Proyectos Romano:
A study of Roma communities in Balbriggan
**Cairde** is a non-governmental organisation working to reduce health inequalities among ethnic minorities and supports the participation of minority communities in enhancing their health. Cairde works through a rights based approach, believing that the absence of equality and respect for human rights is correlated to the existence of health inequalities.

**Musicantia** is a Roma led initiative which aims to meet the human rights, social and cultural needs of the Roma population in Ireland. By using music, language, culture, and other expertise among Roma adults, children and young people, Musicantia actively promotes integration between their own and other communities.

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Preface

This report is one of the most important pieces of research undertaken in Ireland during the last ten years. It is sometimes forgotten today but the Roma were one of the first immigrant groups to settle in Ireland as the short-lived “Celtic Tiger” years came to a close. As Europe’s perennial migrant people, it was they more than any group who initiated Ireland’s first tentative debates on issues relating to multiculturalism, immigration and Irish identity when a group of Roma were discovered hidden in the back of a lorry in Rosslare, in the mid-1990s. The operative word here is “hidden” because the Roma are a “hidden” people; worse still they are Europe’s most marginalized and forgotten minority. No matter where you go in the world today, you find Roma who are forced to hide their identity and discrimination is the norm still for this long-established people who have migrated throughout the world over many centuries.

The Roma highlighted in this report have been in Ireland for more than a decade now, their children have been born here and yet it is both disturbing and scandalous how “marginal” they still are to the main organs of Irish society and culture. Despite our very positive image abroad we Irish have a history of this, of neglecting the weakest and the most vulnerable amongst us. It is a long history and one we have only just begun to discuss as a society and as a people.

The Roma live here amongst us and yet they are still hidden and assigned to the margins, still the perennial “outsiders.” Amongst the most valuable aspects of this report into the Roma life experience in Ireland, as relating to language, health, education, and everyday discrimination is the participatory nature of it – i.e. that it came from the Roma themselves, that they initiated and saw the work through to completion because they no longer want to remain “forgotten.” Marianna Prontera and everyone who collated this report are to be commended on their efforts. It is vital that this research reaches as wide an audience as possible.

Dr. Micheál Ó hAodha
Visiting Lecturer,
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Introduction

This report is a snapshot of the socio-economic situation of the Roma population in Balbriggan and is a collaborative initiative between Cairde and Musicantia. Since both organisations set up offices in Balbriggan, in 2010 and 2013 respectively, they have been providing information and advocacy to a significant and increasing number of Roma families and individuals. This study is a direct consequence of the need to gain a wider and deeper insight into the experiences of the Roma communities living in Balbriggan. It aims to better inform our work and the work of other agencies who support Roma communities, with the intention of providing more culturally specific services and policies. There are an estimated 10-12 million Roma living in Europe, while 5,000 is the estimated number of Roma living in Ireland. The researchers of this project estimate that there are 65 Roma families living in Balbriggan. Official data is scarce, and in general there is little information available on Roma as data on ethnicity is not yet systematically collected in Ireland by service providers. In the 2016 Census, for the first time, the Central Statistics Office used the example of Roma as an ethnicity in the guidelines to the official form. This was a milestone and it is possible that this may produce some useful national data, though it may take several censuses for Roma to learn to trust the process and for comprehensive statistics to emerge. This small-scale research project is an initial attempt to start addressing this significant information gap and to encourage further research studies.

Having initially presented the hard facts derived from the study results, this research document goes on to make a number of recommendations on how to tackle some of the current issues faced by Roma communities in Balbriggan.

Methodology

The study was carried out over a period of approximately one year and consisted of three main phases. The first part of the project comprised of a short training delivered to five Roma participants in quantitative and qualitative research methods. During the training participants were presented with different research methodologies and different methods to collect data. The second part of the project was based on data collection, which was entirely carried out by the Roma researchers over the summer months in 2015. Thirty questionnaires were collected in person during this span of time and the forms maintained the anonymity of the research participants. The third phase of the project consisted of data entry, data analysis and the report compilation.

Aside from the value of the results produced from this study, there is an intrinsic worth in the research process itself. Participants conducted participatory action research by studying and reflecting on how to research their own ethnic group. This changed the dynamic from external research about Roma to ‘insider’ research by and for Roma people. The Roma researchers decided that the most culturally appropriate method to collect data was through a questionnaire that also included open-ended questions. The questionnaire was divided into seven sections that included the following topics: respondents’ profile, housing and accommodation, health, training and education, employment, racism and discrimination, and finally respondents’ own views on what needs to be changed. This report reflects the topics in the questionnaires and it adds recommendations which are informed by the analysis of the data.
It is important to acknowledge that while the data produced in this report represents the specific socio-economic situation of Roma people living in Balbriggan, certain aspects of the research will be more widely applicable to the broader Roma population in Ireland than others. It will be the task of future research to investigate this further and give a national picture of the Roma population in Ireland.

People who took part in this study are all of Roma ethnicity and originally came from Romania.

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1 The word ‘communities’ is deliberately used throughout the report to emphasise the diversity within the Roma population.


3 For Census 2016, Pavee Point, Traveller and Roma Centre, produced a video encouraging Roma people to record their ethnicity http://www.paveepoint.ie/census-2016-april-24th-make-your-mark/
Participants’ Personal Profile

Thirty Roma people adults participated in this study. Out of these 60% are women and 40% are men. The majority of those who took part to this study are of working age: participants’ average age is 35 years old.

The most common marital status is co-habiting with 53% and the second most common status is single 30% either divorced, never married, or widowed. Married couples make up only 13% of respondents. 77% of the respondents have children. A significant number of Roma people who participated in this research are single parents. The average number of children per family is four which is almost three times the national average of children per family in Ireland\(^4\); 17% of the respondents state that they have children outside of Ireland. The most common religion among respondents is Pentecostal with 61% followed by Orthodox Christian (36%). 93% speak Romani as their first language. The average time that respondents have spent in Ireland is 12 years. None of the respondents have been in Ireland for less than five years and 63% have been in Ireland for more than 10 years. A majority of respondents came to Ireland to seek asylum before Romania joined the European Union in 2007.

Although the majority of respondents have spent more than a decade in this country, the level of their spoken English is very low, while their reading and writing skills in English are even weaker. 46% have no English or speak beginners English; 25% cannot read any English and 39% can read English at a basic level. Therefore 64% of the population state that they cannot read in English or can only read English at a beginner’s level. 32% cannot write in English at all and 43% can write basic English. 75% of the population state that they have no written or beginners written English. Only 4% of the respondents state that they can speak, read, and write in English fluently.

\(^4\) According to Census 2011, the average number of children per family in Ireland is 1.38 http://www.thejournal.ie/census-shows-family-size-still-declining-but-at-a-slower-pace-400539-Mar2012/
PARTICIPANTS

Thirty Roma people participated in the study

The average age is 35 years old

60% 40%

CHILDREN

23% 17% 77%

No children Have children Have children outside of Ireland

The average children for family is 4

TIME IN IRELAND

100%

have been in Ireland for more than 5 years

63%

have been in Ireland for more than 10 years

The average time that respondents have spent in Ireland is 12 years

MARITAL STATUS

53% co-habiting, 30% single (divorced, never married or widowed), 13% married

RELIGION

61%

Pentecostal

36%

Christian Orthodox

3%

Other

LANGUAGE

50%

40%

30%

20%

10%

0%

writing

reading

speaking

no english

beginner

intermediate

advance

fluent
Housing and Accommodation

97% of respondents live in private rented accommodation and only 3% live in social housing provided by the local authority, even though the majority of respondents have been in the country for over a decade and usually have been registered with local authorities. The current housing crisis that the country is facing and specifically the shortage of supply of large housing units available from the local authority partly helps explain why this is the case. None of the respondents own a house.

83% of respondents are satisfied with their current accommodation and 85% feel generally accepted by local people. Some stated that this was not always the case when they first moved in and that it took a few years before neighbours accepted them in the area. Some of the respondents state that they live in areas with a high percentage of non-Irish nationals and this plays a fundamental role in their feeling accepted, implying that they find it easier to settle in a more multicultural environment.

The majority of respondents (64%) state that it was very difficult to find accommodation, and on average respondents and their families have moved at least four times since they came to Ireland.

97% of respondents live in private rented accommodation
97% of the respondents state that they have a medical card. 77% visited the GP at least once in the past year. 92% have never used the D-Doc\(^5\) the main reason being that they are not aware of this service and what it offers. As a result of this outside GP visiting hours, the majority of the respondents (62%), attended at an A&E at least once in the past year. This happens often in families with young children. This shows a lack of access to information on the health services available among Roma people.

97% of the respondents state that they have a medical card

The most common chronic health issues among Roma respondents are diabetes and liver problems, followed by heart issues and high cholesterol. Almost one third of the respondents state that there is someone in their family that suffers from diabetes.

The most common health issues are diabetes and liver problems, followed by heart issues and high cholesterol

77% of the respondents state that language represents a barrier when it comes to accessing health services and 86% would like the help of an interpreter. 44% state that they would like to communicate with health professionals in Romani; 19% state that they would prefer to use the Romanian language, while 33% state that they would like to be able to communicate either in Romanian or the Romani language. Therefore, 96% of Roma people surveyed would like to communicate with healthcare practitioners in a language other than English, and their experience is that such interpreting services have not been routinely available to them.

77% of the respondents state that language represents a barrier when it comes to accessing health services

\(^5\) D-Doc is an out of hours GP service [http://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/2/PrimaryCare/GP_Out_of_Hours/D-DOC/#What is D-Doc?](http://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/2/PrimaryCare/GP_Out_of_Hours/D-DOC/#What is D-Doc?)
Training and Education

93% of the respondents state that they attended school. Five years is the average amount of time spent in school; four years is the average among women and six years among men. 14% of the respondents never attended school or attended school for one year or less. 55% of the respondents never finished primary school; 12 years old is the most frequent age of school leaving among respondents. 10% completed secondary school. Only one respondent attended third-level education. Although the majority of the respondents only attended a few years of primary school, the vast majority (83%) would like to return to study. The topics that they would like to study are very varied; however, English language courses are the most popular by far. Some of the respondents outlined their wish to complete secondary school and obtain the Leaving Certificate. Language barriers (66%), racism (52%) and childcare expenses (45%) are the top reasons barring participants' attempts to go back to study.

The vast majority of respondents have children of school-going age. They state that their children are enrolled in school and that they enjoy school because they make friends and learn in a fun way. Only one respondent mentioned racism as an issue for her child in primary school. This is very positive and it seems that at primary school level in Balbriggan, Roma children are well integrated, at least in the school context. In secondary school racism emerged as an issue in some of the respondents’ accounts. However, we do not have sufficient data to provide more information on this topic and more research in this field is certainly needed.

93% of the respondents state that they attended school. Five years is the average amount of time spent in school.
The unemployment rate among respondents is very high and 90% state that they are in receipt of a social welfare payment. The ability to access social welfare payments is a significant issue for Roma people in Ireland, primarily due to difficulties proving that they meet the Habitual Residence Condition\(^6\) (HRC). In Balbriggan, Cairde and Musicantia have supported many Roma people to prove they meet the HRC and can therefore access social welfare and other services to which they are entitled. However, in most other parts of Ireland, Roma people find it very difficult to access services because of the HRC.

The unemployment rate among respondents is against the current national unemployment rate of 7.8\(^7\) while, according to Census 2011, the unemployment rate in the electoral division of Balbriggan Urban was 13.1%. Among respondents, the three most common payments are: Jobseekers’ Allowance, Disability Allowance and One Parent Family payments.

Before migrating to Ireland, the most common job held by Roma women respondents was selling items at their local markets. They find it difficult to find a similar type of occupation in Ireland. The most common employment among Roma men, before migrating to Ireland, was working on construction sites. A minority managed to find employment in this field in Ireland, even if only for a short period of time. Other jobs held by respondents included: salesperson, barber, cleaner, farm labourer, driver, car mechanic, musician, and wood sculptor.

The most frequent obstacles that prevented respondents finding employment are: language 73%, racism 33% and childcare expenses 30%. These are the same three reasons stated previously as barriers to accessing training and education courses.

The unemployment rate among respondents is 90%

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\(^6\) For further information on the HRC visit: http://www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/Habitual-Residence-Condition--Guidelines-for-Deciding-Offc.aspx

\(^7\) 7.8% was the monthly unemployment rate for Ireland for June 2016 http://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/mue/monthlyunemplo-yment/june2016/
Racism and Discrimination

79% of the respondents state that they have been victims of several forms of racism and discrimination since they moved to Ireland. 90% of the respondents do not report any racist episodes to the Gardai. There are many reasons for this, the most common being ‘afraid of having problems/ not wanting to have issues with the people reported’ (35%). The second significant reason is the language barrier; not being able to speak English fluently represents an obstacle to approaching the Gardai (22%). The third major reason is a lack of trust in the Gardai (17%). Roma respondents have reported throughout the questionnaire that they have been verbally abused by Police/Gardai both while living in Ireland and prior to moving to Ireland. Therefore they do not see any value of reporting incidents to the authorities. The fear of being deported from Ireland is also mentioned among respondents.

In broader terms, the experience of Roma respondents is that racism against them is so deeply embedded in Irish society that they find it difficult to believe that some institutions could positively intervene in this respect.

EXPERIENCE of RACISM in IRELAND:

I have been playing in the street with the accordion and police come and take me driving licence and take our instruments and tell us to go home to Romania, he speaks very rude with us. Some Irish people they say bad words to us and they make me feel rubbish.

when I was on maternity they treated me like dirt and the nurse ignored me.

yes, they threw rocks at my window and kicked down my front door.

A bunch of Irish children they tell me gypsy go home to Romania (…) Me boys, they are bullied in school and the teachers doesn’t say anything. I reported to one of the teachers about the incident and the teacher said to my son “why you stay in this country to receive a child benefit?”

One time I was outside the post office to pay a bill. When I finish, I came on the street. One Irish boy 15-16 years old approached me and with one hand is give me with a fresh egg on the head. I was scared because in that moment I didn’t realise why he was doing that (…) he told me bad words and say ‘go home to your country’

The bodyguard kicked me out of the shops many times; when I do shopping I’m followed; in Balbriggan in some shops don’t let us to go in, they refuse Roma people to buy something.

in ROMANIA:

Romanian people they call us gypsy and they bully all Roma children in the school. They say I am foolish, stupid and I smell bad.

They tell me black gypsy all the time and the children don’t play with me.
Respondents report a variety of places where they are discriminated against and are victims of racism. This variety shows that racism against Roma people is a very common and widespread phenomenon in Irish society. The list of places were Roma respondents report racism ranges from hospitals and GPs, secondary schools and work places, continuing on through housing and social welfare offices. Discrimination happens most commonly in some shops where Roma respondents are systematically refused access or where they are often closely monitored by the staff of the shops (26%). They also report that in the street they have been verbally and sometimes physically abused by passers-by (26%). Also 17% of respondents state that Gardai racially abused them while busking or begging in the street.

Places were Roma respondents report racism ranges from hospitals and GPs, secondary schools and work places, continuing on through housing and social welfare offices

Among the respondents who state that they ‘have never experienced racism in Ireland’, there are those who clarify that this is the case because they tend to cover their Roma identity in a number of ways, such as by not wearing ‘traditional clothes’ and not mentioning their ethnicity. This indicates that there is a serious problem with racism where, in order to fit in and to be accepted in wider society, it is necessary to hide their ethnicity. Other respondents also mention that they are not discriminated against because they have blue eyes and fair skin. This confirms the worrying, widespread and misleading stereotype that all Roma people have dark skin and dark eyes.

Among the respondents who state that they ‘have never experienced racism in Ireland’, there are those who clarify that this is the case because they tend to cover their Roma identity

- I don’t look like a Roma woman, when I speak with people they tell me if I am from Poland? I am lucky because my style is different, I don’t wear skirts and scarf.
- When I am at my job I do not talk to my Roma friends.
- I am not really discriminated because I am very white with blue eyes and I do not wear long skirt and I do not wear headscarf no but I hid the truth and no one know I’m Rom. And secondly my skin is white.
The final question asked what the respondents would like to see changed over the next few years. The theme of the elimination of racism is the predominant one (79%) and emerges again and again, strongly outlining the imperative need to address this issue for the future not only of Roma people but for society as a whole. Racism is spread in various parts of society and impacts directly or indirectly on how Roma people can participate in it. The need for integration stands out starkly when reading through the answers. Employment is also flagged up when referring to integration. 33% of respondents measure their level of integration through employment opportunities in this country. Roma respondents find it difficult both to acquire a job because of the widespread misconceptions about their ethnicity, and to maintain one if their identity is revealed at work.

The other emergent themes are: difficulty securing housing, and bullying in schools. The difficulty in finding accommodation reflects the current housing crisis in Ireland however it is exacerbated by the widespread racism against Roma people. Bullying of Roma children in secondary school was also mentioned as an issue and respondents would love to see an end to it.

When looking for support and advice, Roma respondents to this questionnaire stated that they consulted the following: various NGOs (50%), family and friends (37%) and religious institutions (33%).
Recommendations:

Two main recommendations emerge from the analysis of the questionnaires. One relates to the issue of racism and discrimination (1) and the other to the question of literacy, provision of English classes and education in a more general sense (2). Both issues are interlinked and ultimately impact strongly on all facets of Roma people’s lives. These recommendations should be taken hand in hand with ‘the Ten Common Basic Principles on Roma Inclusion’ of the European Union8.

(1) The issue of racism permeates every single aspect of Roma respondents’ experiences of living in Ireland: from accessing employment to walking down the streets. Without any doubt, racism needs major attention and the following are some practical suggestions that can be implemented to fight against it:

- Both statutory and non-statutory bodies should establish systems and procedures that can accommodate equality and cultural diversity9 and implement anti-racism/intercultural awareness training for all staff e.g. LIR10

- Further expand the provision of anti-racism training/programmes in schools through such initiatives as the Yellow Flag Programme11, Show Racism the Red Card12 and other programmes.

- Embracing and supporting existing anti-racism campaigns i.e. the Love, not Hate campaign13 run by the European Network Against Racism Ireland (ENAR Ireland)14; supporting local initiatives that work against racism and promote integration projects such as the Balbriggan Integration Forum (BIF)15 and Fingal Ethnic Network(FEN)16.

- Encourage Roma participation in local community projects i.e. parent & toddler groups, women’s groups, community centres, volunteering activities etc.

- Encourage Roma participation in local projects and voluntary activities to encourage and support non-formal language acquisition e.g. Failte Isteach.

- Ensure that Roma culture is showcased during cultural or community events.

- Link Roma people with local and national organisations working with Roma and providing advocacy services (Pavee Point, Musicantia, Irish Traveller Movement, North Fingal Travellers Organisation, Tallaght Roma Integration Project, NASC The Irish Immigrant Support Centre, Cairde, Crosscare, Citizen Information Centres, Migrant Rights Centre Ireland, Immigrant Council of Ireland etc.)

- Encourage the employment of Roma interpreters and cultural mediators in order to enable Roma service users to access services more effectively and communicate well with service providing staff. A small number of Roma people are trained as cultural mediators and are available to provide mediation and interpreting services 17.

- Encourage the development of Roma Primary Health Care Projects around the country. These should be modelled on the existing Travellers Primary Health Care strategies.
The naming of the Roma as a specific target group in the national Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme (SICAP) is very welcome. SICAP aims to improve the economic and social inclusion of individuals who are marginalised through community development and customised support. However, in order to succeed it is vital that the Local and Community Development Committees (LCDCs) responsible for implementing SICAP at local levels engage with Roma community groups and community agencies advocating for Roma.

- Report racist incidents and crimes and fill out the i-report form (ENAR Ireland) when racist incidents happen. These types of incidents are currently hugely underreported.

- Establish links with local Garda stations and designate male and female Gardai officers who can be contacted directly by Roma people in case of racist crimes.

- Support local groups of Roma people and link them with existing local structures to represent their voice in the community.

- Link with local media to provide exposure to Roma culture and issues.

- Due to the severe impact that the housing crisis is having on Roma families/individuals, local authorities and the HSE (Health Service Executive) should allocate specific funding towards working with Roma community groups and agencies advocating for Roma housing rights to make sure that their housing needs are addressed. Moreover, housing issues affecting Roma people should be taken into serious consideration when housing policies/strategies are designed at a national level.

Concerning formal education, the data reveals that the levels of both literacy and English language competence is very low among respondents and proves the immediate need for the provision of literacy classes for non-English native speakers and also the provision of English language classes. According to a study on the provision of English classes available in Balbriggan carried out by the BIF in 2015, there is a strong need for the availability of more English classes and for a clear English language progression route that participants can follow. Through the analysis of the questionnaires it becomes clear that the provision of English classes is the first step towards studying other subjects, to accessing services and the labour market and towards integration as a whole. The accessibility of English classes and other courses in general is also further hindered by the racism that is frequently experienced by Roma people from both teachers and other students. This issue represents a significant barrier and cannot be ignored.

77% of the respondents state that language represents a barrier when it comes to accessing health services, finding employment, and formally reporting racist incidents.

Data also shows that the vast majority of respondents would like to return to study; this strongly suggests that they would welcome the provision of classes. However, classes should not simply be provided, but delivered in a way that can meet participants’ needs. For example, childcare should be kept in mind when providing courses to students who are also parents. Courses should be designed and delivered in collaboration with local Roma organisations.

Furthermore, data reveals that there is a wide range of expertise among the respondents ranging from music, construction and sales. This expertise should be recognised by nuanced schemes that would promote and encourage their use which will be beneficial for society as whole.
8 For further information on these recommendations visit: http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/youth/Source/Resources/Documents/2011_10_Common_Basic_Principles_Roma_Inclusion.pdf

9 North West Inner City Network: NWICN (2008) Opening Doors: the intercultural toolkit for service providers in the North West Inner City

10 LIR runs an ‘anti-racism programme to promote education and awareness on issues of racism using a community and development education approach’. LIR also aims ‘to promote models of good practice in the workplace and in the community’ (http://www.wheel.ie/training/profile/lir-anti-racism-training-and-education)

11 The Yellow Flag Programme “is a progressive equality & diversity initiative for primary and secondary schools which promotes and supports an environment for interculturalism” (http://www.yellowflag.ie/home)

12 Show Racism the Red Card is an anti-racist charity set up to ‘challenge racism through providing education resources and intercultural activity which support integration’ (http://www.theredcard.ie/about.php)

13 The Love, not Hate campaign calls for the government to enact the Criminal Law (Hate Crime) Bill immediately to protect minorities in Ireland’ (http://enarireland.org/hatecrime/)

14 ENAR Ireland is ‘a national network of anti-racism civil society organisations which aims to work collectively to highlight and address the issue of racism in Ireland through the promotion and monitoring of EU and global anti-racist initiatives’ (http://enarireland.org/about-us/)

15 BIF is “a voluntary body that believes in developing positive intercultural relationships by respecting and sharing the richness, beauty and potential of all people and their respective cultures which will add significantly to the quality of people’s lives in the area” (http://cairde.ie/balbriggan/balbriggan-integration-forum)

16 FEN “represent the collective views of the ethnic community and International Diasporas so as to influence and inform policy and planning countywide” (http://www.integratingdublin.ie/participation/th embedded/ethniccommunityandinternationaldiasporas.html)

17 For further information on this topic see Intercultural Mediation Training Resource: A Practical Guide and Training Manual (Access Ireland 2010)


19 iReport.ie is ‘a national, confidential and easy to use online racist incident reporting tool for people who experience or witness racism to do something about it’ (http://enarireland.org/racist_incident_report/)

20 For further information on this internal study contact balbrigganif@gmail.com