

ROMA: ONE PEOPLE – MANY LIVES

INTRODUCTION

CONCLUSION

Have you ever thought about Roma people living in Ireland? Have you ever wondered about their lives? Wondered what they want for their children? What they think about school? Where they might work? What they might do at weekends?

Roma: One People – Many Lives is an opportunity for you to meet a number of Roma people who live, study and work here in Ireland. Each of them has a story to tell. Through this exhibition they are inviting you to learn about their lives and their hopes and dreams for the future.

Before you begin – take a moment to read some facts about Roma:

DIVERSE ORIGINS, SIMILAR EXPERIENCES

There are approximately 10–12 million Roma people living in Europe. This means that they are the largest minority ethnic group in Europe.

Within the European Union (EU) the term Roma is used to describe groups of people with more or less similar cultural characteristics, such as Roma, Sinti, Kale, Travellers (including Irish Travellers) and Gens du voyage.

Roma have faced a history of racism for centuries. The Holocaust had a devastating impact on their community. While there is no definitive figure available, estimates put the number of people killed in the hundreds of thousands. Experiences of racism and discrimination continue today across Europe. Public leaders have used racist language against Roma and Travellers. In some European countries violence and hate crime against Roma is rising. Many Roma children are educated separately from other children, and many leave school early. Roma and Traveller families are also repeatedly at risk of forced eviction from their homes and often experience discrimination when looking for somewhere to live.

These critical human rights issues faced by Roma are recognised by the European Commission and the European Council. These institutions have called on all EU member states, including Ireland, to develop National Roma Integration Strategies that will promote inclusion of Roma and Travellers in ways that will make a practical difference to their lives.

ROMA IN IRELAND

While there are no official statistics, Pavee Point estimates that there are around 5,000 Roma living in Ireland. Many of the Irish Roma community originally come from Romania. However, many others come from the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Poland and Bulgaria. Many live in the greater Dublin area but some live in Cork, Athlone, Donegal and other towns around the country. Of course, many Roma people living in Ireland today are Irish citizens.

CUSTOMS AND CULTURAL PRACTICES

Roma are not all the same. Many of those living in Ireland may share some of the same customs and cultural practices but there are also many differences amongst them. Like Irish people, there are local traditions that are not shared by all; there are differences in language between people from different regions; and there are customs that are unique to some depending on where people are from and how they are raised.

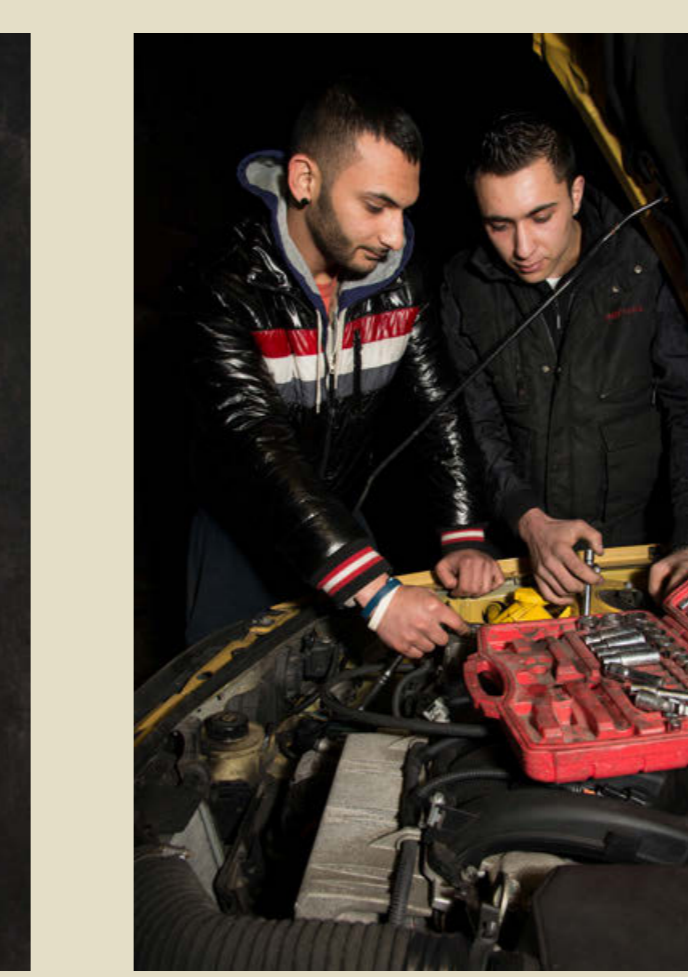
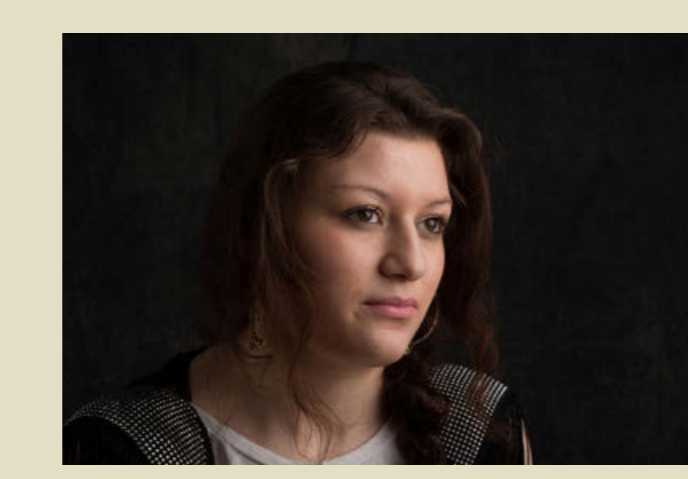
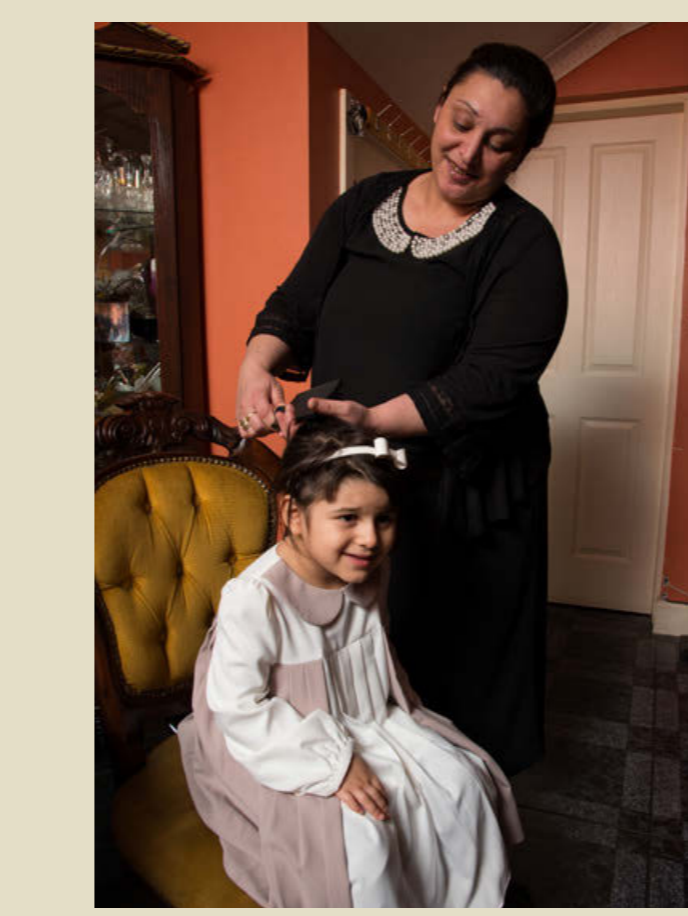
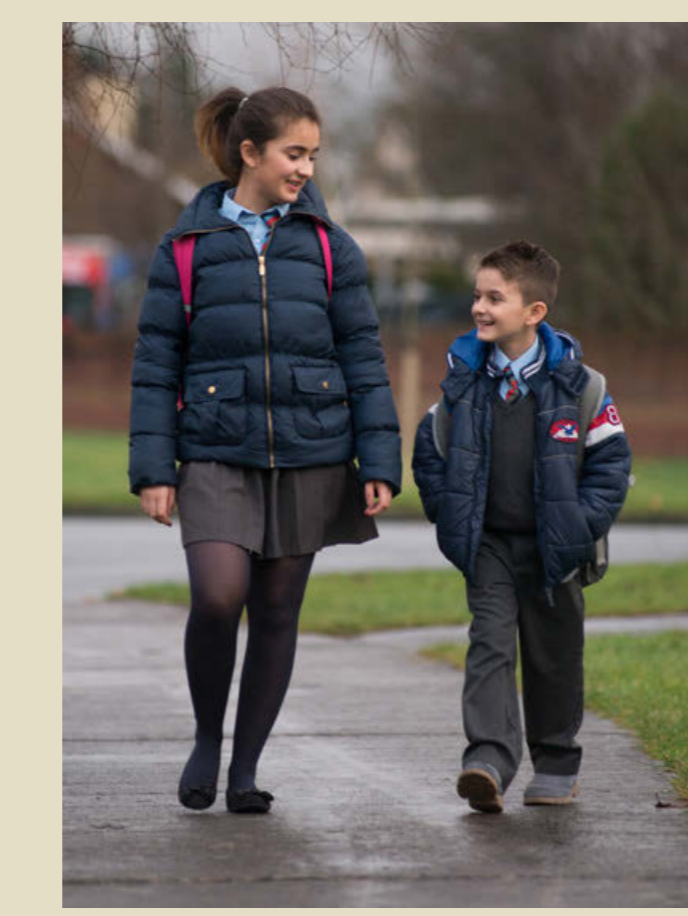
CHALLENGES FACED BY ROMA IN IRELAND

Many Roma people come to Ireland with the hope of a better life for their families. As EU citizens they have the right to move to and live in other European countries. There are many challenges for anyone settling into a new country – learning a new language, finding somewhere to live, finding a job, making friends and getting things work in a new environment.

Many Roma in Ireland find it difficult to gain employment due to factors including racism, discrimination and lack of training and formal education. They report experiences of discrimination when trying to access housing and supports and services such as social welfare and healthcare. In addition, many Roma are not entitled to any social welfare support and are often living in poverty.

Roma have often been portrayed in a negative light in the Irish media and are often associated with criminal activities and 'organised begging'.

Roma also experience a high level of racism in Ireland. Pavee Point and Nasc have noted high levels of documented violence against Roma in recent times. This has included attacks on houses and verbal abuse. Roma women in particular report not being allowed into shops, being prevented from accessing services and experiencing racist comments from some service providers.



WE ARE NOT ALL THE SAME

Roma people are not all the same. We do not all wear the same clothes. We do have our own language – but there are many dialects. (Jennifer)

Everyone sees begging as part of our culture. We're not cultural beggars. This is not in our culture. People beg because they are forced to – they have no choice. (Gabi)

Romania is a big country and like Ireland has many different areas. In each area there are different traditions – so there are many differences between us depending on what part of Romania you come from. (Emanuel Snr)

All people are different – like Irish people – different faces, different minds, different attitudes – this is the same everywhere. (Iosca)

When some people see us – they just see our skins and not us as women. (Veta)

If you look at my hand you see five fingers – but no two fingers are the same. This is also true of people – we are not all the same. If people take the time you can explain this so that they understand. (Ana)

WHY WE ARE HERE

We didn't have a nice life in Romania because we were persecuted by the Romanian government. So that's when we decided to come to Ireland to ask for help. We wanted to start a new life in Ireland. (Jennifer)

Why do we have to talk about people leaving? There are Irish people living in England, living in the United States. Why do they move? They went because they think they will have a better life. We think we will have a better life if we choose to live in Ireland. Ireland is our home now. (Gabi)

I came from Slovakia to escape from racism and discrimination and to stop living in poverty – to have a better life in Ireland. (Monika)

I was born in Ireland. Adela is ainm dom. Is as Cill Choca mé. (Adela)

We came to Ireland in 2007. Familie Ciucu are a 'stateless' family. All my children were born in Germany. We came seeking asylum here in Ireland because we were persecuted in Romania. (Stelian Snr)

I came in Ireland to ensure that my children would have a better future and to give them what they didn't have in Romania, like school and the chance to study. Especially study... so they can have a job in the future and they won't be despised and stereotyped to infinity. (Doina)

My husband is studying at the moment – so most weekends and evenings the books are out. (Emilia)

I don't go to discos – but I like to dance at home. I also follow X Factor – I love to see people singing. (Miriam)

If it isn't raining I am outside playing soccer with my friends – most of whom are Irish. If it's raining, sometimes I play the piano... If I was to buy a new CD I would buy the Fur Elise by Beethoven. (Emanuel Snr)

I enjoy watching football and playing cards, especially poker. (Ion)

I hope in the future to be a community development worker. I am very proud of the work I do. (Gabi)

IRELAND IS OUR HOME NOW

I am a mother of 12 children. It's a very busy life – starting each morning at 7.00am. Every day I send 10 of my children to school. After school the oldest children help the younger ones with their homework. They are good students. (Doina)

For the last two years we had a shop in the town. Very few Irish people came in, then we employed an Irish girl for a while, and some came in when she was working, but we had to close it down a few weeks ago; business had got very bad. (Emanuel Snr)

As a pastor I visit homes of people – each week maybe one or two homes. I see how people are getting on. If they need help. Sometimes I would pray with them or just spend time listening to them and why they might have stopped coming to church. I don't get paid for what I do – but it takes up 4 or 5 days of my week. (Ghiocel)

I wish people around me would view me as a normal person and not see me as someone who came to Ireland to do terrible things or to beg. I would wish that people see us differently – they probably think I came here to hustle or do things that are not legal, but I honestly came here to help myself, my family and to have a better future. (Bianca)

WORK: PAID AND UNPAID

I came here to look for work. It was very hard in the beginning – having no English. Then my children started going to school and I now speak better English and have found work – so has one of my sons. (Daniel)

Now I am finished in school and am awaiting for a bright future... I applied for Garda College and am waiting for an answer. In the future I hope things will change for Roma people but until then I have to go out there and start doing good things myself. (Ricarda)

I hope in the future to have a better life. I hope that people will see us as human, that the discrimination will stop and that people will think how it makes us feel. This is the only way we can have a chance to realise our dreams. (Emilia)

HOPES AND DREAMS

Ten years from now I want to be working and getting my own money. I would like to be coming home to my own house, finding my wife and children, watching TV. At weekends I would go visiting families, brothers and cousins. (Stelian Jnr)

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I want our children to think of themselves as Roma and as Irish. Not thinking about who I am and where my parents are from – just go to school and get a good education. (Gabi)

Members of the Roma community living in Ireland are making this country their home. However, inclusion in Irish society is not an easy journey. Many Roma people in Ireland continue to experience prejudice and discrimination in their daily lives.

This exhibition shows a snapshot of the real lives of Roma people living here. It aims to challenge some of the stereotypes about Roma people which are based on inaccurate and misleading information.

A commitment by policy-makers and elected representatives to ensure that laws and policies address the challenges experienced by Roma can make a real difference to their lives. As a citizen you can also make a difference.

TAKE ACTION

- Find a way to introduce yourself to Roma people living in your community – maybe at the school gate, in your local shop...
- Talk to your local politicians about what can be done to promote greater inclusion of Roma and Travellers in local and national policies, including a progressive National Traveller/Roma Integration Strategy in Ireland.
- Help tackle the existing stereotypes of Roma people. For example, let others know that begging is not a cultural norm – it is a last resort and a survival strategy.
- Let people know that many Roma come from situations of racism and human rights violations.
- Explain to others that most Roma in Ireland are EU citizens and have the right to live in Ireland, just as Irish people can live anywhere in the EU.
- Recognise that many Roma in Ireland have jobs and are part of the community in which they live – although some may hide their identity because of their fear of racism.
- Promote the inclusion of Roma in your community by reaching out and including members of the Roma community in local activities and celebrations.
- Inform yourself further about the situation facing Roma people in Ireland by contacting groups such as the Equality Authority (www.equality.ie), Nasc (www.nascireland.org), Pavee Point (www.paveepoint.ie) or The European Roma and Travellers Forum (www.ert.org) and see what else you can do.



THE LAST WORD

So to end I just want to say that I am proud to be Roma and I want to keep this tradition and wish it for my children and their children as well. (Lorin)

It's a better life here in Ireland than back home. I am working here. But it's not easy for a Roma woman, wherever we go we face racism and discrimination. It never stops. (Monika)

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