

ADVISORY COUNCIL ON YOUTH (CCJ)

8 April 2025

English only

Statement on International Roma Day

Today, the Advisory Council on Youth joins with Roma communities in Europe to celebrate International Roma Day. On this day, we commemorate the First World Romani Congress of 1971 and reaffirm the importance of Roma youth participation, inclusion, and fairness in today's Europe.

Roma youth remain underrepresented in policymaking and disproportionately affected by widespread and persisting antigypsyism, and still face disproportionate barriers to education, employment, healthcare, and public life. Progress on these issues requires more than symbolic gestures, it requires political will and bold institutional change.

The Council of Europe has made tangible efforts to facilitate this transformation. Following the adoption of the Recommendation CM/Rec(2023)4 on Roma Youth Participation¹, a second consultative meeting was held in January 2025 at the European Youth Centre in Strasbourg. On this occasion, Roma youth organisations, Joint Council on Youth representatives, the Committee of Experts on Roma and Traveller Issues (ADI-ROM), and other actors came together to agree upon a roadmap and coordinate the next steps towards the implementation of the Recommendation.

This work is part of a broader strategy that recognizes a need for double mainstreaming, namely ensuring both the incorporation of the interests of Roma youth into Roma-specific programs and into the wider youth policy arenas. At the same time, safe spaces for Roma youth—spaces in which young people feel free to express themselves, engage with one another, and develop leadership—remain a significant challenge.

The Council of Europe is currently developing its Strategy on Roma and Traveller Inclusion for 2026–2030. As part of this process, Roma youth and civil society organisations are being consulted to ensure that the Strategy reflects current priorities, challenges, and experiences of Roma youth, particularly in the areas of education, participation, and antigypsyism.

In parallel, the Council of Europe has also published a feasibility study on desegregation and inclusion in education,² which confirms that many Roma children still face structural barriers to accessing quality education. The study calls for clear legal definitions of school segregation, the regular monitoring of segregation practices, and sustained investment in inclusive education systems at the national level.

Moreover, data from the same Feasibility Study confirms that Roma children and youth are still subject to deep structural exclusion. 83% of Roma children are under threat from poverty, and in some countries, up to 60% attend schools where all or most students are Roma. Many are misdiagnosed and referred to special education, and school principals often deny Roma pupils on the grounds of "lack of capacity."

The study also finds that only 29% of Roma young people aged 18-24 complete upper secondary education, compared to 78% of the general population. Youth-led initiatives and Council of Europe data show that 68% of Roma youth report experiencing racism at school, while 95% report facing discriminatory speech and treatment targeting their ethnic group. This structural antigypsyism is a root cause of exclusion and inequality, and it must be tackled directly and systemically. But Roma youth excel when provided with support, like mentoring, scholarships, or community outreach. To apply these

¹ <https://rm.coe.int/0900001680aacef2>

² <https://rm.coe.int/item-02-cdadi-2024-19rev-feasibility-study-on-desegregation-and-inclus/1680b29c7e>

findings, an ADI-ROM working group is currently drafting a recommendation to guide member states on how to fight school segregation and invest in inclusive education systems.

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On this foundation, the Advisory Council on Youth calls on member States to:

- Fully apply Recommendation CM/Rec(2023)4 and involve Roma youth and their organisations in all aspects of this process;
- Double mainstream Roma youth into both Roma inclusion and youth policy while also applying intersectional strategy to respond to the particular needs of Roma girls and women, LGBTQI+ Roma, and youth in remote or marginalised areas;
- Make tangible efforts towards desegregation of education at all educational levels;
- Provide continued support for safe spaces and capacity-building efforts that enable the active involvement of Roma youth;
- Support youth-led activities like the "Roma Youth Together" seminar and other spaces that allow for engagement, community and leadership development.

Roma youth are key actors in building democratic, inclusive societies. The Advisory Council on Youth is dedicated to collaborating with Roma to enhance equality, combat discrimination, and facilitate active participation of Roma youth across Europe.

Opre Roma!³

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.

³ (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.)