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## **Roma youth participation: practices and approaches**

*A research and support project within the framework of the Roma Youth Action Plan*

Presentation

## Background

The Council of Europe has been playing an important role regarding the situation of Roma people in Europe, regularly condemning widespread discrimination against Roma and their social and economic marginalisation and developing ways for Roma participation at European level. In October 2010, a High Level Meeting on Roma was organised and the outcome, the Strasbourg Declaration on Roma (CM(2010)133 final), has become a guiding document for all the activities the Council of Europe undertakes regarding Roma people. The High Level meeting agreed to a joint effort and pan-European response to meet the needs of the estimated 12 million Roma living in Europe. The “Strasbourg Declaration” includes guiding principles and priorities in the actions to be taken:

- Non-discrimination, citizenship, women and children’s rights.
- Social inclusion including education, housing and healthcare.
- Empowerment and better access to justice.

The youth sector of the Council of Europe has associated young Roma to its policy and work for intercultural dialogue and human rights education since 1995, when a ground-breaking training course for Roma youth leaders was held at the European Youth Centre in Strasbourg. Since then nearly every year a study session has been co-organised with Roma youth organisations. Roma youth workers and youth leaders participated in the Training course for Trainers on Diversity and Cohesion (2007), the - Diversity Youth Forum (2007) and the Enter! project on access to social rights for young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods (2010-2011), the Training Course for Roma youth leaders on fighting discrimination (2012 – 2014). In September 2011, as a follow-up of the Strasbourg Declaration, the youth sector has co-organised with the Team of the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Roma Issues a consultation with Roma youth organisations in Europe for the elaboration of a ‘Roma youth action plan’.

## The Roma Youth Action Plan and youth participation

Initiated in 2011, the Roma Youth Action Plan<sup>1</sup> is a response of the Council of Europe to the challenges faced by Roma young people in Europe, particularly in relation to their empowerment, participation in policy decision-making processes and structures at European level and multiple realities of discrimination. The action plan includes activities of the Youth Department and of other sectors of the Council of Europe, as well as activities by other partners – intergovernmental and non-governmental – cooperating with the Council of Europe and interested in securing a maximum of impact of their activities by avoiding double work and creating synergies.

The Roma Youth Action Plan gives priority to human rights and intercultural dialogue as responses to discrimination and antigypsyism, together with the development and capacity-building of Roma youth organisations and movements. Another pillar of the Roma Youth Action Plan is youth participation, namely through supporting Roma youth organisations and making a link between Roma youth

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<sup>1</sup> More about the Roma Youth Action Plan: [www.coe.int/youth/roma](http://www.coe.int/youth/roma)

participation and the policy-makers. The participation of Roma young people in local and regional life is tainted with prejudice about the self-exclusion of Roma communities and pretence inherent cultural barriers to their integration. While lifting the veil of prejudice is an essential step to look seriously into the participation of young Roma, it ought to be complemented by a serious account of the exogenous and endogenous factors that support or hinder their full participation.

Youth policy development is an important part of the mission of the Council of Europe in the field of youth. In their 8th meeting in 2008, the youth ministers of almost 50 European states adopted the “Agenda 2020”, a medium-term strategic document on youth policy of the Council of Europe. The “Agenda 2020” defines the main themes of European youth policy until 2020, namely human rights and democracy; the promotion of cultural diversity; and social inclusion. The “Agenda 2020” states that the aim of youth policy is that of “ensuring young people’s full enjoyment of human rights and human dignity”, “young people’s active participation in democratic processes and structures” and “equal opportunities for the participation of all young people in all aspects of their everyday life” and also that of supporting young peoples’ autonomy and well-being, the integration of excluded young people, and all young people’s access to education, training and working life, to cultural, sporting and creative activities.

Within the broad framework of the Council of Europe youth policy, the Roma Youth Action Plan puts a great emphasis on the needs to mainstream Roma youth issues in youth policies and youth issues in Roma policies (hereinafter, “double mainstreaming of Roma youth issues”). At the moment, there is little space for the concerns and needs of Roma young people in both youth policy and Roma-related policies. At best, Roma young people are recognised as a specific group, while the more common situation is to address Roma youth issues through general policies without placing any emphasis to the specificities of Roma youth. The participation processes through which Roma young people and Roma youth organisations can have their voices heard in matters that concern them remain rather an exception across Europe.

## **Rationale**

The rationale for this project is rooted in the need to both analyse and understand, and, on the other hand, to define approaches for Roma youth participation, understood in the broader picture of youth participation in policy related processes.

In a series of meetings associated with the Roma youth action plan in 2013, this need has been reaffirmed, as follows:

- During the Croatian presidency of the Decade for Roma inclusion, the specific situation of Roma youth was considered as a priority and a meeting bringing together national youth councils, Roma youth organisations and other youth organisations demonstrated the value and need for more opportunities for networking

- The conclusions Summer University of the CDEJ – the European Steering Committee on Youth also pointed to the need to know realities of Roma youth participation and provide visibility to good examples, that exist, but are often not discussed and replicated
- The Seminar on the role of youth policy in supporting Roma youth participation, organised by the Youth Department in November 2013, pointed out to a need to have good examples and guidelines for Roma youth participation processes on the local level and to create opportunities for capacity-building and networking
- The ROMED programme of the Council of Europe, in its second phase now, develops strategies and concrete processes through which local Roma communities can enter in a dialogue with local policy-makers.

Against this background, this project intends to both create a better understanding of forms, approaches, practices of Roma youth participation, as well as to support those existing examples and invite others to use them as starting points or inspiration.

The project on Roma Youth participation is developed to support and further develop strategies and programmes for Roma youth participation, especially at the local and regional levels. The starting point is the recognition of existing forms and examples of Roma youth participation, hence challenging stereotypical views about Roma youth and citizenship matters and also encouraging public authorities to take seriously Roma youth participation, at local, regional or national levels.

## Objectives

The project aims to support Roma youth participation at different levels, by gathering qualitative data about approaches and practices of Roma youth participation and supporting pilot initiatives where Roma youth participation is key to long-term change.

The project objectives are:

- To create a better understanding of the realities of Roma youth participation
- To develop capacities and platforms for Roma youth participation at regional and local level
- To develop data and information on forms, approaches, challenges of Roma youth participation
- To make proposals to policy makers and funders on how to support and increase Roma youth participation
- To develop a better understanding of the role of the Council of Europe in relation to Roma youth participation;
- To enhance the role of the Council of Europe in relation to Roma youth participation within its role in youth policy development

## Approach

The project approaches can be synthesised as:

- *Participatory*, as the project intends to involve Roma youth network in all its phases
- *Evidence-based*, as it will build on data, narratives and analyses of specific cases of Roma youth participation (forms, approaches, challenges and results)
- *Community-based*, as the project will look specifically at Roma youth participation not in a vacuum, but rather within the Roma community and also in relation to the wider society
- *Thematic*, as the project intends to involve a limited number of initiatives which address specific concerns of Roma youth (e.g. situation of specific groups, access to rights etc.)
- *Multi-level*, as the project will cover several levels and forms of youth participation, from the local to the national, whether formalised or not.

## Scope

The research will cover a diversity of “inspiring practices” of Roma youth participation according to the following criteria:

- Roma
  - o Project dealing with specific Roma issues and projects dealing with general social issues affecting particularly Roma people
- Youth
  - o Specific Roma youth projects and generic youth projects (in which Roma young people participating in them)
  - o Projects targeted to the youth and projects led by the youth
- Participation
  - o Projects dealing with political, social, cultural and economical participation
  - o Projects having participation as a specific purpose and projects including participation as an approach
  - o Projects promoting “traditional-formalised” forms of participation and projects promoting new or “innovative or informal” forms of participation
- European
  - o Projects implemented in a large diversity of countries, in diverse cultural contexts and related to different Roma groups.
  - o Connected –or not- to European programmes, institutions or policy frames

## Focuses

For each selected project the focuses of the research will be:

- The social context and need analysis in which the project is rooted with a particular attention to the respect or not to the rights of Roma

- The characteristics and specificities of Roma youth participation promoted at local and regional level
- Its autonomy: in terms of youth led and in relation to local, regional, national or European programmes and authorities
- Its results: in terms of inclusion and of combating discrimination
- Its sustainability in the community and/or at local and regional level; is it an island in the desert or the project is accompanied by other project or policy initiatives
- If pertinent, the role models generated and/or any particular form of leadership
- Its “replicability” with the necessary adaptations in other contexts

## Steps

The project will be based on a limited number of initiatives, and for these initiatives the process includes:

- interviews and visits
- training/coaching activities or other forms of meeting that would support the initiative
- networking with other initiatives / organisations etc.

The project steps are:

May 2014	Setting up a project team
May – July 2014	Identify the initiatives to be included in the project First meeting of the project group ( <b>3 – 4 June 2014, Strasbourg</b> )
July – October 2014	Visits to the initiatives Collection of data Possible training activities or other support
November 2014	Second meeting of the project group Collecting input from the field
December 2014	Finalising the collection of information into a publication and dissemination of results

## Outcome – Delivery

The outcome of this project will be a publication.

The purpose of the publication is to be a tool for advocacy, a tool for promoting and supporting Roma youth participation.

The target groups of the publication are: Youth and Community based organisations, Local, National and Regional authorities and other youth policy actors including European institutions

The main message should be: It is Needed!!! (Roma youth participation).

The style should be “inspiring – motivating and empowering” and easy to understand for –among others- the people involved in the researched projects or initiatives.