

PRESS RELEASE

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International Roma Day: an opportunity to celebrate, but also to recall the urgent need for action against the exclusion of Roma

Tomorrow, 8 April, the world celebrates International Roma Day¹. The European Roma Policy Coalition (ERPC)² is taking an active part in these celebrations and highlights on this occasion the important cultural diversity which the Roma, Sinti and Traveller communities bring to the European Union.

But these celebrations are also an opportunity to remind citizens and policy makers of the discrimination and disadvantage which Europe's largest minority faces on a daily basis. An estimated 7-9 million Roma live in EU member states but to date there is no integrated and comprehensive EU policy specifically targeting discrimination against Roma. Commission officials have acknowledged that "social exclusion and discrimination of Roma communities are well documented and despite all available legislative and financial instruments remain often extreme". However, these words have not been matched by effective action and change.

The European Roma Policy Coalition therefore urges the European Union to adopt a Framework Strategy on Roma Inclusion, developed in full consultation with Roma communities. This strategy should ensure that Roma communities are protected from discrimination, have equal access to education, healthcare and housing, and are empowered through participation in the civic and economic life of the country.

David Mark, the coalition coordinator, said:

"Celebrating the cultural diversity of the Roma community is all the more relevant as this year is European Year of Intercultural Dialogue. The EU must now ensure that its emphasis on cultural diversity is matched by strong and effective action to ensure the economic and social inclusion of Roma, Sinti and Travellers into European societies and protect them from discrimination."

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¹ Established in 1971, International Roma Day celebrates a community dispersed throughout Europe, facing enormous economic, social and political challenges.

² The European Roma Policy Coalition, launched on 6 March 2008, is a network of national and international NGOs working on different aspects of discrimination against Roma people which calls for the full realisation of the economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights of Roma. The member organisations are: Amnesty International, European Network Against Racism, European Roma Grassroots Organisation, European Roma Information Office, European Roma Rights Centre, Fundación Secretariado Gitano, Minority Rights Group International, Open Society Institute and Spolu International Foundation.



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