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8th INTERNATIONAL ROMA WOMEN'S CONFERENCE

PROTECTING THE HUMAN RIGHTS AND DIGNITY OF ROMA AND TRAVELLER¹ WOMEN IN TIMES OF CRISES

24-26 November 2021

Skopje, North Macedonia

Concept Paper

Introduction

The biannual International Roma Women's Conferences have three aims: first, to review the current situation of Roma and Traveller women and girls in Council of Europe member states; second, to review how gender equality and Roma and Traveller integration policy measures as well as international standards have been implemented by member states in co-operation with civil society; and lastly, to indicate the way forward for the implementation of the Council of Europe Strategic Action Plan for Roma and Traveller Inclusion (2020-2025)² in order to combat antigypsyism and discrimination against Roma and Traveller women and girls, support their access to inclusive quality education, training and employment as well as foster their democratic participation and equality.

The conferences offer a unique platform for Roma and Traveller women to exchange and share their knowledge and experiences on current issues affecting them, reflect on the causes of current problems and propose possible solutions, make recommendations to decision-making stakeholders, and develop bilateral or multi-lateral co-operation. The conferences thus build capacity and empower Roma and Traveller women.

¹ The term "Roma and Travellers" 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.

² Council of Europe Strategic Action Plan for Roma and Traveller Inclusion (2020-2025), available at: <https://edoc.coe.int/en/roma-and-travellers/8508-council-of-europe-strategic-action-plan-for-roma-and-traveller-inclusion-2020-2025.html>

The rise in nationalism and populist rhetoric and policies coupled with economic austerity measures as well as the COVID-19 pandemic and its related restrictions have pushed back many human rights and fundamental freedoms.

When citizens were legally obliged to stay confined in their homes, this obligation was sometimes difficult to meet for some members of the Roma or Traveller communities due to the nature of their employment or occupation and their unstable, often overcrowded and sub-standard housing conditions and lack of temporary halting sites and permanent caravan sites. Living in overcrowded sites, settlements and inner-city ghettos with lack of income and food, limited or no access to clean water and hygiene products, poor or non-existing water pipelines and sewage systems, inadequate electrical infrastructure and garbage collection further exposed Roma and Traveller communities to heightened risks for their health and physical or mental well-being.

The current COVID-19 situation has brought to light many systemic and structural failings to protect Roma and Traveller women, highlighting also the ambient antigypsyism and anti-nomadism which in many countries is manifesting itself as racist scapegoating of Roma and Travellers as well as scare-mongering among the mainstream population. During the crisis and especially during the periods of lockdown, Roma and Traveller women are at higher risk of facing a lack of medical care, lack of income, and an increased level of stress, isolation and domestic violence. They also sometimes faced unequal treatment by law enforcement officers or other public authorities.

Furthermore, alongside with rampant violence against women and girls there is an on-going nutrition and educational crisis amongst the poorest Europeans. Roma families and children living in extreme poverty are often malnourished and going to bed hungry. They also lack IT equipment and internet connections or mobile devices necessary for participating in distance learning. This has placed most school-aged Roma and Traveller children into a very disadvantageous position which could have a serious impact on the rate of school dropouts and could lead to educational failure and huge systemic inefficiency and waste of money within the educational systems.

For the above-mentioned reasons, the focus of this conference will be on protecting the human rights and dignity of Roma and Traveller women and guaranteeing their access to basic services in times of crises. It will also examine whether intergovernmental co-operation and National Roma Inclusion Strategies support the measures taken by national authorities during the COVID-19 pandemic. How can the needs of women and girls be taken into account and related thematic work be developed in the member states? What priorities should be put forward to ensure that Roma and Traveller women and girls are not left behind but can equally benefit from crisis mitigation efforts? How can civil society organisations in general, and Roma and Traveller women civil society organisations in particular, influence the advancement of gender equality and of gender mainstreaming?³

³ Gender mainstreaming is an approach to policy-making that takes into account both women's and men's interests and concerns. In 1998, the Council of Europe defined gender mainstreaming as: "The (re)organisation, improvement, development and evaluation of policy processes, so that a gender equality perspective is incorporated in all policies at all levels and at all stages, by the actors normally involved in policy-making."

A little bit of history

To date, the Council of Europe has organised 7 International Roma Women's Conferences:

1	3-4 December 2007	Stockholm	Our Voices Heard
2	11-12 January 2010	Athens	I am a European Roma Woman Ban on early marriages, let the girls grow!
3	23-25 October 2011	Granada	I am an International Roma Woman
4	16-17 September 2013	Helsinki (Espoo)	Acting now for an equal future
5	6-7 October 2015	Skopje	International review Advancing Despite Everything!
6	6-7 November 2017	Strasbourg	Women and Political Representation: The Case of Roma and Traveller Women
7	25-27 March 2019	Helsinki (Espoo)	Access to Justice and Rights

Objectives of the 8th International Roma Women's Conference

Objective 1

To support the implementation of the Council of Europe Strategic Action Plan for Roma and Traveller Inclusion (2020-2025), while remaining sensitive to multiple discrimination and intersectionality as cross-cutting issues. A stock-taking of current problems which Roma and Traveller women face will be carried out through exchanges with and between Roma and Traveller women civil society organisations. Capacity-building and empowerment of Roma and Traveller women in Europe will be fostered with a view to reinforcing the protection and promotion of their human rights and dignity.

Objective 2

To specifically address how to protect and promote the human rights of Roma and Traveller women in times of crises, and thereby to draw lessons from the current COVID-19 crisis which could help policy-makers and decision-takers as well as Roma and Traveller communities to be better prepared to face similar crises in the future.

Objective 3

To establish gender equality as a more structured and consolidated feature of National Roma Integration Strategies (NRIS) by discussing how NRIS and national authorities have protected Roma and Traveller communities, and in particular women, during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Objective 4

To create synergies between the Council of Europe and Roma and Traveller civil society by disseminating their work and achievements, especially through EU/CoE joint programmes and projects relevant to the theme(s) of the conference and exploring how they can further support the empowerment and capacity-building of Roma and Traveller women in Europe.

Topics dealt with at the Conference

Plenary sessions

- Impact and consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on Roma and Traveller women and girls - Reducing Roma and Traveller health inequalities
- Statelessness and lack of ID

Workshops

- Roma and Traveller youth activism at local, regional, national and international levels – Intersectionality.
- Employment of Roma and Traveller women - Access to employment opportunities and racism, employability of Roma and Traveller women, microcredits, good practices, transition from education to employment, poverty and unemployment during COVID-19.
- Roma and Traveller women in arts, culture, language and heritage - How can culture and art emancipate Roma and Traveller women? Why can heritage deter emancipation? Representation of Roma and Traveller women in mainstream arts and culture.
- Impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the education of Roma and Traveller children from pre-school to higher education and training - The digital divide. How to prevent Roma and Traveller girls from dropping out of school. How pandemic learning pods can exacerbate inequalities.
- Racism, antigypsyism and anti-nomadism in times of crises - Selective abuse of power and scapegoating during the COVID-19 pandemic. How were Roma and Traveller rights curbed even more and what was done to address the issue? Trespass legislation in Ireland and the United Kingdom. Evictions. Access to sanitation and healthcare.
- Environmental Racism - a disproportionate number of people who live in or near environmentally hazardous areas such as toxic waste sites, landfills and major roads are either minority groups and/or are people of low socioeconomic status, including Roma and Traveller communities, and these groups have a weak political voice. Living in areas suffering from environmental issues can also mean that there is no recourse against water or electricity cuts, no housing assistance, and no protection against evictions. Inequality in access to housing, employment, health, education and justice is caused by environmental racism. How do we enforce environmental justice?
- Think tank on Roma and Traveller Feminism - How have the emerging Roma and Traveller feminist movements tackled the issue of intersectionality? Have they encountered obstacles and how are they overcoming them? Has the younger generation embraced feminism? Do National Roma Integration Strategies include gender equality and if so, how?
- Being LGBTIQ and Roma or Traveller women - How do Roma or Traveller LGBTIQ women view their situation between sexual orientation and gender identity on the one hand, and Roma traditions and societal expectations governing gender roles on the other?

The conference programme has been developed in close co-operation with Roma and Traveller women's organisations, the Council of Europe Secretariat and governmental representatives of the host country.

Possible follow-up

Based on the outcome of this conference, a new instrument for the empowerment of Roma and Traveller women and girls should be drafted, taking into account the latest developments, and aiming to further gender equality and active participation in decision-making as well as in public and political life.

Conference participants

Approximately 100 participants physically present and online participants through the live-stream.

- Roma and Traveller women from civil society organisations and networks
- Gender equality rapporteurs
- Members of Parliament and other elected officials
- Representatives of governmental authorities or agencies
- Representatives of European Institutions or Agencies, and of other International Organisations
- Academia

Relevant Council of Europe instruments

Council of Europe Conventions

- [Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence \(Istanbul Convention\)](#)
- [Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings](#)
- [European Social Charter](#)
- [European Convention on Human Rights](#)
- [Protocol No. 12 to the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms](#)
- [European Convention on Nationality \(ETS No. 166\)](#)
- [Convention on the avoidance of statelessness in relation to State succession \(CETS No. 200\)](#)
- [European Convention on Social and Medical Assistance \(CETS No 14\)](#)
- [Protocol to the European Convention on Social and Medical Assistance \(CETS No 14A\)](#)

Council of Europe adopted texts

- **2021:** [Guidelines of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on upholding equality and protecting against discrimination and hate during the Covid-19 pandemic and similar crises in the future](#)

- **2020:** [Recommendation CM/Rec\(2020\)2 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the inclusion of the history of Roma and/or Travellers\[1\] in school curricula and teaching materials](#)
 - **2019.** Recommendation CM/Rec (2019)1 of the Committee of Ministers to member States to prevent and combat sexism
 - **2019.** [Declaration by the Committee of Ministers on the legacy of the No Hate Speech Movement youth campaign \(Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 29 May 2019 at the 1347th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies\)](#)
 - **2017.** Recommendation CM/Rec(2017)9 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on gender equality in the audiovisual sector
 - **2015.** Recommendation CM/Rec(2015)2 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on gender mainstreaming in sport (Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 21 January 2015 at the 1217th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies) Spanish
 - **2013.** Recommendation CM/Rec(2013)1 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on gender equality and media : English French Portuguese Spanish Croatian Greek
 - **2012.** CM/Rec(2012)6 : Recommendation CM/Rec(2012)6 of the Committee of Ministers on the protection and promotion of the rights of women and girls with disabilities
 - **2012** [Declaration of the Committee of Ministers on the Rise of Anti-Gypsyism and Racist Violence against Roma in Europe \(Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 1 February 2012 at the 1132nd meeting of the Ministers' Deputies\)](#)
 - **2010.** Recommendation CM/Rec(2010)10 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the role of women and men in conflict prevention and resolution and in peace building
 - **2008.** CM/Rec(2008)1 Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the inclusion of gender differences in health policy
 - **2007.** CM/Rec(2007)17 : Recommendation Rec(2007)17 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on gender equality standards and mechanisms adopted on 21 November 2007 and explanatory memorandum
 - **2007.** CM/Rec(2007)13 Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to member states on gender mainstreaming in education adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 10 October 2007 and its explanatory memorandum Croatian Spanish
 - **1998.** Recommendation No. R (98) 14 of the Committee of Ministers to Member States on Gender Mainstreaming
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- **1985.** CM/Rec(1985)2 : Recommendation R (85) 2 of the Committee of Ministers on legal protection against sex discrimination