

In this June 2014 newsletter, we bring you a summary of the seven changes in access to benefits that affect all EU migrants in the UK, but are likely to have disproportionate effects on Roma families. We would encourage as many people as possible to join [in this consultation](#) about denial of housing benefits by 30th May. We also report on the National Roma day events, including the House of Lords debate secured by Baroness Whittaker. We highlight a recent Amnesty report on the treatment of Roma communities in Europe, and a clear and understandable guide to EU law about whether member states can expel EU citizens for being unemployed. We report on the growth of Romano Lav in Glasgow. We carry the latest news involving Roma Support Group, and events planned for this month's Gypsy Roma Traveller history month. Finally, we have a list of some forthcoming events.



## June 2014 newsletter

### Welcome from Roma Support Group

Welcome to the second edition. We want to bring you information, reflections, arguments and discussion about the issues that face Roma communities in the UK. The Roma Support Group has developed over the last fifteen years into a major service agency working for and with Roma communities, mainly in London. We run advice and advocacy sessions; education support programmes (including homework support) for children and families; a Roma Support and Engagement Programme (including tailored staff training and development); and an arts and culture programme. Recently, RSG has been able to develop its work on developing Roma advocacy and mediation, community engagement and development (again principally in London) and also into policy development and information provision. This e-bulletin is one manifestation of these recent developments.

Contact us via:  
[andy@romasupportgroup.org.uk](mailto:andy@romasupportgroup.org.uk)

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## DEBATES AND DISCUSSIONS in the UK

### Restricting access to benefits

There has been much speculation about the contribution of wealthy non-UK citizens to the current housing price spiral, and the consequential crisis for many people who are unable to live in half decent accommodation. We know that this is particularly severe in the 'world city' of London, but its ripples cover the whole country. Despite the anti-social impact of this wealth (nearly three quarters of new inner London homes are bought by people living outside the UK), there has been not one change in government policy announced.

Compare this with the seven changes that have been announced since last November that affects those EU citizens who might want to access benefits as they seek work in this country. We know that Roma migration is complex – people sometimes have few options in the countries of Central & East Europe. We know that most people who come to the UK are looking to better themselves; they are here for work, or looking for work. Indeed, our rights are to move within the EU to seek and gain work, with dependants. And all EU migrants pay taxes from day one - not

least VAT. They contribute. And in return, to enable the free market of labour within the EU to function, people may sometimes need assistance. But that assistance is under attack. There seems to be a near universal silence about these changes.

What are the changes?

\* No one is now able to apply for income based job seekers allowance (JSA) until they've been here for three months. Actually, for some people, this is not a change at all as JSA could only be claimed after you were deemed to be 'habitually resident' in the UK; in other words, after the DWP had decided that you have every intention of settling and working in this country. So those most affected have actually been British citizens returning to the UK after work or study abroad.

\* But the government has announced that you will have to pass a more stringent test to meet the habitual residence test (HRT).

\* Children of EU migrants are entitled/encouraged to attend school upon arrival; surely the best way for the children to learn about their new town and country. But the government has announced that every EU migrant will have to wait three months to be able to claim child benefit or child tax credit.

\* After 1 April 2014, an EU migrant who has not worked in the UK who makes a new claim for JSA will be time limited for 6 months.

\* And also after 1 April 2014, if you claim JSA as an EU migrant who has not worked in the UK, you will not be able to claim housing benefit. So jobseekers from the EU will find that access to benefits is much more difficult, and also that they cannot access Housing Benefit at all.

\* But these changes aren't just going to affect people seeking work. It will affect people who are working or self-employed. The government want to re-define who is a 'worker'; so if you have earned less than £150 per week average for three months, you might be deemed to be a 'job seeker', rather than a 'worker' or self-employed person (there is a complicated two stage "test" of whether you really are or were a worker). And as we can see, the position of people as job seekers is much more hazardous than those who are 'workers'.

And even if you have worked for three months and earned enough to escape this test, if you lose your job, you will keep your rights to benefits for six months only. After that time, even if you have worked for two or three years in a decent job, you will only continue to get benefits as a former worker if there is a real chance of you getting another job quickly. After that, you get reclassified as a jobseeker, so no housing benefit, and no benefits at all after six more months.

\* And finally, in addition to the range of existing sanctions that employment 'advisors' have in Job Centres for those on JSA, the government has announced that people's development of English language will now be assessed. And after 9 April 2014, all interpreters at Job Centres have been withdrawn.....

Staff at the East European Advice centre described these changes as:

*"shocking and worrying. We envisage one major consequence for our Roma users: they will be destitute. We also fear that some users may become victims of dodgy and unsavoury practices in terms of work - some may be exploited or otherwise harmed."*

And Sue Lukes, who edits the housing content at the Chartered Institute of Housing website on migrant housing rights says:

*"My major concern now is simple: the result of these and other measures is to place all EU migrants including workers and the self employed into a situation of precarity in some ways worse than that faced by A8 and A2 migrants for seven years apiece. Worse because if you*

*have worked for a year now, you still may face the loss of your worker status after six months of unemployment and moving to IBJSA means losing your housing benefit. In fact, if you have been working for three years and then lose your job and the DWP decide that you fall below the lower earnings limit and so were not a worker at all you may not even get HB to start with. The lower earnings limit is particularly pernicious because as we all know, lower earnings are a function of discrimination in relation to gender, age and disability....”*

Staff at Roma Support Group say:

*“This is a clear case of the government deciding to further attack those whose lives are already precarious. Many Roma families we work with have been here for years, and worked hard, sometimes only to find that when work finishes, or they become ill, they need benefits. Denying access to housing costs when rents are spiralling and denying unemployed people benefits is going to lead to misery for some Roma families. And for newly arrived Roma families - it seems that children will suffer, families could be living in overcrowded housing and adults are likely to work in dangerous and unregulated employment. Is this what the government wants to see?”*

And here's one thing we can do. The Social Security Advisory Committee to the DWP have said that they want to scrutinise the decision to cut housing benefit for JSA claimants who are defined as EU migrants. They are taking submissions from around the country. This is one thing that we can do.....

**All responses have to be submitted by Friday 30 May 2014.**

<http://ssac.independent.gov.uk/news/press-releases/07-04-14.pdf>

*(Thanks to Sue Lukes for advising on some of the detail)*

### **Useful information about these benefit changes**

Crisis and Homeless Link information about the new benefit changes. [Click here](#).

Chartered Institute of Housing advice website. [Click here](#)

CPAG "New restrictions for migrants" article February 2014; [click here](#)

The Aire centre has developed a new resource – a Roma Rights unit. [See this link](#). Anna Blus says “here is a link to the section of our website dedicated to the Roma Project. We are in the process of scheduling our training sessions and surgeries but in the meantime, I’d encourage people also to use our 'general' advice line for advice requests on 020 7831 4276 or by email - [info@airecentre.org](mailto:info@airecentre.org)”

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### **National Roma Day: reports from London, Glasgow and the House of Lords**

8<sup>th</sup> April was declared the day to celebrate Roma culture and the awareness of a Roma 'nation'. It was chosen as the very first international Romani conference was held, in the UK, during 8<sup>th</sup> April 1970.

This year, National Roma day was marked by events in Glasgow and in London which we highlight here. Due to the achievement and perseverance of Baroness Whitaker in the House of Lords, there was also a debate on National Roma day (albeit on 2<sup>nd</sup> April), which is significant as it was concluded by a speech from Baroness Warsi, who effectively states the current government position on a range of matters affecting Roma (and Gypsy and Traveller) communities in the UK.

**Click [here](#) for events in London**

**Click [here](#) for events in Glasgow. And [here](#) too**

And click [here](#) for the debate in the House of Lords.

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### The Holocaust Commission

Many people - Roma, Jewish, and others - who spoke at the events on Roma National day, talked about the many thousands of Roma who died in the camps under the Nazis - the Porajmos. For example, Lawrence Brass, the treasurer of the British Board of Deputies said "Gypsies and Jews were both the victims of Nazi racial purity policies which led to their extermination". He was therefore disappointed, he said, that no Roma had yet been included on the Holocaust Commission and he had spoken about this to the chair of the commission.

There is an opportunity to alter this. The Holocaust Commission is asking how the memory of the genocides be kept alive; and how the lessons are made relevant for now and the future. And that has to include the Roma. Click [here](#) to go to the website.

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### Romano Lav - a Roma led organisation in Glasgow

Maybe some people read the thoughts of a Labour MP just before Christmas, despite it being carried in the Daily Telegraph. If you didn't, you might want to scan it [here](#). Although some MPs from all parties (but mainly Labour) having signed up to Jeremy Corbyn's early day motion defending Roma migrant communities, the sentiments of Tom Harris MP are not unusual. But in a city with strong recent echoes of sectarianism, and discrimination, you might have expected a more nuanced argument than

*... filthy and vastly overcrowded living arrangements, organised aggressive begging, the ghettoisation of local streets where women no longer feel safe to walk due to the presence of large groups of (workless) men*

It could be the Irish fleeing the great starvation in the 1840s, but it's Tom Harris's view of life in Govanhill in 2013.

It isn't unusual; we've heard it a lot lately. But one difference is that in Glasgow, there is a small but strong group of people who are prepared to argue against this kind of prejudice and racism. Friends of Romano Lav are a Roma-led constituted group supporting inter-cultural dialogue and challenge discrimination and racism against Roma people. Their main focus is active participation of Roma people in socio-political platforms. The group has developed from a feeling that whilst there are a number of generally helpful and supportive programmes coming from Glasgow City Council, NHS or local NGOs,, there is little attention given to the views of the Roma and their active involvement in planning and delivery of Roma focused initiatives.

One of the activists – Marcela – described how she'd worked as a mediator for the local NHS, after being a researcher on an initial research project in 2008/9, [\*Report on the situation of the Roma community in Govanhill, Glasgow\*](#). *"I was seeing maybe 30 or 40 people a day; you didn't have time to think about anything – least of all, how they needed to be able to speak for themselves and not rely on me, or others like me. This is a common problem, in numerous towns and cities. Then I have realized that service provision alone only heals the symptoms of poverty and exclusion, but does not go to the root of the problem. Very often, local practitioners or community workers, in a desire to seek improvements, end up servicing the Roma communities, and are unable to speak and challenge as well."* Oxfam was prepared to assist in investing in community development in Govanhill, and also supported a major investigation (with Govanhill Law Centre) into the unequal treatment of Roma claimants in the benefit systems. This isn't always easy; as Lenka says *"there are some of our families who say on the one hand 'we don't have a problem in Glasgow' – which is true compared to Eastern Slovakia where most of the Roma in Glasgow are coming from; but then they also say, 'why do we have to work with those Romanians?'"* Friends of Romano Lav work inclusively with Roma regardless

their country of origin.

Together with West of Scotland Regional Equality Council they run cookery classes in Govanhill and for Roma and non-Roma, Slovak and Scottish. In fact, they argue that with the difficulties of learning at formal ESOL classes, especially those run by Job Centre Plus, having activities that cater for both Roma and non-Roma – like cooking, eating and dancing – is essential for acquiring more spoken English. Marcela says that the Roma in Glasgow face poverty, lack of access to services, a denial of rights as well as a dependency culture that has got its roots in communism. *“If Roma will not start actively participating in social and political platforms they will become a lost nation. It’s a big challenge, but we have to start from somewhere to make positive changes and not to be called a lost nation in a future.”*

Friends of Romano Lav organised the first public celebration of National Roma Day with a march throughout Govanhill and other awareness raising activities on 6<sup>th</sup> April.

Marcela gave the example of Macedonia where Roma young people are encouraged to think about attending universities as Macedonia is developing equality and social justice through positive discrimination. *“This is something we’ve might have to be thinking about – in Scotland and in England. According to the World Bank, Roma are a very young population; we’ve got to do everything possible to invest in them. Education shouldn’t be closed off or discouraged. Roma people, same as others, should feel welcome in schools. Unfortunately, we do not have an opportunity to learn here about Roma history, Roma language and Roma role models.”* And Romano Lav has got their sights beyond that too. They are looking for a partner to organise the Roma Pride summer school on a national level based on example from Open Society Foundation Budapest.

Contact Romano Lav via [romano\\_lav@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:romano_lav@hotmail.co.uk)

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## **DEBATES AND DISCUSSION in EUROPE**

### **Roma in Europe – demanding justice and protection**

The endless use of the phrase “benefit tourists” by government spokespersons and throughout much of the press and media needs constantly challenging to understand the movement of Roma families. The semi-apartheid systems in some of Central and Eastern Europe are not part of the history; they are very much alive today – like the ‘civic’ walls in Slovakia and the educational assessments of young children in Czech Republic. Amnesty have consistently researched and highlighted these oppressions, and in their new report *“We Ask for Justice: Europe’s failure to protect Roma from racist violence”*, this is given sharp focus by in depth reporting from Czech Republic, Greece and France. Find the report available [here](#).

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### **Can EU citizens be deported for being unemployed?**

When both Germany and the UK governments are talking about removing 'unwanted' EU citizens, and preventing any return for 12 months in Britain's case, it is useful to have some facts about the law. [In this blog](#), the Professor of EU and Human Rights Law at Essex University, Steve Peers, explains that there are few circumstances when anyone with some status in the country can be lawfully deported for being unemployed. But as we know too well at Roma Support Group, to threaten people with removal for an alleged breach of an alleged condition still creates fear and uncertainty.

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## **NEWS FROM ROMA SUPPORT GROUP**

## International symposium; theory and practice of multiculturalism in Hokkaido



A major conference in Hokkaido (Japan) in March heard a presentation about Roma in the UK in the opening session. As this is not a frequent event, we thought that this was in itself noteworthy. Also, as Sylvia Ingmire (the CEO of Roma Support Group - RSG) delivered the lecture, we thought that it would be doubly relevant for this newsletter!

Sylvia explained that the conference organisers were keen to understand how her experience of working with the Ainu people of Hokkaido had informed her own practice in the UK, and the subsequent development of the RSG in which Sylvia has been intimately and critically involved for the last 16 years. Sylvia's lecture covered three main points - three lessons, which she has learnt from Japan:

1 "Don't study indigenous people - the indigenous people will teach you". Try not to ask too many questions, but concentrate, look and listen. Sylvia explained that the importance is not to make any presumptions at all, but to acknowledge that the Ainu would respond to those non-Ainu who wanted to work collaboratively.

2 Cultural barriers don't exist. Difference is not a barrier. But we must all allow ourselves to understand and become as culturally 'fluent' as possible. Sylvia explained that for the Ainu, and the Roma, the problem isn't what you as an 'outsider' know, it's what you think you know. It's those dangerous, frequently wrong, assumptions that we as the outsiders impose on the indigenous people. How does this work for the public services? Staff aren't required for example, to understand Roma culture; but the danger is that to know little or nothing makes a service ineffectual for the Roma.

3 And lastly, cultural identity is essential for social and political change. It is the core of who indigenous people are. The historical and cultural differences between the indigenous people of Hokkaido and the Roma are huge. The Roma do not have a nation, or what they frequently say, "a country of our own"; but Roma are very much part of Europe and are European citizens. And so the cultural self-expression of the Rom, across national boundaries, is possibly more critical for a unified and effective voice for social change.

Sylvia said that the conference delegates were intrigued by how the lessons of working with Ainu in Hokkaido were transferable to Europe. And subsequent discussion hinged on other similarities and differences between Japan and the UK in regard to responses to hate crime, to the issue of 'returnees' from other lands (Russia, Korea etc) back to Japan, and the experience of minorities (like Ainu and Koreans) in Japan. Sylvia was particularly struck by three things that were talked about by the Japanese delegates:

a the organisation of opposition to hate speech against Koreans. The biggest contingent on many of the demonstrations are teenagers who are keen followers of K-pop and who have become politically and socially involved in the anti-discrimination movement. And have drawn strength from the opportunity to combine music and art and politics.

b the problems facing “returnees” (including Japanese people born outside Japan, who have never had any contact with Japan...) cannot be understood without an understanding of Japanese history. For Sylvia, this mirrors the impossibility of understanding the issues facing Roma people if they are not included as part of our European history, which undeniably is also about anti - Roma persecution and genocide.

c finally, how does the recently changed state legislation towards the Ainu, which redefined them from second class citizens' status of "former aborigines" to the rank of "indigenous people of Japan" impact on their social grass roots movement? Is state patronage over Ainu culture compatible with an open and honest dialogue, where power is so unequally distributed? How do the Ainu or any other minorities continue their struggle for an independent voice and a degree of cultural and political self-determination? These are not questions that are specific to Japan but also for many other minorities elsewhere, who are facing a similar predicament.

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## Roma Youth Orchestra

In June, the first weekly rehearsals will start to take place for members of the Roma Youth Orchestra. Led by staff from Roma Support Group and working with partners at the Newham Academy of Music and the Grand Union Orchestra, the Youth Orchestra will be for children and young people from age 8 to 25.

Tania Gessi from RSG explains:

*We've been running music classes for a long time, with experienced adult Roma musicians teaching and mentoring Roma children. This has been a great success – with performances and one CD. But we want to move beyond that. We want to open up the Roma Youth Orchestra to non-Roma as well, and to challenge the notion of what passes for 'gypsy music' as being seen as authentic Roma music. But Roma musicians have always developed and adapted. The wide distances travelled have introduced a multitude of influences in Roma music, starting with Indian roots and adding elements of Greek, Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Serbian, German, French, Spanish, etc. so the end result is a real mix of different musical styles. We think that young Roma will want to adapt...and see where fusion and cohesion takes us; East London meets Budapest?"*

The classes are free. Funding from Arts Council England and the Rayne Foundation has ensured that the programme will last for two years. Some existing musical competence is expected from students. The classes will be at the New Vic (Newham 6<sup>th</sup> form college).

Tania says:

*It's difficult to say now what we think will happen. Public performances are something that we expect, as well as the development of individual talent and creativity. And a chance for young people to work with others who they might not usually encounter; a chance to learn differently....*

All enquires to [tania@romasupportgroup.org.uk](mailto:tania@romasupportgroup.org.uk)



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## Forthcoming events

### GRT History month

#### THE LAUNCH: GYPSY, TRAVELLER AND ROMA HISTORY MONTH @ Victoria and Albert Museum

Sunday 1 June, 13.00 – 16.00 @ V&A

Join us for the launch of Gypsy, Traveller and Roma History Month at the V&A. Enjoy a special performance of personal verse, poetry, dance, film and music to celebrate the richness the communities bring to UK culture.

The event will include:

- **Through the Eyes of Children (remembering the Holocaust)** a display by *the National Federation of Gypsy Liaison Groups*
- **Poetry** by *Valdemar Kalinin*
- Talks on crafts: **Blacksmithing** by *Jake Bowers*; and **Floristry** by *Sherrie Smith*
- Display of **Roma costume, crafts and dolls**
- **Film and Poetry** by Romany/Nigerian/Working Class artist *Ronke Osinowo*
- **Music** by *Bridget McDonagh and Phien O'Phien*
- **To Gypsyland** by *Delaine Le Bas and Barby Asante*

Venue: The Lydia and Manfred Gorvy Lecture Theatre, V&A

Tickets: £5, £3 concessions

To book call 020 7942 2211 or visit [www.vam.ac.uk/whatson](http://www.vam.ac.uk/whatson)

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## **SKILLS SHARING: THE ART OF FLORISTRY @ Victoria and Albert Museum**

Sunday 15 June, 11.00 – 16.00

Celebrate Gypsy, Traveller and Roma History Month in this skills sharing workshop. Explore the historic connection between traveller communities and the art of floristry, before learning how to create a stunning floral arrangement with expert guidance. Pick up professional tips and tricks relating to the care of cut flowers and leave with a beautiful bouquet to take home.

Led by Sherrie Smith [www.sherriesflowers.co.uk/](http://www.sherriesflowers.co.uk/)

Tickets: £50.50, no concessions

To book call 020 7942 2211 or visit [www.vam.ac.uk/whatson](http://www.vam.ac.uk/whatson)

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## **TATCHO DROM... TAKE THE STAGE**

Saturday 28 June, 15.00 – 16.00 @ V&A

Explore the musical heritage of Eastern Europe and the Balkans. Inspired by the migration of Gypsies, which started 1500 years ago in Rajasthan, this innovative production of music and dance will inspire and inform appreciation of traditional Gypsy music and culture. Free, booking essential

Tickets: Free event

To book call 020 7942 2211 or visit [www.vam.ac.uk/whatson](http://www.vam.ac.uk/whatson)

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## **To Gypsyland**

A Studio Practice and Archive Project by Delaine Le Bas. Co-curated by Barby Asante  
Commissioned by 198 Contemporary Arts & Learning

To Gypsyland is a Strategic Touring Programme supported using public funding by the National Lottery through Arts Council England

For more information and to learn where the touring programme will be next please visit: [www.togypsyland.blogspot.co.uk](http://www.togypsyland.blogspot.co.uk)

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## **GYPSY FILM EVENT @ BFI SOUTHBANK**

21st June 2014, 12.00 – 15.00

Gypsy culture is once again hot property in film. From arthouse features and shorts to documentaries that grip the public mind, the range of portrayals is vast. And it's rapidly expanding as those inside the culture take hold of the camera.

Hosted by Damian Le Bas.

Through screenings and interactive panel discussions including filmmakers linked to Romani and Traveller life, this event will look at the forces propelling this new wave of "Gypsy" film, its context in the cinematic history, and future directions.

Venue: BFI Southbank, NFT2 auditorium

Tickets: Free Event. Limited seating – please book early

To book: Call 07411 493 101 or email [yrweere@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:yrweere@hotmail.co.uk)

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**THE ROMA – BETWEEN EXTRA AND ORDINARY; photographs, digital story telling and artefacts**

Thursday 19 June - Sunday 6 July, 11am - 5.30pm (free)

Exhibition at Romanian Cultural Centre (RCC) in London/Ratiu Family Foundation with the support of Roma Support Group

Manchester Square, 18 Fitzhardinge Street, London W1H 6EQ

Curated by Violeta Vajda

Preview - 19 June from 6.30pm - 9.30pm

For further information, please contact Carmen Campeanu at RCC,  
[mail@romanianculturalcentre.org.uk](mailto:mail@romanianculturalcentre.org.uk)