



United for Dignity

Conference on the specific situation of Roma young people
affected by multiple discrimination

24 – 26 June 2014, European Youth Centre Strasbourg

Media Briefing

Aims of the Conference?

The conference *United for Dignity* aims to raise awareness of and propose solutions to the problems of multiple discrimination faced by young Roma from across Europe.

A detailed study on multiple discrimination¹ – *Barrabaripen/Equality: Young Roma speak about Multiple Discrimination* (see p.4) – will be launched at the conference.

Roma activists, representatives from LGBT and women's organisations and members of a Roma rap band, De la Negra, are among those taking part.

Around half of those participating in the conference are themselves young people; this is an example of the Council of Europe's unique approach to issues concerning young people. Decisions on policies, programmes and priorities are taken jointly by youth leaders and government representatives; this is known as 'co-management'.

See: <http://enter.coe.int/roma/Roma-Youth-Action-Plan/News/United-for-Dignity-Conference2>

Facts and Figures

- There are around 10 to 12 million Roma living in Europe today.
- The Roma population is one of the youngest in Europe; 26.7% of Roma are aged between 15 and 29 compared to 19.3% in the EU². It is estimated that about 4 million young Roma live in the 47 Council of Europe Member States.
- 50% of Roma children fail to complete primary education (compared to 3% of non-Roma children³).
- The Council of Europe's work on Roma started in 1969; with the Parliamentary Assembly's Recommendation 563 (1969).
- In 1995 the Council of Europe held its first, ground-breaking training course for Roma youth leaders.
- The Strasbourg Declaration on Roma was adopted in October 2010.
- In 2010 the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe adopted its recommendation (CM/Rec(2010)5) on combating discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation or gender identity.
- In 2011 the Council of Europe adopted its Roma Youth Action Plan to: combat discrimination and multiple discrimination; strengthen the Roma youth movement and help youth leaders participate in policy making; protect human rights; and, foster human rights education.

¹ Multiple discrimination has been defined for the purposes of this study as several episodes involving discrimination on different grounds or individual episodes involving discrimination on two or more grounds, whether or not these grounds can be analysed separately.

² Fundación Secretariado Gitano, 2009.

³ Linge, I. and Warmisham, J., (2013), *Empowering Roma Youth through participation: effective policy design at local and regional levels*, Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, Current Affairs Committee, available at: www.roma-alliance.org/en/page/127-report-on--empowering-roma-youth-participation--adopted-during-the-26th-congress-session.html.

What are the Challenges facing Roma Young People Today

Roma young people face the same problems as the Roma population in general: intolerance, poverty, stigmatisation, marginalisation, racial discrimination, lack of access to basic services and social exclusion.

However, the problems are particularly acute for Roma young people.

For example, lack of birth certificates and ID or citizenship documents bar many Roma from basic services and increase the risk of Roma children and women becoming victims of human trafficking.

A key to a young Roma person's integration into society is education. But Roma children often encounter bullying and intimidation from other pupils and teachers, starting at primary school, which can permanently damage their self-esteem and push them to drop out of school early. Some are also segregated into special schools where standards are lower.

These difficulties in turn reduce a Roma pupil's chance of finding work, leaving them badly placed at a time when – as a consequence of the economic crisis – an unprecedented number of young people in Europe are experiencing difficulties in accessing jobs and social and other human rights.

Roma young people – especially those who have dropped out of education and have no work – have little chance of participating in decision-making processes at any level and rarely take part in mainstream youth events. One of the results, which the Council of Europe is addressing, is that Roma youth issues are not included in related mainstream legislation.

The values and traditions of their own community also contribute to the problems faced by Roma young people:

- Traditional Roma gender roles and the practice of forced or child marriage and early pregnancy oppresses young girls and can deny them access to an education.
- Poor families may also expect their children to work instead of going to school.
- Domestic violence traditionally goes unreported and unpunished – a serious problem for young girls.
- LGBT Roma young people can face discrimination from the Roma community while also being rejected by the LGTB community for being Roma, making them doubly vulnerable.

Migration can bring benefits for Roma. In *Barrabariopen/Equality* those moving to the UK reported having their difference accepted and being treated in a more humane way, except by non-Roma migrants from the Eastern European countries they had left. However, in another case, a migrant had his ID documents removed and was forced to beg for a fellow Roma in Spain.

New Study Published on Multiple Discrimination of Roma Youth.

The book *Barrabaripen/Equality* details the particular difficulties faced by Roma youth in Europe who are also LGBT, female, migrants or otherwise disadvantaged.

It includes:

- Nine case studies from Roma aged 18 to 30, carried out in 2013-2014, which reveal the realities of the lives of young Roma who are also women and/or LGBT or migrants;
- Lesson plans and tools for human rights education and training; and,
- Recommendations – including to non-governmental organisations and policy makers – to tackle multiple discrimination.

The study reveals a wide range of problems, including: police abuse and intimidation, bullying in schools, racial discrimination in access to jobs, housing and healthcare and even the danger of human trafficking.

It covers eight countries – Albania, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia Spain and the United Kingdom – and includes the results of five focus groups, held in Slovakia, the United Kingdom, Romania, the Czech Republic and Spain.

Examples of Multiple Discrimination against Roma Young People

The following quotes are taken from *Barrabaripen/Equality*:

Klara – *My class teacher [in Brno the Czech Republic] was a racist and she bullied me as the only Roma child in the class to the extent that I was so anxious, stressed out and nervous about school every morning that I vomited... there was another Roma girl who started school at the same time as I did and we were sat together from the first day. After a week, the class teacher sent her away and referred her to a special school for the mentally disabled. She was normal, so I didn't understand why she had been sent away.*

Gianina – *She [her primary school teacher in Iași, Romania] made me sit on the last bench of the “stupid row”... She would often beat me, pull me by my hair and by my ears, and call me names such as “you good for nothing Gypsy”.*

Ismail, from a Roma slum in Constanța, Romania – *Due to our poverty, my sister and I never went to school: at school kids need books, clothes, and shoes, which we could not afford... Although I worked all day around people's households, I barely earned the minimum to survive. I didn't have anything, not even a house. I have never been to see a doctor in my whole life.*

Denis and Pavel are members of the De la Negra anti-racist rap band set up in Krupka, in the Czech Republic, where regular anti-Roma neo-Nazi marches have taken place since 2009.

Denis – *When I was nine, two neo-Nazis burnt down our house in Šluknov, northern Bohemia, in an arson attack at night. At that time, four people were sleeping inside the*

house: me, my mother, father and brother. Dad woke everyone up in the middle of the night and rushed us to the car, taking with us the most valuable things that he was able to rescue. When the fire brigade arrived, one half of the house had already burnt and collapsed. The perpetrators, who had set fire to the rear of the house so that no one could see it, received conditional sentences.

Pavel – *On one occasion, I was travelling on a train and wanted to see if there were any spare seats in one compartment. The man who happened to be sitting in the compartment immediately hit me fiercely in the head. I had to control myself in order not to retaliate.*

David – *I have been brutally attacked in Plzeň at least five times. In one of the physical assaults, I suffered a permanent injury to my back.*

Freju (who is gay) – *My partners' brothers, whom we live with in the same house [in Tirana, Albania], beat my partner and me in 2011. When we went to the police to report the case they laughed at us. Instead of taking on our complaint, they held us in the police station overnight, for 10 hours. They undressed us and beat us. All night long they came to our cell to mock us because we told them we loved each other and lived together. We reported the case at the Internal Audit Service, the police department that deals with complaints against police misconduct. There was no follow-up of the case or punishment of the perpetrators.*

Florin – *One day [in Iași, Romania] before New Year's Eve, I was approaching the end of our street with some boys who live on the street, too. One of them had some fire-crackers and we lit two of them. I don't know why, but one of the boys saw a police car approaching and for no reason he yelled, "Police!" and started running. I started to run too. The police car started chasing us, and then the policeman in the car yelled, "Stop or I will fire!" I stopped and fell onto my knees. They got out of the car and started beating us, hitting me in the head with the gun, and they were yelling, "Damn you Gypsies, you good for nothing Gypsies, stay down!" They gave us a heavy fine and I had to stay in a cell for one day.*

Péter – *Once, we were celebrating my birthday [in a city in north-eastern Hungary] and a few relatives of mine visited us. There were four of us: we were chatting, laughing and having fun. Suddenly, somebody knocked on the door. My neighbours called the police. Two policemen were standing in front of my door and warned us to be quiet. I asked one of them, "What should I do, sir? I am celebrating my birthday and some of my friends are here now. Should we whisper if we want to talk to each other?" The policemen were angry and threatened that if they had to admonish us one more time, we would be in trouble. They spoke nastily to us, in the way that policemen often speak to the Roma. They talked down to us. I asked them why they talked to us nastily but I should not have asked that question. They asked about the owner of the flat. As the flat was mine, I had to turn around. I was handcuffed and they took me to detention. I was waiting there until the next morning. And something else happened in detention. I was sitting on a chair in the corridor when five or six masked policemen came with shields, guns and batons. They were either just going to, or on their way back from a mission. I greeted them, saying, "Good afternoon!" This was all I said. One of them asked me to stand up and hit me on my chest so hard that I fell down.*