

## February 2023 Newsletter



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### Introduction & Welcome

Roma Support Group is [recruiting!](#) Two exciting new roles have opened, the first, Roma Policy and Campaigning Project Worker, is ideal for someone who wants to empower Roma communities and campaign against inequalities faced by Roma, and who can speak Romanes or an eastern European language. The second role, Roma Aspiration Project Worker, is a fantastic opportunity for someone who wants to improve young Roma adults' education, social development and aspirations.

As well as the donation pages for organisations supporting [Ukrainian Roma](#), we also direct your attention to a [fundraiser](#) for Turkish Roma affected by the devastating earthquake in south-eastern Turkey. Roma communities in the area are some of the most marginalised in Turkey, and are in urgent need of humanitarian aid.

This edition of the newsletter looks at the [new work](#) our policy team has done around the EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS). As targeted support from the Government for EU citizens in the UK has been dwindling, public authorities have been placed under increased pressure and many Roma have been forced to pay for immigration advice to navigate EUSS. It is vital that changes are made to the current system. Roma Support Group have been working with the All Party Parliamentary Group on Gypsies, Travellers and Roma, and have produced a report outlining recommendations of the changes needed.

We also share with you work that we have produced recently around health. As discussed in the [November newsletter](#), we have worked with [Health and Wellbeing Alliance](#) to create a [health guide](#) for professionals working with Roma, which has been published by the Office for Health Improvements and Disparities. The guide aims to support health and care professions who work with Roma, in order to reduce unequal health outcomes faced by Roma communities in the UK. We have also published a COVID-19 vaccine [resource pack](#) with the Department of Health and Social Care, to reduce vaccine hesitancy among Roma communities in the UK. The resources aim to do this by providing information from

vaccinated Roma, who share their experiences of getting the jab.

The 27<sup>th</sup> of January was **Holocaust Memorial Day**, when we remembered those killed by the Nazis and their collaborators in the Holocaust, including 500,000 Roma and Sinti. To mark the day RSG staff and volunteers attended local authority organised events in Enfield, Islington and Southwark, giving presentations to commemorate and raise awareness of the Roma Holocaust. This work is vital, as a recent **study** has shown that only 11% of the UK population identify Roma and Sinti as victims of the Holocaust. The need for better Holocaust education is also highlighted by Jimmy Carr's Roma Holocaust "joke" and Netflix's continued refusal to remove the "joke" or the programme from their platform.\* As a response to Netflix's intransigence we have released a new statement, which is shared in the newsletter.

In this newsletter we also ask our readers to assist us in supporting the Greater London Authority to improve housing for Roma communities living in the region, by filling in or sharing our **housing survey**.

Finally, we travel to Toronto with our patron Prof. Thomas Acton OBE who **reports** back on how our sister organisation, the Roma Cultural Centre, managed to survive the COVID-19 lockdown in Canada.

\***Claims Conference UK Holocaust Poll** p.3



This month's newsletter focuses on:

- **[Urgent appeal for Roma victims of earthquake](#)**
- **[We are recruiting!](#)**
- **[EU Settlement Scheme report published](#)**
- **[Roma Health guide launch](#)**
- **[COVID-19 vaccine campaign](#)**
- **[Housing survey](#)**
- **[Holocaust Memorial Day](#)**
- **[Power of Roma community keeps RCC Toronto going!](#)**

- [Ukraine donation pages](#)
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## Urgent appeal for Roma victims of earthquake

Following the powerful earthquakes that struck South-Eastern Turkey, [ERGO Network](#) are raising money to provide Roma communities, some of the most vulnerable groups in the region, with food, shelter and heating.

To provide support you can donate [here](#).

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## We are recruiting!

### Roma Policy and Campaigning Project Worker

We are seeking to appoint a dynamic and motivated person to empower Roma communities to exercise their rights and respond to inequalities and injustices they face.

Fluency in Romanes and/or an eastern European language is desirable.

More information can be found [here](#).

**Closing Date for Applications: 5pm 27/02/2023**

**Interview Date: 08/03/2023 (via Zoom)**

### Roma Aspiration Project Worker

We are seeking to appoint a motivated and dynamic person to deliver one-to-one education advocacy and afterschool activities in East London to young Roma refugees and migrants, aged 6 - 18 years, which will address their social exclusion, enhance their confidence and wellbeing, and raise their aspirations.

More information can be found [here](#).

**Closing Date for Applications:** 5pm 06/03/2023

**Interview Date:** 15/03/2023 (via Zoom)

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## EU Settlement Scheme report published

The All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Gypsies, Travellers and Roma, has published a [report](#), *Roma Communities in the UK: the EU Settlement Scheme and post-grace period situation*, written by Professor Philip Brown.

The report follows the recent APPG roundtable event (for details see [April 2022 newsletter](#)), sketches out the current situation of the EUSS (EU Settlement Scheme) in Britain, and describes inequalities in the system and society faced by Roma people.

It makes a case for **more support and protection for Roma people**, appealing to the Government to make 'changes to the system' to 'reaffirm its commitment' to keeping post-Brexit Britain 'open and diverse'.

The report gives some recommendations based on testimonies from community-based practitioners, (including Roma Support Group's Mihai Calin Bica), on the experiences of Roma engaging with the EUSS. It proposes the continuation of collaboration between central and local authorities to ensure long-term success in EUSS service delivery, and the establishment of long-term EUSS support centres by local authorities for EU residents.

Acting on these recommendations, it says, will ensure that local **public services are not overstretched** by 'assisting those unable to access their rights'. It will also **prevent increased pressure on public authorities** who will otherwise have to provide support to people who have lost access to their 'EUSS account and rights' from failing 'to update their pre-settled status'. As a result, these actions will also relieve the **'unnecessary, and avoidable burden'** currently placed on the **'welfare and associated support systems'**.

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## Roma Health guide launch

Through our work with the [Health and Wellbeing Alliance](#), the report *Improving Roma health: a guide for health and care professionals*, has been officially launched and can be viewed [here](#).

The guide is aimed at people who provide health and care services to Roma communities in the UK.

It explores barriers to accessing healthcare experienced by Roma communities, gives practical advice on actions that can be taken to support Roma communities, and highlights other services to be worked with to improve care for Roma.

In an [article](#) for Medscape, Dr Ines Campos-Matos, deputy director for inclusion health at OHID, says: 'Roma communities often face barriers in access to care, such as registration refusal and discrimination, which contribute to poor health outcomes. The guidance highlights the importance of clear and accessible communication, building trusting relationships with individuals, and ensuring consistency of the same healthcare staff for repeat appointments, all of which can encourage positive experiences and improve health outcomes for the Roma community.'

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## COVID-19 vaccine campaign

**Roma Support Group has published a resource pack to inform Roma communities about the COVID-19 vaccine.**

The project was funded by the Department of Health, and the resources were created in response to a focus group carried out with members of different Roma communities in the UK.

The pack includes videos of Roma community members sharing their thoughts on the vaccine and their experiences of getting vaccinated, as well as social media images and text to promote the resources online.



COVID-19 Vaccine Campaign video, featuring Juraj Tancos.

The resources can be used by anyone working with Roma communities, in particular communities that speak Polish, Romanian and Slovak.

[Click here](#) to see the resource pack.

Other COVID-19 resources for Roma communities can be found [here](#).

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## Housing survey

Roma Support Group are pleased to be working with the Greater London Authority to help improve housing for London's Roma communities.

**If you are Roma and live in London, please assist us by filling in this [survey](#) and let the Mayor of London know what should be done to help Roma communities in the city.**

If you are not Roma, please share the survey with your Roma friends, colleagues, or clients.

The survey is anonymous and takes around 20 minutes to complete.

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## Holocaust Memorial Day

The 27<sup>th</sup> of January marked Holocaust Memorial Day, when we commemorate all victims of the Holocaust, including the 500,000 Roma and Sinti murdered by the Nazis and their collaborators.

Watch Marius Daniel Banceanu's emotional message that was shared on our Facebook, [here](#).

Roma Support Group staff and volunteers took part in memorial events across London to commemorate the day, giving awareness raising presentations on the Roma Holocaust.

### Islington



Alexandru Silaghi, descendent of Holocaust survivors and friend of Roma Support Group, with Jeremy Corbyn at Islington Town Hall.

Alexandru gave an account of his family's experiences during the Holocaust.

## Southwark





Tania Gessi, RSG worker gave a half day training session to Southwark council workers, informing them about the Roma Holocaust, and Roma history and culture.

## Enfield



RSG worker Ted Sale spoke at Enfield Council's Holocaust Memorial Day event at the Dugdale Arts Centre.

The full event can be watched [here](#), or click [here](#) to watch Ted's presentation on the Roma Holocaust.

## Statement on Jimmy Carr and Netflix

**Roma Support Group released a statement, supported by other Roma organisations and activists, on the “joke” made by Jimmy Carr that mocks the victims of the Roma Holocaust.**

The “joke” featured in Carr’s Netflix programme, *His Dark Materials*.

Despite RSG meeting with Netflix, they have refused to apologise, edit or remove the programme from their platform.

The statement calls on the public to put pressure on Netflix to discourage the ridicule of one of the biggest tragedies in human history, and urges the Government to enact legislation that prevents this kind of harmful content being published online.

The full statement can be read [here](#).

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## **Power of Roma community keeps RCC Toronto going!**

**The Roma Community Centre in Toronto survived lockdown, through the power of the local Roma community.**

By Thomas Acton, OBE, patron of the Roma Support Group.

*Inspirational leadership of Roma musician Micheal T. Butch means the solidarity is still there.*

One of the nightmares we have at the Roma Support Group in London is that we might suddenly wake up and find we’ve lost our office and the grants have started drying up. Could we go back to our early days, when everything was voluntary and we worked out of volunteers’ own homes?

But this is more or less what happened to our sister organisation, the Roma Community Centre in Toronto, where Canada’s Covid lockdown was if anything more severe than ours in the UK, and has lasted longer. The RCC was founded in 1997 as a few of the long-established Roma families in Canada became outraged qby the racist discrimination against Roma asylum-seekers fleeing violent persecution in Eastern Europe.

They secured rooms in the government-owned premises of CultureLink, an official organisation helping new immigrants in Toronto, and sufficient funding for one or two employees to do casework, overseen by a Roma-dominated Board. They put on cultural and educational events.

From a past visit 15 years ago, I remember the office as a busy place, crowded with clients and volunteers. No more! When lockdown came in 2020, the Government just closed the whole CultureLink set of offices down, and they remain closed to this day.



Prof. Acton outside the firmly closed doors of the CultureLink Suite (Photo: K.Wong)

In London the RSG also had to make radical adjustments to allow our projects and activities to continue despite the pandemic and being forced to move office. Within the first month of lockdown, the RSG's frontline services were all adapted to be able to give support to Roma over the phone. We also undertook huge information campaigns on social media, raising awareness on issues around Covid, the census, financial support, Brexit and other issues facing Roma communities in the UK.

Through the dedication and effort of staff and volunteers, we were not only able to continue our work, but expand it, as we were able to reach more Roma across the country, not just in London.

The efforts Roma Support Group made years ahead of the pandemic to build stronger

partnerships and allies through the voices of our people have also been essential. Soon after the pandemic started our allies offered us their support, being aware of the struggles of Roma people. This has enabled RSG to adapt its services and continue successfully supporting people in the new circumstances.

With the RCC office closed, and without the help of the CultureLink Office, it was not possible to keep the grant proposals going in, and grant income diminished sharply, and paid worker posts lapsed. So the burden of responsibility for field work fell on their Hon. President, Micheal T. Butch, who holds a position constitutionally similar to our RSG Chair, Roza Kotowicz.

The RCC still does have an active administrator working from home, Maggie Szlimiak, who eventually was able to fix a phone call between myself and Micheal which led to a long meeting.

Micheal is a fourth generation Canadian Kalderash Rom, son of a noted Rom Baro. In his early 40s he decided to give up his trade as a car dealer and become a band leader. His band, "*The Gypsy Rebels*" plays festivals, weddings and slavas. And does well enough to make him a living – though it takes a lot of his time, as I found out when trying to fix a meeting with him. (See [here](#) for their rendition of *Gelem, Gelem*, the anthem of the world Romani movement adopted in 1971.)

Micheal finally tracked me down at my hotel, and came to meet me with an old friend, the French anthropologist Chantal Hilaire, who now lives with her husband in Toronto, serves on the Toronto School Board. She and her husband are prospective RCC Board members. She first met Micheal more than 30 years ago, when he came home from school and was amazed to find this gaji woman speaking Romani with his parents.



Micheal T. Butch with Thomas Acton (Photo: T.Acton)

Our conversation lasted all evening, starting, of course with what friends we shared. We were reassured to find we both admired Pastor Stevo Athanasiou, the pastor of the *London Gypsy Church*. Micheal had arranged the music for his recent preaching visit to Canada. Even more astounding to me was that around 30 years ago, Micheal organised a choir for another Pastor Stevo, Stevo Demeter of the Montreuil church in Paris, on one of his American missionary journeys.

In 1971, I stayed with English Gypsies in the church of Stevo and Loulou Demeter. Such memories! Now, with Micheal, we talked music, theology, and politics at length. He integrates religion, culture and civil rights in the same way as my great hero from 50 years ago, Matéo Maximoff, novelist and associate pastor of Stevo and Loulou at Montreuil.

How, I asked Micheal, had the work of the RCC been carried on in the time of Covid? 'I was just going to tell you that!' he grinned.

Micheal, with other volunteers, had kept the outreach going themselves. Every phone call needing help was logged by the administrator, Maggie Szlimiak, and passed on to Micheal, to arrange a meeting. In time of lockdown they couldn't safely go into the often crowded lodgings of new arrivals, and the office was no longer available for interviews. So the coffee-shop 'Tim Horton's' became a kind of substitute office where socially-distanced meetings could be carried out in cold weather. If the weather was fine, Micheal would meet them on park benches or even in the street. He will take careful note of the clients' needs, and then recommend a course of action. If letters need to be written, to the city or social



agency administration, or the immigration authorities, he will pass the details to Maggie Szlimiak who will write and send and file the necessary letters. If circumstances warrant, he will refer clients to a network of friendly lawyers, who often act *pro bono* if the clients cannot pay.



The RCC's physical presence on the street is now the top letter box in this stack of five. (Photo: K.Wong)

There are still seven Board members, including an active treasurer. Although grant income has largely dried up, Micheal is still able to raise money by donations, from \$20 to \$2,500 from Roma business people – those who own shops and restaurants, and trust the well-respected son of a Baro Rom to make sure the money is used wisely and well. And the same people now, as Covid restrictions ease, are beginning to find premises and catering to make it possible for *The Gypsy Rebels* to do benefit gigs again, which are rallying points

for both Roma and non-Roma supporters.

Like the Roma Support Group, the RCC has a developed cultural politics; they understand politics as an art form. Micheal told me “The RCC doesn’t do anything for Canadian Rom, or American Rom. It gets them to help Rom from Eastern Europe who’ve come from terrible situations we’ve just forgotten about in North America.” But of course, giving the well-integrated Canadian Roma the chance to identify with and help the suffering Roma masses in and from Eastern Europe is no small service to render.

The back story of the RCC is full of legendary figures like the late Ron Lee, and the charismatic Gina Csanyi-Robah. Although he only became active in the RCC a little over ten years ago, Micheal T. Butch is in the same heroic mould, a Rom who has risen to the needs of the hour, and still remains bubbling over with enthusiasm, full of plans for the future as the RCC looks forward to recovering from lockdown. Whatever political support they need from abroad, we should offer.

For the Roma Community Centre in Toronto, Canada, and Roma Support Group in London, England, the greatest strength is not our offices, nor our grants, but our people, the undying resilience of the Roma people.

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## Ukraine donation pages

### Human rights fund for Ukrainian Roma

European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC) are [collecting donations](#) to support their efforts to prevent the discrimination and rejection of Roma refugees in Ukraine, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania and Moldova.

### Hot meals in Ukraine

Given the difficulties that Roma are experiencing in accessing humanitarian aid, [ERGO Network](#) and [Roma Women Fund Chiricli](#) have launched a campaign: [Hot meals in Ukraine](#).

The cost of providing one hot meal is €4.

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

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

**We gratefully acknowledge the support provided by the Barrow Cadbury Trust.**

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