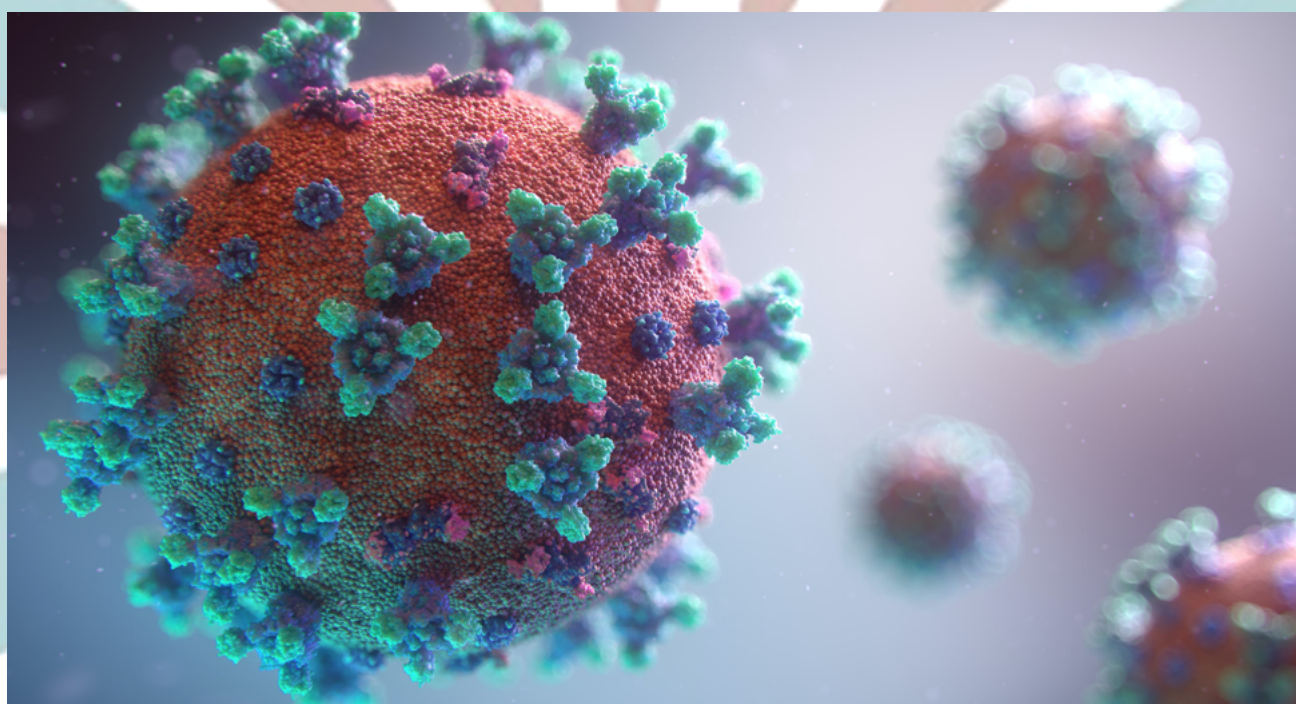


The Roma, COVID-19, and Lockdown impact

Scotland Report
By Ando Glaso



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Who are we?

We are a Roma-led Scottish charity that has been established in Glasgow as a result of a successful engagement with the local Roma community. The organisation was initiated by a dedicated group of volunteers who share the passion and desire to further encourage links between the Roma and Scottish diverse cultures at several levels including; support and understanding through the promotion of arts and music programmes, educational workshops and seminars, conferences and events at local and national level.

In Brief, Ando Glaso has been established not only to strengthen and facilitate support to the Roma community; but also to work with various diverse communities and stakeholders to ensure Roma communities are empowered through celebrating and advancing their cultural heritage as part of their uniqueness, while moving towards enhancing their national, inclusive, identity in Scotland as equal citizens.

We use Roma cultural heritage as means of engagement and existing assets which we build on to create opportunities for work, upskilling and social inclusion. We apply asset based community development approaches to our work as Roma culture and traditions have been historically very important for Roma communities, often providing the most reliable source of income. Therefore we identified culture and arts, particularly music and dance as a medium of engagement, interaction, inclusion and development. Combining our expertise in Roma cultural heritage with experiences from the creative industries and long-term, tested, community development approaches we developed a unique way of working with and supporting a large number of Roma people in Scotland and beyond.

In modern days, opportunities for Roma people to practice their traditional crafts have mostly vanished and rich Gypsy music traditions are being replaced by more modern trends. As Europe's largest ethnic minority, Roma people remain largely marginalized, often living in segregated ghettos and are a target for populist media and politics. We see similar trends in the UK and Roma people's rich cultural heritage often remains an uncharted territory for Roma empowerment and inclusion.

At Ando Glaso, we see the vicious circle of marginalisation/ghettoisation of Roma communities, causing social and cultural deprivation that affects important aspects of Roma people's lives from mental to social and financial wellbeing. We are aware of the important role that our own Roma heritage plays in revealing the truth of our past and shaping our future; we believe nurturing and showcasing this heritage is the key for our communities in the UK and beyond to flourish.

Impact of Covid pandemic on our clients

Our Roma community has been hit hard by the pandemic. Many people left and of those that decided to stay, many suffered additional economic hardship. Many Roma families typically rely on the grey economy for basic income due to racism in society. Many Roma people do a lot of manual work which includes cash-in-hand work for local businesses and landlords. Romanian Roma families also rely on street performances and begging. Throughout the pandemic, and most remarkably at the beginning of it, all that was gone, and there was no centrally regulated immediate support provided by the government that would replace this kind of income from the grey economy and casual work. It was a scary time for many.

“I was very scared because I didn't know what was going on, it was very bad experience for me. I was worried for all my family and definitely the second wave was scarier than the first one, I can say that the second wave destroyed our lives in some way as it took everything away from us.”

(Polish man, 32)

“I was scared at start, thinking I can't go there I can't do anything, I can't go out with my friend, I can't go and see family, so I had a lot's of stress and anxiety. I was afraid to go out so I was just sitting home. I didn't want to go out, I was scared” (Slovak woman, 18).

Many Roma families have since returned to what can be seen as some kind of normality, like everyone else, however, the issue of empty streets makes it impossible for some to return back to their grey economy street busking business.

Many Roma lost their jobs at the start of the pandemic which exacerbated panic at the beginning. Some also left their job for fear of bringing the virus home. Some found new sources of income in food and parcel delivery. Every single respondent however reported that the Covid crisis had a negative impact on their life in one way or the other, and also on the lives of their close family and friends.

Why is this report needed?

Because Roma too, watched in disbelief and because they too, were hit by the severity of the situation, but their voice was not heard, their anguish unseen. We want to remedy some of this and make the experience of Roma visible and put on record the immediate impact, which is still very much alive in the minds of those that went through it.

“I was in Poland at that time and it was sometime in march and I remember my husband telling me that he was watching the news and they have been talking about this virus that is spreading fast and kills people but I didn't believe it but he was watching the news every day and he kept on telling me about it so I went to watch it myself and that's when it hit me when I saw the people dying” (Polish woman, 36).

March 2020 was the time when the severity of the situation sank in and started dismantling what was to date considered a normal everyday life. We bring forth a witness statement from the “front line” of this pandemic and share with others how disproportionate exposure to the virus combined with lockdown restrictions and the long term impact effects of racism affected the Roma families. This introductory

community action research project collects data on the impact of the pandemic including how lockdown has impacted lives in relation to local Roma communities in the city of Glasgow, Scotland. This work is a new territory for us and required us to contract a short-term academic analyst who has experience of working within disadvantaged communities, particularly Roma communities. We believe this diversion from our usual work is important as local Roma communities have the right to have their voices heard at this time and make their experience known as valued members of our society. We consider this work to be a matter of urgency, something that has to be documented before the “new normal” sets in and before decisions are made by policy makers on how long term recovery for communities is handled. And perhaps most importantly before we forget, before we shrug off these difficulties which people felt they had no power to control or prevent. This way we will be strategically putting in place evidence of what has happened so that history can't be re-written through one narrow, exclusive point of view, as it happened in the past.

What this report brings?

For centuries Roma have been abandoned by policies, disproportionately targeted by state-security systems and served as scapegoats to all sorts of societies' ills. It appears that this history of marginalisation has been no different throughout this pandemic as Mihai Calin Bica, a Roma practitioner in the UK stated.¹ He said: “We (understand Roma) have ties of kinship which help us even during times like this. But we also need the government and local authorities to do a lot more than they currently are.” In his account Roma injustice continues to prevail as families face financial insecurity, a disproportionate risk of infection and reduced access to education and services, which in his view are exaggerated by an increase in discriminatory attitudes in the UK. Here in Glasgow our understanding of Roma's lived experience is similar, but there is no evidence of it as yet. We want to change that.

There is an assumption that the West is better for the Roma than the East of Europe. It is for this reason that Open Society Foundations recently published a briefing paper called Roma in the COVID-19 Crisis² which excludes the UK and only includes countries in Europe where the Roma situation was expected to be affected the most because of this pandemic, countries such as Italy, Spain and the Balkan countries. There is a risk that the Scottish Roma voice will

not be included in debates about future post-Covid justice. We fully support what the briefing paper proposes: “EU institutions should centrally allocate and manage targeted funds for Roma communities across Europe, in partnership with Roma advocates and Roma-led organisations.” We offer to contribute towards this vision which includes Scotland, a place of residency to many East European Roma in who should be included in this plan. In addition to the immediate report made by The Open Society Foundation, we offer an evaluation of the impact of Covid in Scotland on individuals and families through the eyes of the Roma, a year on.

Did your life change because of the Covid crisis?

“Yes, it did because before the pandemic I was going shopping and I wasn’t looking at what I’m buying and was spending a lot of money , and now I only buy what I need and that’s how my life changed and I opened my eyes more on people and I try to help people in need and I appreciate my life more” (Polish woman, 32).

Methodology

In this section, we want to highlight the work of the Roma community researchers! This participatory project demonstrates the abilities that community representatives have to work in collaboration in something like research. Our participatory research project into Roma and Covid in Scotland continued in line with our planning. We received the funding in December 2021 and planned the project as a 9 months project (till August 2021). We had to upskill of course in particular areas, but we similarly gained access and trust through the community representatives within Roma community members. By involving these representatives in, not just the translation but the analysis we can be assured of the relevance of our outcomes. Moreover we made the data available for their own research outcomes and because they are based on their own judgement of importance, and not on ours we can be assured of their validity. Therefore our research is done by the Roma community, with the Roma community and part-analysed by them. We are very proud of this achievement, and we hope that this can be of inspiration to others.

The initial two months (December and January) were spent on searching for Roma community representatives (Czech, Slovak, Polish, Romanian) that would be interested to participate in this project as community researchers. We were looking for individuals that were mature and empathetic enough so that others in their communities would be willing to open up and talk to them about Covid and the impact of lockdown. Another condition was that they had to have good enough English to be able to undertake training online in English. We used our existing contacts to start with and produced a flyer that described the conditions of this potential engagement. Within 6 weeks, we managed to put the team together. February was spent on training the community researchers on recording in depth interviews online and on using recording equipment safely. They all attended training in qualitative research methods including ethics (Friday 5th, 12th, 19th, 26th February), 1h x 4weeks, and were expected to spend individual study time (4h x 4weeks) to practice their interviews and to get familiar with the technological aspects of these data collection methods, for example the use of tablet to record and save interviews. Further training on qualitative research methods in March (5th, 12th, 19th and 26th) included multilingual interview styles. Together, we also undertook mock interviews before the researchers started work

in the community. Throughout the research period, we continued meeting every week to check on progress and offer support. This period also involved a lot of administration work: management and coordination of research participants’ training, delivery, research and purchase of devices and other tech equipment for the purposes of the research, setting up online and remote communications systems, setting up devices and delivery of devices to participants etc. March was spent by community researchers each finding, interviewing and recording 15 X 20-30min interviews with their community members and in their preferred language. Some people preferred answering in Romanes (older, traditional), some preferred the language of their country of origin (majority), some preferred speaking in English (young people). The interviewer mostly conducted interviews in Romanes and in the language of their country of origin. As a result, we had a combination of languages, for example: Questions asked in Slovak and answered in Slovak, Questions asked in Slovak and answered in Romanes; Questions asked in Romanes and answered in Romanes, Questions asked in Slovak and answered in English. These multilingual dialogues then had to be translated into English, which means that whoever was translating them had to be skilled in all of those languages. For each language we had to find one person that could do the translation/transcription and one that could do the multilingual interviews. This was a challenge but we got support from within the community that helped us to find the right people for this work. Simultaneously, in March, we continued training, this time on transcriptions, translations and analysis (how to pick the important stuff from the interviews). We designed and delivered training on how to analyse data and how to do transcription of it on March 5th, 12th, 19th and 26th. Total hours pp 10. The participants involved in this part of the research were then tasked to listen through the interviews, unpick parts that are important, transcribe and translate them to English.

In April, the community representatives completed the first part of the analysis by reflexive analysis: Picking what they considered to be the important parts, transcribing and translating those in English. This was the end of the community participatory part of the research. From there onwards, we began to read through their transcriptions and conducted thematic analysis of the content. We have devised 7 themes that we have introduced in this report and that form the core of this research.

Changes in original proposal

There have been no major changes to the original proposed research plan. There have been a few small changes however:

1. We initially struggled to get community representatives that would be mature enough and empathetic to do the interviews and who would simultaneously have good enough English to do the translations of the interviews. We only found a Polish community representative that was capable and confident to do this. For the other languages, we had to recruit two people – one to do the interview and one to translate it.
2. We initially struggled to get a Romanian Roma community representative that would have good enough English to be able to be trained to do the in-depth interviews, be available at the time of the research and be willing to take part as community researcher. Eventually, we recruited a Romanian Roma young PhD based in Glasgow researcher who agreed to do this.

Those changes happened mainly due to changes in the Roma demographics. Many of them lost their jobs due to Covid lockdown and many of them moved back to their country of origin or elsewhere in the UK. In short, we have experienced a small exodus of the Roma from Glasgow due to change in economic structures related to covid lockdown and predisposed by the Roma by large operating in grey economy. The more suitable Roma people left Glasgow before the research project started and who were left were less capable to be community representatives (i.e. did not have a good enough standard of English to be trained and mentored in English on in depth interviews). That is why we had to slightly adjust our strategy for the project’s delivery.

Questions asked

We were conscious not to artificially set focus to the dialogue. We simply asked people to recap their year of covid starting in winter 2020 and finishing in spring 2021. We used storytelling as a method to let the people freely express themselves on how the year has been to them.

1. Bica, M.C. (2020). From coronavirus to the hostile environment, the chronically overlooked Roma community has been completely abandoned in the Independent: <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/coronavirus-roma-home-office-hostile-environment-brexite-education-a9499971.html> [Last accessed 15/06/2021]

2. Korunovska, N., & Jovanovic, Z. (2020). Roma in the COVID-19 Crisis: An Early Warning from Six EU Member States: <https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/publications/roma-in-the-covid-19-crisis> [Last accessed 15/06/2021]

J: What would you say that Covid changed in your life?

“It turned it upside down to be honest. When we had the first wave and we started to work I had job all the time every day but the more Covid approached us the worst it got I would not get as many days and hours as before. I have my mum who was sick I had to earn money to get back home, now PCR tests were super expensive, so it was financially but also emotionally hard through Covid” (Czech man, 39).

Our questions simply reminded people of the year. They were questions, for example: How was the spring lockdown to you? How was your summer? What about the second lockdown, how did you feel then? How was your Christmas different? What did you think when they started talking about new strands of virus and what about vaccinations? At the end we asked them two general questions: What was that thing that kept you going throughout? And was there anything positive that this experience brought to you? We intended to enable some kind of positive ending, if possible, after talking to the people about their dramatic experience of covid pandemic. In the last question, we enabled them to express what they think the future will look like for that reason.

After this initial process, the Roma representatives collected what they considered to be important to put in the report and it was only after this point that we got to see the data. At this point we started our thematic analysis to coordinate the data for the purpose of making the stories work together. This report contains the most essential data as a result and much more is being stored for future reference and AG research work.

Key Activities and Positive Impacts/Outcomes on community researchers

Activity	Number of participants	Demographic info (e.g. age, gender, disability, unaccompanied minors, etc.)	Positive impacts/outcome
Recruitment of Roma community representatives	6	3 women 3 men	3 Trained to conduct in depth interview and follow research ethics (esp. anonymity and confidentiality) 3 Trained to do first data analysis (pick important parts, transcribe and translate them)
Recruiting participants and conducting interviews	52	9 family members of community representatives (mixed demographics) 7 young people (16-18) 7 elderly (over 60) 17 work age males 12 work age females	Some form of closure on the year 2020 was reported by the participants to the community researchers
Translating, transcribing, analysing data by community researchers	3	2 males 1 female	Trained to do transcription ready for next stage of analysis. Improved confidence on doing translation

Research themes

We loosely related our analysis to Nancy Fraser and her theory of justice. For Fraser (1995)³, justice is built on two key pillars – recognition and redistribution. She divides injustices (and so justices) into those two categories to stress upon the fact that identity politics, recognition are not good enough if not followed with politics of economic redistribution. Those pillars therefore address injustice from different angles, feeding into each other. This also means that it is not possible to speak strictly about economic or about social justice. They two are interconnected but both refer to different kinds of injustices. Below, we outline how her theory is loosely used in this report to analyse the data.

Theme 1 – Stigmatisation

Recognition concerns itself with social identity injustices. This injustice is argued to be “rooted in social patterns of representation, interpretation, and communication” (Fraser, 1995: 71). This means that this type of injustice is an effect of cultural domination (majority culture over minority culture). The other two kinds of social injustice addressed by Fraser are the ignorance of existence of one’s culture and on the other side (nonrecognition) and disrespect for one’s cultural heritage and identity. ERIAC⁴ as well as Hungarian Roma Heritage initiative⁵, stress upon how Roma artists have nowhere to show their art work, due to their cultural activities not being valued. In theme one we look into how covid pandemic affected existing Roma stigmatisations.

Theme 2 – Hate speech

Fraser also looks into the issue of representation which we connected to issues of hate speech. In theme three we are looking especially on how covid pandemic brought to light issues of hate speech. A typical example of this in general terms can be the issue of calling new variants by the name of country of origin and how, at the beginning of the pandemic and to a lesser extent later, this led to new forms of racism across the world.

3. Fraser, N. (1995). Recognition or redistribution? A critical reading of Iris Young’s Justice and the Politics of Difference. *Journal of Political Philosophy*. 3(2). pp. 166-180.

4. The European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture, About ERIAC. <https://eriac.org/about-eriac/> [Last accessed 15/06/2021]

5. Martini, N., (2021) RomaMoMa: what should a Roma museum of contemporary art be like? <https://www.calvertjournal.com/articles/show/12789/romamoma-romani-contemporary-art-off-biennale-budapest> [Last accessed 15/06/2021]

Theme 3 – Roma and Poverty

For Fraser (1995), the common forms of economic injustice are exploitation, economic marginalisation and deprivation. We already know that the Roma historically faced various forms of economic injustice including slavery. Economic injustice is a continuous occurrence in their present general exclusion from the labour market which makes the Roma live at risk of poverty. Systemic exposure to economic injustices makes 80 % of Roma live or are at risk of extreme poverty (FRA, 2016)⁶ due to them being forced to live in segregation, due to discrimination on the labour market, by poorly paid jobs, and lack of opportunities for equal education standard. In our third theme, we look into how the local Roma reported on any new forms of economic injustices that might become exacerbated by the pandemic.

Theme 4 - Roma and Culture

In this theme we look specifically on Roma cultural heritage and the impact of Covid on culture in general. Cultural activities in society during the Covid pandemic gained a new meaning – the meaning of risk of super spreading events. This new meaning and the harsh realities of Covid transmissions had a devastating impact on cultural life in general.⁷ For Roma, who could be using culture for their economic justice, this blow might have a disproportionately higher impact due to pre-existing forms of economic injustices.

Theme 5 – Local Roma interventions

In this theme we consider the impact of local interventions on Roma during pandemic and ask to what degree were interventions needed and acknowledged by Roma as essential for survival during the pandemic. We further consider how local initiatives may potentially threaten meaningful community development and how pre-existing unbalanced interventions might inaccurately be reinterpreted as effect of the lockdown.

Theme 6 – Marginal interventions

This second last theme focuses on, what we call marginal interventions and the work of Ando Glaso. We demonstrate how Ando Glaso combines social and economic justice and then we consider how the charity managed to “survive” the pandemic and what new challenges and opportunities were incurred by Roma via this charity during the pandemic. This theme is loosely linked to theme 4 on Roma heritage, however here we consider how economic opportunities that

Ando Glaso channelled to the Roma impacted on general well being of Roma during the pandemic.

Theme 7 – Private life, family and God

In this last theme we consider the apolitical: family and God – and how these two aspects impacted on the lives of Roma during the pandemic. This theme for us was unexpected, however the topic of family and belief resonated strongly throughout the interviews both as a source of anxiety and also as the thing that kept people going. Therefore we felt this topic should be added based on the recommendations of the community researchers.

How did it affect your kids?

“At the beginning I didn’t realise how much it affected them , but now I know that it did especially one of my daughters. Because she opened up and she started to talk about it to me , she had a big depression and anxieties and she distanced from people because she’s afraid to go around them so she doesn’t get infected and she doesn’t feel safe around people anymore” (Polish woman, 32)

Background information on the locality

Glasgow is the biggest city of Scotland. It is situated in what is called the Central Belt of Scotland, closer to the West Coast. The population of Glasgow city is just under 600 000 people.⁸ Out of this 12% is made of minority ethnic groups⁹ which is the largest proportion of BAME in a single Scottish city, making Glasgow the most diverse place in Scotland.¹⁰ Although internationally well known as city of culture and business, local statistics indicate that Glasgow has a high level of deprivation, however recent data suggests the situation is

gradually improving (SIMD, 2020)¹¹.

Govanhill, where many Roma live, has a fairly steady population of 14 000 coming from 7500 households.¹² At 40%, the locality has a high percentage of minority group residents.¹³ Historically, this part of the city used to be a mining village and it is built in typical 19th century three-level tenements¹⁴. Currently, this part of the city is considered to be one of the poorest in Glasgow.¹⁵ We don’t know how many Roma live in Scotland. The estimated number is around 4000 - 5000 Roma people¹⁶. It is believed that 90% of those live in Govanhill¹⁷. There is an additional 4200 Scottish Gypsy and Travellers living throughout Scotland¹⁸. Most of the Eastern European Roma came to Scotland in 2005 and 2009 as a reaction to EU enlargement¹⁹, however, many have already left as a response to Brexit and the Covid pandemic.²⁰ Of those that decided to stay, they did so, because they believed that we would see a path out of the pandemic.

J: So you thought about leaving to go back home?

“Yes, I did. A lot of people were taking their stuff and going home before they fully put restrictions on travelling so I was thinking of going too, wait until situation is better with Covid or gone and come back. However, once I noticed that people take it more seriously and are more careful, I thought to myself, it’s going to be okay, we can do it, so I stayed instead. We didn’t go anywhere only work, home, work, home” (Czech man, 39).

Theme 1: Roma stigmatisations

In this first section, we consider stigmatisation in relation to Roma and in the context of the pandemic.

What is stigmatisation?

Social stigma incorporates four definitory components: (1) labelling the differences between people; (2) attributing negative stereotypes to those differences; (3) creation of the separation of “us” and “them”; (4) status loss and discrimination against to those who are negatively labelled²¹. Stigma is associated with the presence of power, meaning that social stigma is more strongly manifested and perpetuated by those in the position of privilege against those who are considered underprivileged. In other words, social stigma refers to negative labelling, interiorisation, and discrimination of marginalised communities or individuals.

As a pioneering definition, stigma represents an act of interiorising individuals or groups based on some characteristics such as race and ethnicity, body shape, religion, sexual orientation, or addiction²². Essentially, stigma distinguishes between what is viewed as “normal and acceptable” and what is considered “tainted and undesirable”²³. The pandemic changed what is normal and acceptable especially in terms of social interaction. This means that the pandemic produced new forms of stigmatisation along the way, and new forms of privilege and underprivileged.

Roma and stigmatisation

Stigmatisation is a part of lived reality for most of Roma, experienced outside of the pandemic context. One of the participants reflected that even though they are appreciated for their skills, for their work (especially as musicians), there is still a manifestation of prejudiced attitudes towards Roma people:

I would like this racial hatred to disappear... because wherever you go, even if they do not show it, when they see you darker, you feel a little marginalised. So, no matter where I go, this is happening and I would like this to disappear. I really want to say, when we go to other jobs, they see us like that. The moment we sing we are seen differently. We are applauded, appreciated [...] But when we entered a store, already, from the door they were looking at us differently (Romanian man, 52).

Stigmatisation is typically related to competition for the status and resources, intense fear, or simply a collective answer to uncertainty and anxiety provoked by an endemic²⁴. It can also be based on egocentric motivations. This alludes to the idea of the superiority of a particular group/community, combined with displaying adverse reactions and scapegoating towards other groups²⁵. Individuals who experience stigma often face a high level of stress, discrimination, rejection, identity concealment, or internalised stigma²⁶. These factors can lead to or accentuate some existing socio-economic injustices manifested at the individual or group level.

Due to the stigma and discrimination, ethnic minorities – for example – have difficulties finding employment or access a stable income²⁷. Even when they access a workplace, their performance and job satisfaction are low due to stigma-related stress. The stigmatised communities (BAME, LGBTQ+, people living with HIV etc.) have limited access to health-care services or might be reluctant to use them²⁸. Nevertheless, social stigma can severely impact people’s wellbeing, leading to low life satisfaction, depression, or even suicide²⁹.

8. World Population Review (2021). Glasgow Population 2021 <https://worldpopulationreview.com/world-cities/glasgow-population> [Last accessed 17/06/2021]

9. Understanding Glasgow (n.d.). Percentage of non-white ethnic minority groups in selected Scottish cities https://www.understandingglasgow.com/indicators/population/ethnicity/scottish_cities [Last accessed 17/06/2021]

10. Understanding Glasgow. (n.d.). Glasgow Overview <https://www.understandingglasgow.com/indicators/population/overview> [Last accessed 17/06/2021]

11. Scottish Government (2020). Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation 2020 <https://www.gov.scot/news/scottish-index-of-multiple-deprivation-2020/> [Last accessed 17/06/2021]

12. Scottish Government. (n.d.). Glasgow’s Housing Strategy 2017 - 2022 : Neighbourhood Profiles <https://www.glasgow.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=36602&p=0> [Last accessed 16/06/2021]

13. Govanhill Community Development Trust (n.d.). About Govanhill: <http://govanhill.info/about-govanhill-community/> [Last accessed 15/06/2021]

14. Govanhill Community Development Trust (n.d.). History of Govanhill: <http://govanhill.info/about-govanhill-community/history-of-govanhill/> [Last accessed 15/06/2021]

15. Faith in Community Scotland & The Transformation Team. (n.d.). Govanhill Community Profile: <http://crosshillandgovanhill.org.uk/grindocs/Govanhill%20Community%20Profile-1.pdf> [Last accessed 17/06/2021]

16. Social Marketing Gateway (2013). Mapping the Roma Community in Scotland: Final Report. Glasgow <http://www.socialmarketinggateway.co.uk/news/new-research-mapping-the-roma-community-in-scotland> [Last accessed 15/06/2021]

17. CIS (2016). Roma Community in Scotland. <https://www.renfrews-hire2023.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/The-Roma-Community-in-Scotland-2016.pdf> [Last accessed 29/05/2021]

18. Scotland Census (2011). Online. Available: <https://www.scotlandscensus.gov.uk/media/p4ac0tiv/statsbulletin2.pdf> [Last accessed 29/05/2021]

6. FRA. (2016) Fundamental Rights Report 2016: https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2016-fundamental-rights-report-2016-2_en.pdf (accessed at 15 June 2021)

7. Lee, S. (2020). A Study on the Cultural and Creative Industry in the COVID-19 Era. *The Journal of the Convergence on Culture Technology*, 6(4), 567-573.

Roma stigmatisation in the context of COVID-19

The present crisis of COVID-19 created a favourable context for stigma directed against groups at risk of vulnerability (ethnic minorities, poor people, migrants). The World Health Organisation³⁰ and partners acknowledge its negative impacts on communities due to the pandemic and produced a dedicated response on COVID-19-related stigma.

Social stigma in the context of health is the negative association between a person or group of people who share certain characteristics and a specific disease. In an outbreak, this may mean people are labelled, stereotyped, discriminated against, treated separately, and/or experience loss of status because of a perceived link with a disease.³¹

As mentioned, stigma in the health context might develop in acts of discrimination against specific communities, and moreover, can accentuate racist manifestations against ethnic minorities. Our research told us that, thankfully, the Roma in Scotland did not fall victim of the new forms of stigmatisation generated by the pandemic. We did not ask directly about stigmatisation as we wanted to leave it absolutely on the people to express what they considered important to speak about regarding the pandemic.

19. Idem 16

20. Stewart, C. (2020). Claims 50% of Roma group have fled Govanhill after false Covid-19 rumours <https://www.glasgowtimes.co.uk/news/18373662.claims-50-roma-group-fled-govanhill-false-covid-19-rumours/> [Last accessed 29/05/2021]

21. Link, B.G. & Phelan, J. C. (2001). Conceptualizing Stigma. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 27, pp. 363–85

22. Goffman, E. (1963). *Stigma: notes on the management of spoiled identity*. Prentice-Hall

23. Ibidem

24. Strong, P. (1990). Epidemic psychology: A model. *Sociology of Health & Illness* 12(3), pp. 249–259

25. Sumner, W. G. (2008). [1906]. *Folkways a Study of the Sociological Importance of Usages Manners Customs Mores and Morals*. New York

26. Frost, D.M. (2011). “Social Stigma and its Consequences for the Socially Stigmatized”. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 5, pp. 824–839.

27. Pager, Devah, and Hana Shepherd. 2008. “The Sociology of Discrimination: Racial Discrimination in Employment, Housing, Credit, and Consumer Markets”. *Annual Review of Sociology*, pp. 181–209.

28. Owuor, J. & Nake-Namisi, J. (2015). Internalised stigma as a barrier to access to health and social care services by minority ethnic groups in the UK. <https://raceequalityfoundation.org.uk/health-care/internalised-stigma-as-a-barrier-to-access-to-health-and-social-care-services-by-minority-ethnic-groups-in-the-uk/> [Last accessed 17/06/2021]

29. Bignall T, Jeraj S, Helsby E, Butt J. (2019). Racial disparities in mental health: literature and evidence review.

Even though they did not report an increase in stigmatisation however doesn't mean that pre-covid forms of anti-Roma stigmatisations have disappeared. Merely what it means is that new forms of stigmatisations that emerged with the pandemic did not directly affect the Roma communities in Scotland. Old forms of stigmatisations can be assumed to be still present, just normalised as everyday reality, thus not disturbing albeit still harmful. That is why they were not reported as they are not new and so not disturbing.

This was not the same case elsewhere in Europe where Roma were severely affected by new forms of injustices during the first “spring” wave of the pandemic^{32 33}. Ethnic minorities^{34 35}, such as the Roma, were at first confronted by a wave of racism, being scapegoated for causing and/or spreading the virus. These kinds of reactions have been stated as contributing even more to the existing socio-economic and health inequalities in society. An eloquent case is the treatment received by the Roma community in this period all over Europe³⁶.

COVID-19-related discrimination was also strongly experienced by people belonging to many other ethnic minorities groups. As Wuhan (China) was considered the epicentre of the pandemic, an increasing wave of adverse reactions and attacks against Chinese people has been reported³⁷. Motivated by the fear of infection, racism, or political ideologies, these manifestations were also encouraged by discourses at a very high level, such as those of the former USA President, Donald Trump³⁸.

30. WHO, CIFRC, UNICEF. (2020). Social Stigma associated with COVID-19: <https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/covid19-stigma-guide.pdf> [Last accessed 17/06/2021]

31. Ibidem

32. Walker, S. (2020) Europe's marginalised Roma people hit hard by coronavirus in the Guardian: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/may/11/europes-marginalised-roma-people-hit-hard-by-coronavirus> [Last accessed 17/06/2021]

33. Matache, M. & Bhabha, J. (2020) Anti-Roma Racism is Spiraling During COVID-19 Pandemic. *Health and Human Rights Journal*. <https://www.hhrjournal.org/2020/04/anti-roma-racism-is-spiraling-during-covid-19-pandemic> [Last accessed 17/06/2021]

34. Oh, H., & Waldman, K. (2020). Building a coalition to fight coronavirus-related discrimination against people of color. *Public health*,

Conclusion

Roma people in Europe suffered as a result of new forms of stigmatisation generated by the pandemic. Wrongful stigmatisation perceived Roma as “being part of the problem,” for example moving back to their countries of origin and so being seen as a threat of spreading the illness further in regions of a given country where up to that point people felt safe from Covid. This resulted in racially motivated disrespectful actions of fencing off the Roma settlements where the people migrated back to.³⁹ Thankfully, no such acts were reported or observed in Scotland. The community researchers were briefed about the need to report to the research lead any case of racism disclosed by the interviewees. We have not received any. We can assume that racism against the Roma in Scotland has not increased as a result of the pandemic as we have not found evidence, factual, experiential or anecdotal, of the opposite. We can also assume that new forms of stigmatisations have not affected the Roma in Scotland, because, again, we haven't found any contradicting evidence.

Theme 2 – Racism and hate speech

Acknowledged as the largest minority in Europe (10-12 million), and historically one of the most persecuted groups on the continent⁴⁰, Roma have been the victims of racism related to the colour of the skin, cultural elements such as clothing and language, religion but also because of their economic status or residential areas⁴¹. Besides these, the global pandemic of 2020 seems to create another occasion for Roma to encounter racism. In this section we focus on analysing the effect of the pandemic and lockdown on the Roma in the context of hate speech and racism.

What is racism?

In general terms, racism represents a form of discrimination that reinforced by an ideology of “superiority of one race or group of persons of one colour or ethnic origin”⁴². Racism also incorporates a belief that “biological or cultural superiority of one or more racial groups is used to justify or prescribe the inferior treatment or social position(s) of other racial groups”⁴³. Basically, racism describes unjust treatment received by individuals/communities because of their race, skin colour, or ethnicity. Sometimes, it might also be motivated by xenophobic attitudes, which in this case, people can be unfairly treated

because of their citizenship.

The phenomenon of racism is widespread in most of the key areas of public life, such as the labour market, education, housing, access to goods and services (public transport, restaurants, institutions), or healthcare services. The manifestations are the consequences of structural racism, which reflects the process of implementing and reproducing unjust policies and laws rooted in the states' economic systems and maintained by societal and cultural norms.⁴⁴ Individual racism, on the other hand, refers to the action of a person who operates according to their own stereotypes and prejudices to justify the disparities of people from other racial groups.⁴⁵

36. European Roma Grassroots Organisations (ERGO) Network. (2021). The role of Social Economy in supporting Roma social and economic inclusion A close-up on the Covid-19 pandemic and the recovery strategies. Position Paper. <https://ergonetwerk.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Social-Economy-and-Roma-Inclusion-in-the-aftermath-of-Covid-19-ERGO-Network-final.pdf> [Last accessed 18/06/2021]

37. Chung, R. Y., & Li, M. M. (2020). Anti-Chinese sentiment during the 2019-nCoV outbreak. *Lancet* (London, England), 395(10225), pp. 686–687

38. BBC, (2020). Trump angers Beijing with ‘Chinese virus’ tweet. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-51928011> [Last accessed 17/06/2021]

39. Follis, A., Neagu, B., Nikolov, K., Maksimov, V. (2020). Less blame, little action for Europe's Roma during second COVID wave. <https://www.euractiv.com/section/non-discrimination/news/less-blame-little-action-for-europes-roma-during-second-covid-wave/> [Last accessed 17/06/2021]

40. FRA. (2017). Fundamental Rights Report 2019: https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/eu_roma_strategic_framework_for_equality_inclusion_and_participation_for_2020_-_2030_0.pdf [Last accessed 17/06/2021]

41. Ibidem

42. European Commission. (n.d.) .Racism – Definition. https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/european_migration_network/glossary_search/racism_en [Last accessed 17/06/2021]

43. Clair, M., & Denis, J. S. (2015). *Sociology of Racism*. edited by James D. Wright. *The International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences* 19, pp. 857–863.

Racism and Roma in covid pandemic

Encouraged by political discourses and aggressive marketisation on various means of information, as well as alimeted by the fake news, Roma people have been increasingly victims of virulent racist attacks, hate speech, and abuses all over Europe in the “Covid year” 2020. For instance, in Bulgaria, the authorities have built a temporary wall around a Roma settlement with the justification that the residents do not comply with social distancing regulations⁴⁶. This narrative caused, even more, the expression of anti-Roma sentiments in the country. Another country with high exposure of anti-Roma sentiments was Romania. During the first months of the quarantine, several cases of police abuse against the Roma were reported⁴⁷. There were cases of individuals bitten and humiliated by the law representatives and shared on social media⁴⁸, which subsequently delighted the racist audience. In Europe in general, the covid pandemic meant more justified racist violence against the Roma.



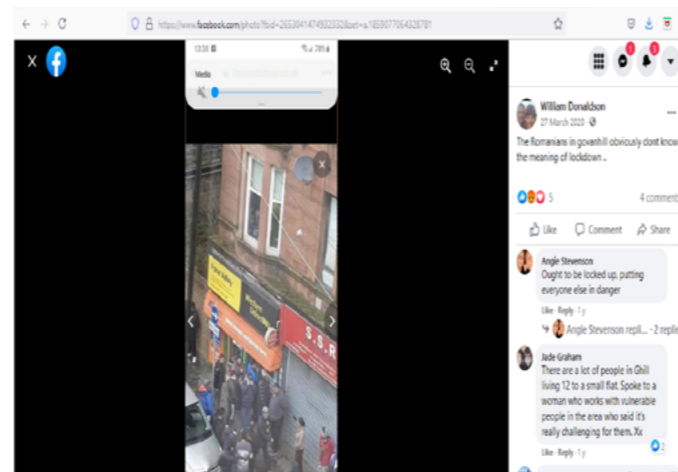
Police officer patrols “fenced off” Roma settlement in Slovakia during Covid crisis (Source: *the Guardian*⁴⁹)

Cases of hate speech in Glasgow

Roma were also the victims of hate speech and fake news in the local press in Glasgow. Some unfounded allegations of breaking the social distancing rules or deliberate spreading of the virus were shared on local media. Prof Colin Clark from UWS and a trustee of local Roma-led Romano Lav charity recalls:

Since at least March 2020, it has been evident that patterns of everyday life in the area have changed in quite remarkable ways. For example, in April, it was reported in the local press that images had been shared online of Roma families supposedly gathering for a backyard BBQ that were deemed to be breaking social distancing rules. Likewise, an earlier incident in March led one national newspaper to suggest that Roma youths had been deliberately coughing on passing pedestrians and spreading the virus in a deliberate and reckless manner⁵⁰.

These rumours contributed to a racialisation of the pandemic and incited racist threats towards the community as evident from the chat below:



49. Walker, S. (2020). Europe’s marginalised Roma people hit hard by coronavirus. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/may/11/europes-marginalised-roma-people-hit-hard-by-coronavirus> [Last accessed 20/06/2021]

50. Clark, C. (2021). One Crisis after Another: The Impact of COVID-19 on Roma Communities in Glasgow. <http://ccse.uws.ac.uk/2021/01/14/one-crisis-after-another-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-roma-communities-in-glasgow/> [Last accessed 18/06/2021]

Source

This was also confirmed by the chair of Romano Lav:

Romano Lav are deeply concerned regarding press reports involving our communities in Govanhill. Last week several photographs claiming to be of local Roma people breaching social distancing rules appeared on social media. It was evidenced that these photographs were from other cities and taken before the lockdown started. However, these images have created a tense and racialised atmosphere where Govanhill’s Roma communities are placed unfairly under the spotlight regarding social distancing (Davie Donaldson, 19/4/2020)⁵¹

Consequently, it is estimated that 50 % of Roma from Govanhill immigrated to mainland Europe⁵².

As illustrated above, it is evident that Roma were the victims of more accentuated injustices during the COVID-19 in the locality. However, racism did not come across as an issue when we conducted our research. This could be partially because victims fled the country. However, besides the above, the manifestation of possible increased racist violence towards the Roma in the locality is in the evidence of a small exodus of the Roma from Scotland at the beginning of the pandemic.

In this regard, some interviewees pointed to an element of the pandemic which is indirectly connected to racism and hate speech in this context – the working mechanism of propaganda and fake news. Like many others, Roma too, were trying to orientate themselves in the new reality, frantically looking for information online at the beginning of the pandemic in order to make sense of what was going on. Some fell victim of conspiracy theories as evident from this statement:

J: And one last question, when do you think will all of this go back to normal?

P: It have to, it should, if it doesn’t go back to normal way like before for me personally I will take my stuff and go live in the forest build a small house and be there till the end of my days without any propaganda and all that.. Just turn off the TV you stop the pandemic. That’s it. (Czech man, 41).

The mixed feelings about the pandemic – fear and suspicion, are also evident from this testimonial:

J: So the announcement of the first lockdown, what were your thoughts when you first heard about it?

P: It was a bit of a shock, how it travelled through countries and how it eventually reached us. It hit home when I knew it got to Slovakia and Czech Republic. But with like anything new like this its weird because you don’t know what to expect. You get mixed feelings when you are a bit sceptic at first but also a bit scared at the same time (Czech woman, 33).

This means that fake news and conspiracy theories played an active and significant role in people’s susceptibility to and immediacy of the adaptation of the new Covid rules.

Conclusion

Roma people, like many others, were unsure about what was going on at the beginning and were not sure if they could trust the government and media. However, on top of this, they became seen as being part of the problem in many places of Europe (spreading the disease by migration, for example). This resulted in them being physically cut off, albeit temporarily in various parts of (mostly) Central and Eastern Europe. Lack of trust in political leadership combined with an avalanche of fake news and conspiracy theories meant that a small minority of Roma at the beginning, like others, did not fully adhere to the rules and they, as a close community, paid for it mainly with their lives and lives of their loved ones. Conspiracy theories, no doubt, added negatively to the spread of the pandemic within Roma communities, too and sensational journalism directly benefited from this all.

44. Fraser, N. (1995). Recognition or redistribution? A critical reading of Iris Young’s Justice and the Politics of Difference. *Journal of Political Philosophy*. 3(2). pp. 166-180

45. Scott, C.L. (2007). A discussion of individual, institutional, and cultural racism, with implications for HRD. *International Research Conference in the Americas of the Academy of Human Resource Development*, Indianapolis <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED504856> [Last accessed 18/06/2021]

46. Amnesty International (2020). Stigmatizing quarantines of Roma settlements in Slovakia and Bulgaria. <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/EUR0121562020ENGLISH.PDF> [Last accessed 18/06/2021]

47. Letter from Romani CRISS and UCTRR available here: https://drepturile-omului.info/arhiva-stiri/?fbclid=IwAR0kuGZbMMP-5m9zqn1TA--_eOZMHSIUvq51NkZtXNznigX46DK3GOpLof-po&lang=en [Last accessed 19/06/2021]

48. Ibidem

51. SACC (2020). Govanhill Roma Communities and COVID-19. <https://www.sacc.org.uk/coronavirus/2020/govanhill-roma-communities-and-covid-19> [Last accessed 18/06/2021]

52. Stewart, C. (2020) Claims 50% of Roma group have fled Govanhill after false Covid-19 rumours <https://www.glasgowtimes.co.uk/news/18373662.claims-50-roma-group-fled-govanhill-false-covid-19-rumours/> [Last accessed 29/05/2021]

Theme 3 – Roma and poverty

In this theme we consider the topic of poverty and how the Covid crisis affected people economically. We will start by defining poverty.

What is poverty?

Poverty can be defined as the lack of financial resources to ensure a proper standard of living, which goes hand in hand with racism, as emphasised by the UN. They are elements of a vicious circle that obstruct the access of marginalised groups to resources and opportunities⁵³.

Roma and poverty

In the Roma context, the economic marginalisation and exploitation (i.e. slavery) caused disproportional inequality and high rates of poverty in the present. As stated by the Fundamental Rights Agency, 80 % of the Roma are at risk of extreme poverty⁵⁴. A report called Mapping of the situation of Roma in cities in Europe conducted by Euro Cities illustrates the following:

- Roma face a higher risk of poverty, experience more severe forms of poverty and are more likely to be born into poverty;
- Roma are more likely to be unemployed or in precarious jobs due to having low or no qualifications and due to discrimination from employers;
- Roma are less likely to attend secondary or higher-level education and, when they do enroll, they tend to have higher rates of absenteeism and are more likely to drop out;
- Roma have a worse housing situation than most people in cities as they live in overcrowded, precarious housing and are discriminated against by landlords;
- In some cities, Roma face more limited access to basic services (electricity, energy, sanitation and running water) than other residents, especially for Roma living in camps;
- Roma are at a higher risk of certain health conditions (obesity, heart and lung diseases);
- Roma are entitled to social services in most cities, but they are often unaware of the services available to them or they distrust them due to prior discriminatory experiences.

Source: Mapping of the situation of Roma in cities in Europe, Euro Cities⁵⁵

Poverty and Covid

The COVID-19 crisis accentuated acute existing social, economic and health inequalities. Data suggests that people in vulnerable situations were disproportionately affected by the virus, and by the economic impasse that emerged. At this point, it is evident that ethnic minorities, people living in poverty or socio-economic deprived areas and marginalised groups (i.e. homeless, street steelworkers, prisoners) are more exposed to social injustices. For instance, the study of Patel et al. (2020)⁵⁶ illustrates that those living in poverty are more affected by the virus as a consequence of living in improper conditions or overcrowded houses. The authors also indicate that individuals experiencing poverty cannot afford to work from home, and therefore, they will need to expose themselves to the risk of catching the virus by travelling by public transport and working in jobs with a higher risk of transmission (e.g. supermarkets). Moreover, poverty is also associated with poor health conditions (diabetes, cardiovascular illnesses, obesity) that might create a favourable context of developing severe forms of the disease^{57 58}. Additionally, these conditions might be amplified by the limited access to health care services (ibid).

53. UN (n.d.). Vulnerable People. <https://www.un.org/en/letsfightracism/poor.shtml> [Last accessed 18/06/2021]
54. FRA (2016). 80% of Roma are at risk of poverty, new survey finds. <https://fra.europa.eu/en/news/2016/80-roma-are-risk-poverty-new-survey-finds> [Last accessed 18/06/2021]

Roma and Poverty in Glasgow during Covid crisis

Some Roma people described the pandemic in economic terms as a “war” to stress upon the inequalities of the pandemic:

Its kinda economical war because economy is suffering. Because of that, I am a good example of it. I had to close down, had to fire people and people like me in the similar situation are suffering. Only big corporation companies are able to survive they get the money (Czech man, 41).

However, among the most affected families were those engaged with informal activities such as music. Roma musicians in Govanhill are usually the main income providers in their families, but the restrictions in place created enormous challenges to satisfy basic needs (food, adequate care and educational activities for the children). The situation became even more complicated when they are not able to access other jobs. Conclusively on this point, it can be argued that the Roma community experienced a double injustice by being deprived of cultural and economic activities.

Since this pandemic started, it has blocked all these sources that we were supposed to have with music events (Romanian man, 40).

You can't go out and make money. It's hard for me, I have two children. A 7-year-old boy who has to go to school. I have another 2-year-old girl ... you realise that everything is closed everywhere, you have nowhere to make money, it's hard. It is very difficult (Romanian man, 38).

It was very difficult because, at some point, the police did not leave me to play my violin not even in the park (Romanian man, 73).

55. Euro Cities (2017). Mapping of the situation of Roma in cities in Europe. https://nws.eurocities.eu/MediaShell/media/Mapping_of_the_situation_of_Roma_in_cities_FINAL_REPORT.pdf [Last accessed 18/06/2021]

56. Patel, J.A., Nielsen, F.B.H., Badiani, A.A., Assi, S., Unadkat, V.A., B. Patel, Ravindrane, R., and Wardle, H., (2020). Poverty, inequality and COVID-19: the forgotten vulnerable. Public Health. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.puhe.2020.05.006>

57. Ibidem

58. Centre for Global Health Inequalities Research (2020). The COVID-19 pandemic and health inequalities: we are not all in it together. https://eurohealthnet.eu/sites/eurohealthnet.eu/files/CHAIN_info-graphic%20covid19_and_inequalities_final.pdf

For some Roma people in Scotland, lockdown however did not automatically mean poverty. Many Roma people had to change their work pattern, for example start working from home, but apart from that, they did not economically loose:

J: When the first lockdown came, were you working at the time?

P: Yea we were working in the office at that time, when they introduced info about Covid and changes it may bring. By the end of March, it was organised to work from home and to get as many people as possible to work from home. It was something new for sure, something most of us have not done before so it was kind of exciting at the same time. But here we are a year later and still working from home but I would say is not the best thing anymore. Everything has it pros and cons (Czech woman, 31).

And:

D: What support have you received if any? from organisation or charity?

P: I didn't need charity because I have worked from home and I get paid normally, financially we was good on that because we get paid from work me and my husband and my daughter (Slovak woman, 48)

There was a strong sense of good economic support coming from the central government which mitigated the negative economic effect on people:

J: Was there any financial issues you suffered from during this pandemic or even when you had Covid yourself?

P: Not really because we all worked, but we also received a support from Government they understand that people can get infected and affected by this Covid and if you do they here to provide support (Czech man, 20).

However, being financially secure during the pandemic did not necessarily mean that people would be stress-free:

P: Financially I can't moan because my workplace was paying furlough for me, but mentally yes I have very big depression because I have a problem with my heart and I was supposed to have an operation last year but it was pushed away because the pandemic started and they shut the clinics and hospitals

so I can't get access to it, and I am very stressed out I don't know how much longer I can go on like that I don't know if I am not gonna die before I get the appointment for the operation (Polish woman, 43).

One participant also reported that the effect of the lockdown was not felt so much by loss of work as by loss of working as a collective:

Financially it was same because I work from home so it didn't limit me and socially also same that I can't be with collective in work and we are used for them because we are great collective so I am always looking forward to work but we can't (Slovak woman, 48).

Young participants also reported impact of the pandemic and lockdown not so much in economic dimensions but in terms of their wellbeing and emotional state:

It affected me ... not that I cannot go to sing, but it affected me that I am alone in the house. The school is always online. It's mentally tiring, and that's how it affected me. And emotionally, I probably don't socialise much anymore. I only socialise with my mother, my father, my boyfriend, my family in general. I mean, I don't have any more friends. (6)

Conclusion

The Roma in Scotland lived through the pandemic in different ways. For some, lockdown meant the end of the grey economy and so the end of income, thus poverty. For some, there was not so much loss of work but more change of work-pattern. Some people had to close their businesses, meaning that they made people jobless at a time of crisis. For some, especially young people, economic security did not necessarily mean that their wellbeing did not suffer. Those diverse experiences of the effect of the pandemic crisis in Scotland illustrate how being Roma does not automatically equal poverty anymore. Scotland appears to be able to provide such an environment that seems to be disabling racial marginalisation. However, the testimonials also demonstrate that economic security does not necessarily mean good mental and economic wellbeing.

Theme 4 – Roma and Culture

When mentioning Roma history, we do not simply refer only to a history of oppression, but it can also be related to a population with a vibrant cultural heritage, especially in music, dance, or cuisine. Numerous musicians and bands of Roma origin were and are internationally acclaimed for their artistic virtuosity of interpreting a various range of styles: classical music (Ion Voicu), jazz (Django Reinhardt), Romani folk (Taraf de Haïdouks, Esma Redzepova), rock (Gogol Bordello). Moreover, the Flamenco style of music and dance, developed by the Spanish Roma, was included in the UNESCO's List of Intangible Cultural Heritage⁵⁹. In this section we consider the effect of the pandemic on Roma culture. We start with highlighting how Roma heritage contributes to culture and arts in Europe.

Roma contribution to arts and culture in Europe

Examples of Roma contributions to culture can be related to the early development of dramatic arts and circus performance in the Romanian Principates (century 18th)⁶⁰, in times when the majority of Roma were still slaves in many territories. In the same period, culinary art was another domain that Roma exceeded and brought significant contributions by merging and adapting oriental and occidental cuisine to the local taste⁶¹. Despite all these enrichments brought to the cultural heritage in Europe, however, the Roma were and still face cultural disrespect and misrecognition, as called by the theorist Nancy Fraser.

59. European Parliamentary Research Service (2018). International Roma - Day How the European Union supports the study of Roma culture, language and history. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2018/620201/EPRS_BRI\(2018\)620201_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2018/620201/EPRS_BRI(2018)620201_EN.pdf)



The first Roma Circus group in Europe appeared in 1322 – Source (including photo Roma Times News)⁶²

The impact of COVID-19 on culture

Cultural and creative sectors are among the most affected by the pandemic in terms of employment and financial sustainability, as highlighted by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)⁶³. Even more, the possible collapse of arts and culture can have profound social implications. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UN Human Rights) claims that the pandemic represents “a cataclysm for cultural rights” or “a potential cultural catastrophe”⁶⁴. OHCHR acknowledges cultural rights as an essential component of human experience that needs respect and protection in these difficult times. As quoted: *“If you think artists are useless, try to spend your quarantine without music, books, poems, movies and paintings.”* (Stephen King)⁶⁵

The implementation of lockdown measures had considerable impacts on entertaining, leisure and creative sectors leading to devaluation of the industry. The OECD estimates that this crisis will determine a severe drop in public and private funding to the arts sector⁶⁶. Ultimately, UNESCO warns that culture could be the most challenging sector to recover after the COVID-19 crisis⁶⁷. Additionally, there might be impacts on social aspects of cultural and creative industry such as exacerbating the present inequalities within creative industries⁶⁸. For

example, the online creative industry gained more popularity⁶⁹ which means that marginalised communities and cultures with a high rate of digital poverty, such as Roma musicians, become even more excluded. In this respect, some local organisations such as Ando Glaso in Glasgow played an essential role in cocreating cultural activities with local Roma artists by adapting them to digital content creation⁷⁰

The local context of culture in times of COVID-19

The UK Parliament recognises the immense threat of the pandemic on the cultural and creative sectors⁷². Some financial support was decided however “freelancers and small companies will continue to fall through the gaps of Government support”⁷³. These concerns are justified since the statistics show that after less than three months from the beginning of the pandemic, the GDP in cultural sector decreased by almost 45 % in the UK⁷⁴.

62. Muaren, R. (2019). The first Roma Circus group in Europe appeared in 1322. Roma Times. <https://www.romatimes.news/index.php/en/categories/culture/3545-the-first-roma-circus-group-in-europe-appeared-in-1322> [Last accessed 17/06/2021]

63. OECD (2020). Culture shock: COVID-19 and the cultural and creative sectors. <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/culture-shock-covid-19-and-the-cultural-and-creative-sectors-08da9e0e/> [Last accessed 15/06/2021]

64. United Nations (2021). COVID-19, culture and cultural rights. <https://undocs.org/en/A/HRC/46/34> [Last accessed 15/06/2021]

Also, during 2020, the number of freelancers working in the creative industry decreased by almost 40,000⁷⁵, mainly because of the pandemic. Some studies are currently looking at the impact of COVID-19 on ethnic minorities in the UK (including on arts & culture), but it is not clear whether this will include data on Roma.

COVID-19, Roma, and Culture

The wide engagement of Roma individuals with artistic activities (music, dance) for a living is well known (including a high number of people with low level of education). In this context, it can be argued that the lockdown generated a challenging situation among Roma artists; especially, for those of whom artistic performances were the primary source of income:

P: As you know, I have a musical life style and I have a music band and I was very active going out, spending time with my friends and doing lots of different things and the lockdown took all of this away from me (Polish woman, 45).

Despite some financial support from European states, the situation of Roma culture and Roma artists in Scotland is not adequately addressed. For the Roma artists, UK art funding did not represent a realistic solution since the most vulnerable are illiterate and / or do not speak sufficient English.

65. <https://twitter.com/StephenKing/status/1246098663174266882?s=20>.

66. OECD (2020). Culture shock: COVID-19 and the cultural and creative sectors. <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/culture-shock-covid-19-and-the-cultural-and-creative-sectors-08da9e0e/>

67. United Nation (2020). In moments of crisis, people need culture. <https://en.unesco.org/news/moments-crisis-people-need-culture>

68. European Parliament's Committee on Culture and Education (2021). Cultural and creative sectors in postCOVID-19 Europe. Crisis effects and policy recommendations. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2021/652242/IPOL_STU\(2021\)652242_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2021/652242/IPOL_STU(2021)652242_EN.pdf)

69. OECD (2020). Culture shock: COVID-19 and the cultural and creative sectors. <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/culture-shock-covid-19-and-the-cultural-and-creative-sectors-08da9e0e/>

70. https://www.facebook.com/Andoglaso/videos/?ref=page_internal

71. Lang, J. (2021). GRT History Month: In the Blood. Musicians Union. <https://musiciansunion.org.uk/news/grt-history-month-in-the-blood>

72. House of Commons (2020). Impact of Covid-19 on DCMS sectors: First Report: Government Response to Committee's Third Report of Session 2019–21. <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/2959/documents/28316/default/>

73. Ibidem

Other-than artistic forms of cultures and the effect of Covid on them in the context of Roma

Taking away cultural industry, what was reported to be hard on the people that we interviewed was change of employment culture from being employed and having a routine, to suddenly being stuck in the house:

D: Over the last year what's affected you from covid and lockdown ?

P: I can't go to work. I was used to waking up early and coming back home at 6night. I always did something but now I am always home I don't meet my friends, family. I don't see them. I have developed stress and anxiety and I don't want to do anything. I am always home on my bed. I am starting to think I will never go back to work. I have started thinking it will get worse and will be stay like this for ever, and I am always thinking I will stay in my room for ever (Young Slovak woman, 18).

And:

I was missing my work because I am used to going out, doing my job and meeting my friends. Then the lockdown came and I had to change my life to suit the restrictions. Everyday, I was doing the same thing waking up , cleaning, cooking , washing up, then eat go for a bath and going to sleep, then it was going on and on like this everyday (Polish woman, 40).

Given the historical issues of chronic Roma unemployment in various countries of Central and Eastern Europe, this is unfortunate. As mentioned earlier, Scotland seems to offer better opportunities for the Roma to enter the labour market. Staying at home unemployed due to the lockdown creates risk of losing the culture of work for anyone. The chance of losing this culture can be argued higher for those that come from background where it is common not to work due to historical encounters of discrimination.

74. House of Lords Library (2020). Covid-19: Impact on the UK cultural sector. <https://lordslibrary.parliament.uk/covid-19-impact-on-the-uk-cultural-sector/> [Last accessed 18/06/2021]

75. Florisson, R., O'Brien, D., Taylor, M., McAndrew, S., Feder, T. (2021). The impact of Covid-19 on jobs in the cultural sector – part 3. Centre for Cultural Value. <https://www.culturehive.co.uk/CVresources/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-jobs-in-the-cultural-sector-part-3/> [Last accessed 18/06/2021]

The culture of gathering is traditionally essential for the Roma culture and heritage. Like with culture of employment, it appears that the Roma community has been disproportionately affected by the lockdown rules when they were restricted to practice this part of their heritage that is essential to their cultural identity:

P: Us as Roma we have this tradition to meet with each other, whole family gets together but because of Covid we could not do that so that was probably the biggest change we had during that period and New years was pretty much the same as well since it still wasn't permitted to meet more people. We missed to have our whole family around (Czech man, 20).

Social gathering restrictions were not easy for anyone, however given that this is integral to the Roma culture, we can see how restricted social gathering affected the Roma more than others in Western countries. Some people expressed sadness:

“At any other Christmas we would be with all of my children in one home and with the rest of family and it will be a happy day like it supposed to be” (Polish man, 41).

Some demonstrated resilience and adaptation to new realities:

P: Christmas is Christmas and it doesn't matter if it is lockdown or normal days because we are excited that you do decoration you clean house. Also, my daughter had 18th so we were excited. She didn't have party because of lockdown and we couldn't but she enjoyed her birthday. Christmas is about doing something different: you do baking with family, with girls, so Christmas is something different. We missed family but we can see each other through computer all Christmas (Slovak woman, 48).

Different attitudes produced different realities.

Conclusion

The outbreak of the pandemic had an immense impact on art and culture. The pandemic deepened existing disparities in terms of cultural manifestation and engagement of ethnic minorities.⁷⁶ This had a devastating effect on the family economics of the most vulnerable Roma in Scotland – the Romanian Roma. Limited financial resources to support the Roma culture and heritage during the lockdown in

Scotland can be seen as attributing to worsening of the economic inequalities. Additionally, although some progress was made in the last few years in terms of cultural recognition of the Roma in Scotland, the emergence of COVID-19 pandemic seems to dismantle them and contribute to further marginalisation of Roma culture in Scotland.

The lockdown also had a negative effect on naturalisation of the culture of employment which disproportionately affects people that come from disadvantaged backgrounds, such as Roma. Similarly, Roma were disproportionately affected by restrictions on social gathering as this affected a core element of their culture. Digitalisation that appears to partly remedy many of the listed issues is a tool that excludes those that are digitally illiterate: elderly, illiterate, migrants with poor English. In this respect, some work has been already done to remedy this issue.

Theme 5 – Local Roma Interventions

When most Eastern European Roma started to arrive in Scotland back in 2005, there were no interventions in place. First report about the Roma in Glasgow was made by Oxfam in 2008⁷⁷. This report pointed to the widespread and multi-layered poverty amongst the new arrivals. On this basis, local practitioners started a first initiative called EU practitioners. This was a regular monthly meeting where local practitioners worked together to try to resolve some of the issues that they were faced with when working with the local Roma community. First Roma Led charity, Romano Law, was established in 2011, first as a community group, then as Scottish Charity. We then saw the establishment of a more organised response when Glasgow City Council took over the EU practitioners' network. On this basis, the council established Roma families Social Work as well as an establishment of the HUB, which was, to a degree, a continuum of the EU practitioners' meetings. In this section we consider the effectiveness of local interventions during the pandemic

Background to local interventions

Since the Oxfam report, there have been a few reports made by various organisations who have researched the welfare of Roma in Glasgow.

76. Centre for Cultural Value, Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre and The Audience Agency (2021). COVID-19 Cultural Participation Monitor. Inequalities through COVID-19. <https://www.theaudienceagency.org/asset/2696> [Last accessed 17/06/2021]

1. All levels of government give public recognition to the Roma ethnic minority status
2. Access to services (which come with EU enlargement) are communicated clearly to relevant agencies and authorities
3. Allocate human and financial resources to support public services to meet the needs of the Roma in relation to health, education, housing, and employment.
4. Allocate human and financial resources to support public services to develop capacity to protect, enhance and develop Roma rights.
5. Services to recognise need to prioritise community development, social inclusion and community cohesion work.

Oxfam (2009)⁷⁸ established the base for current local Roma services by producing a framework for practitioners' interventions so that Roma rights would be sustained - the key points being:

In 2010, Govanhill Baths produced a map of local assets.⁷⁹ This comprehensive report concluded that although there were many assets in the locality, they were not effectively utilised due to lack of community-led development. Similarly, Glasgow Community Planning Partnership report (2010)⁸⁰ recommended, apart from stabilising new migrants and supporting vulnerable families, community involvement was needed (increasing activity, integration and cohesion) (17-18). Sarah Cowan's report (2011)⁸¹, besides echoing already raised concerns about lack of local community's civic engagement, highlighted how local interventions were failing to provide opportunities for the Roma to partake in decision making and how action was missing to "investigate local statutory services that have been identified as potentially failing to meet equal opportunities guidelines" (10). Besides that, she also recommended a production of a report on human capital amongst the Roma. This was taken on By Glasgow City Council in 2012.⁸² This fairly normative report highlighted, besides the usual apparent Roma capital deficits, an issue that amongst the then known Roma communities (Czech and Slovak), that there was no known leader who could represent their voice. More than half of the 112 respondents however highlighted that they would welcome someone like that. This hint was ignored as further development of local Roma engagement strategies turned super-normative.

A report conducted by a privately owned company (Social Marketing Gateway, 2013)⁸³ is a top-down

report takes Roma governance far away from the community and its impact is also noticeable in the later URBACT local action plan⁸⁴ which focuses almost exclusively on "Roma problems" and how to empower the practitioners to "deal" with those problems. In terms of participation in civic structures, Roma had entered to Covid pandemic with serious disadvantage.

77. Poole, L., Adamson, K. (2008). Report on the Situation of the Roma Community in Govanhill, Glasgow. <https://bemis.org.uk/resources/gt/scotland/report%20on%20the%20situation%20of%20the%20roma%20community%20in%20govanhill,%20Glasgow.pdf> [Last accessed 18/06/2021]

78. Oxfam (2009). Briefing on the Situation of the Roma Community in Govanhill, Glasgow. Roma Report. <https://oxfamilibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/112456/situation-roma-govanhill-glasgow-210708-summ-en.pdf;jsessionid=F2610A6983B-F346AB8D62BD8119B08AD?sequence=2> [Last accessed 18/06/2021]

79. Govanhill Baths (2015). Govanhill, what the people say? A map of assets. <https://www.govanhillbaths.com/mdocs-posts/govanhill-what-the-people-say-a-map-of-assets-2/> [Last accessed 15/06/2021]

80. Bynner, C. (2010). Review of Community Engagement in Neighbourhood Management in Govanhill. Report for the Govanhill Neighbourhood Management Steering Group <http://crosshillandgovanhill.org.uk/grindocs/ReviewofCommunityEngagementinNeighbourhood-ManagementinGovanhill.pdf> [Last accessed 15/06/2021]

81. Cowan, S. (n.d.). Roma Participation in Community Development Interventions: Support to access employment in Govanhill, Glasgow <http://crosshillandgovanhill.org.uk/grindocs/Roma%20Participation%20in%20Community%20Development%20Interventions.pdf> [Last accessed 17/06/2021]

82. Crkon, P., Dec 2012, - available through DRS, Glasgow City Council

83. Social Marketing Gateway (2013) Mapping the Roma Community in Scotland. Final Report. Glasgow. <http://www.socialmarketinggateway.co.uk/news/new-research-mapping-the-roma-community-in-scotland/> [Last accessed 18/06/2021]

84. Glasgow ROMA-NeT (2015). Local Action Plan 2012-13 https://urbact.eu/sites/default/files/import/Projects/Roma_Net/documents_media/The_Local_Action_Plan_of_Glasgow.pdf [Last accessed 20/06/2021]

Local interventions during Covid

The local institutional services during the pandemic shut off all "unnecessary" activities, community development being the first obvious one to go. Participatory and civic engagements became quickly replaced by basic (additional) aid services (food banks, food parcels, food vouchers), and basic social and health care. Some people reported that they received this type of support:

J: Are there any organisations that you know that provide support or you even received that support yourself?

P: Yes, of course. We received food packages/deliveries during Covid period to support us from the community centre Romano Lav and Community Renewal (Czech man, 39).

However, a few people (or their families) that we interviewed reported how they were actively engaged in delivering local interventions such as food parcels in their neighbourhoods.



Govanhill's Roma Helping Others Through the Pandemic, source Greater Govanhill⁸⁵

This directly challenged our stereotype on seeing the Roma as being at the receiving end of aid:

D: Do you get any support from organisation or charity?

P: No we didn't need any support because I have my mum and dad who cares about as but I know lots of people who needs a help but I don't need. But my mum dad aunty uncle working for charity so they always delivering food to other people who needs it, staff for kids nappies milk and other things so they always was there for other people is well (Young Slovak woman, 18).

Security and interventions

Before the rules came into place, people, young and old, classed Covid as a hoax:

P: In the first time I didn't scare of it I just thinking it a hoax I just think it will disappear I thinking it's will just for couple month maybe and that will go away like a flu I didn't think about it (Slovak woman, 20).

The main reason to change in attitudes from not following the rules, to following the rules was reported to be personal experience with Covid:

J: Okay, and what about the second wave that came. Was it any worst? mentally challenging perhaps?

P: Mentally it was all okay I would say, it was all the same pretty much just that we were being told its worst. But we didn't really feel until the moment we got Covid. Then it got pretty serious and we started to be very careful much more than to what we already have been (Czech man, 20).

As a result of the personal (and community) experiences, when it came to following the rules of lockdown, the interviewees by in large respected the rules which means that there was no need for security intervention when it came to Roma people:

J: Do you think that implementation of lockdown is a good move from the Government?

P: Yes and I think this should have been done much sooner, of course we don't meet with anyone and everyone should respect the rules so we can get back to normal as soon as possible (Czech man, delivery driver).

Of those that reported not respecting them, the main reason was disinformation and for young people, peer pressure. In this context, it seems that disinformation was a problem especially at the beginning of the pandemic which had an effect on people following the rules. Intervention on misinformation could have been better handled by prompt production of accessible material. However, this might not be enough if there were historical issues with mistrust and lack of civic participation of the Roma.

85. Davies, R.J. (2020). Govanhill's Roma Helping Others Through the Pandemic. Greater Govanhill. <https://www.greatergovanhill.com/latest/govanhills-roma-helping-others-through-the-pandemic> [Last accessed 18/06/2021]

Conclusions

The local interventions during covid were of humanitarian character (food vouchers, parcels etc.) from which some Roma people benefited, many did not require it, and good few actively provided it to others. This is good as we can see how the Roma are emancipating from the “needy subject” category to which they have been stereotypically fitted by local top-down action-planning.

The originally recommended priorities: Roma community engagement in local civic structures, became lost in the pandemic. When it came to “following the rules,” some people that were affected by misinformation said they would not take the vaccine, for example. Many people reported that it was a good thing and that they would take it. This difference in attitude was not based on age or nationality, but purely on individual judgement. Personal experience with Covid part-restored the decision to be careful and follow the rules which means that local policing did not have a reason to engage with the Roma. What the crisis highlighted are the serious issues with effective communication between the local practitioners and local Roma which could have prevented misinformation from spreading and affecting the more vulnerable Roma population.

What appears to be not provided by local interventions was information to Roma that they could lean on. This may have prevented them from researching on the internet and engaging with misinformation. The ongoing gap between Roma and the structures of power manifests as a problem especially in times of crisis. Apart from over-engagement due to too many practitioners and few potential participants, we anticipate further diminishing of the Roma participation in civic structures which is going to have further detrimental effects in future crises.

Theme 6 – Marginal interventions

Compared to other local interventions, Ando Glaso (AG) does not focus just on Govanhill. In fact, since its establishment, AG’s aspirations grew from city-wide initiatives to Scotland wide ones. Currently, AG is developing a business plan that would incorporate international collaborations with Roma. In this section we look at the form of interventions that AG offered throughout the pandemic. Its working

mechanism is different and deserves attention. First, we introduce the work that AG does.

The work of Ando Glaso

Currently, AG engages the Roma using their cultural identity and heritage as a tool through which it encourages their civic participation. In a recent article that was published in Musicians Union, AG representative, Janos Lang, asks the question, whether music is in Gypsy blood?⁸⁶ He argues that Gypsy cultural heritage, such as music, is perceived by the majority of society as something that comes “naturally” to Roma whilst, in fact, it is a skill that is practiced and learned. This racialised misconception, he argues further, has a detrimental effect on Roma empowerment because heritage does not get picked up by typical Roma engagement initiatives: “Roma people’s rich cultural heritage often remains an uncharted territory for Roma empowerment and inclusion.”

The overall goal of AG’s intervention is focussed on de-marginalisation of Roma culture. In practical terms this means that AG seeks to assist in changes that are necessary for Roma cultural heritage to be appointed on a similar level such as traditional Irish or Scottish heritage. AG is at the beginning of this process. Demarginalisation would mean that robust structures have been established around the Roma culture, as it is with, say Celtic Connections, where Scottish musicians can achieve professional recognition and connect with other cultures while celebrating their own heritage, or Irish World Academy where one can achieve a Bachelors degree in Irish dance, music, ethnomusicology, etc. This would enable non-Roma as well as Roma people to study and learn traits of Roma cultural heritage as a skill and Roma artists to be recognised as professional artists rather than just as “street vendors in Scotland” (Voiculescu, 2014).⁸⁷ Demarginalisation would also mean direct empowerment to the Roma artists and performers. Perceived as marginal, they lack the power to “choose not to” collaborate with initiatives that damage their cultural heritage for fear of losing possible future sponsors (Silverman, 2015).⁸⁸ All in all, demarginalization of Roma heritage is the key, according to AG, to unlocking doors of fair and equal forms of collaborations for Roma and to their empowerment to protect their heritage from “superficial staged ethnic stereotyping” (Silverman, 2015: 177).

86. Lang, J. (2021). GRT History Month: In the Blood. Musicians Union. <https://musiciansunion.org.uk/news/grt-history-month-in-the-blood> [Last accessed 18/06/2021]

A marginal practice, such as that performed by AG, is practice based on the choice not to partake in normalisation of the Roma. It brings about a change of environment that firstly enables equal and fair participation. Secondly, as equal partners, Roma regain their power to “choose not to”⁸⁹ partake in commercial and ethno-political appropriation of their heritage. Whilst commercialisation and consumption come as no strangers also to Roma communities, AG’s other role is to also directly influence the Roma participants in buying into the idea that their heritage does not need to be sold off for profit to the majority. AG performs practice that can be called “ecology of participation” (Taylor and Bovill, 2018).⁹⁰ This strategic “new use of the self” (Whyte, 2010)⁹¹ could be argued to be a new form of civic participation: “a process of becoming which recasts subjectivity; acting well in relation which enacts concern; and an orientation to harmony in which difference in equality is valued” (Taylor and Bovill, 2018: 112).

AG and the pandemic

AG’s ecology of participation enables rather than prescribes exact future interconnections between Roma and “others,” not building the new ideal, but purposely leaving the knots loose and so possibilities open. These are argued to be important in establishing new forms of relations that are free form normalisation (Agamben and Heller-Roazen, 1999)⁹². However, AG’s work is itself vulnerable to changes in the environment, such as those brought by the Covid pandemic. As the pandemic hit, the “higher principles” of engagement had to be temporarily thrown out of the window as the charity had to temporarily resume to aid food parcels and food vouchers to vulnerable Roma. However, AG quickly regained its balance and with easing of the lockdown over summer and early autumn 2020, the charity went back to “feeding opportunities” for Roma to collaborate and perform, albeit virtually.

Music has been an important part economically, culturally and socially especially for some of the Romanian Roma interviewed as can be seen from this statement:

From the age of 13-14, I was singing at weddings and parties. We had some boys where they gathered, and they always called us to sing. That’s how it is with us, [gypsies]. This is the most important occupation - music. We sang somewhere, in the park, everyone could hear us and slowly I began to sing with other older fiddlers who saw us yielding. We were more

skilled than others, and we started playing with the best, oldest fiddlers.

(Vassi, 52 years old)

Music to them is more than a simple activity that produces income; it has a strong symbolic meaning too (a part of their tradition, connection with the family or the native country, a personal passion). The passion is well illustrated in this statement:

Music is part of me, of my life, of my culture. I consider it a family, like my children. A love, a passion. I love music from the bottom of my heart. Music relaxes you and makes you happy. Music is the hope that helps you move forward all the time.

(Marc, 40 years old)

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(Marc, 40 years old)

The initiative of Ando Glaso is well perceived by the musicians because the charity’s engagement is made of two important elements: passion and trust, as one respondent expressed with smile:

I saw that the boys were nice and that some money came out of it. I got along well and played music with them from the bottom of my heart.

(Adrian, 42 years old)

87. Voiculescu, C. (2014). Voyagers of the smooth space. Navigating emotional landscapes: Roma street vendors in Scotland: ‘Every story is a travel story—A spatial practice’ (De Certeau). *Emotion, Space and Society*. 13. pp. 24-31

88. Silverman, C. (2015). Gypsy/Klezmer Dialectics: Jewish and Romani Traces and Erasures in Contemporary European World Music. In *Ethnomusicology Forum*. Vol. 24, No. 2, pp. 159-180. Routledge.

89. Agamben, G. (2020). *I. Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Stanford university Press. pp. 1-160.

90. Taylor, C. A., & Bovill, C. (2018). Towards an ecology of participation: Process philosophy and co-creation of higher education curricula. *European Educational Research Journal*, 17(1), 112-128.

91. Whyte, J. (2010). A new use of the self: Giorgio Agamben on the Coming Community. *Theory & Event*, 13(1).

92. Agamben, G., & Heller-Roazen, D. (1999). *Potentialities: Collected essays in Philosophy*. Stanford University Press

Collaborating with the organisation is a great opportunity to engage in activities that bring triple satisfaction - the chance to play music, networking with other musicians (socio-cultural recognition and representation), and financial advantages (economic redistribution) as explained here:

Ando Gaso is a very good organisation that deals with Roma culture, which puts value on culture, on International Roma Day, for example. I think it's a good thing AG. I'm glad it exists. I like that we do music.

(Marc, 40 years old)

It was good to learn that Ando Glaso was perceived as being "theirs" which made them keen to engage with the charity further:

I would like to see a bigger project, to form a band, even if it is a family band or with other foreign Roma, to give some concerts, to be a bit bigger. To show to the world what we know, what we do best.

(Vassi, 52 years old)

I would like to develop our music more and have our own room so that we can manifest. Let's bring more, let's look for talented boys, Roma of ours - that now new generations are coming from behind who are with music and let's move forward.

(Romanian man, 40 years old)

The charity's engagement generated independent aspirations and a drive to do more – a meaningful engagement.

Conclusion

In summary, music is an essential part of some of the people interviewed, especially the Romanian Roma. It represents an occupation passed from generation to generation and also considered a form of identity inside of the family and an element of pride in their own heritage. Although without any formal training, Roma develop exceptional musical skills. They use these talents to make a living as (occasional) artists/professionals and satisfy their emotional and affective needs (connection, belonging, appreciation). In this respect, Ando Glaso pledges to explore this immense potential of Roma musicians in order to gain the well-deserved artistic recognition and representation of Roma culture (cultural and social justice) alongside with the possibility to obtain some material

benefits (economic justice). This is well received by the participants and can be seen as having a positive impact on their wellbeing. Glasgow as a melting pot of Roma cultures holds potential that might and might not be fulfilled depending on the approach taken.

Theme 7 - Private life, family and God

The concept of family is controversial in the context of the Roma and their governance. It is historically documented (Willems, 1997)⁹³ how Roma family (large families with many children) became classified as a public health concern during the 19th century. This racial governance was concerned with an apparent risk of the Roma population "overbreeding." From this, there was only a small step to forced sterilisations and concentration camps during the 20th century Europe (Sokolova, 2012⁹⁴; Albert and Szilvasi, 2017⁹⁵; Marks, 2017⁹⁶). It is also argued (Foucault, 2003⁹⁷) that with the evolution of modern forms of governance, family became valuable to politics. It is because the ideal family unit meant ideal equilibrium for economic activities: Healthy family with an ideal number of offspring meant good labour power. On the other hand, family economics that are off the scale of the ideal, for example a family with more offspring than this ideal, would be considered an obstacle and an issue for the established system. This social exclusion would bring on racial discrimination. In this last section we consider the effect of pandemic on private life in Roma context.

The theme of family during pandemic

Despite being worried about the material (job, money, food), the key value to the Roma during pandemic was by far family as obvious from this statement:
J: How would you describe the pandemic and affect it had on you?

P: I think it was tough for everyone, everyone had to deal with it differently in different way. Some people lost jobs, some people had to deal with mental health issues which became more of a thing and people talk about it more. For me personally it was just mainly thoughts about family and how to keep your family safe and not put anyone at risk (Czech woman, 38)

This is where we saw the biggest impact of the crisis:
J: What would you say that Covid took from you but what you even maybe potentially gained from it?

P: It took way friendships, visits, going out, I can't visit family and friends. We could not attend important celebrations. We had to respect the guidelines. But I don't think I gained anything through this experience maybe the only think that I am more cautious, I call back home more check up on family more than what I would usually do, I am more scared for them (Czech man, 39).

Family as a source of strength

Family ties brought about a feeling of belonging and identity and how much one valued family mattered during the pandemic:

D: And what things kept you running? that you say to yourself you must go on?

P: My family because I know there is some people living alone or they don't have anyone; they are staying alone. I probably couldn't stay alone, thank God that I have family. We are supporting each other. Before the pandemic, we only saw each other at night but now we were home so we were spending time together with our grandma playing cards and other games. For me it was good thing we had time for each other that was a big thing that kept me on (Young Slovak woman, 18).

And:

M: Was there anything that helped to go through this whole situation?

P: Yes, spending more time with my kids and the two of my girls they bond together even more and that was good because the time I was working I didn't have much time to spend with them and also I am happy that nobody from my family got infected (Polish woman, 48).

93. Willems, W., (1997). In search of the true gypsy: from Enlightenment to Final Solution. London: Frank Cass Publishers.
94. Sokolova, V. (2012). Cultural Politics of Ethnicity: discourses on Roma in communist Czechoslovakia. Vol. 82. Ibidem-Verlag: Ibidem Press.
95. Albert, G., & Szilvasi, M. (2017). Intersectional Discrimination of Romani Women Forcibly Sterilized in the Former Czechoslovakia and Czech Republic. Health and human rights, 19(2). Online. Available: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5739354/> [Last accessed 12/3/2021]
96. Marks, S. (2017). The Romani minority, coercive sterilization, and languages of denial in the Czech lands. In History Workshop Journal. Oxford: Oxford University Press. pp. 128-148.
97. Foucault, M. (2003). "Society Must Be Defended": Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-1976. Vol. 1. F. Ewald (ed). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Family was that thing that gave them power to continue going through the pandemic, to remain stable. Family was the thing that made them feel that they had to be strong to overcome the obstacle.

Identity and belonging

Identity and belonging became more conscious because it was no longer taken for granted:
J: Is there something at all that you could say is a positive about this whole situation?

P: This is quite difficult question. For me the only positive would be that my family got out of it and we are all healthy. We are very thankful we are healthy now. Its very important to follow the rules and keep an eye on hygiene. Love for the family and friends is important (Czech man, 48).

This consciousness was not reported to be based on group identity. Being Roma played little role for the respondents during the pandemic. Instead, people reported that the experience of lockdown and covid pandemic made their family ties stronger:
M: Is there anything that you would say was actually positive about this whole experience?

P: Yes spending more time my family and learning that we should hold together with all the people that were important for us (Polish man, 43).

Secondly, not being able to see extended members of the original family due to restrictions brought about conscious recapitulation of what family means for one:
M: How did you feel when you weren't allowed to see your family?

P: It touched me very much because I worked before the pandemic and I have lots of friends even my boss and can't get to meet them anymore so it is a sad time for us we've been separated from everybody and had to stay in the house all the time (Polish woman, 48)

Family as a source of anxiety and faith in God

Family can be seen as bringing power to people but also similarly weakness; empowerment to keep going but also powerlessness of not being able to see one another. This seemed to be the case for the elderly and for the young especially. The young people reported how it was hard not to be able to hang out with friends. For the elderly, it was hard to imagine that their kids won't see them again, before they die:

P: My thoughts was like oh my God it's that really true? My kids they are back home in Slovakia. How can I go home to see them? How it's going to be? I am old, I already survived for long enough but young generation, how they will be here? What will happen to them? We, as humans, can't die like that! It was mental. We had lost of thinking in our mind. If I die, my kids will not see me anymore also I was worried about my kids and friends. It was bad (Elderly Slovak man, 60+).

Family however also brought about anxiety when one worried about the health of one's family and one's own health:

M: How did your life change because of it?

P: I had depression before the pandemic because of my illness but now it got even worse, and this virus has a very bad impact on my life because I couldn't get outside and I got a social anxiety because of the lack of meeting with my friends and had no one to talk to (Polish Man, 43).

Feeling of responsibility towards family was a strong trigger in feeling anxious about Covid and the pandemic lockdown:

I got afraid because this situation started to get more serious and we weren't sure what's going on. I was coming back from work and straight for a bath and washed the clothes that I had on, because I was so scared from this virus and I didn't want to get it or the worst spread it on to my family (Polish woman, 48).

This was expressed strongly across the four nations. Besides family, a strong importance to the interviewed Roma was also God:

We people can't be like this, shrouded in darkness, and scared. We must open our eyes to somehow

survive in reality, not just use feeling that generates fear. So we also believe and have faith which gives us hope. Because I am a Christian, we can't give up just like that (Elderly Slovak man, 60+).

Conclusion

Family was by far the most mentioned topic throughout the interviews across all four nations and across all ages and genders. The pandemic generated a great amount of fear from losing a family member and from transmitting the virus to other family members. The pandemic scared people and generated a lot of anxiety. For those that had poor mental health before the pandemic, this experience made it worse. For those that were ok before the pandemic, this experience triggered worries. Family was also that thing that was reported to keep people going and help overcome the crisis, whether it was by keeping it together and not crumbling under the pressure, or through faith which gave people hope and strength. Keeping family safe appears to be the centre of the focus of actions taken by the people throughout the crisis. As a central-point of attention, the concept of family signifies that Roma were not so much engaged with individual rights fought by others, such as freedoms to gather, to not wear a mask and so on. Those individual rights and freedoms were mentioned, but more in a sense that it was a shame that we couldn't travel freely anymore. It was not important to fight for those, at least not as important as keeping family safe and shielding it from the effects of the crisis. In this context, it can be argued that the crisis had an immense impact on Roma, especially their mental health, because it triggered worries about family and as already mentioned, anxieties and depression in many interviewed individuals. This impact will, no doubt, be felt for months to come and signifies how seriously Roma took the crisis and did all they could to protect themselves and people around them, especially their loved ones.

Report's conclusions

The purpose of this research was to bring forth the lived realities of Roma in Scotland during the pandemic because they, too, were hit by the severity of the situation, but their voice was not heard and their anguish remains largely unseen. Racialisations took place at the beginning of the pandemic which spread rumours that Roma are not practicing social distancing. This at times was generated by local hate speech and fuelled by tabloid media. Our report is to partially remedy this and make the lived experience of the Roma visible. Through this research, we have put on record the initial impact, which is still well remembered and still continues to affect those that went through it.

We did not assume that the Roma would have lived through the pandemic differently and that they would have had different experiences from anyone else in Scotland. The purpose of this research was to record the impact of Covid crisis on the Scottish communities, so that someone else sometime in the future won't be able to produce alternative realities for the Roma to fit a political agenda. However, as we went along with the data analysis, we realised that the crisis indeed affected the Roma community differently. The Roma as BMAE are statistically in increased risk of developing Covid 19 complications. This means that they already entered Covid from a disadvantageous starting point. Adding to this, we found some possible traces of disadvantage that would be worth looking into in more detail. Below we present a list of possible follow-ups to this report. They are not presented in any particular order:

1. **Education:** Low education levels due to racism = increased risk of uncritical thinking = increased sensitivity to conspiracy theories = increased disinformation amongst the Roma community = increased spread of Covid 19 amongst the Roma community = increased impact of the pandemic (death, long covid etc) adding to the biological disadvantage.

2. **Charitable aid:** Many Roma people, like others, received food parcels during the pandemic due to loss of income. Additional support during the pandemic was therefore welcome. But this should not be applied across the Roma population as many participated in disseminating the food parcels to others in need in their local communities. Not all Roma ended up as receivers of aid during the

lockdown. This is good as we can see how the Roma are emancipating from the "needy subject" category to which they have been stereotypically fitted by local top-down action-planning. There is the question to ask, what kind of people became more dependent on organisations external to family. There is a risk that the lockdown will be used to excuse organisational inability to practice meaningful participation prior to the lockdown with resulting dependency of client on services. This dependency was there before the lockdown. The lockdown actually could be seen as a potential circuit breaker.

3. **Employment:** Those that depend on the grey economy are amongst the most disadvantaged – the Romanian Roma. Those most disadvantaged got disproportionately more affected by the lockdown – no street customers to get money from. For those that only just learned that work routine is a norm (due to historical encounters with racism in the labour market), the lockdown meant a break from this newly acquired routine. This can have a significant impact on first-time employed individuals coming from multigenerational unemployment backgrounds. The possibilities that Scotland offers in employment have been interrupted this way and can have a regressing effect on the Roma people learning this new routine and others coming from similar backgrounds.

4. **Work:** Majority of the working age Roma interviewed that the pandemic did not necessarily mean loss of work as more a change of work pattern – work from home – which was reported to have its advantages, but also disadvantages (not being able to be at work and with work colleagues was reported to have negative effect on their mental health).

5. **Poverty:** People that depended on the grey economy were negatively affected and suffered from poverty more during the lockdown. However, this report shows that different Roma lived through the crisis differently. From this report we can see that being Roma does not automatically translate into living in poverty anymore. We saw how the Roma suffered because they could not go to work although they wanted to because they liked what they were doing at work, and we did not see that the crisis would automatically translate into poverty and increased dependency on aid.

6. **Following the rules:** Some Roma not practicing social distancing at the beginning due to lack of trust

of information coming from official channels (result of experience of racist policies) – coming from already marginalised community, the risk of spreading the disease to general population is lower, but the risk of spreading the disease amongst each other is higher.

7. Stigmatisation: Media reporting on the Roma not practicing social distancing add to the Roma being seen as part of the problem and a risk, rather than seeing the Roma as being at increased and disproportional risk of actually catching the illness (increased spread amongst the Roma community due to mistrust of information coming from official channels and increased buy into disinformation) and developing complications from it.

8. Health: Many Roma suffer from chronic health issues such as diabetes, heart issues, high blood pressure due to historical experience of racism – this has proven to be a significant disadvantage during the pandemic as those are all risk factors of developing complications, long covid and death. This could be seen as not taking care of their bodies, but they reported anxiety because they couldn't get hold of their GP or because their health appointments and operations were cancelled. They also reported gratitude that at the beginning there was a system in place that their tablets would be delivered to their home. All means they care about their body and want their body to be healthy.

9. Vaccination: A massive resistance to vaccination in general in Slovakia means that many Slovak Roma will not get vaccinated as they watch news from home which also triples into their social media channels. The Scottish Roma will not benefit equally from the successful vaccination campaign in Scotland because of the Slovak media influence. Similar applies to Romanian, Czech and Polish Roma, but is most prominent amongst the Slovak Roma.

10. Young people and mental health: Young people, including the Roma young people, were disproportionately affected by the lockdown as they couldn't go to school and meet friends and other family members they would normally hang out with. This had a negative effect on their mental health. Young people in general got portrayed as part of the problem for not practicing social distancing. From the interviews it was understood that they need social contact more to be mentally healthy. The young

Roma were not different from this.

11. Elderly: People that would be commonly described as elderly in the Roma communities had on one side memories of similar “catastrophic” events in the past. This knowledge helped them to overcome this crisis as they knew that there was light at the end of the tunnel. However, because their families are split between countries (of origin and Scotland), they were anxious that they might die before they saw their families (and their families see them) again.

12. Believing in God: For many, believing in God meant having responsibility to be strong and not give in to panic.

13. Roma culture: The pandemic had a devastating effect on the Roma culture and the culture became disproportionately and significantly affected by the lockdown because the culture is based on gathering.

14. Mental health: Not being able to gather had a negative mental health effect on many people that reported an increase in anxiety and depression throughout Covid. Although anxiety and depression are not uncommon amongst non-Roma communities, the effect of pandemic in this sphere was stronger because the lockdown effect hit the core of the Roma culture.

15. Roma heritage: “Being Roma” in nationalistic sense did not play significant role to the people during the pandemic in the sense that it would somehow help them overcome the crisis. They rather clung together as families. When it comes to practicing art, the Roma were just affected as others because performing opportunities became very limited. The Roma did not necessarily report that this was an economic problem as many are not professional performers in a sense that they would solely rely on income from art activities. Not being able to showcase skills, however, was reported to be a mental issue for many. Limited financial resources to support the Roma culture and heritage during the lockdown in Scotland can be seen as contributing to worsening of economic inequalities but also to further marginalisation of Roma culture in Scotland.

16. Government benefits and furlough: Furlough was considered to be beneficial to many Roma that had to stay at home during the pandemic however access to benefits for freelance artists was considered to be riddled with obstacles from language barriers to

some of the Roma artists (that depend on performing art) being illiterate and having limited support available to apply for those benefits. As a result, many that could have benefited didn't receive support.

17. Racism: The Roma did not report to us that the lockdown meant increased racist (verbal, physical) attacks. This does not necessarily mean that this did not happen. Racist attacks might have happened, but they were not reported through this research as significant in any shape and form. If we see racism as an act between two entities, then lockdown perhaps had a positive effect on face-to-face racism. However, there are reports coming from the EU on the increase of those attacks, including hate speech, online during the year of pandemic 2020.

18. Rights and freedoms: Family was by far the most mentioned topic throughout the interviews across all four nations and across all ages and genders. The pandemic generated a great amount of fear and anxiety but family was also that thing that was reported to keep people going and overcome the crisis. As a central-point of attention, the concept of family signifies that the Roma were not so much engaged with individual rights fought by others during the pandemic, such as freedoms to gather, to not wear a mask and so on. Roma families, more than other families, was that thing that were disproportionately affected during covid. This impact will, no doubt, be felt for months to come.

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