



Declaration of the World Roma Congress 2023

The World Roma Congress met from 15 to 17 May 2023 in Berlin with participants from 30 countries all over the world: India, USA, Germany, France, Belgium, Kosovo, Turkey, Poland, Serbia, Bulgaria, Romania, Denmark, Sweden, Belarus, Slovakia, United Kingdom, Czech Republic, Macedonia and many more to address the urgent challenges faced by Roma communities worldwide. The focus was on the current situation of Roma: worldwide discrimination, the situation of Roma refugees and the threat to the community from the rise of right-wing extremism. The discussion on the state of the Roma movement was particularly intense. The Congress was streamed worldwide online, allowing thousands to follow the presentations and discuss on social media. It was agreed we must insist on our self-identity as a nation, rejecting categorisation as an ethnic minority.

The discussions are urgently needed because we are in an emergency situation. Despite the ongoing struggle against discrimination, racism and anti-Romaism, they continue to rise worldwide. The Ukraine war poses a great threat – not only to Roma in Ukraine, but also to our communities in the countries to which the war threatens to spread. Many Roma live in these countries, and it is in these countries that they have little state protection and experience a high level of structural and institutional discrimination.

Roma do not occupy territories, do not commit terrorist attacks, do not wage wars and have pursued emancipation through non-violent means.

Nevertheless, we are among the most hated people. Therefore we have resolved not to repeat mistakes, especially in connection with past and current wars and conflicts. Roma did not receive the necessary protection even as war refugees.

The transformation processes after the end of the Cold War increased the socio-economic exclusion, discrimination and marginalisation of Roma in many countries. The rise of nationalism and other reactionary ideologies made Roma scapegoats. The wars in Yugoslavia left many Roma homeless. They still live in the diaspora today.

The forgotten war in Syria was also reported. The fact that the Dom community, the Roma in the Middle East, was displaced by this war goes unrecognised.

Structural and institutional discrimination in particular is often not recognised or even ignored in all European countries. Racist violence is a serious problem in many countries. Right-wing extremism and right-wing populism in politics and society threaten Roma communities all over Europe.

We have no time to lose. With the World Roma Congress we have created a platform where every two years we will meet to inform the Roma population worldwide about the current situation, to confront current politics, and to discuss strategies, structures and demands. A general reform of Roma policy is necessary.

We hereby declare the following needs and demands to ensure a better future for the Roma nation:

In the field of rights and justice:

- to take appropriate measures to recognise and reconcile the genocide against Roma all over Europe during the Second World War;
- recognition of 13 June as the commemoration day for the Roma expelled from Kosovo in 1999; raise the question about the property of Roma stolen from them during and after the Kosovo war; compensation for the destroyed Roma houses; compensation for the injuries suffered from being forced into lead-poisoned camps;
- to develop a simplified admission procedure for Roma seeking refuge from war zones; Undocumented Roma must have the same rights as documented ones;
- to provide a protection status for Roma seeking refuge from pogroms, state and non-state persecution as well as structural and institutional discrimination;
- to work towards establishing laws against anti-Romaism and other positive legislative changes, including to implement existing anti-discrimination legislation;
- advocacy of the full rights of Roma in all aspects and levels of social, health, economic and political participation;
- to form teams for monitoring structural, institutional and individual discrimination as well as hate crimes against Roma;
- intervention against all such crimes against Roma;
- to promote legal and social counselling specialised in the protection and representation of Roma rights and to work against anti-Romaism in all countries.

In the area of raising awareness and foster solidarity:

- to advocate for the establishment of teams for educating workers in public institutions and international organisations against discrimination and anti-Romaism;
- to raise awareness among the majority population for balanced reporting regarding Roma, to fight stereotypes about Roma and foster cultural understanding;
- set up a Roma Media Network, that brings together media from Europe and promotes cooperation with Roma media to strengthen the Roma community;

- the Network should support the professionalisation of Roma media, promotes diversity in reporting and encourages general media organisations to report on Roma challenges and promote mutual understanding;
- to deepen Romani solidarity and strengthen cultural relations with India and Middle East;
- to take measures to raise awareness of solidarity among Roma and non-Roma, including the strengthening of democracy and activism.

In the area of political changes:

- to promote the political participation of Roma at the United Nations and its agencies, within the European Union and other regional and international bodies;
- to promote Roma as active members of the political scene, including their participation in the strengthening of democracy, and democratic processes;
- to support anti-discrimination measures in education, employment and housing; the focus must be on decreasing structural and institutional discrimination;
- to promote political representation: public institutions should ensure that Roma are adequately involved in political decision-making processes. Promote Roma leaders, representation in parliaments and governments, create mechanisms for Roma affairs;
- to create a permanent representation of the Roma nation in Brussels, built on transparent structures; the office is responsible for international enquiries and emergencies of the Roma community as well as communication and undertaking lobbying activity;
- to establish a European political Roma party to represent the interests of the Roma at European level.

We stand united in our commitment to protect the rights of the Roma nation, promote the well-being, and ensure the equality of Roma individuals worldwide. We shall endeavour to leave behind the passive attitudes. We have to join forces and support each other. We pledge to stand up for the needs of all Roma and thereby take charge of our own future. We need strong and supportive structures in our community. For our generation and the generations to come.

Berlin, 17 May 2023