



8 April 2014 – Today marks an opportunity to highlight Roma culture as we celebrate the International Roma Day. But beyond being a celebration, this day also highlights the persecution and discrimination that Roma people face in all areas of life. The Roma people have been heavily discriminated against throughout history. During the Holocaust, the Roma people were amongst those targeted by the Third Reich for elimination. In Romania, under the reign of Nicolae Ceaușescu, they were also targeted for persecution.

Though today systematic violence against the Roma has decreased, isolated attacks and vigilante strikes at Romani communities are commonplace, especially in eastern European countries. Amnesty International [reports](#) that Europe's response has been inadequate and calls for more preventive action. On this International Roma Day, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on minority issues, Rita Izsák, also [calls](#) on all European States and institutions to fully include Roma people in the decision-making process in Europe at all levels.

Persecution, however, [documented](#) by Amnesty International, still continues through other means. Because they often live in informal settlements, Roma families have been forcibly evicted from their housing, or even from their adopted country, by many governments. In some countries Romani children are often placed in special schools designed for pupils with "mild mental disabilities" or segregated in separate schools and classes that offer an inferior education. In turn, they are severely disadvantaged in the labour market.

The Romani community originated in India, from where the nomadic peoples have spread across Europe and beyond. Between 10 and 12 million Romani live in Europe, and are one of Europe's largest minorities. Yet, their nomadic nature and cultural differences have led to their persecution and underrepresentation within the societies they inhabit.

Unable to find jobs, millions of Roma cannot access better housing, afford medication, or pay the costs of their children's schooling. Socially marginalized, the Roma are therefore also politically excluded. In national politics they are rarely represented at all, and on the European level their presence is quite small. Thus far there have been only 3 Roma Members of the European Parliament - the first ever came from Spain and the two currently serving are from Hungary. But there are changes being made as there is a rapidly rising number of Roma intellectuals and leaders both in governments and civil society, including young people and women, who are passionate and talented advocates not only for the rights of Roma, but about ensuring fair and just societies for all.

Despite the continuing hardships, today Roma's across Europe will celebrate April 8. Various Romani communities will mark the day with festivals, dances, concerts and tournaments, and in Bulgaria a memorial service will be held for the Roma's who lost their lives in concentration camps during the Second World War.