

THE CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

Resolution 333 (2011)¹ The situation of Roma² in Europe: a challenge for local and regional authorities

1. Recent events have highlighted the continuing discrimination and disadvantage faced by the estimated 10-12 million Roma in Europe. Roma have faced a long history of social exclusion within European society, exclusion which is compounded by severe disadvantage across a number of inter-related fields (lack of education, unemployment, poverty, lack of access to health care, poor housing and residential segregation, etc.).

2. Anti-Gypsyism is a specific form of racism targeted at Roma and has deep roots in European history. Myths and stereotypes about Roma continue to prevail in the minds of the non-Roma population, rooted in ignorance, fear and segregation, and still largely unchallenged by education. The recent resurgence of extremism targeted at Roma and other groups, fostered by the economic recession, fomented by demagogues and fed by media reports, demonstrates that anti-Gypsyism continues to be potent as a populist political force.

3. Discrimination against, and enforced segregation of, Roma are widespread, both at national and local levels. Roma are frequently victims of acts of physical violence, forced evictions, ghettoisation and deportation regardless of citizenship status and associated rights. Research shows that Roma continue to face severe exclusion, poverty, disadvantage and lack of access to a wide range of social rights.

4. Representatives of the Roma population are rarely involved in the definition of policies and actions and little is done to empower Roma to represent their interests.

5. In view of the measures taken by some member states in 2010 which were widely covered in the media, the Secretary General of the Council of Europe decided concrete action must be taken urgently and priorities agreed upon to improve the inclusion of Roma in Europe. He called a high-level meeting to discuss how to overcome the immediate and long-term challenges related to the rights and obligations of Roma communities throughout Europe.

6. In the resulting Strasbourg Declaration, the Council of Europe renewed its commitment to address human rights issues relating to Roma and recognised that the primary responsibility for promoting inclusion lies with the member states at national, regional but especially local level.

7. Local and regional authorities have a responsibility to protect and promote the human rights of their citizens and have a wide range of powers they can use for this purpose.

They have, therefore, a duty to take effective action at the local level and must show leadership and vision, as well as win support from all sections of the community for addressing Roma issues in order to remedy the situation of the social exclusion of Roma.

8. In addition, as the public authorities closest to citizens, local and regional elected officials are best placed for devising policies to facilitate Roma access to rights, and for combating anti-Gypsyism, prejudice, discrimination and racist violence.

9. Some local and regional authorities have already committed to improving the situation of Roma and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe welcomes the recent emergence of a number of regional and national-level networks or platforms of municipalities working on Roma issues. In particular, the Congress welcomes the commitment to work for Roma inclusion expressed by mayors, presidents of regions and other representatives of local and regional authorities during the Summit of Mayors on Roma, organised by the Congress on 22 September 2011 in Strasbourg, and their decision to establish a European Alliance of Cities and Regions for Roma Inclusion.

10. In the light of the above, the Congress invites local and regional authorities to:

a. implement the decisions taken during the Summit of Mayors on Roma and, in particular, take the steps set forth in the Final Declaration of the summit and contribute to the future European Alliance of Cities and Regions for Roma Inclusion;

b. publicly commit to addressing Roma issues and remedying the situation of their social exclusion;

c. monitor and analyse the local situation to provide a sound evidence base for the development and implementation of strategies and action plans for Roma inclusion, taking into account the diversity in the identity and circumstances of different Roma groups, as well as measure the outcomes so as to show whether the desired impact has been achieved;

d. devise strategic action plans with clear objectives, setting out targets and stages for achievement, using an integrated approach which recognises the inter-connected nature of problems in the specific fields. In particular:

with regard to education:

i. discontinue any segregated schooling for Roma children;

ii. ensure pre-school provision for Roma children where necessary to prepare them for school so that they can enter on the same footing as non-Roma children;

iii. ensure all Roma children enter primary school and attend on a regular basis, encourage them to continue into secondary education, or ensure those who left school early return to obtain basic skills and occupational qualifications. In this context, have recourse to Roma school mediators appointed for this purpose;

iv. make arrangements to ensure continuity of education of “travelling” and migrant children, for example through co-ordination between schools, records of progress, and making provision for educational activity while “on the road”;

v. provide training for teachers and engage Roma “teaching assistants”/mediators to support Roma children in class;

vi. organise out-of-school educational activities to engage Roma children and young people, and to bring them into contact with non-Roma children, especially in fields such as culture and sport;

with regard to employment:

i. work with local employers to encourage recruitment of Roma, including “on-the-job” training to develop occupational skills, and engage Roma mediators to assist with this;

ii. introduce measures to promote recruitment and training for Roma employment within the local authority’s own workforce;

iii. encourage and support self-employment and small business development, including skills training and advice on business and financial management, as well as small loans, for example in co-operation with local banks;

iv. promote and support the use of Roma cultural activities and crafts, particularly those practised by women, as a basis for small business development;

v. provide advice services regarding local employment opportunities and how to access them, as well as about appropriate action to take in the case of discrimination;

with regard to health:

i. identify the health situation and needs of Roma and assess the effectiveness of current service provision;

ii. ensure Roma, especially in segregated settlements and travelling/migrant communities, have access to local health services, including provision of outreach and mobile facilities and of interpreting services where necessary;

iii. ensure health services reach women and children and include preventive care, especially immunisation for young children, and that health information is readily available;

iv. work with local health agencies to ensure services are sensitive to Roma culture and circumstances and are responsive to Roma health needs;

v. appoint Roma mediators to facilitate access to health care for Roma;

with regard to housing:

i. develop strategies to end Roma residential segregation, to replace or improve the quality of existing housing, or to give Roma access to housing with all basic amenities (fresh water, drainage, gas, electricity, refuse collection and paved roads) so as to facilitate social inclusion;

ii. ensure access to adequate accommodation on suitable sites for travelling/migrant families with basic amenities

and effective site management, ensuring consultation with settled residents in the area to address any concerns and promote social cohesion;

iii. regularise the tenure of Roma in their homes or on sites, avoid forced evictions and arrange agreed alternative accommodation of appropriate standard wherever necessary;

iv. identify land where, if purchased or rented by Roma, non-permanent accommodation can be installed while respecting environmental and sanitary regulations;

with regard to Roma empowerment and participation:

i. engage leaders of the Roma community to work in partnership on the implementation of strategies and undertake capacity-building in the Roma community for this purpose. Specifically, ensure a senior official has overall responsibility for work on Roma issues, as well as Roma mediators, to assist in the implementation of strategies;

ii. establish structures to ensure the voice of Roma is heard by those responsible for Roma issues (including the voice of women and young people), either in the form of Roma-specific consultative bodies, or by involving Roma in representative bodies for minorities and community groups generally;

iii. provide information and civic education programmes to promote active citizenship in the Roma community;

iv. promote and support the development or strengthening of local Roma associations that can mobilise and articulate this voice in appropriate forums, as well as act as partners for the local authority;

v. recruit, train and provide properly established employment for Roma mediators, drawn where possible from the local Roma community, including those trained through the Council of Europe ROMED training programme. When training mediators, make use of the course components of the ROMED programme;

vi. promote intercultural understanding by organising activities, together with Roma associations, to promote Roma culture and identity both within the Roma community and the wider community (including schools);

vii. promote Roma participation in local authority activities, including in local politics (for example by voter registration and by standing as candidates for election), and especially encourage participation by women and young people;

e. take action to combat ignorance, myths and stereotypes among the non-Roma population, including via local media and especially provide awareness training and practice-oriented workshops for both managers and staff on Roma issues, with Roma participation in both planning and delivery:

i. produce and disseminate materials (leaflets, booklets, CDs, web-pages, etc.), including materials already available through the Council of Europe Dosta! Campaign, and work in schools and with the local mass media, to raise awareness on Roma culture and history in order to counter negative

myths and stereotypes and bring together Roma and non-Roma communities;

ii. design activities to bring visible benefits to both Roma and non-Roma communities, and enable both groups to work together thus building mutual understanding and respect;

iii. avoid using negative stereotypes and terminology relating to Roma, especially in statements by political leaders and senior officials;

iv. actively and publicly condemn and counter any public manifestations of anti-Gypsyism in the form of hate speech, discrimination, threats, intimidation and physical violence, whether by individuals or organised groups, and take steps to ensure that the law is enforced effectively and in a non-discriminatory manner by police and other responsible agencies;

f. secure the necessary financial and other resources for the implementation of action plans, from internal and external sources as appropriate;

g. mainstream the addressing of Roma-specific issues into the core functioning of the local and regional authority;

h. join or create national networks of municipalities and/or regions which aim to improve the situation of Roma;

i. draw on previous Congress resolutions, such as those relating to migrants and minorities, aspects of which may be relevant for the work on Roma issues, while also ensuring that the specific features of the situation of Roma are appropriately addressed;

j. take into account and implement, within their competences, General Policy Recommendation No. 13 on combating anti-Gypsyism and discrimination against Roma, adopted by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) in June 2011, in particular as regards

education, housing, health care, employment and access to public services and to places open to the public.

11. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe:

a. recalling Resolutions 249 of the Standing Conference of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe, 1993) on gypsies in Europe: the role and responsibility of local and regional authorities, and its Resolutions 16 (1995) and 44 (1997) towards a tolerant Europe: the contribution of Roma (Gypsies), and the Club de Strasbourg's declaration of October 2010, which all call for the establishment of co-operation structures, undertakes to facilitate the setting up of a European Alliance of Cities and Regions for Roma Inclusion, as a pan-European framework of co-operation between local and regional authorities, existing networks and other structures, in order to share experience, identify and promote good practice, and facilitate joint working;

b. calls on local and regional authorities to join this alliance to work together to promote Roma inclusion and strengthen their capacity in this respect;

c. invites the member states to include, where possible, Roma mayors in their national delegations to the Congress;

d. is committed to co-operating with the Committee of the Regions of the European Union in order to achieve the inclusion of Roma, *inter alia* through exchanges of best practice.

1. Debated and adopted by the Congress on 19 October 2011, 2nd Sitting (see Document CG(21)8, explanatory memorandum), rapporteur: J. Warmisham, United Kingdom (L, SOC).

2. The term "Roma" used at the Council of Europe refers to Roma, Sinti, Kale and related groups in Europe, including Travellers and the Eastern groups (Dom and Lom), and covers the wide diversity of the groups concerned, including persons who identify themselves as "Gypsies".