



Council of Europe Roma and Traveller inclusion



Roma and Travellers

COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Council of Europe activities on

Roma and Traveller¹ inclusion

A little bit of history ...

Roma are originally from central/northern India, from where they started migrating westward some 1000 years ago. Their language, Romani, belongs to the Indo-Arian language family and is similar to Sanskrit. The first Roma groups arrived in Europe around the 14th century, possibly earlier. Initial enthusiasm about their arrival, when they were taken for pilgrims or their skilled craftsmanship was appreciated, was followed by a long period of rejection, discrimination, deportation, internment and persecution, culminating in the Roma Holocaust during the Second World War, when some 500 000 Roma and Travellers were murdered in extermination camps and elsewhere.² Contrary to common belief, almost all *Roma* are sedentary, whereas *Travellers* are a traditionally itinerant ethnic group not genetically related to Roma.



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from central/northern
India**

Important commemorative days are:

8 April – International Roma Day

2 August – European Roma Holocaust Memorial Day

5 November – World Day of Romani Language

1. The term “Roma and Travellers” is used at the Council of Europe to encompass the wide diversity of the groups covered by the work of the Council of Europe in this field: on the one hand a) Roma, Sinti/Manush, Calé, Kaale, Romanichals, Boyash/Rudari; b) Balkan Egyptians (Egyptians and Ashkali); c) Eastern groups (Dom, Lom and Abdal); and, on the other hand, groups such as Travellers, Yenish, and the populations designated under the administrative term “Gens du voyage”, as well as persons who identify themselves as Gypsies. The present is an explanatory footnote, not a definition of Roma and/or Travellers.

2. See Council of Europe collection of fact sheets on Roma history, culture and language: <http://romafacts.uni-graz.at>



10-12 million Roma are present across Council of Europe member states

The current situation – some facts and figures

Today, there are an estimated 10-12 million Roma who are present in almost all Council of Europe member states. The exact figure is not known due to the lack of data based on ethnicity. While the number of Roma is much higher in central and eastern parts of Europe, Roma inclusion questions remain the same regardless of geographical location, as Roma groups are characterised by low educational attainment, high unemployment rates and reduced or lack of access to basic rights and services such as health care, education or decent housing, and hardly any participation in public or political life.

Deep-rooted prejudice and stereotypes have traditionally led to discrimination and exclusion. Coupled with increasing nationalism and racism, these lead to hate speech and hate crimes against Roma and Travellers, often referred to as anti-Gypsyism. Roma have no kin state to protect their interests and no consulate to promote, for example, the teaching of their language, history and culture, or to facilitate access to public services. While this primarily falls under the responsibility of the member states' governments, international organisations also have an important role to play in this regard.

Council of Europe activities on Roma and Traveller inclusion

The Council of Europe's work on protecting and promoting the rights of Roma and Travellers is based on the Organisation's dynamic triangle of standard-setting, monitoring and co-operation activities.

Standard-setting



Standard-setting in this field started in 1969 with a [Recommendation of the Parliamentary Assembly](#) followed in 1975 by a [Committee of Ministers Resolution](#). Since then, several [Roma and Traveller-related instruments](#) have been adopted by the Committee of Ministers, the Parliamentary Assembly and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe.

The [Strasbourg Declaration on Roma \(2010\)](#) and the subsequent [Thematic Action Plan on the Inclusion of Roma and Travellers \(2016-2019\)](#) as well as the [Strategic Action Plan for Roma and Traveller Inclusion \(2020-2025\)](#) highlight a series of measures to be taken at local and national level in order to implement the current standards and legal framework of the Council of Europe. The implementation of the Action Plan is overseen by the Committee of Experts on Roma and Traveller Issues ([ADI-ROM](#)).



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Roma and Travellers still suffer from widespread anti-Gypsyist prejudice

Monitoring



The case law of the European Court of Human Rights³ and the findings of Council of Europe monitoring bodies, such as the [European Committee of Social Rights \(ECSR\)](#), the [European Commission against Racism and Intolerance \(ECRI\)](#), the [Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities](#) or the [Committee of Experts on the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages](#), show that Roma and Travellers still suffer from widespread anti-Gypsyist prejudice and stereotyping and are victims of discrimination and exclusion in many member States.

These processes perpetuate their marginalisation and pose serious obstacles for any policy initiatives to improve their situation. These blatant human rights violations have also repeatedly been highlighted by the [Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights](#), the [Spokesperson for Roma of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities](#) and several Rapporteurs of the Parliamentary Assembly.

Co-operation



The measures set out in the Strategic Action Plan for Roma and Traveller Inclusion (2020-2025) are based on the lessons learnt from the previous Plan, the expertise of the Organisation and the findings of its monitoring bodies, as well as on innovative practices in various member States. The Plan focuses on three main priority areas:

1. Combating anti-Gypsyism and discrimination and supporting real and effective equality
2. Supporting democratic participation and promoting public trust and accountability
3. Supporting access to inclusive quality education and training.

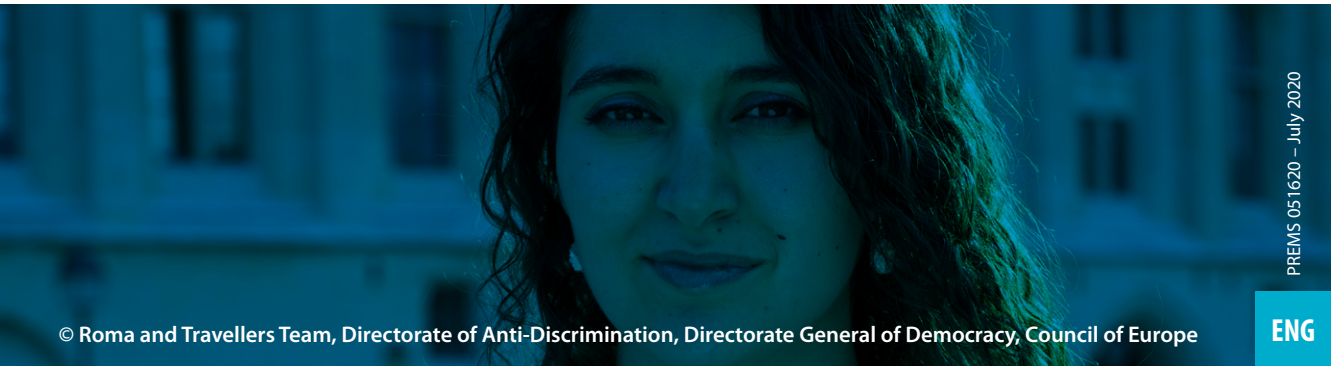
3. See the Court's [Factsheet on Roma and Travellers](#).

The expected results are to be achieved through **specific co-operation and capacity-building activities**, such as anti-discrimination actions, promotion of the participation and empowerment of Roma and Travellers through the Roma Political Schools, teaching Roma history and recognition of the Roma Holocaust. Actions are supported by the ordinary budget of the Council of Europe, or in the framework of Joint Programmes with the European Commission, such as Inclusive Schools – Making a Difference for Roma Children (**INSCHOOL**), Roma and Traveller Women’s Access to Justice (**JUSTROM**), Building capacity at local level for the integration of Roma (**ROMACT**), and Promoting good governance and Roma empowerment at local level (**ROMACTED**), or by voluntary contributions from members States as in the case of the International Roma Women’s Conferences or the Action Plan for Ukraine.

The establishment of the European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture (ERIAN) in Berlin is an example of successful co-operation between the Council of Europe, the Open Society Foundations (OSF) and the Alliance for ERIAC. The Institute, launched in 2017, aims to promote arts, culture and education as a means to promoting human rights and intercultural understanding and thereby to tackling anti-Gypsyism and discrimination against Roma in Europe and to increasing their self-esteem.

Roma and Traveller civil society organisations and individuals are consulted on the implementation and assessment of the Action Plan through regular Dialogue meetings established by the Committee of Ministers in 2015.

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PREMS 051620 – July 2020

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The Council of Europe is the continent’s leading human rights organisation. It comprises 47 member states, including all members of the European Union. All Council of Europe member states have signed up to the European Convention on Human Rights, a treaty designed to protect human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The European Court of Human Rights oversees the implementation of the Convention in the member states.