

Policy Brief:

Addressing Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Child Poverty – The Urgent Need to Include Roma Children

Introduction

Child poverty in the UK is rising, disproportionately affecting **racial and ethnic minorities**, particularly **Roma children**. Despite this, **Roma children are largely absent from discussions on child poverty and welfare**, leaving them **invisible in policymaking and intervention strategies**.

Key Facts:

- **4.3 million children in the UK live in poverty**—a 20% increase in the past seven years (IGPP, 2023).
- 28.5% of Roma are in elementary occupations compared to 10.5% national average (2021 Census)
- **Children from the most deprived 10% of areas are over ten times more likely to enter care than those from the least deprived 10%** (Bywaters et al., 2017).
- **More than 90% of Roma children across Europe are at risk of poverty**, making them one of the most economically disadvantaged groups (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2022).

However, **UK-specific data on Roma children remains scarce**. The **Roma Support Group** and **House of Lords Committees** have noted the absence of a **reliable national dataset tracking Roma poverty rates or their representation in the care system** (Committees.Parliament.UK, 2022). The report *Come to Us in a Peaceful Way* (2024) further confirms this gap.

Ethnic inequalities in child welfare are well-documented, yet Roma children remain notably absent from official statistics.

- **Black and Mixed ethnicity children are overrepresented in care proceedings, while Asian children are underrepresented** (Bywaters et al., 2020; Nuffield Family Justice Observatory, 2023).
- **Ethnic disparities in child welfare cannot be explained by deprivation alone—racial bias in interventions also plays a role** (Bywaters et al., 2020; Nuffield Family Justice Observatory, 2023).
- **Roma children are uniquely disadvantaged because they are often not counted in official datasets, making their struggles invisible in child poverty and child welfare discussions** (Come to Us in a Peaceful Way, 2024).

This **lack of data contributes to the invisibility of Roma children in policymaking**, making it difficult to develop targeted interventions that address their unique challenges. Without explicit recognition and **better data collection**, **Roma children will continue to be overlooked in child poverty discussions**, increasing their risk of **family separation and state intervention**.

1. Poverty is the Leading Cause of Child Welfare Interventions

Poverty significantly contributes to increasing numbers of state interventions and numbers of children in care.

- **The rise in child poverty between 2015 and 2020 led to over 10,000 additional children entering care** (Children in Care Report, 2024).
- **Local authority spending on children's social care has doubled in the last decade, yet child poverty continues to rise** (MacAlister, 2022; Joseph Rowntree Foundation 2025).
- **Austerity policies have exacerbated economic hardship for ethnic minorities, leading to higher child protection interventions** (Women's Budget Group, 2017).

Why does this matter?

Rising poverty and homelessness are driving demand for children's social care, leading to **unnecessary child removals** ([ADCS 2025](#)). Roma families—who experience **some of the highest levels of deprivation in the UK**—are disproportionately impacted.

2. Roma Children Face Extreme Poverty and Social Exclusion

Roma children are among the most disadvantaged in the UK but are largely invisible in official poverty data.

- **90% of Roma children across Europe are at risk of poverty—the highest of any ethnic group** (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2022).
- **25% of Roma children in England and Wales face severe deprivation in housing, education, and health—compared to just 2% of other children** (LSE, 2018).
- **27% of Roma families live in overcrowded housing, compared to 8% of the general population** (Census 2021).
- **Roma employment rates remain significantly lower (54%) than the national average (60%)** (Census 2021).

Discrimination in Access to Services

- **60% of Roma children experience barriers when accessing education and healthcare** (Come to Us in a Peaceful Way Report, 2024).
- **High rates of school exclusion and poor attendance correlate with increased social service interventions** (Come to Us in a Peaceful Way Report, 2024).

Why does this matter?

Without explicit recognition, **Roma children remain overlooked in government poverty reduction strategies**, despite their extreme vulnerability.

3. Roma Children Are Increasingly Entering the Care System

While comprehensive data is lacking, trends indicate a growing number of Roma children are being placed in care.

- **600 Roma/Gypsy children were in the UK care system in 2023, an increase from previous years** (Department for Education, 2023).
- **Between 2011 and 2018, 8,240 Gypsy/Roma children were referred to social services** (Allen & Hamnett, 2022).
- **Social workers frequently misinterpret Roma cultural parenting norms, leading to an excess of risk-averse interventions** (Come to Us in a Peaceful Way Report, 2024).

Bias in Social Services

- **Roma families are more likely to be scrutinized by child protection services due to long-standing institutional biases** (Greenfields et al., 2015).
- **Poverty is a significant contributing factor in child protection investigations and child removals for Roma families.** (Come to Us in a Peaceful Way Report, 2024).

Why does this matter?

The lack of disaggregated data on Roma children in care obscures the true scale of the issue. The Strategy for Eliminating Child Poverty must acknowledge this growing trend to prevent unnecessary child welfare interventions.

4. Systemic Exclusion and Policy Failures

Roma children remain systematically excluded from child poverty strategies.

- **Post-Brexit hate crimes against Roma have increased, deterring families from seeking support** (Come to Us in a Peaceful Way Report, 2024).
- **Roma families are among the least likely to seek social assistance due to fear of discrimination and previous negative encounters with authorities** (Dagilytė & Greenfields, 2015).
- **The lack of culturally competent social work training leads to inappropriate interventions and deepens Roma distrust in public services** (Come to Us in a Peaceful Way Report, 2024).
- **The government does not collect ethnicity-specific data on Roma children in care, making them invisible in policy frameworks** (Ahmed et al., 2022).

Why does this matter?

Without targeted action, Roma children will remain unprotected, and their communities will continue to experience deepening poverty and discrimination.

Conclusion: A Call for Immediate Policy Action

✦ **The Strategy for Eliminating Child Poverty must explicitly reference Roma children and include tailored interventions**

✦ **Disaggregate ethnically sensitive information in administrative data sets and ensure consistency in data collection in all government departments.**

✦ **Develop a centralised Roma Inclusion Strategy to address and alleviate the discrimination, isolation and poverty faced by the Roma community.**

Failure to act will result in continued systemic exclusion, worsening child poverty and care interventions for Roma families.

The data is clear: **Roma families face extreme poverty, systemic discrimination, and increasing child welfare intervention. Addressing these issues is not just a matter of social justice—it is a policy imperative.**

Indicator	Roma	National Average
At risk of poverty	90%	20%
Living in overcrowded housing	27%	8%
Employment rate	54%	60%
Lack of formal qualifications	31%	14%
Roma children in care 2023	600+	
Social services referrals 2011-2018	8, 240	

Sources: Come to Us in a Peaceful Way Report (2024), Department for Education (2023), Census 2021, European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2022).