



Sign of recognition to mark International Roma Day

08 Apr 2021

The 8 April is International Roma Day, a significant day when it comes to raising awareness about the perceptions of people for whom the – often negatively connoted – term “gypsy” is still all too common in everyday language. Fifty years ago, on 8 April 1971, the first World Roma Congress was held in London, a major first step for the rights of this ethnic group.

One day before International Roma Day 2021, the Council of Ministers in Austria sent an important signal by adopting the working definition of antigypsyism/anti-Roma discrimination developed by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA).

Hannah Lessing, Secretary General of the National Fund, whose central task since 1995 has been to provide recognition for all victim groups, emphasizes that, “Discrimination against people and ethnic groups is an alarm bell that reflects the state of a society. The potential consequences became all too evident under the Nazis. That’s why decisive action must be taken so urgently, not only against antisemitism, but against exclusion of any kind.”

To this day, antigypsyism/anti-Roma discrimination as a phenomenon has received insufficient attention, including in Austria. The working definition developed by IHRA with the significant involvement of Austria is a means of identifying and naming it. The definition, which uses the term “Sinti and Roma” as an “umbrella term which includes different related groups, whether sedentary or not,” states:

“Antigypsyism/anti-Roma discrimination is a manifestation of individual expressions and acts as well as institutional policies and practices of marginalization, exclusion, physical violence, devaluation of Roma cultures and lifestyles, and hate speech directed at Roma as well as other individuals and groups perceived, stigmatized, or persecuted during the Nazi era, and still today, as ‘Gypsies’. This leads to the treatment of Roma as an alleged alien group and associates them with a series of pejorative stereotypes and distorted images that represent a specific form of racism.”

In the address to the Ministerial Council the adoption of the working definition of antigypsyism/anti-Roma discrimination was described as “an important step for the international recognition of the genocide of Roma and Sinti,” and “a strong commitment by IHRA Member States to emphatically confront discrimination, violence and hate speech against Roma and Sinti.” The adoption of the working definition of antigypsyism/anti-Roma discrimination will now be forwarded to the National Council and Federal Council for their information and possible further action.

Event to mark International Roma Day on 8 April in Vienna

The association “Voice of Diversity” has organized an international panel discussion which will take place on 8 April. It will be followed by a concert by the Harri Stojka Roma Music Ensemble. In the context of a new EU framework strategy for Roma equality, inclusion and participation, the panelists will discuss their personal vision for a life of equality in the Europe of 2030 and how their work and personal dedication help improve the lives of the Roma population. Light will also be shed on the current impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Roma and Sinti. The event, co-funded by the National Fund, will be broadcast online via livestream at www.voiceofdiversity.at.