



**Civil Society
Consulting**



**Press release
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A new report by Civil Society Consulting (CSC) evaluates Luton Roma Trust's successful model of support for Luton's Roma community, illustrating how a grassroots organisation is directly addressing structural barriers faced by the UK's most marginalised population – providing a replicable model of effective support.

Coming to the end of their National Lottery Community Fund grant, Luton Roma Trust (LRT) sought an external evaluation to demonstrate their value and impact. Civil Society Consulting (CSC) was commissioned to conduct an independent report which spotlights the specific needs of the local Roma community and to assess LRT's pioneering support across healthcare, education, welfare, and employment with recommendations for their long-term organisational sustainability and development.

Roma experience a unique set of challenges relating to migration and discrimination. The report is participatory-led, with the aim of capturing the multiple and complex barriers that this marginalised community faces. Beneficiary surveys and interviews were used to gather data, as well as the perspectives of Luton-based organisations that have collaborated with LRT. Due to high levels of institutional mistrust, digital exclusion, and language barriers, CSC contracted a Luton-based, Romanian-speaking consultant to lead the qualitative and quantitative research. The report is further enriched with case study narratives and an analysis from internationally renowned expert in participatory research with Roma and other Gypsy and Traveller Populations, Margaret Greenfields (Professor of Social Policy, Anglia Ruskin University).

Crina Morteau, Manager at Luton Roma Trust commented ***'This report shows that our services are essential to the Roma community in Luton. We are very grateful to the National Community Fund and Civil Society Consulting as well as all other partners involved in this project for their dedication and support throughout this process. We are astonished with the findings which gives us the impetus to continue providing quality services for one of the most marginalised communities in the UK.'***

CSC Director Francesca Godfrey who led the evaluation commented, ***'Our report shines a light on the impact and legacy of Luton Roma Trust, a user-led grassroots organisation which has been carrying out some truly pioneering work on public health and social***

integration in the Luton Roma community, and draws attention to the need for mainstream policy mechanisms to fortify progress 'on the ground'. The project signifies the importance of community engagement with marginalised GRT communities, as it enables the community to be included in decision making and it allows their views, opinions to be heard and amplified.'

Professor Margaret Greenfields added *"This report strongly underlines both the critical importance of having grass-roots, community-led organisations who work to support Roma migrants, and simultaneously the level of disconnect from services, lack of access to mainstream sources of knowledge and reliance on personal networks which often occurs for Roma people who are building a new life after migration. The findings clearly flag up areas for further development, the remarkable work already undertaken, and the level of added value to both the local Roma community and service providers of having Luton Roma Trust operating in the local area".*

Key Findings:

The report showcases LRT's ability to assist the Roma community in a multitude of areas, including health, employment, statutory entitlements, wellbeing, and integration into UK society:

- LRT's capacity to represent the Roma population in Luton, empowering their identities and enabling a greater sense of belonging in the UK, yielded remarkable results; **100% of participants reported greater contact with outside communities after receiving support from LRT;**
- Participants praised the quality of services, reporting improvements to mental health and increased accessibility to the UK job market; **100% of survey respondents reporting that they are 'very likely' or 'likely' to recommend LRT to other members of the community;**
- LRT's language services, as well as their ability to address specific and complex issues relating to work, education, housing, and healthcare, were found to be highly valued;
- There was substantial evidence of the LRT's value to older respondents, as well as data indicating women were more likely than males to report social isolation and loneliness;
- One of LRT's main goals is to help Roma become independent/self-sufficient; the organisation has made excellent progress in this regard, but there is still more work to do;
- Consistently, participants agree that LRT is the reason for their continued residence in Luton.

The survey results generated insights into the intersecting challenges that the Roma population faces, which are indicative of prevalent issues across the UK.

Key findings include:

- Structural racism as the most pressing issue impacting Roma integration and empowerment;
- Other prevalent systemic disadvantages were difficulty accessing local public services and government assistance, housing problems, and social isolation;
- Low educational attainment was another compounding factor impacting social inclusion: with **only 15% of respondents reporting their level of English to be 'very good'**;
- The reality of mistrust of authority and barriers to access to healthcare on Covid-19 vaccination uptake were evidenced by the fact that **96% of the participants reported they were unvaccinated**, following trends found across Europe in relation to Roma communities' access to health.

Recommendations:

CSC and Professor Greenfields worked together to develop a series of recommendations based on an analysis of the survey data, case studies derived from interviews, and community perspectives. These recommendations will support LRT to tailor their programmes to the community's needs and develop organisational capacity and partnership working.

- The report honed in on key areas for LRT to focus on and develop programmes around, including the impact of discrimination, gender/age disparities, and vaccination advocacy;
- Increasing the volume of English language classes, which is considered fundamental to integration, and developing English programmes that provide beneficiaries with the language tools to communicate with English-speaking service providers;
- Beneficiaries and other stakeholders identified room for development in leveraging cooperation with connector services, local commissioning groups, and authorities, citing LRT's potential in co-producing immigration advice and integration initiatives;
- There is a need for a shift in organisation strategy to strengthen LRT's sustainability, and focus on long-term community development rather than crisis fighting;

In partnership with statutory agencies, **Luton Roma Trust** helps the local Roma community, many of whom have migrated to the UK in recent years, to establish their lives in Luton and integrate holistically into life in the UK. With lived experience as its heart, the organisation works with the community delivering three pillars of support: empowering the Roma community in Luton, advocating for the Roma community in Luton, and developing a sense of cultural identity.

Civil Society Consulting CIC (CSC) is a not-for-profit with a mission to strengthen the social sector by providing high quality and people-oriented consultancy to civil society organisations, at a not-for-profit price. CSC aims to empower grassroots social action leaders from ethnically diverse backgrounds and their organisations to best cater for the communities they know and care about.

Professor **Margaret Greenfields (Anglia Ruskin University)** has over 30 years' experience of working with Gypsy, Traveller and Roma communities. She was an advisory partner on this evaluation project, lending her expertise to advise the process and research methods from an

academic and ethical standpoint, and to provide a critical comparative perspective and analysis of the findings.

Note to editor:

The Roma are Europe's largest and most disadvantaged ethnic minority group, migrating to the UK in larger numbers following the expansion of the EU. Despite efforts in recent years to promote Roma inclusion, such as the 2019 report from the Women and Equalities Committee report, Roma in the UK continue to one of the most disadvantaged ethnic groups with poor socioeconomic, educational, and healthcare outcomes; Brexit and the pandemic have only served to exacerbate these systemic inequities. There is currently no clear national strategy for Roma integration; their identities are frequently conflated with those of UK Gypsies and Travellers, and the specific challenges they encounter are often obscured. LRT is a rare one organisation providing the holistic support, expertise, and advocacy needed to facilitate Roma integration and filling the service provision gap.

The report is available here:

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