

# What is International Roma Day and why is it celebrated?

Four local residents highlight the importance of 8 April for celebrating the presence, identity and contribution of Roma people in Sheffield.

by Tereza Bugosova, Rosa Cisneros, Robin Kaleja, Terezia Rostas  
8 APRIL 2022



Teresa Bugosova's dance troupe performing at the EU-funded RTransform project, November 2021.

*Reel Master Productions*

For many Roma people, 8 April is a day to come together and celebrate. For many others, it's a day like any other, where the need to survive the

harsh reality of discrimination and social exclusion outweighs the desire to rejoice. But what is International Roma Day and why is it 'celebrated'?

In 1971 the First World Roma Congress was held near London, organised by the World Council of Churches and the Government of India. Donald Kenrick, who published an article on the event, reported that the Congress was attended by 23 representatives from nine nations, including the former Czechoslovakia, Finland, Norway, France, Great Britain, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Spain and the former Yugoslavia. There were also individuals from Belgium, Canada, India and the United States.

Several sub-commissions were created to look closely at social affairs, education, war crimes, language and culture. Another key outcome of the first Congress was the turn towards using the word 'Roma' rather than 'Gypsy' or other variants. While it's true that here in England 'Gypsy', 'Roma' and 'Traveller' are all used, in Europe and abroad the preferred term is Roma. The Roma flag was also promoted as the national emblem.



The flag of the Romani people.

*Mikael Good (Pixabay)*

The 1971 Congress was a landmark event and pushed a narrative forward which influenced how Roma people were talked about and included in the social, cultural and political spheres for years to come. The message to the world was that this community was active,

organised and demanding an end to human rights violations against it. A few years later, at the fourth Congress, it was decided that 8 April would become International Roma Day. Since 1990, the day has been celebrated across the globe and Roma from all walks of life honour it in a variety of ways.

This year in Sheffield, the Roma community are coming together to share stories, eat, dance, reminisce and applaud the various role models living and working here. Although often hidden or excluded from mainstream spaces, the Roma of Sheffield are contributing to the city's economy and cultural heritage ecosystem in many diverse ways.





Jan, Year 10 student and head boy at Fir Vale Secondary School.  
*Terezia Rostas*

International Roma Day is an opportunity to get together with Roma and non-Roma to celebrate Romani culture, history and language, and to raise awareness of the issues Romani people have been facing for centuries. We see it as an opportunity for schools, public institutions and others to embrace inclusion and celebrate diversity by raising awareness of the importance of this day for the Roma and non-Roma alike. It's about coming together to rejoice and celebrate life and love, while also educating each other on traditions, customs and language.

Throughout the years, many Roma families from Sheffield have participated in a number of projects, educational events, co-created a children's book, contributed to regional initiatives such as developing educational guidebooks, and also been part of documentaries that tell their stories in their own voices. The Roma community living in Sheffield are diverse, active and eager to challenge the negative stereotypes that often follow us. Young Roma people in Sheffield are leaders in their area. They hold their heads up high when discussing their educational successes.

International Roma Day is an opportunity to embrace where we come from and an opportunity to be proud of our identity. The day allows for us to have fun while build solidarity and promoting and preserving our language and our customs.

8 April allows us to remember the past and honour the moment, but it's also a day to dream about the future. We want a Sheffield that shows that we are not ashamed to be Roma and that we are proud to be from diverse backgrounds.

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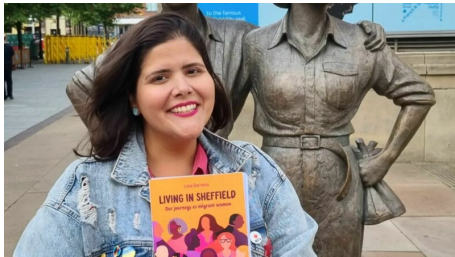
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