

Petr Torak 0:00

Good Evening Anna, and thank you very much for your participation.

Ana-Maria Ion 0:07

Thank you for inviting me.

Petr Torak 0:09

Thank you. We've met, it's been probably a nearly a year or maybe just over a year, we've met back in Peterborough, and lots of our students and obviously myself as well found your story and your speech here at Compas absolutely amazing and very inspiring. And I'm very pleased that you accepted this invitation for this interview that will motivate more and more young students.

Ana-Maria Ion 0:34

Ah, yes, we met over a year ago. Thank you for inviting me in Peterborough. I had such a lovely time. And I met really great people. And I'm looking forward visiting you again soon. And yes, I felt amazing discussing with them about education and the opportunities of education in UK. It was a very interesting discussion we had indeed.

Petr Torak 0:58

Thank you very much. So without further ado Ana, so can you please tell us a little bit about yourself where you're from, and just a little bit about your background?

Ana-Maria Ion 1:08

Um, I am from Bucharest, Romania. I am 26 years old, I was born in the area called ferentai, if you Google it, you'll see two big Roma community and the South area of Bucharest. Our area is like an urban legend, where gaggia Roma people are living together and like there's a fusion there. I'm a law graduate doing a master's degree in London, UK. And I came to the UK to actually switch my career from law to education. At the moment, I'm happy to say I'm working as a teaching assistant in Essex, with different schools and finding my work really, really important for the community I'm working with. And my work involves not only gaje kids, but also Gypsy Roma and travellers, which I'm proud to do. So yes, at the moment, I'm working with schools, and also we're working with Metropolitan Police. I'm a translator and interpreter are Scottish police and the NHS.

Petr Torak 2:13

Well you are very busy then

Ana-Maria Ion 2:15

Yeah, I am pretty busy. But thank God busy from home at the moment.

Petr Torak 2:20

Certainly. And it's I guess it's good to be busy as well, you know, especially as much to offer so.

Ana-Maria Ion 2:26

Of course

Petr Torak 2:27

So going back to your childhood, you said you're from Romania, what are your memories like from Romania? And, you know, going to schools? You know, you said that obviously your place where you grew up was tranquil in all it was that what any issues you know, have you How have you experienced your upbringing being Roma female?

Ana-Maria Ion 2:46

If you would ask me this question before coming to the UK, I would say everything was all right ish. And I would embed an eye towards my education in the past, after coming to the UK, and actually making myself more woke and more attuned to the movement movements that are happening nowadays. I would say, my experience with discrimination and racism in Romania is quite interesting.

I have faced discrimination in school especially. And why I'm telling you this is because I didn't know that was discrimination. I have realised while following the BLM movement online, there were typical behaviours that are meant for people who are belonging to a specific race or ethnicity. And those behaviours are going unnoticed, I would say I was the victim of concealed racism. It's a specific tone in the voice. It's a specific attitude of face expression towards the person. And the lack of access, giving to that person to resources, and making it look like it's something normal, it's just happened is the odds that that person had a rough day. But actually, I was witnessing my fear my colleagues who are gaje, and they had, they had access to the same things I was denied access to, but in a very nice way. All this time, I thought, Oh, I was just unlucky. The planets were not aligned but I actually was a victim. And I realised now as I'm working as a I'm working in education. So in schools especially Yes, I have faced discrimination. I had to work harder for getting specific mark that my colleagues would get it easier. So yes, I was and it affected my mental health on the long run.

Petr Torak 4:58

I can imagine and obviously, you know You know, this is quite a significant thing. And I think, you know, this whole, you know, they call it here the Rodent racism is, you know, has got even worse effect on people and especially young people that open racism would have. So yeah, and I completely understand it. And so you don't you moved into the UK and how old were you when you moved here?

Ana-Maria Ion 5:23

I was 21 or 22 years old.

Petr Torak 5:26

Okay

Ana-Maria Ion 5:27

And I was an adult,

Petr Torak 5:28

How was your experience, then how have you perceived the British people, the system, and everything else?

Ana-Maria Ion 5:35

Um, compared to the Romanian way of teaching people of addressing people or approaching people, there is less emotional involvement in the communication in the British way of communicating with others, which in my opinion, is making the essence the context is making it easier to be delivered, which in Romania is quite lost in translation is lost on on the way in communication. First of all, second of all, in the British way of working in a group, there is more education delivered to people on how to improve their productivity, which I did not find here in Romania. And then there is the respect towards yourself and the culture and people don't get that. Easy, don't get it don't find they don't find it easy to make jokes towards your culture to make jokes towards your appearance, which it happens easily in Romania and it's quite let's say enforced or encouraged.

Petr Torak 6:49

And so apart of, obviously, the attitudes towards ethnic minorities and education, what would you say that you like the most about the UK?

Ana-Maria Ion 6:58

You can sit at table with whoever you want, wherever they are, from all over the world, and actually learning so much you think you already know from the internet from back home, you actually don't know anything? Actually, I when I got to the UK, I made friends from all over the world. And I am proud to know that the human heritage is so ample is, so it's, it's full of variety. And I get to enjoy so many wonderful things that are hidden from us. And we're not actually allowed to taste it to have a grasp of it. So the flavour of the UK, it's I call it the equality and diversity policy that is applied everywhere.

Petr Torak 7:48

Very nicely said, thank you. And okay, so you've come to the UK? And have you done your studies only in Romania? Or have you done some studies here in the UK as well?

Ana-Maria Ion 7:56

I have started with my studies in Romania, I did a bachelor in law. And then I came to the UK. And I started doing my master's degree at the moment, I'm working on a DPSI, which is a diploma in public service interpreting, because my aim is to work with the immigration, immigration, court and beliefs. So at the moment, yes, I'm working on two degrees, one of them is a master and the other one is DPSI.

Petr Torak 8:29

That's amazing. Well, you know, I'm very curious how you manage all this, you know, the studies, your work and all the community work that you do it and?

Ana-Maria Ion 8:36

It is demanding, but it is connected to what I did before. So at the moment, I don't find it that tiring, because I like to do.

Petr Torak 8:46

So you study. And you also You said you work as a teaching assistant at a school? What, you know, how do you feel you know about this job, you know what differences you make as a teaching assistant?

Ana-Maria Ion 9:00

I didn't know I never knew I would like to be a teacher to start with, to teach others and to like, develop skills in others. What I'm bringing to them, in my opinion, is my own originality and the way I'm converting my experiences my bad experiences in new and better ones for others. So what happened back to me in the past, I'm preventing and fighting them so others will never encounter such unfortunate situations. As I said, the children I have in front of me in the classroom are far from British, and I'm talking about white British. They're from all over the world, including Gypsy Roma and travellers and I'm proud to see them there. I'm proud to coach them from time to time or mentor them. Though I'm not acknowledging them that I'm Roma because I know Don't think I should mark that point in front of them. Because I believe that we should respect the person in front of us, not the race. But the race. The race, respect has to come from within without any discussion and debate.

Petr Torak 10:16

That's very nice. And but I think it's even though you don't tell them they will, most of the children will recognise you as being Roma or or not?

Ana-Maria Ion 10:27

This is a tricky question. If they're from Romania they will recognize me if they are from anywhere in the UK, I have heard people speaking to me in Hindi, others speaking to me in Spanish, people don't actually cannot place me exactly somewhere on the map. And I find it funny. So only for people who have the eye for gypsy girl or oma girls, they would say, oh, you're from there, you look like this and that. But one good thing about British people in the British system is that people don't get to joke with that. People don't get to pick on you with that. And that's not a topic for a brief discussion of casual discussion. So we never encounter such unpleasant situations.

Petr Torak 11:14

That's absolutely true. And but what I also think, and I've seen this, when you come to Peterborough, and I've seen it, lots of other towns when I visited schools with my colleagues, you know, I think that those Romanian, especially Roma children that are at your schools, and they know that you are Romanian or Roma female, for them, it must be absolutely amazing feeling to see. You know, somebody from within their community, achieving so much that you have achieved in your life. And I've seen it here in Peterborough, when you were talking to girls, you know, when I stand there, it's

nice, it's Roma, Okay, good. But for a female, you know, and in such position, highly educated, well spoken to stand there, you know, because we're like, wow, you know, like, they're like, Whoa, I can't believe it, you know, so it must be you probably must see this a lot to your school.

Ana-Maria Ion 12:02

Thank you for bringing that up. Actually, I missed the I missed all the youngsters from there. And the girls especially. Yes, when people who know me who can who can say, oh, you're from here, you're like that. They feel safer. The children are from Romania, not only Roma, if they're Gaza too, if they see me in front of them. They're like, Oh, wait, this is a good story, I can reach this good story alive. This is the narrative I want to follow. They get this picture that, oh, the story has a good ending as well as not a bad one. Because, you know, when a Romanian or Gypsy or Roma, people expect the less from you, so you're expecting less from yourself too, so they have this safer feeling. If we're talking about girls, I'm doing my bit towards feminism too. I'm trying to be feminist, I cannot say I'm a feminist. And I'm trying my best to make them understand that any target is achievable in the UK, and they should forget what happened in their home country, because here is a different narrative. So yes.

Petr Torak 13:13

Absolutely. And this takes me actually very nicely to my following questions, which is actually around the changing role of Roma women within the society. What's your opinion? Do you see the role of Roma, Roma women in the society changing not only within the wider society, but also within the Roma community?

Ana-Maria Ion 13:33

At the moment? Yes, I would say there is a change. And in my opinion, if I would point out something that really needs changing is the mental health. I will always be advocating for mental health, myself, I am a person who has been affected mentally by racism. In the Roman culture, the woman when she is brought up by her parents, she grows with this concept in her mind and her system that Oh, my value is less, I should lay lower, I should say less. Nowadays, the system is granting them more access to education. And when they get access to education, of course, their independence level is growing. And the Romani woman women feminism movement is growing at the moment. So in the future, I can see many other Romani women following their dreams. But I can see with that some of the traditional aspects being not lost, but some of them will be dissolved on the way because it sounds quite tricky from my side to say it, but part of the so called traditions of Roma are based on the woman.

Petr Torak 14:58

And I completely agree with i, there is this, it's actually a big part of the Romani traditions. And with the Roma, women emancipation, it will be changing. But I think, you know, it's a time about, you know, it's just a matter of time to change it, because young girls here in in the UK, suddenly realised that those expectations, whether it's family expectation, or community expectations are based on very old traditions that are not maybe even relevant in these days, you know, 21st century, and that, you know, the fact that they are Roman women doesn't mean that they cannot have a family, but at the same time to pursue their career and go to university and work as a police officers, or doctors, lawyers, or whatever else it is in. So that's, I think that's, that's the beauty of this change.

Ana-Maria Ion 15:51

If I can have my comeback on this is that actually, the women from my generation, they have a conflict, that intergenerational conflict with their parents, and mostly with their mothers? Because the parents do not understand this quite sudden development like, why are you? Why are you married? Let's just say it's a woman in her 20s. If she's approaching her 30th birthday, and she's not married, in the opinion of the community, she is not fulfilled, woman, she's not happy. And there, the conflicts are starting from my final opinion on this question is that the development of the woman, the Roma woman, will take 20 years or 30 years more. So I would say it starts with my generation, and it will be clean and clear towards the next one. So we are I believe the parents of the actual Roma women that are free. This is my opinion on this topic.

Petr Torak 16:58

Very well said, yes, thank you. And still on the topic of Roma. What does it mean to be Roma?

Ana-Maria Ion 17:07

It means to take part on a project you did not choose. And it means to be free, and to be free, it can have good and bad impact. What's most important is if one, any of us would choose that project, again, if we had the choice when we were born. So I would choose it again over and over again, for me to be reminiscent project all of our lives.

Petr Torak 17:32

One other question for you specifically, it's so obviously, you know, you're, you have achieved so much. And, you know, you are studying, working and working towards your goals. But where do you see yourself in 5 or 10 years time?

Ana-Maria Ion 17:48

Well, I'm taking pride of being superstitious and I don't know if that's part of my tradition. I wouldn't give actually details. But I will give a hint. So let's say today's I'm following rules. Hopefully one day, I will take part in making rules for the better of the community.

Petr Torak 18:08

Lovely. Thank you very much. And lastly, the last question for all those young people that will be listening to this video interview. What would be your recommendation to them? What tips would you give them to succeed in life?

Ana-Maria Ion 18:23

First of all, to develop their emotional intelligence, and develop also their critical thinking, do not ever believe that racism will be cut down or deleted from this world, it will always be there, develop mechanisms that are helping you not only cope with those cope with racism, actually develop mechanisms that are helping you achieve your target without getting damaged, or without having to fix ourselves every single time. Be aware, be woke, and nothing that your targets are not achievable, all of them are achievable. Just make sure you're not stopping on the way for the unnecessary stuff. And unnecessary stuff are the bad things people are bringing to us such as racism, discrimination and xenophobia.

Petr Torak 19:23

Wow, thank you very much Ana, It was very, very powerful. You're very well spoken. I have to say it's a it's a very pleasure to speak to you about those topics. And I'll be really looking forward to another opportunities for you to come to Peterborough and speak to your our youngsters here again, because they asked that before, you know, they really enjoyed every word that you've said to them.

Ana-Maria Ion 19:46

Please tell them I miss them very much. Thank you for invitation. I can't wait to meet them again. But I'm waiting for a tier 4 area to change the situation. So when I'll get the chance To travel Of course, the first point on the map is Peterborough. It was such a pleasure experience.