



**“We have to prevent a humanitarian catastrophe now!”**

April the 8th is World-Roma-Day.

All over the world, this day has been celebrated by Romani people since 1971. They celebrate their identity on that day and their fight for participation and equal rights. They also commemorate over 500,000 Romani people who were murdered by the Nazis.

The Romani civil rights movement has achieved many victories, especially in more recent decades. By now, there is a variety of Romani self-organisations engaged in advocacy work. Despite of these successes, during the Corona Virus crisis anti-gypsyism is on the rise again. Many Romani people, especially in eastern European countries, are threatened by the precarious living conditions and the omnipresent anti-gypsyism. Today, the Berlin townhalls of Neukölln and Charlottenburg are giving a strong sign of recognition by putting up the Romani flag. However, in a crisis like this, such important symbols are not enough.

“We are extremely worried about the current situation of many Romani people, especially in eastern Europe,” explains Merdjan Jakupov, board chairman of *Amaro Foro*. “Their living conditions in Bulgaria, Romania, Serbia and other (west) Balkan countries were very difficult before this pandemic already. Often they are forced to live in irregular settlements without water or electricity. In most cases a lot of people live together in very small rooms or houses, so quarantine or really any distance to other people at all is not possible for them. In addition, nationalist and extreme right-wing politicians are trying to make Romani people into scapegoats, blaming them for the situation. In Bulgaria, entire settlements or town districts, that are mostly inhabited by Romani people, have been blocked completely, so the people living there don’t have access to any supplies or provisions any more.”

Furthermore, the economic situation presents a huge problem. Many Romani communities are excluded from the regular labour market, and are therefore forced to work in the irregular sector in order to survive. With the current ban on going out, many of them are left completely without any income and no possibility to take care of their families. Most of them do not have access to medical treatment either.

“Anti-gypsyism is deeply rooted and widely spread across all European societies. During the last years, anti-gypsyist sentiments and practices have been on the rise and becoming more and more established in and beyond Germany. In the current situation we anticipate famines,



massive human rights violations and racist pogroms“, emphasizes Merdjan Jakupov. “Anti-gypsyism has reached a new, higher level in times of the Corona virus.“

*Amaro Foro* appreciates the civil society’s initiatives and self-help networks that have already responded to this situation that are trying to help Romani people, especially those in particularly vulnerable positions. “Voluntary commitment alone is not going to be enough though. We therefore request the institutions of the European Union to support all of its member states, membership candidates and surrounding countries in protecting the Romani minority from the virus, from starvation and immiseration and from racist pogroms,“ asserts Merdjan Jakupov. “If necessary, pressure has to be put on these countries to make sure that they guarantee human and civil rights, including the physical integrity of all human beings living there. This is also an obligation and responsibility of the German government to use its influence in the European Union and to fund support programs itself.”

*Amaro Foro is a transcultural migrant youth self-organisation of Romani and Non-Romani people. The name is Romani language and means “our city“. Together we engage in the fight against discrimination and exclusion and for empowerment, self-organisation and social and political participation.*

Please sign the petition *#SaveRomafromCorona: Protect Romani Communities from a Catastrophe* to the European Commission [here](#)

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