endeavor to open a Consular Office in Belfast covering the needs of consular services of the Romanian citizens in the area.

CHALLENGES

There have been challenges during the delivery of the Roma Helpline; many of which have been resolved through cooperation and collaboration between the Stakeholders. Some people signposted or referred to statutory or community organisations for support were unable to get the help and support they needed due to being unable to have access to an interpreter. The Roma Helpline Coordinator is unable to support Callers in conversation with support services with language barriers because interpreters need to be registered. However, interpreters need to understand the need, explain it, and to be a qualified advisor who understands the issues and the system – for example applications for Universal Credit. In this way the Roma Community will get the proper advice, and access to their welfare benefits.

Similarly, some families choose not to follow the signposting advice, for example a referral to Advice NI; reasons for this include the language barrier, inability to communicate on the telephone, not knowing the person at the end of the telephone (suspicious); having been signposted so many times and nothing comes out of it; receiving one-off support in the past, but requiring sustained support; concerns that they will have a financial liability; and because they don't trust anyone. Furthermore, they may make an initial enquiry, but will not be able to understand the follow-up questions and telephone calls and will 'give up' applying. Some Roma families have been paying someone to apply for Universal Credit for them (ie filling in the forms) and then expecting between £150 and £200 'commission' depending on outcome.

Offering support, especially advice and guidance about complex issues, is more difficult over the telephone than face-to-face; especially when seeking to build trust, remove obstacles to accessing support, and changing people's attitudes towards support services. When speaking with people face-to-face it is easier to build trust through body language and facial expressions; which are harder to put simple into words over the telephone.

A number of Roma households chose to return to Romania at the start of the Coronavirus pandemic. This led to a lot of Callers seeking travel-related information. Queries included quarantine restrictions, travel options, NI and Romanian legislation and guidelines about Covid-19, and people's rights in relation to leaving or entering Romania or Northern Ireland, In addition to buses and airplanes, some people have been travelling back and forward from Northern Ireland to Romania, offering places in the car at a cost (which is cheaper than the bus or flights). However, there have been people who have paid up to £100 deposit for a place, on journeys that did not exist.

At the start of the pandemic there was much misinformation and rumours about what would and would not happen during Covid-19 within the Roma Community. This led to much sensitivity across the community, and mistrust about who to listen to and who to believe. For example, households were told that if they return to Romania the UK government will pay the rent for six months on Belfast rented properties; this was untrue. Families then found

themselves evicted because they didn't pay the rent, and Landlords changed the locks to ensure that they could not gain entry to their previous home.

Accessing accommodation for the Roma community has become increasingly difficult during the pandemic, not only for the reasons given in the paragraph above; but also due to households being unable to pay the rent (due to unemployment as a result of Covid-19 and problems accessing Universal Credit). Some families have been offered accommodation elsewhere in Northern Ireland but refuse to take up the offer because they have family members who support living in Belfast, or because they do not want to split up from their extended family.

“The connections with those working at Housing Right became necessary because of the number of evictions that were happening in the Roma Community. Evictions happened because people were not in work and didn't have enough money to pay the rent; if they received Universal Credit this paid towards daily expenses. Then the Landlord would inform them that they have to leave, although in some cases they had lived in the house for many years. This was legal because Landlords notified households before the 6th May legislation (which said that eviction can't happen for 12 weeks). This resulted in more complications and challenges, because people cannot apply for Universal Credit if they don't show proof of a new house within two weeks”.

Roma Helpline Coordinator

The Roma Helpline Coordinator has taken up issues with employers, often around employment rights and exploitation, providing advocacy for individuals. The amount of time and the positive outcomes are not fully reflected in the Weekly Monitoring Reports, and this Evaluation Report also does not give the full picture as needs may change from one week to another.

Due to the complexity of some of the issues facing Callers to the Roma Helpline, there have been times when organisations to whom the Roma Community have been referred have been slow to respond. This is due in part to language barriers and has resulted in some of those being referred to organisations not getting the support they need.

Many of the Stakeholders had not anticipated the number of requests for support to complete EUSS applications. Fortunately, the Roma Helpline Coordinator had previously worked with the EUSS project and is fully conversant with EUSS applications. Additionally, alongside existing contacts with Romanian Embassies, she quickly made linkages with travel companies, ensuring that (ever-changing) information given to Callers was correct.

Another issue that was highlighted during this project is the ongoing exploitation of the Roma Community, both from employers, Landlords, and the community. It is not possible to present this in detail (safeguarding all those involved in the project); but it is evident that

many members of the Roma Community continue to be exploited on a daily basis, and that an advocacy, support, and advice service is very much needed. The ultimate aim is that capacity across the Roma Community is built such that they can access mainstream statutory and community services; but this also requires additional training about Romanian culture for workers, and accessibility to interpreters with an understanding of people's rights to welfare benefits, housing, employment, and education.

“The Roma Helpline has led to other underlying issues starting to emerge – reinforcing the precarious nature of the Roma community. People are experiencing destitution, they are living on the edge, and many of those who came to NI did so under false pretences. Once the car washes and recycling sites closed down many families had no recourse to public funding and support. The Roma Community are hugely exploited in general – and yet there almost seems to be a feeling that this is ok. For me ‘living in the grey area of society’ is being reinforced; with individuals being put into the position they can’t feed their families and end up being evicted”.

Belfast Health and Social Care Services

IMPACT FOR THE ROMA COMMUNITY

This section of the Report is presented as a series of mini impact stories. Some Stakeholders requested that they remain anonymous.

“The Roma Helpline is a responsive service, which was set up in a matter of days to respond to an emergency situation. In the early weeks we were tweaking and learning about how we can improve the recording system, the referral pathways and other emerging issues which are deeply affecting the Roma community. As a networking community-based partnership, we [FSP] are pleased to have been invited to host this vital service with independent and trusted staff, and to lobby and advocate where needed.

“This service is very successful; it is showing signs of wider usage which we think is due to a trusted service in their own language. Honorary consuls and ambassadors are also liaising with the Rom Helpline Coordinator directly, reinforcing that this is a well-used and much needed service.

“The Monitoring Reports and this Evaluation Report should inform planning provision and contribute to the good relations of the City going forward. The success of the Roma helpline has been due to the commitment and excellent work provided by the Roma Helpline Coordinator, supported by myself and FSP colleagues. I believe Belfast City Council should be commended for investing in this accessible service for the most vulnerable. I do think the trust and credibility about this service, evidenced by the Roma Community, has been the language and cultural understanding. I consider it an honour to advocate on behalf of the Roma Community”.

CEO, Forward South Partnership

“She [the Roma Helpline Coordinator] helped me to get Universal Credit. She filled in the forms and details. We got some money; but now, thankfully, I have started back to work at the Carwash. I don't know what would have happened to my family without this help; she is a very committed and helpful person”.

Member of the Roma Community supported by the Roma Helpline

“One lady lost all her paperwork, including her birth certificate, which had been retained due to domestic violence. She had no access or resource to get the documentation and travel to Romania. Through the Roma Helpline she found a route to the Romanian Consulate and was able to get the documents released here from Edinburgh. She now has a birth certificate and a passport; and now can apply for Universal Credit”.

Roma Helpline Coordinator / Advisor

“The Roma Helpline kept Roma families from starvation’s door – this is the best way to put it. People were destitute and literally did not have food to put on the table. Food security impacts on mental health, child development, and the ability to function as a family. Food Insecurity is horrendous for any family. The Helpline has prevented that for many families”.

Belfast Health and Social Care Services

“The Roma Helpline has provided a trusted supportive service delivered in a culturally sensitive way. It has opened up contact with the Roma Community and ensured that many within the Roma Community were supported and able to access advice, supplies of food, medicine and be signposted quickly at their point of need. It also supported the Roma Community’s understanding of Covid-19 public health messaging. The fact that the Helpline is specific to the Roma Community has perhaps enabled the community to understand that they are valued part of Belfast society. Furthermore, this project has also brought many partners together and created pathways for signposting the Roma community to other services”.

Stakeholder

“She can only help those who have phoned the helpline, and a lot of Callers have contacted the Helpline through word of mouth – in the Roma Community that implies tremendous trust. Initially some referrals came from BHSCT community workers; and then it spread as people got good, positive, quick responses from the Roma Helpline Coordinator – who has a good reputation as someone who gets things done. Before this the Roma didn’t have a choice, now they have a choice and can get good advice and signposting; they now have options”.

Belfast Health and Social Care Services

“The Roma Helpline has been truly invaluable both in enabling us to get food to the Roma in need; but also enabling us to be confident in the referrals and avoid being overwhelmed and misused. We would not be confident that we could have managed otherwise. I think it has for the first time this community has been provided with a trusted way to access mainstream help. The Roma Helpline Coordinator knows the level of support that is needed for families, has made the appropriate referrals, and has been there to ensure the process did not stall as was previously happening in many cases”.

South Belfast Foodbank

“This project has shown that the Roma Community are willing and able to access mainstream services, if they are reliably informed about them and the language barrier taken away. The data prove that the Roma Community will engage. In my personal view this project has over-achieved in terms of engagement with the Roma Community; it is incredible”.

Belfast Health and Social Care Services

EXAMPLES OF MODELS OF GOOD PRACTICE SUPPORTING ROMA COMMUNITIES

This section initially considers general supports that should be put in place to improve the lives of the Roma Community living in Northern Ireland. It then specifically presents a number of different support measures that may be put in place supporting improved education opportunities and reducing health inequalities. The final subsection reports on the regular inter-agency Zoom meetings that took place throughout the ten-week Covid-19 Roma Helpline response; this presents a model of good practice which may be adapted to future initiatives for the Roma Community and other vulnerable groups.

General Support

Key to the improvement for the Roma Community living in Northern Ireland (and elsewhere) is ensuring that they have access to their rights, be this welfare benefits, employment, housing, education and health. Models of good practice supporting the Roma Community include:

- Providing advice and support to members of the Roma Community arriving in the city.
- Outreach work with children and families.
- Lifelong Learning projects
- Building individual capacity so that the Roma Community members understand their social rights, can improve health and wellbeing choices, and know where and how to access various social opportunities; including education systems, the welfare system, health care, housing rights, and employment rights.
- Trained Roma staff (for example Teaching Assistants, outreach workers, home school liaison workers)
- Funding for Roma support groups, capacity building for community members (ring fenced)
- More cross agency working
- Awareness-raising and cultural background resources and events to inform wider society
- Advice on employment, training, housing and welfare rights
- Improved translation and interpreting services
- Roma specific health visitors and health education workers from the community.

Education

Improvements to Roma pupil attainment requires time, flexibility, financial and social investment, and a commitment to equality and inclusion. Roma pupils are reported to be amongst the lowest achieving ethnic groups within schools. The following approaches have been used in Primary and Post-Primary Schools in the UK and Europe.

- Use of additional dedicated support, (for example, from Teaching Assistants, Traveller Education Support Service (TESS) staff) and curriculum learning/support.

- Staff valuing and celebrating Gypsy, Roma and Traveller culture
- Engage and encourage Roma parents in raising aspirations and expectations for their children (often low, as influenced by cultural expectations and their own limited educational opportunities)
- Transition supports, especially from P7 to Y8
- Mentoring support
- Provision of dedicated support for attendance, in particular the Education Welfare Officer or through a member of school staff with responsibility for attendance issues, followed by contact with parents/families for primary headteachers, and curriculum support for secondary headteachers. Also reward for good attendance.
- Having an identified key individual in school (who was instrumental in building positive relationships with pupils and families, thus facilitating feelings of safety and trust)
- A more flexible approach to the curriculum
- Buddy systems and peer mentoring
- Nurture Groups
- Help with paperwork and form filling
- Liaison with other services.
- Staff development to understand the importance of, and techniques for, communicating high expectations for the progression of Roma pupils into further education as early as possible in their educational journey.
- Provision of EAL programmes in School.
- Partnerships between Schools and community or statutory organisations promoting health and wellbeing meeting wider non-education focused needs of Roma children and young people.
- Make the school experience attractive and welcoming, including the promotion of a school-level ethos and identity and inclusion to support integration and feelings of attachment.
- Placing value on circle-time, Personal, Social, Health and Economic education, and Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning activities to directly support inclusion and personal and social development.
- Pastoral support in schools for Roma children and young people.
- Engaging Roma and families and community members in the life of the school can lead to closer relationships between pupils and the school, evidenced by increased participation in educational visits and extra-curricular activities.

Health

The Roma Community suffers disproportionately from illnesses that are associated with the social determinants of health. Roma communities appear to suffer higher rates of chronic disease (i.e. asthma, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, hypertension) and the associated disability and limitations on daily activities. Some evidence reports links between these higher rates of chronic disease, and higher prevalence of risk factors (e.g. diet, exercise,

stress), poor access to and uptake of primary care and preventative health programmes among Roma. The following approaches have been used by statutory, community and voluntary sector organisations in the UK and Europe.

- It is common for members of the Roma Community to have undiagnosed health conditions and to attend Accident and Emergency more frequently than others. The promotion of a GP Registration Scheme –that is simple and accessible – might contribute towards alleviating this trend.
- Work with the Roma Community so that they identify important issues about health and wellbeing, and the supports they would welcome. Whenever Roma collaboration is requested for a study, participants must be ‘rewarded’ by being sent the results.
- Health promotion campaigns for the Roma Community – for example immunisation uptake, healthy diet, physical activity uptake, illicit drug use, and smoking cessation. Such health promotions need to be relevant to the Roma Community and take into account cultural factors. Such campaigns could be informed by a consultation with the Roma Community about what they view as important (see point above).
- Opportunities to discuss emotional wellbeing, including relaxation techniques, reducing stress and anxiety
- Taking a multi-agency approach, address the barriers to access to health services and supports, including the following factors:
 - Language and literacy barriers
 - A lack of knowledge of available health care systems
 - Discrimination by health care professionals
 - A lack of trust in health professionals
 - Physical barriers — mobility and distance
 - A lack of identification and/or insurance.
- Work with the network of family members — bearing in mind the close relationship among extended Roma family members;
- Factors such as human warmth in the treatment process, perceived empathy and the feeling of being listened to and understood were among the most important criteria for the Roma population in assessing the quality of health-care services.
- Learn how to deal with conflict and the development of a mediator’s mind-set. Mutual feelings of prejudice and the influence of cultural differences when assessing a situation or interpreting certain codes, could give rise to significant conflict.
- Training health-care professionals including:
 - Background knowledge on Roma culture
 - Knowledge of the ideas that the Roma Community has with regard to health
 - Awareness of the cultural elements involved in the relationship that exists between Roma men and women and health
 - Information regarding the health status of the Roma population
 - Insight into the internal diversity of the Roma community
 - Analysis of prior intervention experiences regarding the health:Roma-community relationship.

- Maternal health risks (i.e. early and late pregnancies, large families, poor access to and low uptake of antenatal care) and poor outcomes (i.e. miscarriage and still birth) are more common in Roma women. Sustaining the Roma Baby Café (delivered by South Belfast SureStart) should be a priority and extended to other areas.
- Training people from the statutory and community sector as health mediators; and include a focus of preventative (rather than curative) care,
- Assistance needs to be provided to those lacking identity documents, which prevents access to services.

The ultimate goal of health programmes should be mainstreaming; that the needs of the Roma population should be met by the same service providers and the same resources as the rest of the population. That should be the objective of the stable programmes referred to in the recommendations; to guarantee that the specific needs and peculiarities of the Roma community can be met through the operation of these mainstream resources and the efforts of service providers.

The Roma Helpline Stakeholder Zoom Meetings

Stakeholders from the core supporting organisations received the weekly Roma Helpline Monitoring Reports and met fortnightly through the inter-agency Zoom meetings. All Stakeholders consulted found these Zoom meetings beneficial, and a model of practice that should continue alongside any sustained supports for the Roma Community, and similar vulnerable groups.

The Zoom meetings supported the delivery of an open, transparent and accessible Helpline service for the Roma Community across Belfast. Benefits of the Zoom meetings included:

- Operating strategically and practically in a coordinated way
- Review of the Weekly Monitoring Reports, “which helped to identify gaps, weaknesses, and trends; ultimately seeking to influence and improve a system that meets the needs of this very marginalised group”
- An opportunity to discuss any issues and move forward with confidence
- Meetings highlighted the numerous difficulties this community faces in accessing help (“be it food, housing, benefits or information”)
- The opportunity to share experiences and expertise, supporting and creating a coordinated response
- Continuous improvement and changes, necessary for a pilot project, through collaborative exploration
- Avoided duplication
- Ensured the Roma community were supported appropriately

“As a strategic organisation linked into various departments, FSP works collaboratively with partners to deliver collective impact. This project therefore allowed us to deliver a project with impact and brought complementarity to the process. This approach has also enabled us to explore how we could build a collaborative, integrated and planned system that allows the best outcomes for the Roma population, and that potential duplication of services is reduced through FSP designing collaboratively with delivery partners a robust referral system”.

Forward South Partnership CEO

“I think the Roma Helpline project has clearly shown how agencies working together can produce effective outcomes. For the Foodbank it has been imperative that people had a clear pathway to access help easily but also that we could be sure of Robust Referrals. On various occasions prior to this pathway of referrals the foodbank had been overwhelmed and even had to close for a week to find a way forward to serve the community but also to have certainty of need. We have great communication with the Roma helpline Coordinator and so we have a route to sorting out problems or clarifying issues and likewise she has been able to ask for our help in relevant signposting”.

South Belfast Foodbank

NEXT STEPS

There were justifiable concerns that when an estimated one thousand plus Roma return to Northern Ireland in August that there will not be the capacity to respond to supports needed from mainstream services. Based on the evidence of need from the Roma helpline Monitoring Reports, Belfast City Council and Belfast Health and Social Care Trust have jointly funded an extension to the Roma Helpline, such that it will continue to be operational from July to December 2020. Unlike the FSP Telephone Helpline, established and delivered during the Covid-19 crisis by FSP, the volume of enquiries throughout July to the Roma Helpline has not decreased. Follow-up Callers have sometimes been unable to get the help they need (and so need further input from the Roma Helpline Coordinator); or more commonly are seeking updates, have communication issues, or require additional support for something unrelated to the initial enquiry. The fact that there has been a seamless transition from the initial ten-week Covid-19 pilot project to the continuation of the service was essential in the continued credibility of the Helpline, and supports the relationship building process between the Roma Helpline Coordinator and the Roma Community (as well as with the core stakeholders).

The Roma helpline is a 'bridging service', through providing a culturally sensitive and language supported service, that is seen as credible to the Roma Community. The Helpline provides a bridge into mainstream statutory and community support services. The Roma helpline Coordinator's ethos has been to say, 'I will introduce you to a person who can help – I am not doing it all for you'. This builds bridges between the Roma Community and Northern Ireland supports, and builds capacity.

"In my view the Roma Helpline has demonstrated need and shown us the need to resurrect some kind of Roma working group – which should be statutory led but involves organisations who are delivering supports directly to the Roma community".

Stakeholder

Taking into account lessons learned, the evidence of need, and good practice models developed elsewhere - future opportunities to support the Roma Community in Belfast, with aspects that could be transferred and adapted in other areas in Northern Ireland, include:

- Developing the Roma helpline into a sustainable Hub, which may have part-time outreach bases in other cities and towns in Northern Ireland with a Roma Community
- Dissemination and promotion of the Roma Helpline, the process, collaboration and impact that has been achieved through limited resources
- A continued service and bridging platform from which to build confidence and capacity within the Roma Community
- Build on and sustain the collaborative inter-agency approach, which ultimately is less time-consuming for all the agencies involved, reduces duplication of services, and gives greater confidence in the authenticity of referrals received

- Develop ‘Cultural Appropriateness’ workshops; and deliver training for service providers, such that they have a better understanding of the needs and background of the Roma Community seeking supports
- Offer a weekly clinic (when social distancing guidelines allow) where members of the Roma Community can meet with an Advisor to help them to address problems. This needs to be someone with whom they have built trust with and can engage with (a service delivered for only two or three months does not build the necessary levels of credibility and trust)
- The need for someone who can advocate on behalf of members of the Roma Community, who can help individuals and families through the paperwork, who has an understanding of the issues, and knows about people’s rights
- Programmes for men, women, and children; building on the example of the Roma Baby Café
- Health and wellbeing (including nutrition) programmes; following consultation with the Roma Community about the issues in which they have an interest.

Northern Ireland is not unique within the UK in not having a specific Roma integration strategy in place; only the Welsh Government has so far produced a framework for action in response to the EU requirement that all member states should develop strategies tailored to the needs of the Roma population in their country for the period to 2020¹¹. An overview of this plan is given in Appendix Five.

There is a risk that the mid-term socio-economic impacts of the pandemic will hit the Roma Community the hardest, contributing to further inequalities. For example, remote learning through digital education is most often not accessible and/or affordable for marginalised Roma children, lacking any/adequate IT equipment, and/or internet connection, or sometimes even electricity. This could further deepen inequalities in education. Many Roma living in segregated settlements see themselves cut from any source of income and (formal or informal) economic activity, leading to rising unemployment and poverty¹².

The ongoing exploitation of the Roma Community, both from employers, Landlords, and the community has been evidenced in this Report, highlighting that many members of the Roma Community continue to be exploited on a daily basis, and that an advocacy, support, and advice service is very much needed. The ultimate aim is that capacity across the Roma Community is built such that they can access mainstream statutory and community services; but this requires additional training about Romanian culture for workers, and accessibility to interpreters with an understanding of people’s rights to welfare benefits, housing, employment, and education.

¹¹ https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-02/enabling-gypsies-roma-and-travellers_0.pdf

¹² https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/overview_of_covid19_and_roma_-_impact_-_measures_-_priorities_for_funding_-_23_04_2020.docx.pdf

The Roma Helpline has also demonstrated that the Roma Community, and Romanians, require more than 'one off' advice; with a need for follow-up calls, and also to be able to come back with further questions about the same or a different issue. New needs are constantly emerging; and once trust and credibility is established, people return with additional, and sometimes more complex, needs and questions.

As noted previously, a Romanian Consulate will be opening in Belfast, hopefully by the end of the year. It is strongly recommended that this Evaluation Report be forwarded to those engaged in the development of the establishment of A Romanian Consulate in Belfast, and others in decision-making positions, as this adds further evidence to the needs of the Roma Community.

Belfast City Council and the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust should be commended for continuing to provide funding to continue the Roma Helpline from July to December 2020. It is evident that this support and advisory service is still needed and will continue to be needed in the medium and longer-term. The challenge is to build on and sustain accessible supports for the Roma Community, not just in Belfast, but across Northern Ireland. The Roma Helpline has already been acknowledged as a model of good practice; and, in the words of Sarah Champion, MP¹³, commitment needs to be taken that "if something is working it should be rolled out".

Taking into account the wider political context, the local context, the robust monitoring systems and accountability developed for the Covid-19 Roma Helpline, and the evidenced impact for the Roma Community – which in turn will have a beneficial outcome across many communities in Belfast – it is strongly recommended that consideration and funding be made available for a sustained Roma Hub in Belfast, with the potential to deliver outreach support in Northern Ireland. A Roma Hub would provide a contact point for face-to-face conversations; small group work on a range of topics including welfare rights, housing, education, and health; access to resources; and the ongoing telephone support. To effectively deliver this much needed service, it would be necessary to have at least two employees; who would provide a bridge between the Roma Community and Romanians with statutory, community, and voluntary support services and expertise; and monitor emerging issues and outcomes.

¹³ <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmwomeq/360/report-summary.html>

APPENDIX ONE

ACTIVITIES / OUTPUTS PRESENTED IN THE BCC MONITORING REPORT, DELIVERED ON THE 27TH JULY 2020

Project Activities / Outputs	
<i>What were the original planned activities for the project? e.g. what did you agree to deliver (include dates and targets)</i>	<i>Please tell us how you are meeting your targets? E.g. number food parcels delivered, number households receiving support numbers accessing helplines, numbers</i>
Connectivity: Advice and Advocate Resource to be provided for approx. 20 -25 hours per week until 30 June 2020 identifying approx. 60 individuals/30 families requiring assistance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Roma Helpline was delivered for ten weeks, from the 22nd April to the 30th June 2020. • The Roma Helpline was available for 24 hours each week. • During the 10 weeks 582 individuals at 346 addresses were supported. Some individuals were supported in more than one way, with a total of 850 individual benefits. • The average length of the telephone calls was between 60 and 40 minutes (the length of time spend on telephone calls decreased, initially many phone calls lasted over an hour; as those contacting the Roma Helpline had very complex needs, in addition to the issue they first contacted the Helpline about. • Approximately 50 Callers contacted the Roma Helpline on more than one occasion. • The FSP Strategic Health Officer and the Roma Helpline Coordinator met on Zoom every week to monitor the previous week's calls and issues.
Connectivity: Continue to disseminate information about the Covid 19 Response for the Roma Community. 1 post per week.	<p>Information about the Covid 19 Response for the Roma Community was shared with the Roma Community through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Belfast Intercultural Romanian Community • FSP Facebook Page • FSP Newsletter • The FSP Twitter account
Connectivity:	The Roma helpline connected the Roma community with wider community projects and supports including:

Project Activities / Outputs	
<p>Link Roma community to wider community support projects such as food banks, advice agencies, health and welfare, etc. on a daily basis – Monday – Friday.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foodbanks: South Belfast, the Larder, Storehouse • Belfast Health and Social Care Trust • Housing Rights • Advice NI • Belfast City Council <p>Representatives from these organisations met regularly on Zoom, managed and coordinated by FSP, throughout May and June to ensure connectivity, review the Project, and discuss response and impact. These meetings supported collaborative working and reinforced the collective impact.</p> <p>In addition, Callers were referred to the embassy or Consulate, the Law centre, the Education Authority, EUSS Step, travel associated organisations, NI Direct and HMRC websites, and foodbanks outside the City Centre.</p>
<p>Food Supply: Continue to identify vulnerable people approx. 80 per week within the Roma community and signpost to wider services.</p>	<p>23% (representing the second most common issue) of Caller Needs related to food. In total 88 households were referred to Food Supply organisations, with 256 individuals benefitting from food parcels. Most families and individuals received food parcels on more than one occasion, but only the first referral has been recorded.</p>
<p>Food Supply: Continue to monitor need and impact on a weekly basis.</p>	<p>Those accessing the Roma Helpline were signposted onto the one of three Foodbanks in Belfast - South Belfast, the Larder, or Storehouse – and other food parcel suppliers outside the City Centre throughout the ten-week service.</p> <p>Representatives from the three Belfast foodbanks attended the regular Zoom, supporting collaborative working through monitoring need and impact.</p>
<p>Financial Advice & Support: Continue to work daily with partners to identify need and signpost to relevant</p>	<p>Those accessing the Roma Helpline were signposted onto the relevant support agencies daily throughout the ten-week service. This included enquiries about financial advice and support.</p>

Project Activities / Outputs	
agencies. We will offer approx. 20-25 hours per week until 30 June 2020.	Representatives from Financial Advice and Support organisations attended the regular Zoom, supporting collaborative working through monitoring need and impact.
Financial Advice & Support: Signpost approximately 30 families, vulnerable individuals/families to the relevant advice agencies per week.	17% (representing the joint third most common issue) of Caller needs related to Financial Advice and Support. In total 22 families (involving 59 individuals) were referred to Advice NI in relation to issues around Financial Support and Advice. In addition, referrals to the HMRC website and Housing Rights also included issues requiring financial advice and support.
Connectivity: Safeguarding training for ROMA helpline staff and colleagues from Volunteer Now to ensure that if potential risks emerge via helpline. (Element added after change request received and approved 19/06/2020)	The Roma Helpline Coordinator and FSP colleagues have received Safeguarding Training from Volunteer Now. This was delivered online on the 22 nd July 2020.

APPENDIX TWO

POLICY CONTEXT

All migrants to Northern Ireland are subject to UK immigration law, policies and procedures. Legislation and policies at regional level and beyond underpin civic and national objectives to ensure an integrated, vibrant population within Northern Ireland, able to integrate socially, economically and able to engage with service providers. Policies, strategies, and legislation provide guidance about how organisations should work with and for the entire population in Northern Ireland. These include:

- The European Convention on Human Rights¹⁴
- The Race Relations (N.I) Order 1997¹⁵
- Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998¹⁶: which requires public authorities to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity and regard to the desirability of promoting good relations.
- Together: Building a United Community¹⁷, which reflects the Executive's commitment to improving community relations and continuing the journey towards a more united and shared society.
- The Provision of Health Services to Persons Not Ordinarily Resident Regulations¹⁸: states that all people who are 'ordinarily resident' in Northern Ireland, are entitled to free health services. Eligibility for health services therefore relates to whether a person is ordinarily resident in Northern Ireland and not to nationality.
- Programme for Government: priorities acknowledge the interrelationship between health, disadvantage, inequality, the social and physical environment, and longer-term economic growth.
- The Racial Equality Strategy for Northern Ireland 2015–2025¹⁹: a framework for government departments (and others) to tackle racial inequalities, to eradicate racism and hate crime, to promote good race relations and social cohesion.
- Together: Building a United Community²⁰: outlining how government, community and individuals will work together to build a united community and achieve change against the following key priorities: our children and young people, our shared community, our safe community, and our cultural expression.
- The Belfast Agenda: created by a partnership of key city partners, residents and community organisations. The city's first community plan sets out a joint vision and long-term ambitions for Belfast's future up to 2035, as well as outlining priorities for action over the next four years including: Growing the Economy, City Development, Living Here, and Working and Learning.

¹⁴ http://www.echr.coe.int/Documents/Convention_ENG.pdf

¹⁵ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisi/1997/869/made>

¹⁶ <http://www.equalityni.org/ECNI/media/ECNI/Publications/Employers%20and%20Service%20Providers/S75GuideforPublicAuthoritiesApril2010.pdf>

¹⁷ <https://www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/articles/together-building-united-community>

¹⁸ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisr/2015/27/made>

¹⁹ <https://www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/publications/racial-equality-strategy-2015-2025>

²⁰ <https://www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/articles/together-building-united-community>

- Making Life Better²¹ 2012–2023: the ten-year public health strategic framework. The framework provides direction for policies and actions to improve the health and wellbeing of people in Northern Ireland. The framework seeks to create the conditions for individuals and communities to take control of their own lives and move towards a vision of Northern Ireland where all people are enabled and supported in achieving their full health and wellbeing potential and to reduce inequalities in health.

²¹ <http://www.publichealth.hscni.net/making-life-better>

APPENDIX THREE

EU SETTLEMENT SCHEME

It is taking longer than usual to process applications for the EU Settlement Scheme due to the Coronavirus pandemic. EU, EEA or Swiss citizens, and their family can apply to the EU Settlement Scheme to continue living in the UK. Those who successfully apply to the EU Settlement Scheme will be able to continue living and working in the UK after 30 June 2021. They will be given either 'settled status' (if they have started living in the UK by 31 December 2020 or lived in the UK for a continuous 5-year period) or 'pre-settled status' (individuals and families can apply to change this to settled status once they have 5 years' continuous residence).

Once an individual and their family receive settled or pre-settled status, they are able to

- work in the UK
- use the NHS for free
- enrol in education or continue studying
- access public funds such as benefits and pensions, if eligible for them
- travel in and out of the UK.

If a family receives settled status, any children born in the UK while they are living in the UK will automatically be British citizens. If a family is given pre-settled status, any children born in the UK will be automatically eligible for pre-settled status. They will only be a British citizen if they qualify for it through their other parent.

See: <https://www.gov.uk/settled-status-eu-citizens-families/what-settled-and-presettled-status-means>

**APPENDIX FOUR
FOOD SUPPORT REFERRAL FORM EXAMPLE**

Belfast Roma Food Support Referral Form	
Name	
Address & postcode	
Contact number	
Nationality	
URN/ ID number	
Number in household Adults – names and ID Children – names/ ages	
Do they require nappies etc?	
Consent – yes / no	
Reason for referral – e.g. waiting on universal credit payment starting financial hardship, self-isolating. Are there any family members who can do shopping if one member self-isolating?	
Dietary requirements/ other needs	
Additional checklist	
Are you receiving weekly food parcels from Belfast City Council through the shielding/ vulnerable families programme?	
Are you receiving food parcels or other support from BHSCCT or other agencies?	
Name of referrer	
Date	



This project is a city wide service and is funded by Belfast City Council



APPENDIX FIVE

THE WELSH ENABLING GYPSIES, ROMA AND TRAVELLERS PLAN: OVERVIEW

The Enabling Gypsies, Roma and Travellers plan, June 2018²², focuses mainly on devolved issues which the Welsh Government can influence. The plan outlines the breadth of work which the Welsh Government is undertaking to ensure inequalities experienced by these communities are reduced, access to opportunities increased, and relations between these communities and wider society improved.

However, all these communities are linked by the history of discrimination and hate crime they have faced, inequalities experienced, and the need for advice and advocacy. We value the cultural differences between these groups, and we want to promote their diversity.

Key issues

- » continue to focus on ensuring sufficient culturally-appropriate Gypsy and Traveller residential and transit sites are created in Wales
- » challenge engrained health and education outcomes which prevent these communities from fulfilling their potential
- » support Gypsies, Roma and Travellers to access the labour market
- » provide advice and advocacy to Gypsies, Roma and Travellers who are encountering discrimination or hate crime
- » improve information sharing, including in relation to rights and entitlements
- » foster good relations between Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities and wider society.

²² https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-02/enabling-gypsies-roma-and-travellers_0.pdf