



INTERNATIONAL ROMANI UNION

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# **STRATEGIC RESOLUTION**

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**Roma people in crisis: A nation in motion**

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### **Roma people in crisis: A nation in motion**

It's still not so clear why the Roma left India. Some scholars believe that their ancestors might have been craftsmen and entertainers who went along with military troops who left their homeland as a result of military conflicts. However, Roma arrived in Europe through Persia and Turkey before 1300 AD.

In Europe, the general opinion of the Roma goes to two extremes. On the one hand, in some books and films they are idealized, portrayed as hospitable, careless travellers, who freely express their joys and sorrows in life through song and dance.

On the other hand, they are blackened as people you cannot trust, who are strange and suspicious - they never interfere, are isolated and separate from others around them.

To understand how this has been achieved, let's look at the past of the Roma people.

We as representatives of the Roma people make efforts to protect the Roma population and our future generations from all negative occurrences in the past, in the present and in the future, in all forms of discrimination, hate speech, segregation, intolerance, violence, genocide, antigypsism and at the same time we are deeply believe in respect of the human fundamental rights, equality between all genders, creation of favourable climate for respect of the rights, respect of the basic democratic principles of freedom, and the life standard, as well as the elimination of all of the irregularities, in collaboration with the international institutions which are obliged for that.

I as a President of the International Romani Union will continually work in order to help the Roma, increase the standard of the Roma worldwide and present the Roma in UN, EU and other international institutions in the best manner.

I as a President of the International Romani Union believe that we couldn't think for the future without return to our history and acknowledge its values along with the countries where Roma live and helping them with socio-economic politics and culture of the Roma.

“Your conventions claim we are equal but your racism maroons us at the margins.

Anon.

Anti-Gypsyism is almost a global phenomenon, as virulent as it is commonplace. Grounded in racial superiority and social segregation, reminiscent of colonial-era attitudes, this form of life-destroying *apartheid* has its roots in an historic stigmatization of Romani people crudely expressed in the misnomers *cigany*, *zigeuner*, *gitans* and many more.

Nearly 50 years ago in London the 1<sup>st</sup> World Romani Congress resolved to ban these words from contemporary usage. While the more respectful media and public have adopted Rom, Roma, unacceptable verbal abuse is again cropping up in the hate speech we hear today even from the mouths of mainstream politicians. Worse, anti-Roma racism continues to rise, not diminish while incidents of physical assault and murder against a shameless background of discrimination and marginalization, multiply without restraint. For many, especially among the eldest in our widely scattered communities, they are a horrific echo of the Nazi-mounted extermination programs of the New Order in Europe and portent of a second genocide.

In this era anti-migrant hostility, A million Roma – perhaps two million (nobody keeps a tally) - have already been forced by worsening economic marginalization and social exclusion to head westward across Europe in hopes of a better life. Yet tens of thousands are being deported back to an unstable Balkans, among them bewildered children born and brought up in the richer, northern states of the European Union.

Even as the deportees fly eastward a hundred thousand toil on the roads below or wait in makeshift camps for inevitable eviction.

We ask you to note most of the new migrants are from communities for centuries following sedentary lives on the edges of towns and villages, from Macedonia to Slovakia. They find themselves today uprooted and lost among the unwanted throngs of migrants entering Europe from other continents; existing without security, vulnerable to repressive official-policies and random vigilante attack.

During 2018, a woman in the Ukraine had her throat cut; neo-fascists killed and injured Roma encamped in a forest. In Montana, Bulgaria, a youth of seventeen was shot dead. The previous December an arson attack on a caravan in Italy, resulted in the death of a woman aged 27.

In Hungary, Roma have been the victims of a neo-Nazi terror; homes fire-bombed, families shot at, children killed. In attacks by the Hungarian Guard six Roma have died and more than fifty have been injured. Romania has seen ugly pogroms. The list of incidents is long. The toll rises. The crisis deepens.

Much to blame for enflaming popular hostility are the irresponsible, sometimes vicious statements of extreme and yes leading politicians. A Bulgarian deputy prime minister has called Roma *feral, subhuman creatures*; a Czech president referred to *gypsies* as work-shy *inadaptable*. After another arson attack in Italy, the Minister of Interior was quoted as saying: “That is what happens when *gypsies* steal babies.”

The current Minister of the Interior said in a recent interview: “Illegal foreign migrants will be deported but Italian Roma unfortunately we must keep them here.”

Policy in France has led to the destruction of scores of camps and the expulsion of tens of thousands, the latter declared illegal; an illegality never acted upon by the EU.

Perhaps Britain, in the throes of a Brexit which could see 100,000 Roma migrants forcefully deported, has exceeded others in its’ spend of public money on negative policies. A 150 million euro has been expended in a decade moving on *Travelers*.

The eviction at Dale Farm in 2011, the subject of an appeal by the UN Housing Rapporteur cost 12 million euro. Justified as an operation to protect a Greenbelt zone, a private developer has now got the go-ahead to build 500 houses on the land.

Further, we draw attention to the fact that missing from official reports, such as produced by the UNDP and more lately the ECRI, is an assessment of the civil and political reaction of Roma to this intolerable treatment. Frequent protest goes unreported outside the limited Roma media networks.

Lack of representation is a major handicap. The once-vocal European Roma and Traveler Forum have all but folded due to withdrawal of funding. A bare half dozen Roma have been elected to the European Parliament. Few serve in state parliaments. The number in the Bulgarian Parliament has recently shrunk. However, since the holding by the IRU of the 10<sup>th</sup> World Congress in 2016, a political revival has been apparent. The adoption of the Democratic Transition, making possible global-wide electronic elections, presages a vital reformation of the Romani national movement.

What path is this taking? Delegates to these Congresses have emphasized the life-enhancing values of the Romani people - communities of an ancient Indian Diaspora - who in the face of great adversity have maintained language, culture and human dignity. Importantly, the 5<sup>th</sup> Congress, held in Prague at the turn of the millennium, defined Roma as a nation without territory.

A nation now proud to have a foothold in the United Nations, in coming to you in New York, we seek an opportunity to outline our situation and explore with you the short- and long-term possibilities of our role here at the UN and with ECOSOC.

## **HATE SPEECH, ANTIGYPSYISM**

The problem of hate speech towards Roma is very popular and actual in Europe.

*The hate towards Roma presented on the mainstream media results in beatings, murdering Roma as well as imprisoning Roma without any cause.*

*The International Romani Union requires larger participation of the European Union, the United Nations and other institutions to take part in the solving process of hate crime, antigypsyism and other forms of hate towards Roma in Europe.*

*The International Romani Union present its cause to solve this problem. The Romani Criss which is part of the International Romani Union starting from 2019 will daily digest the news as well as reports from the International Organizations about these issues and write Official Complaints to the institutions that have to deal with these problems. Also, The IRU - Romani Criss will write reports on the case of hate speech and antigypsyism and share it with all organizations and institutions that have a part in the dealing with these problems of the Roma.*

Antigypsyism is the specific racism towards Roma, Sinti, Travelers and others who are stigmatized as ‘gypsies’ in the public imagination. Although the term is finding increasing institutional recognition, there is as yet no common understanding of its nature and implications. Antigypsyism is often used in a narrow sense to indicate anti-Roma attitudes or the expression of negative stereotypes in the public sphere or hate speech. However, antigypsyism gives rise to a much wider spectrum of discriminatory expressions and practices, including many implicit or hidden manifestations. Antigypsyism is not only about what is being said, but also about what is being done and what is not being done. To recognize its full impact, a more precise understanding is crucial.

A number of key aspects deserve emphasis from the outset. Firstly, it is essential to see that antigypsyism is not a ‘minority issue’.

It is a phenomenon of our societies, which has its origin in how the social majority view and treat those whom they consider ‘gypsies’.

To combat antigypsyism, our attention needs to shift to mainstream societies, while raising the voices of those who are dramatically affected by antigypsyism, but also usually silenced by it. Secondly, antigypsyism is not the result of the poor living conditions many Roma have to live in, or the result of ‘how different they are’.

The idea that promoting Roma integration is the main path to countering antigypsyism is a fallacy that misconstrues the origins and essence of antigypsyism. It inverts cause and effect. This means that, thirdly, addressing the effects of discriminatory treatment – poverty, poor quality housing, substandard education, to name a few – is necessary,

but in and of itself does nothing to eradicate the ultimate source of the disadvantaged position of many Romani citizens.

Consequently, antigypsyism cannot be simply treated as a thematic issue, alongside housing, education, health and employment. It needs to be dealt with as an integral part of thematic policies. Finally, what sets antigypsyism apart is its high level of social acceptance. There is a general leniency towards antigypsyist attitudes and practices. The moral stigma attached to other forms of racism is largely absent for antigypsyism. Europe has seen the emergence of a ‘reasonable antigypsyism’ to scold Roma and take discriminatory action towards them is all too often perceived as justifiable and legitimate. Antigypsyism is the norm rather than the exception in public discourse.

Some hate speech can target Roma directly and explicitly; but many other antigypsyist statements or actions take a more implicit tone: While they unequivocally target Roma or associated groups, they do not explicitly name them, relying on proxy designations (‘the people who don’t want to work’) or euphemisms (‘re-education’, or many so-called ‘public safety measures’). Indirect forms of discrimination are related to this: Measures or policies that disproportionately affect certain groups even though they are based on ‘objective indicators’; clientelization or institutionalization of marginalized individuals or communities; or the acceptance of poor- quality projects because ‘Roma are so difficult to work with’.<sup>1</sup>

## **GENDER**

***The International Romani Union share its concerns about the misuse of Romani women in the labor market and the low income of the Roma women in Europe.***

***Also, the International Romani Union strongly believes that these problems have to be solved with institutional engage.***

***The non-equitable representation of the Romani women in the European Countries is a huge concern to International Romani Union. The strategy of the International Romani Union will include programs for larger participation of the Romani women in the decision-making process as well as larger participation in the political life in the European Countries.***

***The mission of this program is: Larger participation of the Romani women and increasing the educational, socio-economic and political level.***

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<sup>1</sup> Reference Paper Antigypsyism – Alliance Against Antigypsyism

Romani women and girls are often excluded from consultation and decision-making processes on legislation, policies and programs, including those that are specifically designed to address their situation. This contributes to a lack of, or a limited perspective on Romani women and girls in policies on gender, social inclusion or Roma which further hinders Romani women equal access to resources and their full participation in all spheres of public and private life. While some progress has been made in recognizing the multiple discrimination of Romani women and girls and the inequalities they face in their access and distribution of resources and public services, the lack of disaggregated data by gender and ethnicity addressing the status of Romani women and girls across European countries prevents policy makers and human rights advocates from devising viable and meaningful policies and measures for the advancement of Romani women rights and of their situation at local and national level. The lack of data further prevents the opportunity for establishing a base line and providing a possibility for adequate monitoring and evaluation. Romani women and girls' empowerment and gender mainstreaming are key to achieving gender equality and strengthening democratic societies.

The process of mainstreaming Romani women and girls concerns and priorities, both in policy and practice would enable public policy to advance equality and to combat discrimination by facilitating better policy responses to meet the needs of people who experience inequality such as Romani women and girls.

Gender mainstreaming would also introduce a culture of disaggregated data collection by gender and ethnicity, impact assessment, monitoring and review into the public policy process and thus enhance the effectiveness of Roma specific policies; and not lastly, it would eliminate barriers for Romani women and girls experiencing inequality, reduce poverty, boost economic growth and strengthen citizenship. Investing in educating Romani girls, increasing literacy rates among Romani women, increasing Romani women labor force participation and strengthening labour policies affecting women, improving their access to credit, land and other resources and promoting Romani women political rights and participation are some of the important driving factors to Romani women empowerment.

Therefore, it is essential to address the multiple discrimination and social exclusion of Romani women and girls in a systematic and comprehensive way, in order to achieve full enjoyment of their rights and substantive gender equality and good governance.

Romani women constitute among the most threatened groups and individuals in the Member States and accession and candidate countries, and that, "as a result of patriarchal traditions, many women - including Romani women and girls - do not enjoy full respect for their freedom of choice in matters concerning the most fundamental decisions of their lives, and are thus thwarted in their ability to exercise their fundamental human rights.

European policy- and law-makers have not yet succeeded in securing full and effective equality for Romani women, and their equal inclusion, with full dignity, in the societies of Europe" as well as noting that Romani women face extreme levels of discrimination, including multiple or compound discrimination.

Romani women have, in recent years, been victims of extreme human rights abuses in Europe and in particular of attacks on their physical integrity, including coercive sterilization" and that although some Member States have provided redress for such abuse, others have yet to do so.

The International Romani Union has to state that the gap in the level of education between Romani and non-Romani is still extremely large. We share the message to all international and domain institutions to work on these issues since the Roma suffer.

### ***HOUSING and HEALTH***

***The housing and health of the Roma is the biggest problems that Roma face in the European Union and abroad. We have to focus on the increasing of the health and housing of the Roma.***

***The discriminatory politics of the non-Roma (Gadje) towards Roma in the terms of Housing and Health as well as other categories is still large. We ask the European Union and UN to make their efforts to solve these problems that Roma face in the European Union and abroad.***

***Also, the International Romani Union in its strategy involves a program for Health and Housing which will be implemented starting from 2019.***

The persisting phenomenon of antigypsyism has proven to be a strong obstacle preventing Roma's fair and equitable access to housing and health services. Addressing the barriers, enabling many Roma to access health services and improving their poor housing conditions could strengthen the social and economic development of Europe.

Poor Roma health and housing conditions are both an outcome and a driver of social exclusion. According to the latest data, homelessness has been increasing across the EU. Thanks to historical disregard of this topic, for many Roma communities in the EU (and also in the Balkans) substandard living conditions and lack of basic facilities are a daily reality.

The situation represents a housing emergency: living in informal and irregular settlements, at high risk of being forcibly evicted, with limited or non-existent access to public services, and subject to residential segregation. A third of the Roma live in

housing with no running water; 38 % do not have an inside toilet, shower or bathroom – in stark contrast to the general population average recorded by Eurostat. Inadequate housing also leads to daily obstacles in achieving Roma inclusion, reducing significantly employment opportunities and lead to the rejection or segregation of Roma children in school.

In some Roma communities (often referred to Roma ghettos) the living conditions are miserable, which is not only an effect of poor quality housing significantly affects Roma health, which is also much worse than the European average resulting in reductions in life expectancy by up to 10 years compared to non-Roma. The Roma Health report<sup>8</sup> published by the European Commission in August 2014 shows one-third of Roma respondents aged 35 to 54 reported health problems which limited their daily activities, approximately 20% were not covered by medical insurance or did not know if they were covered. Two-thirds of Roma could not afford prescription drugs compared to 29% of the rest of the population, and 15% of Roma children under the age of 14 are not vaccinated compared to 4% of children from non-Roma households.<sup>2</sup>

Improving health and housing status for Roma are preconditions for full participation in social life and the labor market. Addressing the combination of various factors, such as squalid housing, segregation and forced evictions, and barriers and discrimination in access to and provision of quality health services, is a social and economic imperative. Given the complexity of both topics, EU funds and national health and housing programs could play a major role in solving these issues and act as an incentive for Member States to invest in Roma inclusion and to reverse this trend. For that to happen there is a need for the relevant officials responsible on the EU funds from the European Commission and Member States to attend both proposed thematic workshops.

As a response to housing challenges of Roma in the enlargement region, legalization of settlements and individual housing units should be primarily pursued, since it is the least costly solution for the governments and most sustainable for the beneficiaries. Only in cases when legalization is impossible, eviction and relocation procedures should be implemented with the provision of social housing for those in need, who are still many. At the same time, the scope of social services should be broadened and extended to a larger number of beneficiaries.

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<sup>2</sup> European Platform for Roma Inclusion – 12<sup>th</sup> Meeting

## **EMPLOYMENT**

***The International Romani Union Support the active citizenship of Roma by promoting their social, economic, political and cultural participation in society, including at the local level, since the active involvement and participation of Roma themselves, including through their representatives and organizations, is crucial for the improvement of their living conditions, as well as for the advancement of their social inclusion.***

***The International Romani Union supports where appropriate to local approaches to integration, promote the training and employment of qualified mediators dedicated to Roma and use mediation as one of the measures to tackle the inequalities Roma face in terms of access to quality education, employment, healthcare and housing.***

For young Roma, it is often a persistent struggle, enhanced through common aspects of Roma social exclusion, including substandard education and direct or indirect discrimination on the labor market. Equality of opportunities for young Roma would be fair and just, but also a smart economic choice: it would be an effective way to improve growth prospects and respond to the demographic challenge of rapidly ageing populations in EU Member States. Investing in young Roma can break the cycle of poverty, discrimination and exclusion. It can produce high returns and can deliver the kind of lasting change that many policies and programs have so far failed to achieve.

Roma women report much lower employment rates than Roma men – 16 % compared to 34 % compared to 55 % of young Roma men.

There is a need for different actors to come together and ensure that the right to decent work becomes a reality for young Roma. The examples above are a proof for national governments that it is worth investing in good examples of employment measures targeting Roma. This is also a signal for EU institutions that measures targeting the employment of Roma youth should continue with dedicated funding in the Post 2020 EU Roma policy.

International Romani Union demands that the employment especially of the younger Roma will come through entrepreneurship. Owning a start-up company and investing in it will give huge results. For this, the International Romani Union has prepared an Operative Program as well as Action Plans for Employment of at least 3000 Roma in Macedonia. It will be implemented in the next period.

We ask the governments and the international institutions to review the possibilities for the Post 2020 EU Roma policies and funding.

## **ADVOCACY**

*Effective Roma participation is needed in order for policies to be successful and to have a positive impact on these communities. Roma's active participation in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and projects is consistently referred to as a crucial element to improve the effectiveness of policies.*

*The International Romani Union suggests the following in the terms of advocacy:*

1. Constructive, pragmatic and non-discriminatory policies
  2. Explicit but not exclusive targeting
  3. Inter-cultural approach
  4. Aiming for the mainstream
  5. Awareness of the gender dimension
  6. Transfer of evidence-based policies
  7. Use of Community instruments
  8. Involvement of regional and local authorities
  9. Involvement of civil society
  10. Active participation of the Roma
- Develop a long-term joint campaign to encourage the Commission to ensure that it has an effective representation of minorities, including Roma, in its staff by 2030.
  - Develop a long-term plan to encourage the effective lobbying of the EU by Roma organizations, making alliances and consistent representations based on good country evidence and analysis.
  - Increase the number and quality of internships across as many political groupings in the Parliament and DGs in the Commission as possible.
  - Support Roma organizations in developing plans to broaden their income base through the Diaspora inter alia to work within their community on political empowerment.
  - Promote an eligibility requirement that up to 50% Roma participation in the management and research components of EU funded research projects on Roma
  - Engaging more Roma in political issues, including those who fear discrimination and do not wish to be identified in the public domain
  - Create and use an infrastructure of Roma expertise based upon professional knowledge in various areas of education, employment, health and housing and others identifying good and bad practices.
  - Promote a European wide strategy to ensure that state organizations act quickly and effectively to stop mobile phone, social media and internet racism.

- Develop a strategy to promote Roma networks, culture, and information exchange
- Provide support for opportunities for Roma culture to be enjoyed and celebrated online and to promote “virtual” Roma communities
- Initiate research on Roma migration to understand the social and political impact of Roma movement in the countries of origin as well as to publish the findings
- Collate existing research and commission new research on Roma migration, undertaken where possible by Roma for Roma use
- Create a Roma strategy to increase the quantity and improve the quality of EU resources that reach impoverished Roma

## **FINAL CONCLUSIONS**

- An expanding effort to place the combating of anti-Roma racism on a par with existing and future campaigns against Islam-phobia and anti-Semitism.
- Facilitation by the UN of meetings aimed at enhancing Roma self-presentation.
- Increase the participation of Roma in political issues, including those who fear discrimination
- Encourage targeted International scholarship, „mediator” and internship programs that commit Roma to working for their community, directly or indirectly, once the training is completed.
- Create an infrastructure of Roma expertise based upon professional knowledge in various areas of education, employment, health and housing, identifying good and bad practices.
- Promote a European strategy to ensure that state organizations act quickly and effectively to stop mobile phone, social media and internet racism.
- Strategy to promote Roma networks, culture, and information exchange and focus campaigns using social media and the internet.
- Provide support for many opportunities for Roma culture to be enjoyed and celebrated on the internet and to promote “virtual” Roma communities.
- Initiate research by Roma based teams on Roma migration to understand the social and political impact of Roma movement in the countries of origin, publishing the findings.

### **RECCOMENDATIONS FOR THE ROMA NGOs:**

- Roma organizations should make active use of the UN Human Rights Council, the Universal Periodic Review and the UN human rights monitoring mechanisms
- Roma should have some permanent presence in Geneva to monitor progress, to pursue issues and raise the political profile of Roma.
- Roma should have a reserved seat at the UN in order to present the current situation of the Roma on a European level and to be included in the preparation of the reports as well as plans and programs for Roma
- Roma representatives should seek to join a State's delegation to the General Assembly and, on occasions speak for Roma in the debates.
- Roma organizations should lobby and support MEPs/ Groups, taking a strong stand in favor of integration and tolerance and against racism and intolerance.
- Develop consistent and regular lobbying both in Brussels and in capitals, to influence EU and Governments on their policies and programming.
- Roma organizations in Brussels should be strengthened both in terms of their political capacity and by encouraging synergies between “competitive” organizations through their boards and joint projects.
- Roma organizations should identify key diplomats that may be sympathetic and in a strategic position to be supportive
- Strengthen the December 2013 Recommendations of the Council and campaign for the necessary resources for the empowerment of Roma through active citizenship.
- Analyze existing research and commission new research on Roma migration, undertaken where possible by Roma for Roma use.

- Take part in the writing of the Action Plans for Roma
- Inform the public about sensitive topics for Roma
- Be more coordinated
- Focus on the context and develop contextual documents
- Encourage Roma organizations, in partnership with national and international democratic institutions, to develop projects to stamp out ballot buying
- Develop campaigns to encourage Roma to register to vote, to vote on the day of elections as well as to be informed about the voting process and to provide accessible and secret polling booths
- Prepare background literature and posters on Roma issues in the Romani language for the European Elections, as part of a wider initiative
- Work with other minority communities to promote the political representation recommendations of ENAR
- Create awareness among Roma of their participatory rights and have a dialogue with the Council of Europe, with the UN and with States on whether these are being realized in practice.

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