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Strasbourg, 22 May 2026

Contribution to the New Democratic Pact for Europe

Message from Roma¹ Young People in the 2026 “Roma Youth Together” Seminar²

Introduction

As young people and representatives of Roma youth organisations and networks, we come together on International Roma Day (8 April) to celebrate, to affirm our pride and to contribute meaningfully to the process towards a New Democratic Pact for Europe. Building on a long history of Romani activism, marked by the decisive step taken on 8 April 1971 to establish the foundations for international collaboration, we carry this work forward with renewed responsibility and ambition.

This message reflects both our lived realities and our commitment to shaping more inclusive, participatory and resilient democratic societies. It is rooted in the celebration of Roma identity, heritage and achievements; in the collective pride that drives our communities forward; and in our active contribution to democratic life in Europe.

Roma youth are not only concerned about the future of democracy in Europe, but we are also actively shaping it.

We acknowledge the work of the Council of Europe, particularly of its Youth Department and Roma and Travellers Division, in advancing Roma youth empowerment, participation and the fight against antigypsyism. We welcome key policy developments, including Recommendation CM/Rec(2023)4 on Roma Youth Participation and the Strategy for Roma and Traveller Inclusion (2026–2030).

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 This message was developed by the participants of the “[Roma Youth Together](#)” seminar held in the European Youth Centre on 8-10 April 2026.



1. Discrimination, Hate Speech, and Antigypsyism: From structural barriers to collective action

Antigypsyism continues to shape the conditions in which Roma youth live, influencing access to rights, opportunities and participation. It remains embedded in institutions, public discourse and everyday interactions. At the same time, Roma youth are actively confronting these realities. Through advocacy, community engagement and alliance-building, we are contributing to dismantling stereotypes, raising awareness, and promoting rights-based approaches.

Our lived experience offers critical insight into how discrimination operates and how it can be addressed. By bringing intersectional perspectives, highlighting the experiences of Roma women, LGBTI youth and others, we demand to contribute to more inclusive and responsive policymaking. We call for reinforced implementation of anti-discrimination frameworks, investment in community-led initiatives and accessible tools such as mentorship programmes, scholarships and reporting mechanisms. Effective responses require both institutional commitment and sustained partnership with Roma youth.

2. Combating Disinformation: Reclaiming space and strengthening democratic dialogue

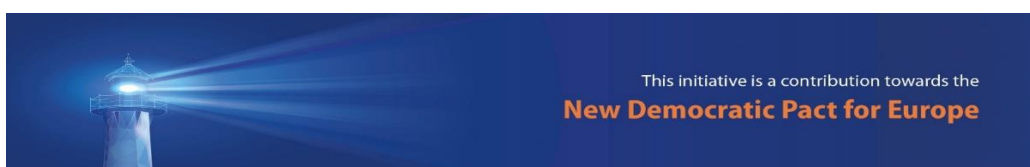
Disinformation and misrepresentation continue to reinforce antigypsyism and exclusion, shaping misleading narratives about Roma communities and fuelling mistrust. In response, Roma youth are actively reclaiming these spaces. Through engagement with media, storytelling and grassroots initiatives, we challenge harmful perceptions and promote media literacy, aiming to build more accurate and diverse representations. Our role should be both corrective and constructive: countering disinformation while contributing to a more inclusive public discourse, where representation reflects reality and upholds dignity.

To achieve lasting progress, greater investment in digital and media literacy is needed, along with stronger accountability from media and online platforms. When Roma youth are meaningfully involved in communication strategies and Roma creators and spokespersons are given appropriate support and training, public representation becomes more respectful and accurate. Furthermore, enhancing education and critical thinking skills would enable our communities to engage more actively in public debate and therefore contribute to build more truthful and inclusive societies.

3. Representation and Participation: Ensuring inclusion and shared responsibility

Roma youth continue to face barriers to meaningful participation, often reduced to symbolic inclusion rather than real influence. This undermines both democratic legitimacy and policy effectiveness. Across Europe, Roma youth must be actively engaged in leadership, advocacy and policymaking in order to strengthen our role as contributors to democratic processes.

Participation needs to evolve from consultation to shared responsibility. Roma youth should be involved not only in expressing views, but in shaping decisions, policies and their implementation. This requires the full implementation of Recommendation CM/Rec(2023)4 on Roma Youth Participation, alongside strengthened capacity-building, transparent consultation mechanisms and sustainable funding for Roma youth organisations. Expanding both formal and non-formal participation spaces, as well as investing in culture and community initiatives, will further support Roma youth in contributing to vibrant and inclusive democratic life.



4. Education: Building inclusive systems together

Education remains a key area where inequalities persist, including segregation and unequal access. These challenges continue to limit opportunities, yet they are not insurmountable. Roma youth are already part of the solution. Through peer support, advocacy and engagement with institutions, we contribute to making education systems more inclusive and representative.

We, Roma youth, bring added value by promoting Roma history, culture and language, enriching educational environments for all learners. Meaningful inclusion of Roma perspectives fosters mutual understanding, challenges prejudice and strengthens social cohesion. Achieving this requires stronger cooperation between civil society and educational institutions, expanded teacher training and inclusive curricula that reflect both the realities of antigypsyism and Roma contributions. Education systems must remain adaptable and inclusive, including through the promotion of the Romani language. Engaging non-Roma students and educators is equally essential to building shared understanding, mutual respect and democratic values.

5. Housing, Rural Areas and Inclusion: Linking living conditions to equal opportunities

Living conditions continue to affect the ability of Roma communities to fully participate in society. Segregation, isolation, and limited access to services remain significant barriers. At the same time, Roma youth have a vital role to play in developing community-based solutions and advocating for more sustainable approaches to housing and local development. Our contribution lies in connecting lived realities with policy solutions. By participating meaningfully in local initiatives and planning processes, Roma youth help ensure that policies are grounded, effective, and inclusive.

Including Roma youth as partners in urban and rural planning at all levels is essential. Improving living conditions is not only a social priority, but also fundamental to enabling democratic participation and equal opportunities.

Conclusion

As Roma youth, we stand at the intersection of challenges and solutions. We bring experience, knowledge and commitment to building more inclusive democratic societies. Our contribution to the New Democratic Pact for Europe reflects both our demands and our engagement. We call on the Council of Europe, its member states and civil society to work in genuine partnership with Roma youth by recognising us as both stakeholders and actors of change.

“Nothing about us without us” remains a guiding principle, but also a practical approach to more effective and legitimate policymaking. Building democracy for all requires shared responsibility. Together, we can strengthen participation, foster inclusion and ensure that democracy delivers for everyone.

