

Want to find out more?

Sources and Further Information:

Roma Fact Sheets <http://romafacts.uni-graz.at/>

European Information Office (ERIO) www.erionet.eu/home.htm

European Roma Rights Centre www.errc.org/

For a news account about the crisis in 2009 when Roma people left their homes in Belfast see: www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/defiance-meet-the-romanian-families-refusing-to-be-forced-out-1722458.html and conditions back in Romania http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/northern_ireland/8143368.stm
The Situation of Roma EU Citizens Moving to and Settling in Other EU Member States 2009 http://fra.europa.eu/fsites/default/files/fra_uploads/705-Roma_Movement_Comparative-final_en.pdf

Signposting Someone in Need

If you are approached by someone in need from the Roma community it may help to contact the **Romanian Roma Community Association Northern Ireland (RRCANI)**: 133-135 University Street, Belfast, Tel: 028 9543 8323 E-mail: info@rrcani.org.

Greeting Roma people

Some Romanian Phrases for Greeting Romanian Roma People:

English	Romanian	Pronunciation tips
Welcome	Bun venit!	<i>boon ven-eet</i>
Good day	Bună ziua	<i>boo-nuh zee-wah</i>
Hello	Salut/Ciao/Bună	<i>sah-loot / cheaow /boo-nuh</i>
How are you?	Ce mai faci?	<i>ch eh my fahtch?</i>
Fine	Bine	<i>bee-nay</i>
Thank you (formal)	Multumesc	<i>mool-tzoo-mesk</i>
Thank you (informal)	Merci	<i>mehr-see</i>
Goodbye / Bye	La revedere / Pa	<i>lah reh-veh-deh-reh / pa</i>

People think that all I care about is sell the magazine and take their money... it fills my heart with joy when they smile and talk to me, some even try to say a few words in Romanian.

Ireland's Big Issue seller

This leaflet was produced by EMBRACE NI and Denis Iliescu, formerly of the Roma Education Project, Bryson InterCultural, in Belfast.

EMBRACE NI

Building a Welcoming Community

Web: www.embraceni.org



48 Elmwood Avenue,
Belfast, BT9 6AZ
Tel: 028 9066 3145

Email: info@embraceni.org

Roma People

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When a foreigner lives with you in your land, don't take advantage of him. Treat the foreigner the same as a native. ... Remember that you were once foreigners in Egypt.

Leviticus 9: 33–34 *The Message*

Who are the Roma People*?

They are not one homogeneous group but people with shared cultural characteristics.

Many are thought to descend from people who were forced out of Northern India in the tenth to fourteenth centuries. They came to Europe where they have been treated with suspicion, persecuted and forced to move on for centuries. They often adopt work patterns such as seasonal agricultural labour or street trading, which fit in with a nomadic life. They have been treated as slaves and the Nazis saw them as subhuman. Up to half a million Roma people died in the Nazi extermination camps.

Where Did They Live Before Coming Here?

Many of the Roma people who have come to Belfast and other northern towns are from Romania but some are from Slovakia, Hungary or elsewhere. Those who come here may speak a Romani dialect but most will also use their national language.

They have usually not received much education, and so may be illiterate in their own languages and speak little English. Some still return to their country of origin for seasonal work so their numbers may vary during the year.

Can They Live and Work Here Legally?

European Roma have the right to be here as EU citizens but temporary restrictions used to be placed on Romanian and Bulgarian nationals (A2). Before January 2014 A2 nationals had to apply for work permits as skilled workers or students, do authorised agricultural or food processing work or register as self-employed. This is why they have often been seen in car washes, selling magazines, newspapers or flowers. The restrictions also excluded them from welfare benefits and healthcare.

Since January 2014 A2 nationals have had full access to the job market and this means that they can access benefits, social housing and health care under the reciprocal arrangements within the European Union.

Because most Roma people have not been able to acquire a high level of education and skills there are only certain jobs that they can undertake.

*This leaflet is based mostly on the experiences of Roma People from Romania.

Did you know?

- The word 'Roma' comes from the Romani word 'ḍom' (pronounced 'rom') which means man, human.
- The deaths of up to half a million Roma in the Holocaust were only recognised formally when German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, unveiled a memorial in Berlin in October 2012.

What do Roma People Say about Their Lives Here?

We feel very happy that people care about our needs and what we want... We would also like to know how the local people see us and how they want us to behave [N.B. integrate] in their society. We think we do the right thing, but we're obviously not!

Roma woman interviewed for a research project on Roma people

I like my house but I'm afraid to be in a room on my own: I'm afraid of vampires and of the bad people who set the house next door on fire.

Nine-year old Roma child in Belfast, whose Roma neighbours' home had been attacked

What Are Their Rights and Issues?

When they had no entitlement to apply for jobs or access benefits they usually had limited family income. Their health suffers if they are on the streets in all weathers and had no access to ongoing health care in the past. Many live in difficult housing conditions and may be resented by local people, partly because family groups live closely together. They have been subject to threats and can be very vulnerable. There have been accusations of anti-social behaviour but relationships with local people are probably better here than in other parts of Europe. Because of earlier experiences they fear publicity and the authorities.

When the regulations changed in January 2014, they could apply for any job but many will still need literacy and language education, and training before they can find employment. European education systems and pre-school provision tended to discriminate against Roma children and provided a simplified form of education so parents are often not equipped to support their children's learning.

Marginalised communities take a while to recover from historic disadvantage. While many individuals will thrive and excel, it will be a while before Roma communities in Northern Ireland reach the same general health and education standards and access to jobs as the general population.

There are people of different nationalities living in this country: some have the same rights as the local people. Not us. Are we not all humans?

Roma woman

We're not asking for charity, we want the right to work like all the others. We're good workers, we work hard and we're not fussy.

Roma man

Aspects of Roma Culture

My mother said I never should play with gypsies in the woods...

Traditional children's rhyme

There are many myths and negative stereotypes about Roma people. Ethnic groups are not homogeneous but this is some background information about traditional Roma beliefs and way of life that may help with understanding the people here today.

Faith and Values

- Roma people have a complex code of values (or dharma) including inter-dependence (mutual support and responsibility), honour, faith in God and fate.
- Most of the Roma in Belfast are Christians and many are Pentecostal.

Family and Community

- It is believed that early marriages protect against negative influences. Young people are given enhanced community status once they marry.
- Women and men have complementary roles in marriage with women responsible within the home and men responsible for the family income and outside dealings.
- Homelessness is rare, as Roma people tend to shelter each other. Adults in the Roma community look out for all the children.
- Older people are respected for their wisdom and are responsible for education within their community.

Pure and Impure

- Roma people have a complex system of belief about what is pure and impure. This includes the human body and physical events (such as birth and death) but also extends to many other aspects of life and culture.

Respect and Image

- Visible signs of wealth are respected e.g. earrings and dress on special occasions.
- Roma men act as protectors of the image/ honour of their families and community.

Sense of Time

- Roma people may tend to relate to the present time and not so much to the future (future was uncertain during nomadic times) or past (due to their traumatic history).

Mistrust of Outsiders

- A history of persecution has led to mistrust of others, including the authorities.