

# THE CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

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## **Resolution 366 (2014)<sup>1</sup> Empowering Roma youth through participation: effective policy design at local and regional levels**

1. The history of European repression against the Roma, which has taken many forms, goes back several hundred years. This discrimination continues today, and indeed has escalated in recent years.

2. Numerous efforts have been launched at European level which aim to guarantee respect for the human rights of Roma and promote their social inclusion. The Council of Europe adopted “The Strasbourg Declaration on Roma” in 2010 in which it renewed its commitment to address human rights issues relating to Roma. The Strasbourg Declaration recognised that the primary responsibility for promoting inclusion lay within the member States at national, regional but especially local level.

3. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe responded to this Declaration by adopting Resolution 333(2011) and Recommendation 315(2011) on “the situation of Roma in Europe: a challenge for local and regional authorities” and launched, in March 2013, the European Alliance of Cities and Regions for Roma Inclusion.

4. It is debateable, however, whether these instruments, and also the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Action Plan on improving the situation of Roma and Sinti within the OSCE area, are sufficient to cover the needs and address the problems faced by young Roma in their everyday lives.

5. The Council of Europe Youth Department launched a Roma Youth Action Plan, based on proposals made by 60 Roma youth leaders during a Roma Youth Conference in 2011, to address the difficulties encountered by Roma youth and to make proposals for action to overcome these challenges and to empower Roma youth. The Congress decided to examine what strategies and policies local and regional authorities could implement to the same end.

6. Young Roma face similar challenges as the rest of the Roma community, such as discrimination, anti-Gypsyism and poor access to social rights. However, they also have to cope with the weight of deep-rooted Romani traditions and cultural heritage. In addition, they have to endure the same problems as all young people today: unemployment, social and economic exclusion, difficult transitions to adulthood, an uncertain future.

7. Poor educational attainment leads to a vicious circle of poverty and social exclusion. Without qualifications and skills, employment is difficult to find. For young people, taking up gainful employment is considered to be a crucial step in their personal development and in forming their identity. It is an important basis for securing one’s livelihood, for participating and positioning oneself in society. Paid employment is important for exiting the poverty cycle and opening up access to other social rights such as housing and healthcare. Without employment, Roma youth run the risk of being permanently excluded from mainstream society and becoming part of the underclass.

8. Young people today are facing challenges such as difficult transitions to autonomy and high unemployment, brought about by the economic and financial crisis. Young Roma people’s situation is worsened by the stigmatisation and discrimination to which they are subjected. This is even worse for young Roma women and girls and for vulnerable groups such as those with disabilities, LGBT persons, migrants and undocumented young people.

9. Because their knowledge of their heritage and culture is sometimes incomplete, but also because some Roma youth activists feel certain aspects of Romani traditions run contrary to respect for human rights, young Roma are no longer sure of their own identity.

10. In order to be able to participate meaningfully in decision and policy making, the capacity of Roma youth activists and organisations needs to be strengthened by acquiring the knowledge and skills to be able to undertake advocacy activities and formulate policy messages.

11. Local and regional authorities must go beyond expressions of good will and be proactive in implementing actions and policies that “support the creation of an environment where Roma youth can grow up free from discrimination and be confident about their future perspectives, while their history, plural cultural backgrounds, and affiliations as young people, as Roma, as citizens of their countries and as active Europeans is appreciated”.<sup>2</sup>

12. Local and regional authorities can be inspired by the Council of Europe’s Roma Youth Action Plan and the EU Youth Strategy’s guidelines to develop different ways of involving Roma youth. These specific policies can empower young Roma and help their integration into society.

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

*a.* implement the recommendations in its Resolution 333(2011) on “the situation of Roma in Europe: a challenge for local and regional authorities, Resolution 346(2012) on “youth and democracy: the changing face of youth political engagement” and Resolution 319(2010) on the “integration of young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods” as they pertain to young Roma;

*b.* publicly commit to: working with young Roma and their organisations to improve their access to their social rights; combatting discrimination and anti-Gypsyism; and promoting their participation in policy and decision making;

*c.* join the European Alliance of Cities and Regions for Roma Inclusion;

*d.* ensure youth policies are explicit but not exclusive, focusing on Roma youth as a target group but not to the exclusion of other young people who share similar realities;

*e.* with regard to education, invest in programmes promoting school attendance and reduce the number of dropouts; in schools, challenge non-inclusive practices and adopt a zero tolerance approach to bullying and discrimination, and install complaint mechanisms; involve Roma parents to raise cultural awareness of teachers, staff and non-Roma parents; engage with Roma parents to help them to understand their rights, entitlements and duties with regard to their children's education; arrange for extra-curricular schooling to improve pupils' educational levels; organise information sessions for pupils with their peers who have succeeded in the education system to encourage them to commit to their education; promote the recognition of competences and skills gained through non-formal education; employ members of the Roma community to liaise between schools, the education department and Roma families; raise awareness of good practices so schools can learn from one another; employ Roma teachers and teaching assistants;

*f.* with regard to employment, employ Roma mediators to offer career guidance and counselling; propose vocational and basic skills training; offer work placements in municipal institutions to help the transition from education to the labour market;

*g.* combat discrimination and anti-Gypsyism by providing grants or in-kind support to projects which strengthen young Roma people's understanding of the key concepts of human rights, discrimination and anti-Gypsyism, or informing on these concepts in schools and other institutions; organising events which bring together Roma and non-Roma youth to

promote intercultural dialogue and learning to help break down prejudices and stereotypes and build trust;

*h.* help strengthen young Roma people's identity by introducing Romani culture and history into school curricula or organising information activities on these subjects;

*i.* empower Roma youth by enabling them to participate meaningfully in joint decision-making structures by providing or funding training programmes on youth participation, human rights education and democratic citizenship or including these subjects in school curricula; supporting Roma youth organisations' projects either financially or with in-kind contributions; ensuring local youth councils are fully representative of the local youth population;

*j.* contribute, either financially or with in-kind contributions, to initiatives to strengthen Roma youth leaders' leadership skills and the capacity of Roma organisations, and generally create the conditions necessary for supporting the initiatives taken by the Roma youth themselves to strengthen the Roma youth movement; employ youth workers, especially of Roma origin, to work with Roma communities;

*k.* raise awareness of the Council of Europe No Hate Speech Movement.

14. The Congress welcomes the launch of the joint Council of Europe/European Commission ROMACT project in October 2013. It encourages the European Alliance of Cities and Regions for Roma Inclusion to ensure its participants include a youth dimension in their policies to promote Roma inclusion.

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1. Debated and adopted by the Congress on 26 March 2014, 2nd Sitting (see Document [CG\(26\)8FINAL](#), explanatory memorandum), rapporteurs: John Warmisham, Italy (L, SOC) and Inger Linge, Sweden (R, EPP/CCE).

2. Roma Youth Action Plan.