

## November 2016 newsletter

### INTRODUCTION

This is not an easy time in the UK, or in Europe, or indeed North America. The decision to leave the European Union dominates. Our legendary Annual General Meeting is held next Monday at the new venue of Woodgrange Community Centre; everyone is welcome to attend and to listen, learn and contribute, and to celebrate with our musicians and our chefs! There will be a chance to hear a panel of speakers discuss Brexit and what it means for Roma; and a workshop in community languages about housing rights.

This newsletter continues to reflect the implications of Brexit. On the one hand, we are pleased to publicise the Migrant Voice event on 25 November; and to provide a platform for the organisers of One Day Without Us – a protest on 20 February 2017 by migrants and supporters of migrants in the UK. On the other hand, we have no option but to remember that there's been a growth in acts of violence and intimidation since the referendum; and we are proud that our friends at Herts Gate have launched a "Report Racism" website particularly for Roma and Gypsy and Traveller people.

We are pleased to review a recent research report by a leading UK 'think tank' – the IPPR – about how local councils (and the government) should respond to how Brexit will affect Roma communities throughout the country. And to compliment this, we want to highlight a report written about what Roma women, men and children think about public services in Glasgow. The voice of Roma women and children, especially, is made very clear; maybe what they say is not new, but it's said with real clarity and reason.

There is growing national recognition in this country of the Roma Holocaust – and members of our community have recently had their experiences listened to by staff from the Holocaust Memorial Trust. We are pleased to highlight a forthcoming public lecture arranged by the Pears Institute about what they describe as the "entanglement of Jews and Roma in 20<sup>th</sup> century Europe".

And finally, a short piece about one of the two new Roma Support Group workers - Mihai Calin Bica; one of the two new 'campaigning and advocacy workers' who have started work last month. We will profile Assen Slavchev in the next issue.

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For more information about Roma Support Group, go to our website here and look at the ['projects' pages](#).

Contact us via:

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



# November 2016

## ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Dear friends and colleagues

Roma Support Group (RSG) is pleased to invite you to the **18<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting:**

Date: **Monday, 21st November 2016**

Time: **4.30pm – 9.00pm**

Venue: **Woodgrange Community Centre, Bluebell Avenue, Manor Park, London, E12 6UJ**

### Transport Links:

- Nearest Underground station: East Ham
- Nearest Rail station: Manor Park
- Buses from Stratford: 25, 86
- Buses from East Ham: 101, 474

### AGENDA

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|--------|---|
| 4.30pm | Registration & Networking & Refreshments  |
| 5.00pm | Training Workshop delivered by Deighton Pierce Glynn:<br><b>Housing Rights (will be interpreted into community languages)</b> |
| 6.00pm | <b>Forum Theatre</b>  |
| 6.30pm | <b>Introduction to new Roma Support Group projects</b>  |
| 6.40pm | <b>Implications of Brexit for Roma in the UK: panel discussion:</b>   |

- Sue Wilman, solicitor @ dpglaw
- Jessica Kennedy, national organiser @ Migrants Organise
- Andy Fearn, learning and outreach @ Protection Approaches

7.30pm **Karate presentation**

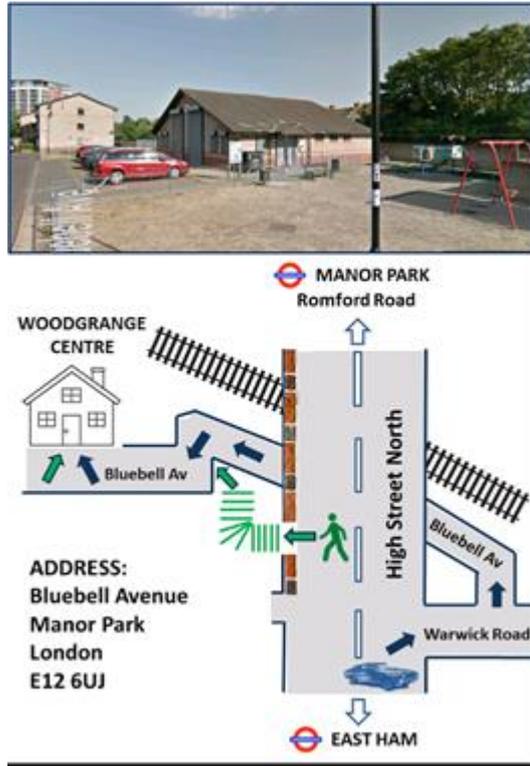
7.40pm **AGM Business:**

- ☀ Address from the Chair
- ☀ Apologies
- ☀ Minutes of the last Annual General Meeting
- ☀ Matters Arising
- ☀ Nominations/ Elections
- ☀ Financial Report

8.20pm **Roma Bridging Sounds Orchestra (RBSO)**

Networking

8.50pm The End



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## Migrant Voice: public meeting

### Migrants and Migration Post Brexit; finding our voice to influence the new landscape.

Migrant Voice is delighted to invite you to our London autumn event

The event will take place on Friday November 25th from 09.30am – 4.00pm hosted at Unite the Union, London & Eastern Region, North London District Office, Ron Todd House, 33 - 37 Moreland Street, Islington, London, EC1V 8BB

Following the surge in hate crimes against migrants after the EU referendum vote and the new developments and challenges facing the UK, this event will go to the heart of these issues and explore ways forward. It will bring together migrant communities with experts on migration, equality, academics, the media and other stakeholders to take action.

Join us for a lively panel discussion chaired by Ronke Phillips, Senior Correspondent, ITV London News with panellists Barbara Drozdowicz, Director, Eastern European Advice centre, Nicholas Hatton, Founding co-chair of

the3million, Saira Grant, Chief Executive, Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants, Peter Kavanagh, London & Eastern regional secretary, Unite the Union and John Page, Head of Organising, Hope not Hate.

This will be a very action oriented event with a number of workshops focusing on reporting and challenging hate crime and xenophobia, building alliances, how we can work with journalists to get stories of migration and hate crime told, and the challenges for migrants' rights and engagement in influencing the new landscape. Workshops will be led by Simon Israel, Channel 4 News, Stop Hate UK, The New Europeans, and John Page, Hope not Hate.

Please see attached the full agenda.

Please email [anne@migrantvoice.org](mailto:anne@migrantvoice.org) if you would like to attend as places are limited.

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### **One day without us – 20 February 2017**

From their founding statement:

“There are moments when silence in the face of discrimination and injustice becomes complicity. In the last two decades, immigration has become a festering toxic obsession in British politics. Year after year, men and women whose only 'crime' is to live, work and study in the UK have been vilified and stigmatised as parasites, intruders, invaders and outsiders.

We are British and non-British citizens; EU citizens and immigrants from beyond the EU; the descendants of immigrants, and non-immigrants. We come from many different political backgrounds. We include Leavers and Remainers. All of us share the same opposition to the dangerous social forces that now cast a shadow over our collective future. That is why we are calling on all those who share our vision to make 20 February, 2017 'A Day Without Us.'

We believe that now, more than ever, it is essential to remind the British public of the contribution that immigrants have made to this country, and what the

country might look like if they were not here.

Inspired by the two historic immigrant days of action in the US and Italy, we are calling for all immigrants and all British citizens who support them to join in a national boycott on February 20 next year which marks the UN World Day of Social Justice.

How are we going to do it?

For one day, we are inviting immigrants and their British supporters to absent themselves from the activities they normally do. To close their restaurants and businesses, leave classes, universities, and workplaces, and demonstrate by their absence what they have created, what they have given to British society and how essential and valuable they are.

Strike or take the day off work. Let your absence also remind the country of your presence. And if you can't do that, then join us in other ways. March, hold parties and meetings. Do it in your town, your community, your workplace, your school, college, or university.

We recognize this may be an unprecedented step for many people, and we don't expect immigrants to do this alone. We call on all British citizens who share our vision to support this event, because we believe it should be a day of solidarity and celebration - and a rejection of the dire politics that threaten our common future."

<http://www.migrantsrights.org.uk/blog/2016/11/one-day-without-us-how-do-we-turn-good-idea-brilliant-campaign>

Wordpress:

<http://www.1daywithoutus.org/>

Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/1DayWithoutUs/?fref=tsand>

<https://www.facebook.com/1DayWithoutUs/>

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## **[Report Racism website – Gypsy, Roma, Traveller communities](#)**

<http://reportracismgrt.com/>

Report Racism GRT is a hate incident reporting site and support service that is run by and for Gypsy, Traveller and Roma communities in the UK by [Herts Gate](#)

Hate incidents, which includes hate crime (for example, physical violence) and hate speech (for example, on Facebook or in the street) can have a severe negative impact on the victim. This is especially so among Gypsy, Traveller and Roma community members who are subject to regular, sometimes daily, incidents of hate.

The UK police define a hate crime as “Any criminal offence which is perceived, by the victim or any other person, to be motivated by a hostility or prejudice based on a person’s race or perceived race, religion, sexual orientation, disability or transgender”. The UK police also record hate incidents that cannot be prosecuted as a criminal act but still cause fear, hurt or damage to the victim.

We recommend that victims of hate report the incident to the police; at the local police station, or by phoning 112 (999 in an emergency), or by using the police [True Vision](#) online site.

However this project well understands that many community members are reluctant to report directly to the police for many differing reasons. That is why Gypsy and Traveller Empowerment Herts have set up this reporting site working with other Gypsy, Traveller and Roma organisations to collect data on where, when and the type of hate used against community members. This data will not identify anyone but will help us highlight to government and police the extent of hate incidents against community members so that hopefully they can counter this problem. We can also provide support to Gypsy, Traveller and Roma victims of racism. See ‘contact and support’ page.

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## **[Roma Communities and Brexit: integrating and empowering Roma in the UK](#)**

Full report:

[http://www.ippr.org/files/publications/pdf/Roma-communities-and-Brexit\\_Oct2016.pdf?noredirect=1](http://www.ippr.org/files/publications/pdf/Roma-communities-and-Brexit_Oct2016.pdf?noredirect=1)

Summary:

<http://www.ippr.org/publications/roma-communities-and-brexit>

It's surely good news that one of the country's leading progressive think tanks has turned its attention on the position of Roma in the UK. Perhaps more so given the recent decision to leave the European Union. Our government, but also other leading agencies and institutions, have had a tendency to highlight how other European states have treated Roma, often in a bid to avoid what happens in this country. So the recent IPPR report is to be welcomed.

However, the focus of the report is mainly what local authorities should be doing. As the report says – how to “co-ordinate provision, adapt services and alleviate tensions”. The report recommends councils should:

- “adopt strategies to support migrant integration”
- “plan and adapt services to meet the needs of Roma”
- “improve community relations”
- “rally together to make the case for central government funds to replace European funding” in the event of Brexit.

There are a number of problems here. Over the last ten years, there has been a growth in the number of committed front line staff working in schools, health clinics, nurseries and council departments who have developed very sophisticated and effective ways of working with Roma communities. But these workers face two major problems; first austerity and the continual cut in posts, in workers' time and even of those small budgets which make a big difference (providing crèches; employing sessional staff). And secondly, an apparent political disinterest at a local level and mirrored at Westminster. Where are the local political leaders who are keen and committed to working alongside Roma communities?

The IPPR report provides some local examples by drawing on initiatives in Glasgow, Derby and Redbridge in London. Some of these projects, especially in

Glasgow, are impressive. But in fairness, IPPR does not make any evaluation of how effective they've been, and in particular, what Roma people in the three areas think. The report that we also carry in this issue that was written about Roma families in Glasgow (Sime, Fassetta and McClung, 2014) can complement the IPPR arguments where the voice of Roma children and parents is centre stage.

What the IPPR report does is to highlight the European Commission's urge that all member states use European funds (like the European Social Fund - ESF, and the European Regional Development Fund - ERDF) to increase what they call Roma integration. (What officials mean when they talk about Roma integration? Is it Roma ceasing to be Roma; or Roma being Roma and exercising their rights – this is itself another issue).

IPPR says that “a total of £1.1 billion in European structural funds for the 2014-2020 period were available to be used for Roma-focused integration initiatives (in the UK)”. We wish that were true! But it isn't. Our government's guidance about the use of European funds to achieve what they call social inclusion (for all, and not just for Roma, Gypsy and Traveller communities) fails even to mention Roma as a potential beneficiary. To date, we are aware of only two sub-regions in the country where Roma are included as possible beneficiaries - Leeds and Sheffield. We think that Roma will be lucky to see £1.10p from European funds between 2014-2020, let alone the millions suggested. Roma Support Group and other Gypsy and Traveller groups are contesting this omission in England of European funding. We are not averse to councils lobbying the government to make good any European funding lost due to Brexit – as universities have been so eloquent about. But let's not get carried away that Roma communities are top of the Brussels wish list.

So what to do? Don't lobby government for funds for supporting Roma to access and progress in local labour markets? Not at all, we actively encourage this; but maybe we should also go back to first principles – persuade the government to accept that Roma communities live in the UK, aren't going anywhere, and that challenging the racism and discrimination that they face needs to be government policy.

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## **Roma families engagement with education and other services in Glasgow: a research report; Sime, Fassetta, McClung (2014)**

[https://pure.strath.ac.uk/portal/files/39688102/Sime\\_et\\_al\\_roma\\_families\\_engagement\\_with\\_education.pdf](https://pure.strath.ac.uk/portal/files/39688102/Sime_et_al_roma_families_engagement_with_education.pdf)

The aims of the study:

- What are Roma families' needs and experiences in relation to key services (education, health, leisure);
- What are the main challenges for services in working with Roma families;
- What are Roma children and parents' expectations of schools and cultural attitudes to formal education;
- Which factors influence Roma families' engagement with public services;
- How can barriers in Roma children's achievement be tackled.

Based upon evidence provided by 8 workers (teachers, social worker, police, family support, voluntary sector); by 10 children (Slovak and Romanian Roma, mainly girls, mainly young teenagers); and by 22 parents (mainly women, mainly in small group discussions, mainly Slovak but also Romanian and Czech)

Key issues emerging:

### *Education and parental involvement*

- The important role of education in supporting Roma migrant children, the vast majority of whom come from an impoverished background in terms of educational resources, opportunities and aspirations;
- The very low levels of Roma children's achievement and poor attendance, often linked to experiences of discrimination in their homeland;
- Generally low aspirations in relation to educational achievement of many Roma children and parents, linked to parents' own negative experiences of schooling;
- Limited levels of parental engagement, often due to language and cultural barriers;

- Many Roma children not attending early years provision due to insufficient local provision and cultural barriers, with increased risk of underachievement later on, and social, emotional and behavioural difficulties;

### *Marginalisation and poverty post-migration*

- The 'natural' segregation of Roma in confined areas in the city, due to poor, affordable housing; this leads to Roma children's isolation and limited exposure to English other than through their teachers;
- Problems associated with poor and overcrowded housing, cultural barriers to engaging with statutory services, fear of social work and police (due to negative experiences before migration);
- Isolated cases of Roma children, especially girls, who are not in school due to parents' beliefs that they would be bullied or exposed to culturally inappropriate information, and their risk of falling victims to trafficking and exploitation;
- Roma families' poor access to services, restricted mainly to local services, due to lack of information on services available, limited access to interpreters, lack of trust, fears of racism and attacks and limited access to transport;
- Low levels of access to welfare support, even when entitled, due to limited knowledge of entitlements;
- Some tensions between Roma communities and existing ethnic minorities (mainly Scottish Pakistani) and between Roma communities from different countries (Romanian-Slovak);
- There is still very low representation of Roma groups in consultations on local service delivery and initiatives and limited opportunities for community participation and engagement, for example through volunteering.

### *Poor health and well-being and limited access to leisure*

- Poor levels of health among Roma migrants, including high levels of stress and anxiety, respiratory and heart illness, poor ante-natal care and higher risk of infant mortality or illness;

- Poor levels of dental care and high levels of obesity; also, low levels of immunisation;
- Limited access of Roma to safe, well-equipped leisure spaces and the impact this has on children's health and well-being;
- Women and children in the community at increased risk of being victims of abuse, domestic violence and exploitation, due to the limited education, lack of trust in services and fear of repercussions from male family members;
- Cultural differences in the provision of health care and expectations mapped on homeland provision make Roma migrants less likely to engage with statutory health services;
- The effective collaboration between multiple agencies has clear benefits in improving the lives of Roma families, but gaps still exist in collaboration with services across the UK or cross-country, with a risk of children falling between gaps when families move unexpectedly.

#### *Adult literacy and education*

- Very low levels of literacy among Roma migrants, especially Romanian Roma, and the impact of this on their opportunities for employment and community engagement;
- The important role of Roma women in the community, in terms of looking after children, engaging with schools and services, and their vulnerable status at the same time, due to their low education and English language skills;
- The significant linguistic barrier that places Roma families at risk of segregation and exclusion and the limited provision of English language skills to address this gap

Some of the above issues can be seen as specific to the Roma population, due to the longstanding issues of discrimination and marginalisation. On the basis of the evidence summarised, the remainder of this section identifies some recommendations for policy and practice and highlights the opportunities that exist to build on existing good practice and achieve successful integration of Roma migrants.

## Recommendations:

- Raising achievement, attainment and aspirations among Roma
  - Early years' provision
  - Engagement with Roma parents
  - English language skills
  - Better access to services – stronger communities
  - Housing and employment opportunities
  - Engaging Roma women in the community
  - Family; poverty, welfare rights and advice support
  - Better representation of Roma
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## **Pears Institute: public lecture**

Thursday 24 November 2016  
Pears Institute Lunchtime Seminar

### **Antisemitism and Antiziganism: Jews and Romanies in the Shadow of Genocide**

**Speaker: Alexander Joskowicz, Vanderbilt University**

1.00 – 2.00pm, Dreyfus Room, 26 Russell Square, London WC1B 5DQ

<https://www.google.co.uk/maps/place/26+Russell+Square,+London+WC1B+5DT/@51.5218338,-0.1303862,17z/data=!3m1!4b1!4m5!3m4!1s0x48761b31d1df7673:0xa0feb1e70975ae4b!8m2!3d51.5218338!4d-0.1281975>

This talk traces the entanglement of Jewish and Romani (Gypsy) history in the twentieth and early twenty-first century, from the killing fields of Hitler's Europe to the post-war creation of archives, debates over compensation, and contemporary Holocaust memorials. It seeks to understand how Jewish archives became central repositories of Romani narratives of suffering, how Jewish scholarship and the model of the Holocaust have shaped understandings of the Romani Holocaust, and how hostility to Jews and to Romanies relates to each other.

Free seminar for scholars. Limited places: book here:

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/antisemitism-and-antiziganism-jews-and-romanians-in-the-shadow-of-genocide-tickets-28391088510>

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## **Roma Support Group – new advocacy and campaigns worker:**

### **Mihai Calin Bica**

“I was born in Baia Sprie, a small, former industrial city, in the north of Romania. At the age of 19 I moved to Timisoara, one of the biggest cities in Romania, where for three years, I studied Social Work at the Faculty of Sociology and Psychology, in the West University of Timisoara. Whilst studying, I joined Parudimos (a local Roma NGO) as a volunteer. This opportunity offered me chances like coordinating small activities and projects, developing my professional skills and being a human rights monitor for the European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC) for two years.

I moved to the UK in July 2012. This meant a huge change for me. I started working as a team leader and, later on, as a supervisor in the lift and escalators industry. Since then I have always looked for opportunities to get back into social services sector, or the voluntary sector as you call it in the UK. I am extremely happy to say I joined Roma Support Group in October this year as a Campaigning and Advocacy worker.

My desire is to be helpful in general. My appetite is to see someone doing better and not to have the negative experience I had, and still have, as a Roma. This motivates me to do as much as I can - fighting for Roma rights.”

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**Views expressed in this newsletter do not necessarily suggest that they are in accordance with the trustees of the Roma Support Group**