

6th International Roma¹ Women Conference

“Women and Political Representation: The Case of Roma and Traveller Women”

6-7 November 2017 (1 ½ day conference)

Palais de l'Europe, room 9

Concept Note

Introduction

The representation of women in politics remains problematic. In comparison to the general population, the ratio of women in major political positions remains disproportionately low, except in Nordic countries where about 41% of MPs and Senators are women. Within that group, minority and marginalised women have minimal representation at all levels of government and are largely absent from key decision-making positions. For example, with one exception, there are no Roma women represented in national parliaments and in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, there are no Roma, men or women, at all.

When women increase their role in politics, their participation serves as leverage for increased equality in governmental decision-making. It also appears that women in politics attract more women in politics.

Women's participation in decision-making is highly beneficial and their role in designing and applying public policies has a positive impact on people's lives. When they become legislators, women are more actively involved and tend to advocate in more gender-salient issues: women's health, reproductive rights, child care and the economy; are more responsive to constituents; are more focused on cooperation, less on hierarchy.

¹ The term “Roma and Traveller” is used at the Council of Europe to encompass the wide diversity of the groups covered by the work of the Council of Europe in this field: on the one hand a) Roma, Sinti/Manush, Calé, Kaale, Romanichals, Boyash/Rudari; b) Balkan Egyptians (Egyptians and Ashkali); c) Eastern groups (Dom, Lom and Abdal); and, on the other hand, groups such as Travellers, Yenish, and the populations designated under the administrative term “*Gens du voyage*”, as well as persons who identify themselves as Gypsies. The present is an explanatory footnote, not a definition of Roma and/or Travellers.

In that context, the Council of Europe has long been promoting gender equality and although progress has been made in advancing women into decision-making roles, namely, in political ones, the target of 40% presentation (CM Recommendation (2003)3) is still far from reached. *De facto*, women from marginalised groups, including Roma women, are largely kept away from political life.

The Congress Recommendation 390(2016) Women's political participation and representation at local and regional levels, encourages governments to encourage and support the establishment of gender equality committees to advocate for women's political participation and support women candidates and to consider adopting legislative reforms in order to implement quotas for candidates in elections.

The PACE Resolution 2111(2016) Assessing the impact of measures to improve women's political representation supports the principle of gender parity as the ultimate goal in political representation.

The Committee of Ministers' Recommendation (2003)3 calls on member states to adopt legislative reforms to introduce parity thresholds for candidates in elections at local, regional, national and supra-national levels.

However, despite all these recommendations and resolutions, women in general and marginalised women in particular still face numerous obstacles to meaningfully participate at the political level.

Aim of the conference

The next International Conference of Roma Women aims to ensure eligibility of Roma and Traveller women candidates in local, national and European elections in 2018-2019 through national legislative changes and endorsement of national and European main political parties. The stakeholders are invited to express their support for the achievement of the overall objective of this initiative, namely an increase in the representation of Roma and Traveller women in local and regional administrations, and in national and European parliaments.

The Conference will also create an opportunity for European gender equality commissions and politicians to raise awareness about their challenges and identify ways for implementing gender equality commitments.

Impact (overall objective)

The overall objective is an increase in the representation of women, and in particular Roma and Traveller women, in local and regional administrations, and in national and European parliaments.

Immediate outcome/output

A pledge by political parties/groups to promote gender equality and the participation of women from minority groups, in particular Roma and Traveller women, in decision-making bodies and in political representation at the next European, national, regional and local elections.

Intermediate outcomes

- ✓ Political parties will allocate 1 eligible place for Roma / Traveller women in a number of districts for local and national elections 2018-2019;
- ✓ 1 seat allocated per country to Roma /Traveller women in EU elections for 2019;
- ✓ Roma / Traveller women becoming members of political parties;
- ✓ Roma / Traveller women becoming beneficiaries of training;
- ✓ Roma /Traveller women working in partnership with NGOs and support institutions for elaborating their political platforms and organising campaigns.

Messages of the conference

- ❖ *Everyone benefits from more women in power*
- ❖ *Equality in political representation*

Topics identified for the Conference

- Introducing electoral and political party quota systems for Roma/Traveller women
- Running as candidates on mainstream political parties' lists
- Empowerment and capacity building for Roma / Traveller women candidates through training and mentoring

Conference participants

Approximately 90 participants.

- Party leaders and members
- Roma / Traveller women party candidates
- Elected Roma / Traveller members or party activists
- Policy makers at local and national level
- Decision-makers
- Gender specialists
- Roma / Traveller women activists
- Roma / Traveller women potential candidates
- NGO's and other stakeholders who are interested in promoting gender equality, including participation of women and men in all aspects of political and public life.
- International organisations

Focus countries

1. Albania, local elections June 2019
2. Austria, parliamentary election 2018
3. Bulgaria, local elections 2018
4. Estonia, presidency of the European Commission July to December 2017
5. France, European Parliament elections 2019
6. Finland, European Parliament elections 2019
7. Hungary, parliamentary elections 2018
8. Italy – regional elections 11 June 2018
9. Republic of Moldova – local elections 16 June 2019, national: 2 December 2018
10. Poland – national elections 2019, local and regional 2018
11. Portugal – legislative elections late 2019
12. Romania – initial partners in the Conference
13. Slovak Republic – local elections: 1 January 2018
14. Spain – regional elections: 1 May 2019
15. Sweden – national elections 2018
16. Turkey - presidential and parliamentary elections 2019