NFCC
Fire Central
Programme Office

Equality of Access to Services and Employment for the Roma Community

1. Introduction

1.1 This paper is one of a suite of documents used as part of our Community Integrated Risk Management planning. A number of groups have been identified as potentially being at greater risk of fire or are potentially not accessing services such as Safe and Well visits. There are a range of equal access cases presented which require focus and additional resources to evaluate further whether this is the case. In the public consultation we will ask people in our communities to work with us to understand further any issues from their perspectives. We also want to work in partnership to re-design services or access pathways where needed.

1.2 There are a number of other separate documents relating to becoming an employer of choice for Roma people. Issues are outlined in this document as a means of underlining the link between more engagement with communities for access to services and how that make us a more attractive employer and vice versa.

2. Further understanding of Equal Access

2.1 As a public service focused on excellent service to our customers, we need to ensure equality of access to our services for every person.

2.2 We know though our fire investigation and Operational Assurance processes that some people are more likely to have a fire and they include those who are living with Dementia, mobility issues, and mental health issues. There are however other groups who aren't necessarily showing as being at higher risk of a fire but they may not be accessing services provided by Fire and Rescue Services (FRS) such as; safe and well visits or reporting fires because of other barriers which may be language, perceived prejudice and other societal factors.

2.3 Equality of access means actively seeking to engage groups who may be unaware or choosing not to access services from us and other public sector providers.

2.4 We need to work to reduce fire risk and other life risk. Within our equality of access approach, we also need to consider:

➢ How we identify all the communities and customers we serve.

➢ How we may develop and improve the provision of goods, facilities, services and access to all those communities across a range and intersectionality of variables

including (but not exhaustive): race, disability, sex, sexual orientation, religion or belief and age.

➢ Learn from and enhance good practice identified through equality monitoring.

➢ Use the results of equality monitoring to mitigate any adverse impact of our goods, facilities, services and access on diverse communities, and on groups within communities.

➢ Eliminate any unlawful discrimination identified through equality monitoring.

➢ Promote good community relations.

➢ Apply the rules of social marketing to make customers safer through changing unsafe behaviours.

2.5 Over and above the data from other sources additional insights from academic research, people impact assessments, consultation and engagement with these communities, charities and groups have been obtained.

3. **Why we need to focus on equality of access to services for Roma communities:**

3.1 Although there is little evidence that Roma people are more at risk of fires or road traffic crashes because of their ethnicity, ethnicity-based hate crime is well documented.

3.2 Evidence of fires is more related to socio-economic factors. (We have focus here on socio-economic factors but we must be mindful that race, and racism play a part as to why certain races experience socio-economic disadvantages giving rise to the socio-economic factors identified. It is a circular and an interlinked process) The evidence presented here is therefore an amalgam of work carried out by many organisations which suggests some Roma people may be at more risk of fire because of prevailing social or economic history and current discrimination.

3.3 Consideration of these factors are presented here to form a case for our further commitment to getting informative data and evidence, recognising the reality of lived experience and needs assessment. At the heart of this work is a pledge to ensure we are tackling racism and discrimination in our workplace and society.

4. **Why now?** We are refreshing our commitment to anti-racism and equality of access as part of our next five-year customer safety strategy.

4.1 We don't understand the Roma community well enough - Firstly, due to a lack of trust in reporting to authorities (if at all avoidable) data or lack of it will not reflect the level of risk faced by this community.

4.2 There is already a huge misconception that 'Gypsy, Roma and Traveller' people have the same ethnic and cultural identity – simply, they do not.

4.3 From our research there are some specific requirements that differ between these broad cultural groups meaning Roma are distinct in culture - and this distinction is important. For example, most Roma interpret the term gypsy as derogatory.

4.4 Lack of trust - Roma are believed to be the largest ethnic minority in Europe and in the UK. As an ethnic group they face a unique set of challenges related to recent migration and past experiences of discrimination.

4.5 Following enforced settlement in the 1960s in Central/Eastern Europe, the majority of Roma are no longer nomadic but live in permanent houses. They do not have a nation state but are citizens of the countries they settled in and/or born in.

4.6 Evidence suggests, due to past discrimination, Roma people often do not disclose/declare as Roma preferring to give their country of origin. This is not a reflection of diluted identity but an added complexity significantly distorting the calculated number of Roma people in the UK and impacts our understanding of this community, its complexity and our ability to design appropriate interventions. This is expanded upon further within the context below.

4.7 Known inequality - Although there are some reports highlighting the inequalities faced by Roma communities, often the evidence base for judging inequality in respect of the Roma community is limited because of its generalisation under the heading term 'Gypsy, Roma, Traveller'. That said, inequality exists for all three groups across a number of social and economic factors. On 5 April 2019 the House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee published the 'Tackling Inequalities Faced by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Communities' report. Within this report it was found that:

- These communities have the worst outcomes of any ethnic group across a range of areas, including education, health, employment, criminal justice and hate crime.

- The committee also found that there has been a persistent failure by national and local policymakers to tackle these inequalities in a sustained way, leading to services

that are ill-equipped to support Roma people. In turn, this has led to a lack of trust in these public services.

- It is noted that domestic abuse and violence against women and girls in gypsy and traveller communities has been identified; there is a known correlation between fire and domestic abuse.

- It was found that Roma communities were significantly worse off than the general population on almost every measure.

5. Contextual Background

5.1 Roma is an umbrella term for people of migrating communities of Europe from numerous different countries of origin including Slovakia, Romanian, Czech Republic, Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, Bulgaria and Hungary.

5.2 Roma first came to the UK as asylum seekers. For several years they were subjected to strict immigration and work restrictions, which have greatly impacted their mental health and contributed to distrust towards questionnaires and detailed questions about themselves. Since the EU accessions of 2004 and 2007 Roma have been coming to the UK as economic migrants.

5.3 On the most basic level, unlike Romany Gypsies, although Roma have migrated to avoid persecution and for economic benefits, they are not a travelling community, and live in mostly rented accommodation. Roma have been politically, socially, culturally and economically marginalised which has necessitated their migration. From a range of reports, it is identified that challenges are faced in almost every aspect of life from housing, above average poverty rates, lower educational attainment and employment meaning we can conclude the following:

5.4 Research with the community themselves, peer reviewed nationally and through work with the East of England Parallel Lives Roma Project, which drew on national expertise means that our professionally gained insight needs to be a factor in mitigating risks in this community.

5.5 Indication from established FRS work with the Roma community specifically, has identified a number of risks that we would either educate on or have direct statutory responsibility to avoid (e.g. behavioural - a lack of seat belt usage, use of mobile phones while driving and circumstantial - overcrowding and poor housing).

5.6 Studies in Europe have identified a higher than average level of burns and scalds in young Roma children. Low levels of education and health awareness is an unambiguous risk factor of all types of injuries including burns and scalds in different regions of the world. Further research relating to the UK is needed.

5.7 Despite equality legislation, evidence suggests that due to irregularities in the provision of language support and bureaucracy, Roma people face difficulty in accessing public services making them invisible within public service institutions.

5.8 Cultural understandings of health, authority and the public sector more broadly, combined with language barriers and the fear of discrimination can prevent Roma people from accessing public services. This can result in either a return to their country of origin putting people at risk or ongoing perceptions of discrimination and no intervention to influence behaviour.

5.9 Roma society is patriarchal with traditional family values. They often have large families, girls tend to marry at an early age and start a family, although they may not always leave home, which can result in overcrowding with complex living arrangements.

5.10 Roma people regularly accept sub-standard accommodation such as boilers not working or damp in their homes. When it is pointed out to them that landlords have a duty to provide a good standard of accommodation the response is that this is nothing compared to what they have come from. They also prefer not to make a fuss for fear that other agencies may get involved. Issues have also arisen previously with media coverage on Slovakian TV reporting on British social workers taking Roma children away from their parents adding to the mistrust of 'authority/uniform'.

5.11 Funding arrangements have the potential to adversely impact Roma people, as projects are often short-term with limited funding, rather than systemic with far-reaching interventions. This is very concerning in a post Covid-19 world as Voluntary and Charity Sector (VCS) organisations are threatened and so public services will need to work more effectively to widen access and work with VCS organisations.

5.12 Evidence obtained on the barriers experienced by Roma people fell under the following themes: experience fuelled fear of discrimination, language; both cultural nuances and interpretation. Certain cultural rules and taboos can mean that Roma lack a vocabulary related to health, state of mind and expressing feelings.

5.13 A lack of English skills can prevent people from engaging with key organisations e.g. healthcare, education and local services, meaning Roma may have a limited understanding of which services are available and correct methods for obtaining referrals. These issues are particularly acute for women and contributed to increasing their sense of isolation. In turn, this increases stress placed on Roma children, who routinely assume interpreting responsibilities for their parents owing to a lack of other options.

5.14 Many Roma speak one of the many Romani dialects as a first language, and they usually speak the language of their countries of origin as a second language (e.g. Slovak or Romanian). Even those Roma who speak English, often need interpreters to help

explain information. There is also often misunderstanding and mistranslation in terms of cultural context.

5.15 Levels of educational attainment are generally low in Roma communities (often as a result of forms of discrimination in schools), and many Roma adults are illiterate. This can make written communication inappropriate for Roma community members.

5.16 Research during Covid19 highlighted that only 3% of Roma could access online forms for applications, and less than 20% of Roma families were able to offer any sort of home schooling due to lack of technology.

5.17 During the COVID-19 pandemic Roma people report having no access to information about coronavirus and no direct support, leading to lack of understanding, or only being able to obtain limited information from trusted sources. Negative experiences with obtaining a GP appointment from within their home countries escalated to not seeking medical help in the UK either. This means that health factors that present risk of fire may be also unattended.

5.18 There were reports of fake news in relation to the pandemic with Roma people having their children removed if they were found to have tested positive and became ill, reinforcing the lack of trust in public services.

5.19 Additionally, many Roma people were left as rough sleepers during the pandemic whilst awaiting their immigration status to be progressed.

5.20 Many Roma people have low income jobs, some reported having no protection in their jobs at factories. Lowered skilled workers, and poor paid jobs should not equal less protection for Roma people.

5.21 Contrary to the perception that Roma people are an insular community, early indicators suggest the Roma community respond positively to both advice and support. There is however a necessary requirement for public services to invest in order to alter current perceptions. At this point there is a key evidence gap in how best to break down barriers so that the Roma have equality of access to mainstream services.

6. Issues of customer segmentation across the Roma community

6.1 Roma was not a category used in the 2011 census and Travellers in the UK are estimated to be at least 200,000 – a reflection in part of obstacles to their participation in official data collection. Estimates have ranged from 120,000 (the Traveller Movement) to 150,000 – 300,000 (the Council of Europe), in part a reflection of different approaches and definitions used.

6.2 As mentioned previously many Roma give their country of origin. As with the introduction of equality monitoring for other groups, early data outputs should be viewed with caution since it is likely that the population will be under-counted.

6.3 Despite broader shifts within the UK on how minority communities are presented, racism against the Roma communities remains entrenched, with a 2017 report by the Traveller Movement describing it as 'the last acceptable racism'. This research found that almost 77 per cent of surveyed (Travellers) had been the targets of hate speech or hate crime, including discrimination in education and employment, with many as a result choosing to hide their ethnicity.

6.4 NGOs working with Roma communities have urged the Government to develop a UK Roma Integration Strategy as required by the European Union Framework for Roma Integration, to help begin addressing these acute inequalities.

6.5 In addition to the work outlined, a focus on emerging migratory groups such as those seeking asylum living on their own for the first time, may be beneficial and provide an opportunity for services. Initial explorations will be conducted as part of this focus of work.

7. **Customer segmentation across the Roma communities to improve equality of access to employment and services**

7.1 Health and economic inequalities mean that Roma life expectancy is considerably lower than the national average. There is a need to evidence whether this also correlates with fires and burns.

7.2 That in itself is just cause for us to ensure we have early interaction with Roma adults of any age because otherwise we will not be able to mitigate the risk.

7.3 Given the context above, priority for this group is personal visits designed to meet the need of the community with long term intensive engagement and partner engagement with charities and other agencies.

7.4 As an example of collaboration to support longer-term engagement, organisations and services in Kent are working together to open a community café, where the realisation of the Roma community being enabled to represent themselves will be realised. As well as improving migrant cohesion with other migrant communities, it will be a hub and facilitator of countywide inclusion, so that good practice and success can be echoed throughout other districts and organisations.

7.5 By the community representing itself, identifying its own needs and accessing its own services it is seen as the first real step towards no longer being a "vulnerable" community, just part of the community.

	7.6 Access to this community is very much about building face to face physical relationships through trusted individual(s) who have a specific reference within their role to this community, because written and inconsistent connections do not offer the opportunity to influence them.
Actions:	7.7 FRS involvement may include fire related safety, safe and well referral bookings through third party support and other safety interventions to be developed with the Roma community for the Roma community.
	7.8 Targeted social media groups and work with charities to get FRS service offer to this group are necessary. Facebook is a known communication tool and this combined with visible, sustained and regular presence in the Roma "hubs" will support trust and generate community cohesion.
	7.9 The development of cross sector working is essential to identify Roma people so that a broader understanding can be obtained, and FRS staff can be culturally developed and supported.

8. Roma are people who experience hostility and discrimination

8.1 The lead-up and aftermath of the British EU Referendum in 2016 has helped exacerbate problems with race across the UK. Race related/hate crimes have risen against this group with much hateful social media generated and this remains a risk in times of heightened national pressure/identity. We need to ensure that our offer of safe and well is understood and bespoke for individuals.

8.2 Working alongside partner agencies to extend offers of support and resources such as fire stations as a safe space, one FRS has been been looking to create independent relationships with these communities across its county so that it may be a trusted public sector organisation in its own right and able to signpost and support access to our partner agencies.

Actions:	8.3 Working with Partner organisations to support access and provide opportunity to access FRS services.
	8.4 Discuss with Police whether they can share data on the level of hate crime experienced.

9. Young Roma people targeted to enhance trust in the Service and recruitment

9.1 There is little association by Roma people that working for the fire service is something that they could do. There is a lack of knowledge, understanding and access including imagery of themselves within services. It is reasonable therefore to suggest there is a need to maintain a highly visible and sustained approach to inclusion of the Roma communities such as providing access opportunities, visibility at the hubs, have a go-days and celebrating Roma specific events (history month) in our workplaces. Alongside this, the opportunity can be used to target recruitment activity towards Roma as part of recruitment for all posts.

9.2 If we are to obtain long term sustained engagement and build trust, it is important that we approach this community from early years, using distinct and targeted messages as part of our education offer and in other areas such as road safety.

9.3 We should encourage young Roma people to think of us as a career.

9.4 Actions:	- Social media campaigns - Recruitment messages - Roma events - Celebrating Roma history month and Roma cultural events to signal an open culture for all - Use of FRS resources as appropriate to develop Roma specific engagement opportunities - Safe spaces for Roma if needing to find sanctuary or report hate crime. 9.5 Evaluation criteria and methodology - Monitoring equality outcomes in recruitment - Seeking disclosure figures in our monitoring - Seeking qualitative evidence to support how we bespoke future services - Seeking specific Roma groups for consultation on design of services

10. Older Roma people

10.1 We aim to support all customers to live happy, healthy and independent lives. We focus several interventions and support to older people by offering targeted safe and

well visits which would include the usual concerns for older people but also ask about possible hate crimes/arson threat. We are concerned that older Roma people may not seek services.

10.2 As detailed in the context, research has identified older Roma people experience worse:

- Health than the rest of the population
- They are less likely to receive effective, continuous healthcare and more likely to die earlier
- There are high suicide rates among the communities
- Employment rates are low and poverty high. This impacts on the income that older Roma can count upon
- Many older Roma people may have had little, if any, formal education
- Accommodation is a crucial issue for older Roma and difficulties in this area have a great impact upon health and well-being
- Policy initiatives and political systems that are designed to promote inclusion and equality frequently exclude Roma communities
- There is a lack of access to culturally appropriate support services for people in the most vulnerable situations, including older people
- Roma culture and identity receive little or no recognition, with consequent and considerable damage to their self-esteem
- These issues often interact to create a significant negative impact on the quality of life and well-being enjoyed by older Roma people

- In summary as a result of enduring a hostile environment over hundreds of years:

▶ Older Roma people have high health and care needs

▶ Are frequently excluded from service relationships

▶ But don't engage well from bad experiences

▶ Older Roma experience health and social inequalities that are now a priority for Government

10.3 Access to this community is more difficult because of this outlined history. Nationally the NFCC will look to have Roma represented within the Stakeholder Group.

10.4 Locally FRS's through engagement and representation with third sector and partner agencies (who may provide intelligence), can create the opportunities to understand how access to services can be managed with sensitivity.

10.5 Actions:	1. Monitoring equality outcomes for Roma communities 2. Seeking qualitative evidence to support how we bespoke future services 3. Pledging activity as with other behaviour change work, to seek personal commitment to the safe and well advice 4. Seeking specific Roma groups for consultation on design of services and IRMP. 5. Working with partners to help survey for needs and outcome measures

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