



'Roma Stories' Exhibition Banners



'God
helped
us to
get
here!'

Baronita Adam

Roma Stories

The 'Roma Stories' Oral History Project shares experiences and stories of Roma people from Eastern and Central Europe who live in London.

A series of orally transmitted histories focus on the Roma genocide in the Second World War (the Forgotten Holocaust), life in postwar communist countries, and why and how Roma people migrated to the UK. They tell us how Roma identity is perceived, how it is changing, how people experience living in London and how they belong here.

Throughout the ages, Roma people's experience has often been marginalised or written out of history altogether. This project has captured a plethora of Roma voices, which reflect the varied nature of human experience of one of Europe's most discriminated ethnic minorities.

This exhibition includes extracts from interviews, rarely seen photographic archives (Robert Dawson Collection, Roma Support Group) and artwork by Roma artist Robert Czibi.



Pre-War Roma Lifestyle

The Roma people originated from Northern India and for many centuries were nomadic and travelled in caravans. Some were skilled craftsmen, e.g. smiths, metal casters, brickmakers, jewellers, others traded various goods, from horses to textiles, and many others were musicians. These activities constituted their main means of livelihood. Since their arrival in Europe, they have experienced persistent persecution in the form of anti-Roma laws, justifying expulsion, slavery, female sterilization and the death penalty for being Roma.

*'My grandfather was a smith
and villagers gave him money in
return, sometimes food,
sometimes a bottle of wine.'*

Janos Sandoz Horvath



*'My grandmother had a
very long scar along all
her back, from the shoulder to
the hip...a Hungarian
policeman had marked her
with a sword.'*

Miroslav Herak



*'In the woods they collected
different types of leaves
and made these healing
mixtures from nettles,
chamomile, and various
other things.'*

Celina Dytlow



Roma - The Forgotten Holocaust

In the Second World War over 500,000 Roma and Sinti were murdered in concentration camps, in forests or by the roadside. The Roma genocide (The Forgotten Holocaust) was not included in post-war historical narratives and their social exclusion, discrimination and marginalisation continued. For many years, Roma people have sought to put this right by trying to ensure that their 'voice' is included in European history.

'They said: "We will spare you because you have blue eyes, but you're going to watch this." And they shot them, one after the other.'

Mania Malik

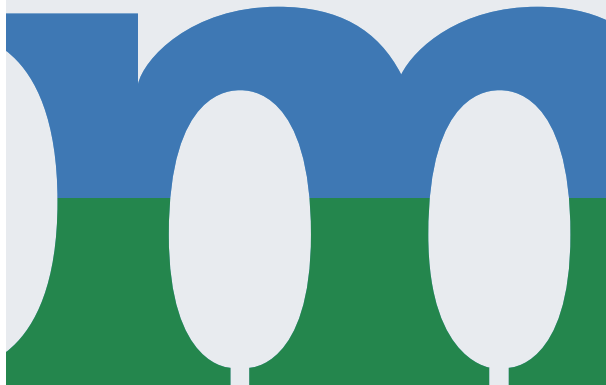
'When the Germans were on their way, her mother told her to run away because she was the whitest, she looked like a Polish girl...'

Zofia Siwak



'Grandfather said they made boats out of paper and filled them with thousands of Gypsies, released them into the water, and by the time the paper was soaked they were dying, drowned in the sea, in the ocean.'

Alexandru Silaghi



'Graffiti used to read: "Roma must be destroyed, they're worthless." I was really scared.'

Anita Wesolowska

Migration



After the war, many Roma in Europe were forced to settle as governments saw nomadism as a threat to their ideology and to sedentary communities. The collapse of Communism in Europe from 1989 resulted in a dramatic increase in racially-motivated violence against Roma. Reacting to this escalation in violence, a large number of Roma families began to migrate to Western Europe in the 1990s as asylum seekers.

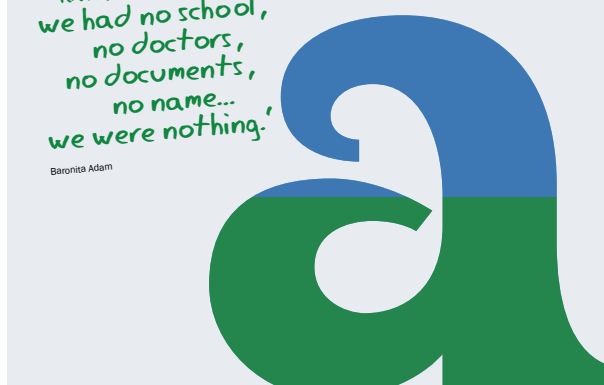


'I knew that if we stayed in Poland life would be difficult for my son.'

Rozalia Glowacka

'What can I say... we had no school, no doctors, no documents, no name... we were nothing.'

Baronita Adam



'Be healthy
and may God be
with you'

Elzbieta Glowacka

Roma Now

After the accession of new member states into the European Union, more Roma were able to freely migrate, however they are still targets for verbal and physical attacks in most European countries. Roma culture has been orally transmitted over many generations.

These audio recorded stories are testimony to its preservation and convey Roma people's dreams and hopes for a future where 'everyone is respected no matter of their colour, ethnicity or background, and where access to opportunities is equal for all'.

'When I got older I realised I wasn't the problem... people have a problem with me being Roma...'

Mihai Calin Bica



'I thank God that our children have a good standard of living now, they go to school, they have rights...they are the same as everyone else.'

Baronita Adam

'We still carry the trauma that our grandparents and our great-grandparents experienced in that war...'

Maria Malik

Stories