

In December 2013, the Council of Europe made a recommendation on how to have effective Roma integration measures in the Member States. I am one of the lucky individuals tasked with carrying out interviews to support the research which will contribute to the development of the National Roma Integration Strategies.

The information that is being collected will be reported in order to help inform and guide United Kingdom's Gypsy Roma and Traveller activists but also shape debates over policy directions in the UK and in EU. In the EU the report will inform stakeholders including the EU commission how well the UK is responding to the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies.

I have seen good practises in Wales, where experts on Roma Gypsy and Traveller field train police officers and provide support and access to quality education. I would like to emphasise on the importance of training police officers. Eastern European Roma Migrants have suffered unimaginable injustice by the authorities in their home countries, and often have a certain fear and distrust of these authorities. This is why It is extremely important that the Welsh Government promotes equal access to services while building trust with these communities and open a dialogue. First we need to take the lack of national data in to consideration in order to effectively work on Eastern European Roma strategies and inclusion. Clearly, it will be very hard to work on strategies for a community when we know very little about them, for example population data, housing data, what kind of help and support they require. To elaborate more, how many Roma are in Wales? Where do they live? These are some of the few questions that need to be answered.

There is a framework called Travelling to a Better Future which has been developed in recognition of the need to address the inequalities experienced by the Gypsy and Traveller community. However, Eastern European Roma Migrants are not included. I would like to address this issue with an important but simple question: what is the reason? Is it because these groups of people have a different lifestyle and traditions compared to gypsies and travellers? Or does the government have a problem politically acknowledging this group of people? What I mean by political acknowledgement is setting up policies, preventing underrepresentation in the government and also strongly encouraging education as the primary way to improve life, opportunities and circumstances.

Also, in my humble opinion I do not think that the work that should be done for Roma people living in Wales should be left on the hands of local authorities because some of these authorities may have discriminatory, stereotypical views gained from biased media reports which will prevent progress and effectively counteract any good work done in this field. The policy making should be centralised and the work should be carried out by the welsh government.

Yesterday just before my speech I ran into a report on EU Roma Communities in Cardiff published by the Ethnic Minority Communities First in 2011.

As I have limited time I will not get into details, however I strongly encourage the policymakers have a look at this report to gain a wide understanding of the current situations. As you may already know, there are many organizations including the one I am working with that will be more than happy to assist with any further information required to set up the policies that need to be in place to properly help Roma integration in Wales.

Finally, I would like to share with you my own personal experiences. I am a Hungarian Roma. The situation in Hungary for minorities and specially Roma people are still really bad. I would like to draw your attention to the Roma genocide not too long ago, which is a strong reminder of how extremely scary the situation still is. I could also stand here all day talking about the discrimination, disadvantages that Roma people have to experience in Hungary everyday but instead I would like to focus on progress we can make in Wales. I am so grateful for the opportunity to live and study in Wales which has personally helped me escape the nightmares that are still very much present in Eastern Europe. I hope to be able to help more people from my community to be socially included in to a society like Wales where there is hope for a better future.

Thank you for your attention.