

IRWC(2023)1

Strasbourg, 13 September 2023

9TH INTERNATIONAL ROMA AND TRAVELLER¹ WOMEN CONFERENCE: BUILDING EQUALITY TOGETHER

30 November - 1 December 2023
Skopje, North Macedonia

DRAFT CONCEPT NOTE

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Since 2007, the [Roma Women's conferences](#) have provided the opportunity for Roma and Traveller women to address, on the international stage, the issues affecting their own and their families' lives. They have also provided a space where Roma women have kept each other informed of issues concerning them and exchanged experiences.

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

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>

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.

To date, the Council of Europe has organized 8 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 Women
3	23-25 October 2011	Granada	I am an International Roma Women
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	Access to justice and Rights
8	24-26 November 2021	Strasbourg	Protecting the Human Rights and Dignity of Roma and Traveller Women in Times of Crises

CONTEXT

Women throughout Council of Europe member States still face inequalities in many respects. Antigypsyism, racism, discrimination, exclusion and extreme poverty are factors which reinforce the disadvantages faced by Roma and Traveller women.

A recent study of the Council of Europe³ concludes that the situation of Roma and Traveller women has not really advanced over the past decades and that “the violations of their human rights are still perpetuated, which indicates a need for special legal and/or strategic provisions to ensure efficient protection of the target groups.”

Conditions for inclusion and opportunities for full participation in society of Roma and Traveller women and girls are hindered by unequal access to education, high unemployment rates, scarce opportunities for employment, and economic development. A low level of education, high unemployment rates, and weak employment opportunities deprive Roma women and girls of real opportunities for integration and full participation in society.

Starting with 2007, when the First International Roma Women Conference took place in Stockholm, the Council of Europe has provided a forum for discussion on the challenges that Roma and Traveller women are facing. The International Roma Women Conferences have been taking place every other year since, with the most recent, the 8th one, taking place in November 2021 in Strasbourg and focusing on the topic of protecting the human rights and dignity of Roma and Traveller women in times of crises.

³ Empowerment of Roma and Traveller women: a change under construction - Towards a Roadmap for Advancing Gender Equality of Roma and Traveller Women in Council of Europe member States, 2021.

In 2016, the Roma and Travellers Team started the implementation of the Joint Programme of the European Union and Council of Europe on “Roma and Traveller Women’s Access to Justice” (JUSTROM). It responded to gaps emphasized by monitoring bodies of the Council of Europe such as the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) and to needs expressed by Roma and Traveller women during the previous International Roma Women Conferences (IRWC). The findings, results and lessons learnt from the JUSTROM Programme are also feeding into the development of Council of Europe standards, such as the Recommendation [CM/Rec\(2017\)10 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on improving access to justice for Roma and Travellers in Europe](#)

In 2021, based on the recommendations collected from various activities as well as from the Council of Europe’s monitoring bodies, the [Steering Committee on Anti-Discrimination, Diversity and Inclusion \(CDADI\)](#) and the [Committee of Experts on Roma and Traveller Issues \(ADI-ROM\)](#) were tasked to prepare and propose by the end of 2023 a Draft Recommendation to the Committee of Ministers on equality for Roma and Traveller women and girls to be adopted by the Committee of Ministers.

The 15th meeting of the [Council of Europe Dialogue with Roma and Traveller civil society](#) held on 6-7 June 2023 provided an opportunity for a substantive exchange of views on the challenges faced by Roma and Traveller women and girls and on solutions which can be proposed to Council of Europe member States, and served as a consultation platform for discussing the draft Recommendation on the topic of equality for Roma and Traveller women and girls, drafted by the ADI-ROM Working Group in charge of preparing it.

To effectively improve the situation of Roma and Traveller women, international and national standards need to be implemented by the national authorities, and civil society is essential in monitoring their implementation. By building alliances between minority and mainstream women’s lobbies, a more inclusive and intersectional approach may be fostered towards gender equality advocacy. Together, these alliances can develop effective work aimed at achieving meaningful and lasting change that benefits all women.

OBJECTIVES OF THE 9TH INTERNATIONAL ROMA AND TRAVELLER WOMEN CONFERENCE

The 9th International Roma and Traveller Women Conference will serve as a forum for an exchange between Roma and Traveller Women civil society and mainstream other minority women’s lobbying on building alliances with the goal of achieving a coordinated, inclusive and overarching central support and monitoring system in the implementation of key standards of the Council of Europe and other international organisations and of national authorities promoting gender equality for all women, taking into account the intersectionality and multiple discriminations faced by Roma and Traveller women.

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.

The Conference will contribute at supporting the implementation of the Council of Europe Strategic Action Plan for Roma and Traveller Inclusion (2020-2025) and creating synergies with similar policies adopted by the international stakeholders such as the United Nations, the OSCE and the European Union.

TOPICS ADDRESSED AT THE CONFERENCE

Plenary sessions

- Overview and perspectives about Roma and Traveller women in view of international and national stakeholders (Council of Europe, European Commission, UNDP, OSCE and Government of North Macedonia)
- Overview of the results of previous IRTWC and roadmap of the draft Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to the member states on the topic of equality for Roma and Traveller women and girls
- Building alliances between women networks and ensuring legal and policy standards are applied for Roma and Traveller women and girls
- Status play of policies on improving the situation of Roma and Traveller women and girls on the agenda of international and European organisations
- National perspectives and practices on measures aimed at addressing the vulnerable situation of Roma and Traveller women and girls.

Workshops

- Workshop 1 - Combating antigypsyism and discrimination against Roma and Traveller women and girls and supporting real and effective equality

Antigypsyism is one of the most impactful mechanisms of Roma exclusion. It recognizes the interdependence of inclusion and anti-discrimination and therefore recommends that initiatives to improve the situation and integration of Roma should include measures combating discrimination and addressing antigypsyism, in addition to measures promoting the social and economic inclusion of Roma in areas such as education, health, employment and housing.

This workshop aims to discuss challenges faced by Roma and Traveller women and girls throughout Europe, take stock of multidisciplinary measures adopted by various state or non-state actors and put into perspective good practices in combating antigypsyism with a particular emphasis on Roma women and girls.

- Workshop 2 - Supporting democratic participation of Roma and Traveller women and promoting trust and accountability

Roma and Travellers, particularly women and youth, encounter a variety of social barriers and prejudices that severely impede their capacity to effectively participate in public and political life. They are consequently largely absent from the local or national political arenas and decision-making processes affecting them. This invisibility undermines their potential to reverse embedded marginalisation and discrimination. This workshop aims to discuss challenges faced by Roma and Traveller women, take stock of measures to enhance political participation and representation to bring Roma women closer to local, national and European decision-making bodies and improve

their active participation and interaction with public administration and their presence in the public sphere and share good practices in this regard.

- Workshop 3 - Supporting access to inclusive quality education and training for Roma and Traveller women and girls

Common challenges for many educational institutions across Europe when it comes to Roma and Traveller children including girls include non-enrolment, early school leaving, school dropouts, and irregular attendance. School segregation appears to be a major factor contributing to low educational performance. The practice of separating groups of pupils into specific schools or classes despite the existing anti-discrimination legislation and policies may even be on the rise. School segregation is a serious violation of the rights of children, and the development of international human rights standards has contributed to fighting school segregation in many countries.

This workshop aims to discuss challenges faced by Roma and Traveller youth, children and girls in the area of education, take stock of measures removing obstacles to equal access to quality education and share good practices in advancing inclusive education for Roma children and girls.

PARTICIPATION

40 international Roma and Traveller women civil society participants will be selected through an open call published on the website of the Council of Europe's Roma and Travellers Team. Participants will be Roma and Traveller women, representatives of Roma and Traveller women organisations and experts from international, national and local civil society organisations. Participants must be competent to work in English, French or Romani, which are the working languages of the meeting;

15 Roma women representatives of North Macedonian civil society, NGOs and associations;

Representatives of EU, OSCE, UNDP, and other international organisations, relevant State authorities and representatives, international independent experts, academics, women organisations and lobbies;

Members of other departments of the Council of Europe and of the Inter-Secretariat Task Force who are mainstreaming Roma and Traveller women and girls' issues into their respective areas of work.

DATES AND VENUE

The conference will take place on 30 November – 1 December 2023, for one day and a half, in Skopje, North Macedonia.

Travel and subsistence expenses, as well as visa fees, if necessary, related to the participation in this 9th IRTWC will be reimbursed to the 40 international Roma and Traveller women according to the Council of Europe's rules and regulations on reimbursement of such expenses.

COUNCIL OF EUROPE ADOPTED TEXTS AND PUBLICATIONS

- [Council of Europe Strategic Action Plan for Roma and Traveller Inclusion \(2020-2025\) \[Romani\]](#)
- [First Implementation Report of the Strategic Action plan for Roma and Travellers Inclusion \(2020-2025\)](#)
- [Recommendation CM/Rec\(2022\)5 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on passing on remembrance of the Holocaust and preventing crimes against humanity](#)
- [Recommendation CM/Rec\(2020\)2 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the inclusion of the history of Roma and/or Travellers in school curricula and teaching materials \[CM/Rec\(2020\)2 in other languages\]](#)
- [Council of Europe Strategic Action Plan for Roma and Traveller Inclusion \(2020-2025\) CM\(2019\)161 approved by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on 22 January 2020 at the 1365th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies](#)
- [Recommendation CM/Rec\(2017\)10 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on improving access to justice for Roma and Travellers in Europe](#)
- [Recommendation CM/Rec\(2012\)9 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on mediation as an effective tool for promoting respect for human rights and social inclusion of Roma](#)
- [Declaration of the Committee of Ministers on the Rise of Anti-Gypsyism and Racist Violence against Roma in Europe](#)
- [Recommendation CM/Rec\(2009\)4 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the education of Roma and Travellers in Europe](#)
- [Recommendation CM/Rec\(2008\)5 of the Committee of Ministers on policies for Roma and/or Travellers in Europe](#)
- [Recommendation Rec\(2006\)10 of the Committee of Ministers on better access to health care for Roma and Travellers in Europe](#)
- [Recommendation Rec\(2005\)4 of the Committee of Ministers on improving the housing conditions of Roma and Travellers in Europe](#)
- [Recommendation Rec\(2004\)14 of the Committee of Ministers on the movement and encampment of Travellers in Europe](#)
- [Recommendation Rec\(2001\)17 of the Committee of Ministers on improving the economic and employment situation of Roma/Gypsies and Travellers](#)
- [Recommendation Rec\(2000\)4 of the Committee of Ministers on the education of Roma/Gypsy children in Europe](#)
- [Recommendation Rec\(83\)1 of the Committee of Ministers on stateless nomads and nomads of undetermined nationality](#)
- [Resolution Res\(75\)13 of the Committee of Ministers containing recommendations on the social situation of nomads in Europe](#)
- [Antigypsyism- Causes – Prevalence – Consequences – Possible responses \(2022\)](#)
- [Research on the barriers of Roma Women's Access to Justice in four countries: Bulgaria, Greece, Italy and Romania \(2022\)](#)
- [Empowerment of Roma and Traveller women: a change under construction - Towards a Roadmap for Advancing Gender Equality of Roma and Traveller Women in Council of Europe member states \(2021\)](#)