



# ROMA

**People of Europe**

*International Roma Day, 8 April 2013*

**S&D**

Group of the Progressive Alliance of  
**Socialists & Democrats**  
in the European Parliament

# ROMA: People of Europe

“It is not possible to understand the paintings of Monet or Picasso, the music of Tchaikovsky, Chopin or Goran Bregovic, the opera of Bizet, Puccini or Verdi, the poetry of Baudelaire or Lorca, the films of Kusturica, bohemia, the violin, the guitar, romanticism, flamenco, without recognising the Roma influence on European culture. We gypsies are part of Europe’s cultural roots and shared values.”

*Rafael Carmona Fernandez,*

Roma trainee working in the S&D Group

**“There are some 10 million Roma citizens living in the EU. They are fully European. There are more EU citizens of Roma origin than the combined citizens of Slovenia, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Malta and Luxembourg.**

If the Roma people lived in a country of their own, it would be roughly the 10<sup>th</sup> biggest EU country by population size – larger than countries such as Belgium, Greece, Hungary, Sweden, Finland, Denmark and Bulgaria. Yet it would also be the poorest one, by far.

As a state, it would be entitled to elect more than 20 MEPs, to manage billions of EU funds for social development and cohesion, and would have a veto on important decisions such as the EU’s multi-annual budget, legislation in the field of social security and protection, and on EU citizens’ rights and anti-discrimination measures.

But Roma people don’t have a country of their own as their communities are spread across many different EU countries. Officially, they are citizens amongst other citizens. But in reality, they experience the most shameful segregation and are often viewed and treated as if they belonged to a nation apart.

The European Union has not yet delivered as it should to end discrimination and exclusion. It’s high time for a change: we need a European Commissioner for Roma to ensure Member States respect their commitments, we need Roma NGOs to be fully involved in EU Roma policies and we need Roma officials in EU institutions for this fight to be stronger”.



*Hannes Swoboda,*  
S&D Group President

# THE HISTORY OF THE ROMA PEOPLE: Centuries of persecution

**Rom** is a masculine noun, meaning ‘man, husband’. The Romani language is divided into several dialects, which together account for an estimated two million speakers worldwide. Although they have different roots, most Eastern European Roma people are Roman Catholic, Orthodox Christian or Muslim.

The Roma reached the Balkans around the 12<sup>th</sup> century, migrating from the Indian subcontinent.

One of the most enduring persecutions the Roma people faced was enslavement, which lasted several centuries in some parts of Europe.

In 17<sup>th</sup> century Spain, the monarchy ordered a nationwide crackdown on ‘los gitanos’: men and women were sent to separate workhouses and their children sent to orphanages.

Under the Habsburg monarchy during the reign of Maria Theresa (1740–1780), a series of decrees tried to force the Roma to settle permanently, removing their right to own horses and wagons, renaming them ‘new citizens’ and prohibiting marriage between Roma people. Her successor Josef II prohibited the wearing of traditional Romani clothing and the use of the Romani language, punishable by flogging.

Later in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Roma immigration was forbidden on a racial basis in areas outside Europe, mostly in the English-speaking world (the United States outlawed Roma immigration in 1885) and also in some South American countries (Argentina adopted a similar policy in 1880).

The persecution of the Roma reached a peak during World War II in the ‘Porajmos’, the genocide perpetrated by the Nazis when up to a million and a half Roma adults and children were subjected to violence, imprisonment and later genocide.

Amnesty International reports continued instances of discrimination and violence against the Roma during the 20<sup>th</sup> century in several EU countries.



# EDUCATION

Many European governments are failing to set up and fund effective measures to help include marginalised Roma children in public education systems and make sure they can take up their right to free and equal education. According to a recent report from the EU's Fundamental Rights Agency, only 15% of Roma children complete upper-secondary education.

This figure covers Roma children who are formally registered in schools, but in fact the figure is much higher as many Roma children do not currently attend school.

In most cases, Roma children are segregated in special schools. According to a 2009 survey

by the Roma Education Fund, in regions with large Romani populations at least three out of four pupils in special schools are Roma. In some countries, Roma make up 85% of children attending special classes.

Roma are also segregated within the mainstream school system, where children are often separated into Roma-only schools or classes. Teachers in these classes often have lower expectations of their students. They also have fewer resources and poorer quality infrastructure available to them. The segregation of Romani settlements, often on the outskirts of towns, is also a factor in their segregation at school according to Amnesty International.

## S&D Group recommendations:

- ▶ Working with Roma families to encourage them to take responsibility for early education.
- ▶ Scholarship programmes and funding for school-age Roma children.
- ▶ Training teachers and developing effective information campaigns to fight discrimination in schools.
- ▶ Including Roma children in mainstream classes.
- ▶ Setting up mentoring programmes for Roma university students (ROMAVERSITAS)
- ▶ Positive discrimination to help young Roma people take part in the Erasmus programme.
- ▶ Creating a Roma traineeship programme at the European institutions – as the S&D Group has done since 2010 – both to train Roma for European-level jobs and to bring Roma perspectives into the institutions.
- ▶ Professional training programmes for Roma people with a view to creating positions in the European institutions, including working on Roma programmes.



# POVERTY

According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), infant mortality rates among the Roma population are twice that of non-Roma citizens. The marginalisation of the Roma is also clearly reflected in housing statistics. The UNDP report on the situation of Roma children across south-eastern Europe estimates that 25% of Roma live in shacks, compared to 3% of non-Roma, and that 55% of Roma homes are not connected to a sewage system.

According to the Fundamental Rights Agency, around 90% of the Roma surveyed live below national poverty lines and about 45% live in accommodation that lacks at least one of the basic housing amenities: an indoor kitchen, indoor toilet, indoor shower or electricity. Another major reason for Roma segregation is the high level of discrimination in terms of access to affordable housing.

About 20% of Roma who responded to the survey were not covered by medical insurance or did not know if they were covered.

## S&D Group recommendations:

- ▶ Using EU funds to set up and finance complex, multi-fund programmes tackling all aspects of poverty (improving housing conditions, training and assisting Roma adults to find work, ensuring access to early education for Roma children).
- ▶ Promoting models of integration in mainstream neighbourhoods.
- ▶ Social housing programmes with adequate policies for household management.
- ▶ Exploring solutions at a national and local level and sharing good practice across Europe.
- ▶ Developing the system of mediators to represent and assist Roma communities.



# EMPLOYMENT

# EMPOWERMENT



- ▶ In 2011, average wages for Roma men were between 45% and 80% of the average wages for non-Roma men. For women the gap is between 20% and 59%.
- ▶ Roma women face double discrimination: gender gaps in employment and pay are very high in Roma communities.
- ▶ Unemployment rates for Roma are up to 30% to 250% higher than those of non-Roma populations nearby.

## S&D Group recommendations:

- ▶ Professional training programmes for Roma people with little or no literacy skills to help them find jobs.
- ▶ Encouraging public and private organisations to employ Roma people.



Roma people have the least democratic representation of any community in Europe. There is very low representation in national parliaments, just one MEP in the European Parliament and almost no representation in high-ranking posts either at national level or in the European Institutions.

According to the Fundamental Rights Agency's EU-MIDIS survey, one in four Roma respondents were the victims of crime – including assault, threats and serious harassment – at least once in the previous 12 months.

## S&D Group recommendations:

- ▶ Empowering Roma people to participate actively in politics and fight for their own rights, through raising awareness of anti-discrimination laws (such as prohibiting discrimination when renting or buying a flat) and creating leadership programmes.
- ▶ Creating programmes which employ Roma people in non-governmental organisations (NGOs) dealing with Roma issues.
- ▶ Improving co-operation between the European Commission and Roma NGOs.
- ▶ Reducing bureaucracy and introducing more transparency in the use of EU funds for Roma communities, to ensure accurate monitoring and reporting on how money is spent and policies are applied.
- ▶ Involving grassroots associations and the Roma community in both the policy-making process and the implementation of programmes affecting them.
- ▶ Introducing targeted EU funding for Roma programmes, within the EU 2020 plans.
- ▶ Setting up free legal assistance programmes specialised in anti-Gypsyism, discrimination and hate crime.
- ▶ Prosecuting those responsible for hate crimes, violence and discrimination against Roma people.
- ▶ Promoting positive examples of Romani culture.
- ▶ Teaching the Romani language and history – fighting prejudice and stereotypes.





# ROMA

*People of Europe*

“ **WE ARE ALL  
WANDERERS  
ON THIS EARTH.  
OUR HEARTS  
ARE FULL  
OF WONDER,  
AND OUR SOULS  
ARE DEEP WITH  
DREAMS** ”

*Roma Proverb*

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# INTERNSHIP PROGRAMME

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## for young Roma people at the S&D Group in the European Parliament

Since 2010, eight Roma students have received funding to join a professional training programme with the S&D Group at the European Parliament, working on different policy areas and gaining new skills. The programme consists of three internships per year.

The programme is open to citizens of the EU or associated states who are under 30 years old and have finished at least one period of study.

This new fund aims to support the S&D Group's political activities combatting increasing extremism, xenophobia and racism in European countries, notably regarding the violation of Roma people's fundamental rights.

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