



**DURBAN
DECLARATION
AND PROGRAMME
OF ACTION
25TH ANNIVERSARY**



UNITED NATIONS
HUMAN RIGHTS
OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER



Buan-Mhísean na hÉireann | An Ghinéiv
Permanent Mission of Ireland | Geneva
Mission Permanente de l'Irlande | Genève



Republic of North Macedonia
Permanent Mission at United Nations in Geneva

VOICES, RIGHTS, ACTION: STANDING WITH ROMA AND TRAVELLERS

HRC 61 Session - Side Event & Exhibition Opening

26 February 2026

Concept Note

HYBRID SIDE EVENT 12:00-13:00, Building A, ROOM IX, Palais des Nations, Geneva | Online on [Webex](#)

EXHIBITION OPENING 13:15-14:00, Building A, Hall close to Salon des Délégués, Palais des Nations, Geneva

BACKGROUND 12 million Roma and Travellers live in Europe. They are the largest ethnic minority. Worldwide, the voices from across the communities are strong and clear, with women and girls bringing especially powerful perspectives. They are demanding equal access to rights and opportunities, fighting for justice, advocating for their own rights and the rights of others pushed to the margins of society. Yet these voices often go unheard, excluded from decision-making tables, not respected or acted upon. Many Roma and Travellers face vicious hatred and discrimination in far too many places.

The Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, Michael O’Flaherty, spent much of 2024 and 2025 visiting and meeting with members of the Roma and Traveller communities across Europe. The Commissioner’s book “[The Unheard 12 Million](#)” and its accompanying photo exhibition, curated by the European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture (ERIAC), document those encounters and highlight the reality of Roma and Travellers’ lived experiences. In the Commissioner’s view, the racism and discrimination that they face on a massive scale “is one of Europe’s greatest human rights scandals”.

The Human Rights Council addressed the situation of Roma worldwide in 2014 in [Resolution 26/4](#), leading to the [Report](#) by the then-UN Special Rapporteur on Minority issues, Rita Izsák. The Report noted the severe marginalisation the communities experienced and underscored the deeply embedded social and structural discrimination and antigypsyism they face worldwide as the overarching factor.

A decade later, the situation continues to be dire. As [noted](#) by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Volker Türk, in his Global Update to the 60th Human Rights Council session, violations against Roma, including police violence, hate speech, and systemic exclusion, are widespread in several European countries and beyond. The level of representation of Roma has dropped at national and supra-national level.

This event is an urgent call for decision-makers and all of us to act decisively to secure the human rights of Roma and Travellers. The event combines the power of stories and narrative photography of the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights’ book and photo exhibition with OHCHR’s work on combating antigypsyism and promoting memorialisation efforts, including through the establishment of the [Romani Memory Map for the Americas](#).¹

¹ The [Romani Memory Map for the Americas](#) is a collective, crowd-sourced initiative led by OHCHR in partnership with Gonzaga University (USA); the Institute of Ethnology of the Czech Academy of Sciences (Czechia); the Prague Center for Romani Histories (Czechia); the Institute of Anthropological Sciences of the University of Buenos Aires (Argentina); the Laboratory for the Study of Ethnicity of LEER/University, São Paulo (Brazil); the Associação Internacional Maylé Sara Kali (AMSK); and Kalo Chiriklo – Collective Against Antigypsyism, alongside Roma human rights defenders and CSOs from the Americas and beyond.

OBJECTIVES

2026 will mark the 25th anniversary of the [Durban Declaration and Programme of Action](#): the UN's blueprint against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, including against Roma and Travellers, calling for their equality and full enjoyment of all rights. It will also signify more than a decade since the adoption, in 2014, of the Human Rights Council's Resolution 26/4 addressing the situation of Roma worldwide, and its follow-up Report by the then-UN Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues.

Within this framework, the event aims at providing a platform to:

Amplify Voices: Highlight the experiences of Roma and Travellers, especially women, including through stories from the Commissioner's book "The Unheard 12 Million", and mobilise support to their fight for justice and equality.

Reflect on Challenges: Encourage discussions on progress made and challenges faced since the 2014 Human Rights Council's Resolution 26/4 and the UN Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues' follow-up Report on the human rights of Roma worldwide.

Help Catalyse Action on Commitments: Promote concrete actions based on the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action's commitments on its 25th anniversary, emphasising its significance in addressing past and contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance faced by racialised groups, in particular by Roma and Travellers, and in preventing their future occurrence.

Strengthen Partnerships: Enhance collaboration among the United Nations, Member States, European and other institutions and partners, and human rights defenders to advance the fight against antigypsyism and discrimination, including through memorialisation efforts.

EVENTS DETAILS

The side-event will take the form of an interactive, moderated panel discussion in a hybrid format. It will be followed by the opening of the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights' travelling photo exhibition "The Unheard 12 Million",² along with the screening of the OHCHR-led Romani Memory Map for the Americas.

THE EXHIBITION IS OPEN FROM 23 FEBRUARY TO 3 MARCH 2026.

The events will be held in English.

On site access is only available for UN badge holders.

² Please note that the Commissioner's travelling photo exhibition can be hosted upon request to the Office of the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights at commissionerHR@coe.int

AGENDA

SIDE EVENT

12:00-13:00, Room IX | Online on [Webex](#)

Interactive discussion with:

- Michael O' Flaherty, Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights
- Kerry Gallagher, Education Coordinator, Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre
- Ashwini K.P., UN Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance (*online*)
- Nicolas Levrat, UN Special Rapporteur on minority issues
- Aline Miklos, Head of Advocacy, Vladimir Herzog Institute (*online*)
- Senada Sali, Legal Director, European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC) (*online*)
- Dushko Uzunovski, Head of the Permanent Mission of North Macedonia to the UN in Geneva
- Noel White, Permanent Representative of Ireland to the UN in Geneva

Moderator: Anna Mirga-Kruszelnicka, Executive Director, European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture (ERAC)

EXHIBITION OPENING

13.15 hall close to Salon des Délégués

Addresses by

- Nada Al-Nashif, Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights
- Michael O' Flaherty, Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights
- Marcos Gómez Martínez, Permanent Representative of Spain to the UN in Geneva
- Anna Mirga-Kruszelnicka, ERAC Executive Director

A light reception will follow.

With the co-sponsorship of:



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