

“Being Roma¹ and LGBTI²: at the crossroads of discrimination”

8-10 June 2017, Strasbourg

Concept Note

Introduction

Roma people are up against numerous challenges in their daily lives due to anti-Gypsyism, which raises barriers to their social inclusion, empowerment, employment, participation in policy decision-making processes and structures, both at national and European level. Stigmatisation and exclusion are worsened for young women, disabled persons and LGBTI members of the Roma community, leading to an even more dire situation for these “minorities within minorities” exposed to **multiple forms of discrimination**. LGBTI persons in particular, including LGBTI youth, too often face rejection by their families and communities that disapprove of their sexual orientation or gender identity, and are faced with higher risks of violence and discrimination, be it at home, school, work or from the institutions. LGBTI persons have often been portrayed by the media as a threat to the nation, to religion, and to the traditional notions of gender and family. The invisibility and the public reprisals are even more pronounced in the case of Roma LGBTI.

Reversely, the LGBTI movement itself does not always prove inclusive and responsive enough to the needs of LGBTI persons belonging to ethnic minorities. As a consequence, **many LGBTI individuals** remain invisible and conceal their sexual orientation or gender identity. The stigma and the discrimination that Roma LGBTI youth and adults face, has a detrimental impact on their life chances. As a result, the cultural clash between sexual orientation and gender identity on the one hand, and Roma traditions and societal expectations governing gender roles on the other, place **LGBTI Roma persons at the crossroads of discrimination**.

¹ The term “Roma” 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.

² LGBTI stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex.

Council of Europe Standards on multiple discrimination

The Council of Europe (CoE) has addressed the issue of multiple discrimination through its standards but also through transversal projects. In its Recommendation [CM/Rec\(2010\)5 on measures to combat discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation or gender identity](#), the Committee of Ministers recommended that member states take policy measures in relation to, *inter alia*, hate crime, employment, education, health, housing, and discrimination on multiple grounds.

With regard to young Roma, the Roma Youth Action Plan (RYAP) adopted in 2011 gives visibility to “minorities within the Roma minority” and sheds light on the deeply-rooted and widespread anti-Gypsyism in Europe.

The RYAP also included a research project launched in 2013 aiming at analysing the mechanisms of multiple discrimination with a view to provide a deeper understanding of the situation of Roma Youth who suffer prejudice on several grounds. Life stories, including testimonies of young LGBTI Roma from Albania, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Spain and the United Kingdom, were published in the awareness-raising and education tool “Barabaripen – Young Roma speak about multiple discrimination”.

The research project and the RYAP provided a possible response to the challenges faced by Roma Youth 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 “Barabaripen” publication also introduced ARA ART, the only officially constituted Romani LGBTI organisation within the CoE member States. In August 2015, the organisation held the first International Roma LGBTIQ Conference in Prague, which has since become an annual event. Following the conclusions and recommendations of the Prague Conference in 2015, the Ad Hoc Committee of Experts on Roma and Traveller Issues (CAHROM) decided that the mandate of its Rapporteur on Anti-Gypsyism and Hate Crime will cover also issues related to Roma and Traveller LGBTI persons.

The Event

Building on these transversal Council of Europe initiatives, the Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Unit (SOGI), the Support Team of the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Roma Issues (SRSG) and the Youth Department are organising a 3 day event in Strasbourg, France, on 8-10 June 2017 which includes:

- A full day **Training session** on 8 June 2017 at the Council of Europe Youth Centre between 9.30 a.m and 5.30 p.m., including the preparation of the Conference's thematic workshops;
- **The conference “Being Roma and LGBTI : at the crossroads of discrimination “** on 9 June 2017, held at the Council of Europe Agora building, Room G02, from 9.00 a.m. to 6.00 p.m., with the presence and involvement of representatives of the CoE institutions and bodies, other regional organisations, NGOs and activities;
- **Festigays activities** on 10 June 2017, to which participants are invited to participate at the “Village associatif” and the Pride parade in the framework of the Awareness week against homophobia and transphobia in Strasbourg (*Semaine des Visibilités pour lutter contre l’homophobie et la transphobie*).

The working languages for the events both on 8 and 9 June 2017 will be English, French and Romani.

The event will bring together 30 Roma LGBTI activists/supporters, experts and representatives from the Council of Europe, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, the European Commission, the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), the European Parliament Intergroup on LGBT rights, the CoE Advisory Council on Youth, the European Network of Parents of LGBTIQ people (ENP), ILGA-Europe, ILGA-World, ARA ART, Transgender Europe and other NGOs.

Event objectives:

- a) to strengthen the capacity of European institutions fighting against discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression to promote equality of LGBTI persons across the member States (mainstreaming Roma LGBTI issues in the CoE and other international organisation's agenda, advocacy campaign and networking, exchange of experiences and best practices, creation of capacity building programmes etc.);
- b) to integrate the experiences of the Roma LGBTI community into the mainstream LGBTI agenda and vice-versa (*eg. identifying common activities between Roma activists and NGOs with non-Roma LGBTI networks/associations*);
- c) increase visibility of the CoE activities on multiple discrimination and the activities of the participating NGOs during the Awareness week against homophobia and transphobia in Strasbourg (*Semaine des Visibilités pour lutter contre l'homophobie et la transphobie*).

Topics to be addressed during the event include: the LGBTI-phobic and anti-Romani hate-speech, violence and discrimination, access to social rights of young LGBTI Roma persons and the inclusion of LGBTI Roma youth in their families, communities and society at large. Emphasis will be put on deconstructing the mechanisms of multiple discrimination but also on the phenomenon of internalised intolerance that materialises within communities against members of other minorities, such as homo/transphobia in the Roma community and racism in the LGBTI community

The conference will serve as a policymaking forum for governments, NGOs and other stakeholders to improve their knowledge, exchange experiences and best practices, plan future cooperation activities and identify possibilities for fostering inclusiveness of LGBTI and Roma persons, including LGBTI Youth.