

8 April 2016

STATEMENT ON THE OCCASION OF INTERNATIONAL ROMA DAY

The Advisory Council on Youth of the Council of Europe,¹ representing the young people in the member States of the Council Europe, takes the opportunity of International Roma Day to send its warm wishes to all Roma around Europe.

With a population of over 12 million, Roma make up the largest ethnic minority in Europe. The history of the Roma is the history of Europe. Roma have lived here for over 1000 years. For centuries, Roma experienced different forms of discrimination, persecution, slavery, the Holocaust, marginalisation and limited access to rights. As a result, their participation in public and political life has been hindered. Roma are poorly represented in decision-making bodies, especially Roma women and young people. In recent years, anti-Roma racism has increased, as have the numbers of extremist and neo-Nazi groups, and far-right political parties. These facts affect the Roma population but are also damaging to democracy, human rights and rule of law on the European continent.

In the last decade, Roma have succeeded in making considerable advances in the field of education, there are Roma intellectuals, politicians, artists etc. who have a great potential to improve the situation of Roma at national and international levels. Furthermore, 2 August has been recognised as European Roma Holocaust Memorial Day by the European Parliament.

The youth sector of the Council of Europe has associated young Roma with its policy making and youth work for more than a decade. In 2011, the Council of Europe launched the Roma Youth Action Plan which focuses on addressing the challenges faced by young Roma, increasing their participation, strengthening their identity, as well as empowering and equipping them with the necessary skills and tools to become active citizens. The new Roma Youth Action Plan 2016-2020 was adopted earlier this year.

As the Advisory Council on Youth of the Council of Europe, we:

- stand against all forms of anti-Roma racism, hate speech, and Romaphobia;
- are combatting the oppression of minorities, in particular the historic oppression of the Roma;
- call for the recognition of Roma minorities in the Council of Europe's member States and for the ratification and implementation of pertinent instruments regarding the protection of minorities, e.g. the Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities;
- encourage the European Youth Forum and the National Youth Councils to further explore the possibilities of enabling young Roma people to participate in their activities and structures in order to truly reflect the needs of all young people at European and national levels;
- encourage the member States to join the [Roma Youth Action Plan](#) as partners, to take an active role in its implementation on the national and local levels and to create the space and means to increase the participation of young Roma as full citizens.

The Advisory Council on Youth welcomes the progress made by young Roma in the last decade and remains committed to supporting the full participation and integration of Roma youth in Council of Europe member States.

On behalf of the Advisory Council on Youth



Marko Grdošić, Chair

¹ The Advisory Council on Youth is part of the co-management structure of the Council of Europe youth sector and is made up of representatives of youth NGOs and networks that provide opinions on all youth sector activities. Together with the government representatives responsible for youth matters they come together in a co-decision body - the Joint Council on Youth - where the youth sector's priorities and objectives are established.