

8 April 2024

English only

CCJ statement on International Roma Day

On 8 April, the Council of Europe's Advisory Council on Youth is celebrating International Roma Day. This year marks a significant milestone, the 53rd anniversary of the First World Romani Congress held near London in 1971, a testament to the spirit of Roma empowerment.

International Roma Day is not just a celebration of a historical event, it is a day to cherish Roma history and culture. Roma communities have enriched Europe for centuries with their vibrant traditions, musical heritage, and artistic expressions. Their resilience in the face of centuries of marginalisation and persecution is an inspiration. However, it is also a stark reminder of the ongoing challenges that Roma communities face today.

Despite the progress made, structural discrimination continues to cast a long shadow. Roma youth, in particular, face significant hurdles in accessing quality education, healthcare, and equal opportunities. The pernicious issue of antigypsyism continues to permeate society, creating a climate of prejudice and exclusion throughout Roma young people's formative years. This is a complex challenge that demands a multifaceted response.

The Council of Europe member states have a vital role to play in dismantling these barriers and fostering a truly inclusive society.

The Advisory Council welcomes the recent Committee of Ministers Recommendation CM/Rec(2023)4 on Roma youth participation which marks a significant step forward. It emphasizes the importance of an intersectional approach, recognising the unique challenges faced by Roma girls and women, LGBTQI+ Roma, and young Roma in isolated communities. We especially recognise the critical need to address the specific challenges faced by Roma girls and women and develop further recommendations to protect their rights and give them equal access to opportunities.

The Council of Europe further bolsters Roma youth empowerment through the annual "Roma Youth Together" seminar held in Strasbourg. This year's iteration, which coincides with International Roma Day, provides a valuable platform for young Roma leaders and youth workers from across Europe to share experiences, engage in creative workshops, and co-create narratives celebrating Roma identity and cultural diversity.

The Advisory Council calls on the Council of Europe member States to:

- Commit to the full implementation of the Strategic Action Plan for Roma and Traveller Inclusion 2020-2025, the Declaration condemning the rise of anti-Gypsyism, and the recent Committee of Ministers Recommendation on Roma Youth Participation;
- Ensure equitable access to quality education for Roma youth. This includes eliminating segregation in schools, promoting intercultural understanding, and fostering an appreciation for Roma history and culture within formal education curricula;
- Support initiatives, such as the annual "Roma Youth Together" seminar, that provide Roma youth with opportunities for vocational training, apprenticeships, and participation in decision-making processes at all levels;
- Foster initiatives that bridge the gap between Roma and non-Roma communities, breaking down stereotypes and fostering genuine social cohesion.
- Strive for the swift crafting and adoption of a recommendation on the rights of Roma girls and women, building on existing texts, such as the Istanbul Convention.

The Advisory Council on Youth is unwavering in its commitment to supporting Roma youth. We recognise the vital role they play in shaping their own destinies and the future of their communities. We wholeheartedly endorse the focus on strengthening Roma youth-led organisations and participation in youth councils and structures. By supporting these efforts, we can empower young Roma to become active citizens and contribute their voices to decision-making processes.

Together, by working with Roma youth, civil society organisations, member States, and initiatives like "Roma Youth Together," we can build a Europe where Roma communities can thrive, celebrating their rich heritage while shaping a brighter tomorrow. Let us honour the legacy of the First World Romani Congress vision by working together to create a future where Roma communities are not just celebrated for their rich history and culture, but fully included and empowered to reach their full potential.

Opre Roma!¹

The statements of the Advisory Council are published for the purpose of informing the public about the activities of the statutory bodies of the Council of Europe youth sector. The statements reflect the opinions and positions of the Advisory Council and its members. The views expressed therein do not necessarily reflect the views of the Council of Europe.

¹ Motto chosen by the First Roma World Congress. Opre Roma! means Up Roma! or Rise Up Roma! It has become a political credo of the Romani Movement over the years.