



September 2014

Black Health Agency (BHA) Engagement with Roma in Manchester (2013-2014): An evaluation

Background

The Manchester-based charity Black Health Agency for Equality is the recipient of funding from Manchester City Council's Equality Funding Programme for a consultation and outreach project in the community of Eastern European Roma in Manchester. The project application covers a three-year period. A grant amounting to ca £37k was awarded for the first year (2013-2014). The budget foreseen for the following two years is £38.5k and £39.6k respectively. We understand that an award has also been made for Year 2 of the project. An evaluation report for project Year 1 was forwarded to the MigRom project on 27 June 2014.

As part of an effort to introduce quality assurance of local authority interventions to support Roma -- in line with the EU's 'Going Local' strategy, and the Council of Europe's 'RomAct' initiative for local authority accountability in projects concerning Roma -- the MigRom project has forwarded the BHA report to four independent experts, who are academic specialists in relevant areas:

- 1) Dr. Celia Donert, Lecturer in History, University of Liverpool
- 2) Dr. Sampson Lee Blair, Editor, Contemporary Perspectives in Family Research, Department of Sociology, The State University of New York
- 3) Dr Barbara Giovanna Bello, Researcher in Sociology of Law and Anthropology of Law, University of Milano
- 4) Dr. Iulia Hasdeu, Lecturer in Anthropology, University of Geneva

In addition, we have received comments from the ERTF (European Roma and Traveller Forum), an umbrella organisation of Roma NGOs with consultative status at the Council of Europe and partner in the MigRom consortium.

The present documentation includes these comments. It also includes an assessment of the report by MigRom Partner 1 (University of Manchester), and links to the relevant documents on which it is based -- the BHA report from June 2014, and the BHA application to the Equality Funding Programme from January 2013. We also include a link to a survey that our project team carried out in the summer of 2014 on birth rates among the Romanian Roma community in Manchester.

The documentation was compiled by MigRom Partner 1 (University of Manchester), and **does not reflect the views of Manchester City Council**, which is also a partner in the MigRom consortium.

PART I: Assessment of the BHA report

NOTE: The views expressed here are those of MigRom Partner 1 (University of Manchester); they do not represent the views of Manchester City Council, which is also a partner in the MigRom consortium.

Executive summary

The BHA intervention was intended to address what was reported to be a high school drop out rate among Roma girls, supposedly due to early marriage and pregnancy. However, the BHA report fails to provide any evidence for a link between the school drop out rate of Roma girls and early marriage or pregnancy, or even of a higher than average rate of teenage pregnancy among Roma girls. Even the claim that there is a notable school drop out rate among Roma girls, on which the entire consultation project is predicated, remains unconvincing, since the figures cited are not verifiable, and since it is unclear what observations they are based on (i.e. who compiled the data, over what period of time, and on what basis the persons in question were identified as 'Roma' given that school records do not consistently contain data on ethnicity, and that 'Roma' in school records are often confused with 'Romanian').

The authors rely on anecdotal statements and selective quotes from random conversations to back up their argument that school drop out and early marriage and pregnancy are somehow encouraged by Roma culture. They make generalising statements about Roma culture, many of them inaccurate. At the same time they fail to take into account that the term 'marriage' in Roma culture often refers to any kind of romantic liaison that is sanctioned by the family, including teenage relationships. In this way, the report presents everyday adolescent romance as a 'problem' that requires outside intervention. All this constitutes a cultural bias that makes the report potentially stigmatising toward the Roma community.

The authors of the BHA report admit that changes are underway in the community and that these changes come from within and are not the outcome of any targeted external intervention. This contradicts their stance that such targeted intervention is required. At the same time, the report's recommendations pertain exclusively to BHA's desire to continue its intervention and to continue to receive Council resources for that purpose. There is therefore a strong aspect of self-interest in the report's conclusions and a risk that this self-interest to engage in funded interventions (so-called 'assertive outreach') might come at the expense of protecting the dignity and reputation of the Roma community in Manchester. There is also a contradiction between the City Council's policy of mainstreaming the services that it is offering to the Roma community, and BHA's effort to single out the Roma community in relation to an issue that is not specific to the Roma.

In light of this, it is worth considering whether better value can be obtained from programmes that seek to build capacity within the Roma community and which encourage self-reliance rather than dependency on outside interventions.

Detailed comments by MigRom Partner 1 (University of Manchester)

NOTE: The views expressed here do not represent the views of Manchester City Council, which is a partner in the MigRom consortium.

The rationale for the intervention

The authors justify the need for special support for Roma with reference to the growing number of eastern European Roma in the UK. They say that “Brown et al. assert that, as of 2012, there are at least 197,705 migrant Roma living in the UK, and that this figure should be considered a ‘conservative estimate.’” The methodology that the team of Brown et al. based at the University of Salford relied on has been widely criticised in academic circles and has found no supporters within the research community. Most practitioners, too, have warned against adopting the study’s conclusions. The only notable exception is the Roma Matrix consortium led by Migration Yorkshire, in which the Salford team are partners. The position of the UK Department for Communities and Local Government, communicated informally at a meeting of the UK chapter of the European Academic Network on Romani Studies on 5 June 2014, is that the Salford study is unreliable because it is based on data that is incomplete and “anecdotal”.

The authors argue that among Roma “the average age of marriage is usually 15-16 years old with pregnancy occurring shortly after.” However, there is no statistical evidence for this being “average” among Roma in general, nor even among the Roma in Manchester (and indeed, this claim is contradicted by the findings of our survey carried out in the community in the summer of 2014; see link below). Some of the authors’ statements about marriage and levels of attainment of Roma girls and boys are attributed to a study by Corsi et al (2010). With reference to that study, the authors claim that there is a “prevalence of early marriage and teenage pregnancy in the Roma community” in Manchester, but this supposed “prevalence” has not been established. The study by Corsi et al. does not deal specifically with the community of Roma in Manchester, and there is no reason to assume that the findings discussed there should apply to Manchester, especially since the report authors admit that the Romani population is not homogenous.

The authors also fail to take into account that in the Roma community the common practice is not to register marriages officially. At the same time, any kind of romantic liaison that is sanctioned by the family, including teenage relationships, is usually regarded within the community as a form of ‘marriage’. The report therefore risks presenting everyday adolescent romance as a ‘problem’ that requires outside intervention. In their grant application to the Equalities Funding Programme, the authors speak of teenagers engaging in such relationships as being ‘at risk’ of leaving school; they even go as far as to link such ‘risks’ to potential criminality. We are concerned about the potential criminalisation of everyday relationships on the basis of a wholesale cultural bias.

Use of data

The report authors claim to be in possession of statistical information on Roma girls who drop out of school due to early marriage and pregnancy. They say that they rely on data that was collected by the International New Arrivals, Travellers, and Supplementary Schools Team. The authors do not specify the original source of the data (e.g. schools, parents, etc.) nor the time frame during which it was collected. They cite percentages, but not actual numbers, and so it is also impossible to establish the size of the sample or the degree to which it is representative of the community. For this reason it is also impossible to determine whether the problem addressed (of attainment and attendance of girls) is relevant in any

distinct way to the Roma community, or whether it is comparable to similar issues found in other communities. The rationale for the intervention rests on the assumption that there is an issue that is specific to the Roma community, but this assumption is not backed up by any evidence.

Our impression is that, in fact, the INA/T/SS team is not in possession of any systematic data, either on Roma, or on Roma in comparison with other population groups. It seems that the authors have access to data exclusively from Cedar Mount School and from nowhere else (they provide an indirect admission to this effect later in the report, when they say that their work involved “primarily Cedar Mount”). From our own observations at Cedar Mount school, with which we have been collaborating since 2010 and especially since March 2014, we know that school staff are often uncertain as to which pupils are Roma, and that Roma background is not recorded consistently in school records. We therefore believe that the Cedar Mount data are insufficient evidence for the claims about the Roma community that the authors put forward in their report. Whatever the sources of data, the use of data on the ethnicity of named underage pupils by an independent third sector agency without any proof that parental consent has been obtained raises serious ethical concerns.

The authors cite Office of National Statistics data for the relevant area, but they admit that this data does not identify a specific problem within the Roma community. We have been informed by Manchester City Council’s Teenage Pregnancy Programme Manager in May 2014 that the City Council had no evidence that there was a higher rate of teenage pregnancies among the Roma community in the Gorton South or Longsight areas. The report authors say that only 4 Roma girls were referred to the Leo Kelly Centre in the past two years, and that one girl continued to attend school during her pregnancy. The authors comment: “It is believed that 50% of the girls may have returned to Romania and 25% have moved elsewhere in the UK.” This comment seems to relate to that same cohort of just 4 girls. In other words, the authors assume in relation to just 2 girls that they returned to Romania, though we are not told on what basis this assumption is made. Moreover, if the authors have indeed established a relationship of trust with the community, as they claim, then it is not clear why they have not taken any steps to ascertain what has happened to the girls if indeed their whereabouts gave cause for concern. Overall, the few cases that are cited and the assumptions that accompany them provide no evidence for the authors’ assertion that “Roma girls are at risk of being kept at home, moved to other areas of the UK or sent back to their country of origin”, even if one were to subscribe to their view that moving to other areas of the UK, or returning to a country of origin within the EU, constitutes a ‘risk’.

Overall the data does not seem to provide evidence that would justify a targeted intervention on this kind of scale. The authors in fact admit that they have no convincing data and that “further research is required”; in light of this, their assertion that there are findings that “indicate the disproportion of teenage pregnancy amongst Roma” is clearly misleading.

Methodology

The report identifies the goals of the intervention as a “consultation” and “assertive outreach”. It does not detail the methods of the consultation, e.g. how respondents were approached, what questions were asked, how the responses were recorded and evaluated, and what ethics protocol was followed to ensure consent and data protection. No details are provided about the successful response rate, either. The authors had shared with us their interim schedule for consultations in September 2013, and we are aware that on at least two occasions of the three that we monitored the consultation had to be cancelled because none of the prospective respondents turned up.

In connection with the outreach component, the authors say that they provided “support”, but their report does not contain any measurable indicator of the effect that this support may have had, nor of the method used to provide the support. Reference is made to a “caseload” of a single outreach worker. The report authors identify their outreach worker as “multi-lingual”, but as far as we are aware that person is not a speaker of Romani or even of Romanian (note that Romani and Romanian are two unrelated languages and the similarity

in name is coincidental). The entire budget for interpreters for the first project year is merely £1,500, thus barely enough for 100 hours, assuming that they applied a rate of £15/hr, which is the normal rate for interpreters who lack formal qualifications. This time allocation will have included the consultations (up to 24 hours by the authors' own estimate) and the preparations (invitations) to the consultation sessions. It is therefore doubtful that an effective outreach work could have been carried out.

The authors report that they relied on 'Roma mentors' for the project, whose age range was 16-22, and that there was 50% gender equality among those mentors. According to our information, the project relied for the most part on just two individuals (this is also confirmed by the Roma Matrix Project website, which takes credit for running the consultation together with BHA, outsourced to the University of Salford).¹ The employment of a sixteen year old on such a project raises ethical issues, which have not been addressed in the report. Given the small scale of the budget that was allocated to mentors (who appear in the budget as 'interpreters'), the fact that only between two and four Roma mentors have been employed by the project, and that one of them is obviously too young to possess any professional experience, it is difficult to accept the authors' assertion in respect of the Roma mentors that the project "promotes employment opportunities consequently impacting upon the success of integration".

The report does not provide a full breakdown of the project team members. The authors refer to a "wide range of people from within BHA and also the International New Arrivals, Travellers and Supplementary Schools Team". In fact, there is some personnel overlap between these teams. According to our information from a meeting with most members of the BHA project team in late August 2013, the team consisted of three staff members of BHA, two staff members of INA/T/SS, and one, the project leader, who habitually moves between BHA and INA/T/SS. In effect, then, the team members belong to just two organisations, and some belong to both at the same time, and so there isn't really any representation of a "wide range" of expertise as claimed in the report.

An issue of particular concern is the reference to an effort to identify individuals "at risk". In the project application submitted to MCC, the authors propose to work with various agencies in order to "share information regarding 'at risk' young people in relation to criminal activity, school drop-out". In a presentation about the project delivered at Cedar Mount School in June 2014, two of the project workers (one of whom, Julie Davies, is co-author of the report) introduced a bullet-point outlining the project's goal to set up a "protocol for Roma". This suggests that the project envisaged a particular, targeted monitoring system for Roma, to be managed by the project team (BHA and associates). The report does not specify what criteria are applied to assess "risks", nor why school attendance and criminal activities should be monitored under a single scheme. One must remember that Roma have been subjected to targeted surveillance and criminalisation throughout their history. For this reason, particular sensitivity is required when working with the Roma community. The authors make repeated references to their "trusting relationships" with the Roma community. It is obvious, however, that neither the authors nor their sponsors have in this case considered the possible impact of the project's goal of systematically monitoring the "risk of criminality" and of sharing personal data on individuals who, based on opaque criteria, are considered to be 'at risk' of becoming criminals. Nor has the possibility been considered, it seems, that such an endeavour might be seen, both within the community and beyond, as an abuse of trust.

Findings

What is labelled in the report as "findings" is in fact a random selection of annotated quotations from conversations. It is not clear whether these were recorded, written down, or reconstructed from memory, and whether the respondents were informed about the intention to use quotes in a report of this kind. It is also not clear on what basis the quotes were

¹ See <https://romamatrix.eu/research/roma-mentoring-project>

selected, and what they represent other than out of context personal views, filtered through the interpretation of the authors and before them, presumably, by the interviewers and the interpreters. It is clear that the authors are trying to use these quotations to make generalisations about attitudes within the Roma community. They seem to be inspired by ethnographic work, but unlike proper ethnographic observations the quotes are not contextualised but elicited through targeted interviews about sensitive personal topics.

Much of the interpretation offered by the authors is inaccurate. For example, the impression they convey that Roma women tend not to work outside the home is not supported by evidence. The authors claim that, as a result of gender roles within the Roma community, the only work option available to women was to sell the Big Issue. This claim is misleading. First, the preference for selling the Big Issue derives from the restrictions on employment that were in force until January 2014. Second, as many men from the Roma community sell the Big Issue as women. And finally, the fact that Roma women sell the Big Issue shows precisely that Roma women are active contributors to income generation outside the home. Statements of the kind "early marriage is a rite of passage" are further proof that the authors do not have deep insights into everyday cultural practices in the Roma community. In light of this and other generalising and inaccurate statements contained in the report, we find the authors' assertion that Roma show "a significant level of mistrust between the genders" to be misrepresentative and potentially stigmatising of the community.

Conclusions

The authors portray an overall picture of the Roma community as one that is characterised by tension between the genders, by cultural pressure on girls to marry early, by a propensity to take conspiracy action to remove girls from the reach of authorities and thus to put them "at risk", and by an alleged "deep-rooted mistrust of outsiders" which puts the community as a whole beyond the influence of municipal institutions. At the same time, the authors portray themselves as qualified experts who have developed a "trusting relationship" that puts them in a unique position to ensure the safety of vulnerable members of the Roma community who are being put at risk, allegedly, by their own families and cultural practices.

The reality, however, is that Roma in Manchester are making use of a wide range of opportunities available to them in education, employment, and advice services. Young Roma are increasingly becoming vocal in articulating the needs of their community and in mediating between community members and local institutions in an independent manner, without the need to be coached or managed by others. Moreover, Roma culture neither conforms to the stereotype portrayed by the authors in their report, nor can it be seen as static or resistant to change. The authors admit that attitudes are undergoing change, and it is our impression that just like any other immigrant population, Roma are adapting to local circumstances. This has been acknowledged by Manchester City Council, which no longer pursues a distinct 'Roma Strategy' and is now instead rightly concentrating its efforts on directing Roma to mainstream support and advice services. The rationale for the BHA intervention is thus flawed and not evidence based. There is a genuine risk that if this intervention is allowed to continue it might contribute to stigmatising the Roma population, and in this way to perpetuating mistrust, exclusion and segregation.

PART II: Comments from external reviewers

Dr. Celia Donert

Lecturer in History, University of Liverpool

(10 July 2014)

My evaluation of the BHA report will comment on the following three aspects: the rationale for the intervention, the methodology used, and the reliability of the findings. As an academic, not a practitioner, I comment from this particular perspective. While I understand that the report is not written as an academic study, I will nevertheless comment from this perspective insofar as the rationale / methodology / findings of this study are likely to affect policy or intervention in local communities.

Rationale

The BHA report explains that the rationale for the project is to ‘understand the occurrence of early marriage, particularly from a gender perspective’, as well as to ‘understand and address the occurrence of disengagement from education by the Eastern European Roma community and how drop-out is influenced by gender and cultural expectations.’ This is a valid aim, although it relies on generalisation and inaccurate labelling (‘the Eastern European Roma community’ is not a meaningful category). If the study aims to investigate ‘gender and cultural expectations’, then the methodology should surely include a robust and differentiated – rather than homogenising – approach to ‘Roma culture’. The BHA report notes that Roma in Manchester a) reside in certain districts in the city and b) originate from specific districts in particular countries (mainly Romania). Likewise, the report notes that participants in the study mainly originated from Romania, specifically Timișoara, Țândărei, Fetesti and Cluj (NB: these are regions with significant differences, geographically, historically and socially, not only for Roma but also the rest of the Romanian population). However, the report does not reflect on how these particularities might influence participants’ responses.

Methodology

The rationale for the intervention relies heavily on statistics about the number of Roma (allegedly) residing in the UK, the number of teenage pregnancies, and the number of school dropouts amongst girls. As evidence of the number of Roma residing in the UK, the study cites the 2012 / 2013 studies by the University of Salford SHUSU. Not mentioned, however, is the fact that the methodology used in this report caused controversy amongst scholars in the field of Romani Studies. The controversy centred on the methods used to estimate the numbers of Roma in the UK, which cast doubt on the reliability of the figures cited, as well as the desirability (in both policy and scholarly terms) of attempting such an exercise.

The use of statistics also raises questions about classification and labelling, which leads to my second (and major) concern about the report. Although the BHA report is admirably specific in its introduction about the origins of Roma currently residing in Manchester (not only country, but also region of origin – although without giving any source to support this claim), it also speaks in broad terms about ‘East European Roma’. This is not a meaningful concept, I would suggest, for this type of intervention. Compounding this problem of generalisation, the BHA report cites from a European Commission publication (Corsi et al., 2010) alleging that ‘Roma girls’ universally have lower attainments in education, etc. Cross-referencing confirms that the EC report also asserts this (stereotypical) view of ‘Roma girls’ without providing any evidence drawn from academic research to support it.

A further problem – which the report itself acknowledges – is the apparent absence of evidence correlating the rise in teenage pregnancies and school dropout rates among girls in particular districts with specific Roma communities. The report is vague on this point,

suggesting that 'further research' is necessary. The report also suggests that available statistics probably under-represent the actual number of Roma girls without educational provision, without explaining why.

In terms of the methods used (interviews and focus groups), use of outreach workers, community mentors and institutional partners, I would have been interested to read more about how this worked in practice (selection / training of outreach workers / mentors etc).

Findings

The report notes that interviewees were from different regions in Romania (Timișoara, Țândărei, Fetesti and Cluj) and thus had different cultural traditions. (Romania is indeed highly differentiated by region / locality). These differences are not reflected in the reporting, which takes the form of unattributed and decontextualised quotations from interviewees. There is no indication as to how the interview material has been selected for this report, and perhaps there is much more evidence than that published here. However, the findings that are presented do not really substantiate the assertions made in the final analysis. For example, the report mentions differing expectations placed on girls and boys, but this is not specific to Roma, and we are not given any sense of how the particularities of Roma communities in Manchester influence these different cultural expectations.

Overall, the attempt to establish assertive outreach programmes for some Roma, including the use of community mentors, seems worthwhile and welcome, but I would also welcome a more robust methodology that would allow for a more nuanced understanding of the communities in question, rather than relying on statistics and categories ('East European Roma') that run the risk of pathologising Roma culture as an undifferentiated whole.

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Dr. Sampson Lee Blair

Editor, Contemporary Perspectives in Family Research, Department of Sociology, The State University of New York
(12 July 2014)

Many readers may not be immediately familiar with the Roma population. In the beginning of the report, it would have been useful to provide a more clear definition of the population. Second, the report contradicts itself in regard to the description of the Roma population. At times, they are described as being very diverse in their cultural traits, but it also states that they have traditional customs and heritage. While both points can be supported, it would have been beneficial to better explain these two points. Third, a clear description of Roma norms concerning marriage, fertility, and gender roles would also have been helpful. Fourth, there is no clear explanation of how the success of the outcomes of the program is measured. Funding agencies and government officials will typically want to know how the program is working, and they usually prefer clear and quantifiable measures.

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Dr Barbara Giovanna Bello
Researcher in Sociology of Law and Anthropology of Law, University of Milano
(6 August 2014)

My evaluation of the BHA report will comment on the following three aspects: rationale for the intervention, the method, and the reliability of the findings. I tried to provide comments based on my experience as a practitioner and scholar.

Rationale

The rationale seems based on the assumption that early marriages and Roma girls' drop-out or disengagement are inherently linked: the first sentence of the section entitled "Rationale of the Romani Wellbeing Project" explains that "[d]ue to the level of complexity in identifying and engaging with girls who have, or are at risk of dropping out, there is a definite need to understand the occurrence of early marriage, particularly from a gender perspective".

This might be true, but when reading the section entitled 'Early Marriage and Teenage Pregnancy in Manchester', the statistics and secondary data used don't really explain whether early marriages are the only or main variable leading to school drop-out. Moreover, it is true that the topic of Roma girls' early marriages is under-theorized and under-researched, but there are a few references - both in scholarly literature and in non-scholarly literature - that could have been taken into account for the rationale's sake.

Another aspect that needs further explanation is whether the rationale refers just to the barriers within the Roma communities (e.g. gender expectations and roles within the communities involved in the project) or also to the out-group relations. In fact, while the last paragraph of the section entitled "Origins of the new migrant Roma" entails a strong assertion on the fact that "Roma are subject to high levels of discrimination", the issue of discrimination against Roma doesn't seem to be taken into account across other relevant parts of the report, especially in the findings. The choice to concentrate just on the causes within the Roma community is valid, but needs to be clearly expressed and considered in the whole report. Again, the section titled 'Early Marriage and Teenage Pregnancy in Manchester' starts with very general statements on the situation of Roma girls in relation to age of marriage and education (ref. Corsi) that refer to Roma girls in Europe. Only on the second page, the reader understands that the first 10 lines of this part do not refer to Manchester. This is misleading. How much the situation in Manchester mirrors the data edited by Corsi et al. (and, above all, how are the data collected in Corsi et al.'s report?) is an open question.

The final issue that I identified, is the categorization used in the rationale (and in the rest of the report). Terms like 'Roma', 'the Eastern European Roma community' and 'Roma girls' are not explained and are used as monoliths. Besides, the report does not seem to take into consideration other grounds (e.g. religion - except with regard to contraception), social status, parents' level of education, etc.) which may (or may not) play a role in issues related to early marriages, virginity, sexuality, etc.. Lastly, although the report acknowledges that 'Roma population cannot be described as a homogenous group - due to differences in language, religion and cultural norms), the rationale and the methodology express a view of the 'Roma culture' as homogenous. Even early marriages are presented as a Roma-specific practice, rather than the outcome of several interplaying factors.

Methodology

The methodology does not help to fill in the gaps identified in the rationale. Categories are taken for granted and used without elaborating on how the diversity within and between Roma communities is considered. This is even more striking because the adoption of the valuable assertive outreach approach to engagement, and the involvement of Roma young mentors imply a close relation with the Roma communities and detachment from pre-defined

and generalizing labels. Some references and explanations are also needed with regard to the statement that “available statistics probably under-represent the actual number of Roma girls without educational provision”.

As far as the interviews are concerned, it is not clear to me how the sample was built, the selection criteria, nor whether the diversity within the Roma community in Manchester had been taken into account in order to build the sample and to select mentors. How representative is the sample?

Findings

The presentation of the findings does not really correspond or support the content of the final analysis and the conclusion made by BHA.

According to the section ‘Analysis’, the consultation emphasizes “the inequalities experienced by the Roma community, particularly in relation to economic, educational and social exclusion”, but I can’t find any quotation or/and comment in the section ‘Findings’ that support this sentence.

Besides, in the section ‘Analysis’, there is mention of the intersectional perspective, but nowhere is explained what theoretical and empirical implications intersectionality has (that should have been shortly introduced in the methodology). In that very sentence, it is also affirmed that “women appear more likely to experience inequality both within and outside the community”: again, it seems to me that the focus of the findings presented in the section ‘Findings’ is mainly on the relations within the Roma community, rather than on the relation between Roma and non-Roma people. The same can be said about the assertion written in the conclusion of the report, stating that “Roma in the UK and on continental Europe have developed a deep-rooted mistrust of outsiders, limiting forms of interaction and engagement with social care providers”.

In the sub-section “Early Marriage and teenage pregnancy”, one respondent explains that she can marry when she wants (that means potentially also at a later stage) and another one explains that the age of marriage is moving from 12 to 17-18. How does this higher age impact on her/their school attendance? The report also does not explain whether and how girls and boys manage to oppose resistance to unwanted marriage and to negotiate new rules with their parents, or they have internalized and accepted the idea of marrying early.

Suggested readings

Kocze, A. and Raluca, M.P., 2009. *Missing Intersectionality: Race/Ethnicity, Gender, and Class in Current Research and Policies on Romani Women in Europe*. Budapest: CEU University Press

European Roma and Travellers Forum and the Romani Women Informal Platform ‘Phenjali’, 2013. *Making early marriage in Roma communities a global concern*. Available at: http://www.ertf.org/images/Reports/Making_Early_Marriage_in_Roma_Communities_a_global_concern.pdf (accessed 15 July 2014).

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In the text that I read, BHA (<http://www.thebha.org.uk/>) reports on its concept, data collection, and the results of its intervention and outreach among Roma in Manchester. First, we must acknowledge the initiative taken by this organization to conduct research in order to better understand the problems and the needs of the target group from their perspective, and in order to involve them in addressing these problems.

The project reportedly draws on the BHA's previous experience, on the work of a part-time employee trained as Outreach worker and 4 mediators ("mentors" - 2 women; 2 men). It investigates themes like "gender differences", "family relations and projects", "early pregnancy", "school attendance" by interviewing 55 Roma people in 12 "consultations" (individual or group interviews). The work also offers an insight into the complex work to improve inclusion, interaction and understanding among communities and with British society: "Early marriage and teenage pregnancy within the Roma community can appear to be at odds with the ideas of equality, but emphasis must be placed on support which is responsive, holistic, long-term and orientated towards the future".

Despite the significant effort to approach the Roma's point of view, and some interesting data about gender in Roma families, we must note some important biases in the report.:

1. The statistics used as an introductory argument seem to come from nowhere. When it is said that 3000 Roma in Manchester (2012) constitute a growing migration, what numbers is this being compared with? A map of Manchester would have been helpful. No critique is offered in regard to the Leo Kelly Center (teen pregnancy) figures when the claim is made that "4 girls have been referred to the centre since April 2012, with just one girl maintaining attendance (although attendance is currently at 44%). It is believed that 50% of the girls may have returned to Romania and 25% have moved elsewhere in the UK. 75% of the girls attending the Teen Pregnancy Reintegration Service were in year 10, with one girl in year 9" - it's not clear if 50%, 25% refers to the 4 girls, which would be a way (Leo Kelly's, BHA's?) to compensate for small numbers through percentages. It's the same problem with other percentages: 84% Roma girls quit school - from how many?
2. Some issues are formulated as *a priori* problems and not questioned: the women's vulnerability, the risk of school drop-out, the cultural differences (compared with Hungarian Roma for example, but also non-Roma) etc.
3. Unfortunately, we don't learn more about the methodology used: how were the themes operationalized? what were the questions asked by the interviewers? how were the Roma mediators perceived by the interviewed Roma?
3. The data are poorly presented in few quoted fragments of statements from the interviewed (we don't know who's speaking, a man or a woman, what is her /his age, is she/he a parent or a teen, etc.).
4. The analysis is summarized in just a few lines. The statements formulated seem not to be interpretations of the data gathered but a general critique of gender relations: "seeking employment for women is complex due to the cultural pressures to conform"; "significant level of mistrust between genders" - are we non-Roma so different concerning the domain of domestic gender roles or the negotiation between employment and family duties, private and public? At the very least, this has to be demonstrated. The conclusion points to gender inequalities but this isn't a new issue, either among Roma or among other migrant populations or British people.

5. The very short bibliography offers a partial explanation for the weakness of the analysis. The BHA text lacks any consideration of many reports and articles about early marriages in Roma communities which are already published and available in English on line, and the authors apparently are unaware that gender in Roma and Gypsy communities is the theme of numerous books and articles (Okely, Gay y Blasco, Hasdeu, Tesar, Vincze, Kocze, Bitu and Morteanu, etc.), and that the gender-school relation has also been problematized for 30 years in the sociology of education and in national and international policy making, and that the gendered honor-shame-respect system is a key issue in British anthropology. All these issues are not addressed in the report, which, in my opinion, means that the main point of the report has been missed.

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Links to further documents:

[European Roma and Traveller Forum \(ERTF\) statement on the BHA report](#)

["BHA Final Report" \(year 1 report on intervention funded by Manchester City Council's Equalities Funding Programme\), 27 June 2014](#)

[Background information on the BHA project, provided by Manchester City Council's Equalities Team, June 2014](#)

[BHA application to Manchester City Council's Equalities Funding Programme, January 2013](#)

[MigRom project pilot survey on birth rates among the Romanian Roma community in Manchester, August 2014](#)

MigRom ('The immigration of Romanian Roma to Western Europe: Causes, effects and future engagement strategies') is funded by the European Union under the 7th Framework Programme call on 'Dealing with diversity and cohesion: the case of the Roma in the European Union' (GA319901). MigRom is approved and monitored by the University of Manchester's Committee on the Ethics of Research on Human Beings (Project Ref. 12412) and by the Ethical Review in FP7 protocol (Proposal ID 319901).

<http://romani.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/migrom/>