

February 2017

Special issue: 1 Day Without Us – Monday 20 February 2017



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

1 Day Without Us

1 Day Without Us is a National Day of Action on 20 February 2017 to celebrate the contribution of migrants to the UK, to coincide with UN World Day of Social Justice.

For 24 hours, we are inviting migrants from inside and outside the European Union, and everyone who supports them, to celebrate the contribution that migrants make.

Some may choose to do this symbolically, by wearing badges and lanyards, posting selfies or pictures that show your support, or putting posters in their windows. Some may wish to have a communal meal or a party with the migrants they have known as friends, colleagues, workmates and neighbours. Workers may take a five-minute silence or a mini-rally at lunchtime or tea-time.

There are also those who may wish to highlight migrant contributions to the UK in more direct ways. Some may prefer a march or a rally. Others may decide to stop work or leave their classes for ten minutes or an hour or the whole day.

For more information, see this link:

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

See what’s on in your town or city on the day; click here and scroll down:

Roma support for 1 Day Without Us

We asked a number of friends and supporters of Roma Support Group about the protest.

Blagoy Manchev and Emilia Mancheva are from Bulgarian Roma background, and are working in the cleaning business.

Stanislaw (Stan) Kierpacz, is from a traditional Roma family in Poland, and after being denied a place at university, decided to become a karate instructor.

Octav Copoti is Roma from Romania, he's 47 and works in the construction industry.

Denisa Gannon is Roma from the Czech Republic; her parents can't read or write but Denisa completed a law degree and now she's on a Justice First Fellowship, based at a law centre. Denisa is the joint chairperson of the National Roma Network.

What do you think about this day of protest?

Octav: I think this is a very good idea because people have to know that we, the immigrants, have a good influence in UK. We are working here, we are paying taxes, rents, buying clothes, food, paying bills and we do everything we can to improve our lives.

Emilia & Blagoy: We have to show all our opponents that we live in global world. And all economics, in UK and everywhere, is based on people's skills - it doesn't matter they are local or migrants. This why we are working; I doubt that English people will do this job. Could you imagine if more than 3 million migrants left this country - what a huge shock it will be for UK? That is why we need to be welcome and feel respected. We need to be seen as an opportunity, not as a problem.

Stan: I think it is a great opportunity for migrants to show to the British how valuable we are. Without migrants, the economic system would break down because we work in many different fields, e.g. in factories, shops, retail, catering, hospitals, farming; but we are also executives, managers etc. Without migrants the whole system would simply stop working. The British would not be able to find replacements easily.....

Denisa: It is important to have a voice; however, the trouble is whether our voice is going to be heard. We as Europeans could have a voice. The question is how are we going to make ourselves be heard?

Imagine one day without migrants – what do you see?

Stan: What do I see? Hahahah. I see chaos. I am not sure if the British would be able to cope with it. I think they have never been in such a situation before.

Octav: *Last week I went to the hospital with a friend of mine and the cardiologist there was Romanian. People there were saying that he's doing such a good job and he helped us so much – there would be one less cardiologist. I believe we make a big difference, we working so hard on construction sites, if we would go back (to our countries) tomorrow they will struggle to finish their buildings.*

Do you think this could have a positive impact?

Stan: *I think that it could. It would allow us – migrants - to show the British that without us, they may lose a lot. Who would undertake some of the really difficult jobs on such low wages - I think they would not do it.*

Octav: *I understand the reason people voted to send us back in our countries but I think this is because they didn't see that we bring good things into their country.*

What are you doing next Monday?

Emilia & Blagoy: *After discussion with my friends, colleagues and relatives we want to take day off on the 20th February. We will be losing of money - me and 5 colleagues with their families - but we have to show some solidarity and get politicians to start thinking.*

Stan: *If it would be really well organised, and I would know about it in advance, I would definitely do something. And not only me - but many other people would do the same. Could be a day off, could be a march – anything.*

Why would you say that other Roma people should support it?

Octav: *We, Roma, we struggle in our countries, it is very, very, difficult for us to find jobs there and to have a decent life. Here we find a country that offered us jobs, that accepted our children into schools, and that offered us so many opportunities. Most of us appreciate that and we want to give something back. When I was working on a construction site I was trying to do my best to show the appreciation. And all my family is doing the same. My relatives are working in restaurants, car wash, construction sites and we all want to do our best to say “thank you” to Britain for offering us this opportunity.*

Emilia & Blagoy: *First, because we are more vulnerable than the other migrant communities. And secondly if the others are doing it, we have to take part and show our commitment as everybody else.*

Denisa: *Roma community are migrants usually from EU. Many left their country of origins to escape discrimination, racism and poverty. Now, we face uncertainty - what is going to happen after Brexit? We came to the UK where we hoped to be treated with dignity, with our Human Rights are taken into account. Unfortunately, now we question whether after Brexit we are going to lose those rights and be facing unequal treatment as in our country of origins.*

Poem: 1 Day Without Us

Can I get an espresso to go?

Not this morning, no

Can I get you to check in on my dad?

Oh, today, that's too bad

Can I get that extension completed?

Can I get the school central heated?

Can I get that town by-passed, or that heart by-pass?

By the end of play?

Ok, so you do want me to stay

To help your son to write

To get that spreadsheet right

Well, you'll have to wait just one day

Cause today is a day without us

You won't find us on the five a.m. bus

You won't find us cleaning below the rim

Or wiping down the multi-gym

Today we're nowhere to be seen

Today, we're where we've always been

Right here, with a right to stay

That's the work that we're doing today

Because we're not a bargaining chip

Not an absent line on a budget slip

Not a drain on the welfare state

Not a stranger to blame or to hate

We do the work you want us to do

We pay our taxes when they fall due

Yes, we live with you and work with you

Part of this place we travel to

We are part of your today, and your tomorrow too

So, today, join the day without us

Watch and/or listen:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UI_LmbLyado