



DJS/Roma Conf. (2011) XX

Strasbourg, 5 August 2011

# Roma Youth Conference

*Voicing the aspirations and projects of Roma youth in the  
Council of Europe*

26 - 30 September  
European Youth Centre Strasbourg

**Presentation**

## Background

*“Roma in many parts of Europe continue to be socially and economically marginalised, which undermines the respect of their human rights, impedes their full participation in society and effective exercise of civic responsibilities, and propagates prejudice.*

*Any effective response to this situation will have to combine social and economic inclusion in society and the effective protection of human rights. The process must be embraced and supported by society as a whole. A genuine and effective participation of our fellow Europeans of Roma origin is a precondition for success.”*

(Council of Europe, October 2010, “The Strasbourg Declaration on Roma”)

The Council of Europe has been playing a central role regarding the situation of Roma people in Europe, regularly condemning widespread discrimination against Roma and their social and economic marginalisation and developing ways for Roma participation at European level.

In October 2010, a High Level Meeting on Roma was organised and the outcome, the Strasbourg Declaration on Roma (CM(2010)133 final), has become a guiding document for all the activities the Council of Europe undertakes regarding Roma people. The High Level meeting agreed to a joint effort and pan-European response to meet the needs of the estimated 12 million Roma living in Europe.

The “Strasbourg Declaration” includes guiding principles and priorities in the actions to be taken:

- a) Non-discrimination, citizenship, women and children’s rights.
- b) Social inclusion including education, housing and healthcare.
- c) Empowerment and better access to justice.

Among the key points in the declaration, of particular interest is the call for *“promoting effective participation of Roma in social, political and civic life, including active participation of representatives of Roma in decision-making mechanisms affecting them.”*

As a result of this meeting, the Council of Europe has initiated the process of re-organising resources in a transversal manner within the Council of Europe Secretariat with the task of further developing co-operation with national, regional and local authorities and international organisations, providing practical assistance in the implementation of new policy initiatives, especially at the local level, and supporting access to training, capacity-building and educational material.

The budget devoted to Roma issues in the Council of Europe increased significantly, as well as voluntary contributions to aid Roma projects, with more investment likely from the Council of Europe’s partnership with the European Commission (ROMED Programme).

Among the projects initiated is the creation of a new European training programme for more than a thousand Roma mediators, who will facilitate and/or reinforce the communication and relation between the Roma communities and the public institutions (education, health, and employment). The project has now begun its roll-out in 15 European countries, signalling a period of innovation in work for the Roma at international level. Training courses will be organised in member states with the aim to equip mediators with the skills they need to carry out the task of representing the Roma communities in the outside world, especially in schools, hospitals and employment offices. The Organisation has also boosted awareness of Roma issues through its Dosta! Campaign against discrimination of Roma communities.

Recently, the Report of the Group of Eminent Persons of the Council of Europe “Living together Combining diversity and freedom in 21st-century Europe” pointed out the discrimination and intolerance widespread in Europe today, particularly against Roma and immigrants. In response to this situation, the Report call for strong actions for the inclusion of the Roma minority, through measures related to their access to employment, education, health and housing. The Report also calls for actions to tackle all forms of violations of the fundamental rights of Roma, including discrimination, segregation, hate speech, ethnic profiling and unlawful fingerprinting, as well as unlawful eviction and expulsion, segregation in schools, to quote just a few among the different actions suggested.

## **Roma Young People and the Council of Europe**

The youth sector of the Council of Europe has for a long time associated young Roma to its policy and work for intercultural dialogue and human rights education. In 1995 a ground-breaking training course for Roma youth leaders was held at the EYC in Strasbourg, in the framework of the “all different-all equal” European youth campaign (against racism, antisemitism, xenophobia and intolerance). As a result of the “All Different – All Equal” European youth campaign against racism, antisemitism, xenophobia and intolerance, the Council of Europe supported the development of the Roma youth networks across Europe, of which the most visible has probably become the Forum of European Roma Young People (FERYP). In addition to denouncing situations of discrimination, Romaphobia and Antigypsyism, the youth policy of the Council of Europe supports the involvement of Roma young people in matters that concern them and, in this respect, sees the participation of young Roma as an essential dimension in the transformation of the status challenges faced by Roma communities across Europe.

The European Youth Centres in Strasbourg and Budapest have played an important role in this respect. Nearly every year a study session has been co-organised with Roma youth organisations. Matters of discrimination against Roma are present in other activities of the programme, such as the forum on human rights education and the activities held in the framework of the “All Different – All Equal” campaign for Diversity, Human Rights and Participation.

Other recent activities of the Directorate of Youth and Sport particularly targeting Roma youth workers and youth leaders were the Training course for Trainers on Diversity and Cohesion (2007), the - Diversity Youth Forum (2007), the Forum on Human Rights Education “Learning, Living, Acting for Human Rights” (2009) and the Enter! long-term training course on access to social rights for young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods (2010-2011).

The European Youth Foundation (EYF) has also regularly supported various projects with young Roma. In 2010 alone, the EYF funded one international activity and four pilot projects at local level which were focused on Roma youth.

For 2011, the Joint Council on Youth gave priority, within the pilot projects on human rights education funded by the EYF, to initiatives addressing situations of exclusion and discrimination of Roma young people using a human rights education approach.

Participation of young Roma in the Council of Europe has also been supported by the membership of FERYP – the Forum of European Roma Young People – in the Advisory

Council on Youth (2009-2011). All activities of the youth sector with young Roma in mind are planned and carried out with young Roma or their representatives.

### **The Roma Youth Conference**

In the follow-up of the Strasbourg Declaration on Roma adopted in October 2010, the Directorate of Youth and Sport has consulted with the Special Representative of the Secretary General to discuss ways of transversal cooperation. In addition to the need to implement a youth dimension to the Strasbourg Declaration, the youth sector of the Council of Europe is driven by the need to refresh its approach on working with young Roma in view of the bi-annual programme of activities for 2012-2013. A Roma Youth Action Plan will provide a strategic approach to the youth policy of the Council of Europe regarding Roma by pooling resources and initiatives and by linking individual activities with medium-term goals.

The involvement of Roma young people in discussing and preparing the priorities and approaches of such a Roma Youth Action Plan is crucial to its relevance and success. The Roma Youth Conference is organised by the Directorate of Youth and Sport, together with the Support Team of the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Roma Issues. It is prepared in cooperation with European Roma youth networks (FERYP and Ternype) with participation of the Advisory Council on Youth and the European Steering Committee on Youth, the two bodies of co-management in the Council of Europe youth sector. The European Youth Forum, representing youth organisations, is associated to the preparatory group as well as the Open Society Foundations (OSF) Roma and Youth Initiatives. This should allow to link the conference with the initiatives OSF related to Roma and youth policies.

### **Aims and objectives of the conference**

The Roma Youth Conference aims at bringing together Roma youth organisations and Roma youth representatives to discuss the priority needs and objectives for a Roma Youth Action Plan within the Council of Europe.

The main objectives of the Conference are:

- to share and explore the situation of Roma young people in Europe, particularly in relation to discrimination and access to human rights;
- to discuss the meaning and relevance of the Strasbourg Declaration for young Roma today and ways to contribute to its implementation;
- to identify youth policy responses to the situation of Roma young people today, particularly at European level;
- to develop proposals and priorities for activities involving Roma young people and youth organisations in the Council of Europe's youth sector and beyond;
- to bring together and facilitate the dialogue between different stakeholders on Roma youth issues in Europe;
- to enhance the participation of Roma youth in the activities of the Council of Europe.

## **Format and Methodology**

The Roma Youth Conference is a four-day event involving some 50 participants. The proposed working languages will be English and French. The possibility of Romani interpretation will be analysed in the light of the selected candidates' needs. Interpretation possibilities into other languages may be considered on a case-by-case basis, possibly relying on volunteer interpreters.

Participants will be primarily young Roma involved in Roma youth organisations and projects as well as leaders of other youth organisations involved in youth policies having an impact on young Roma.

Representatives from other international organisations developing policies on Roma and other Roma representatives will also be invited.

The conference is designed as a multi-stakeholder and non-formal intercultural learning situation, where participants can exchange their experiences and build upon previous results for a common identification of the main priorities to be taken to a policy level.

The outcomes of the conference will be submitted to the Joint Council on Youth and to the Council of Europe's Ad Hoc Committee on Roma. They will also be taken into account by the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Roma Issues.

## **Outcomes of the conference**

In addition to the learning outcomes and networking among the participants and institutional representatives, the conference should result in:

- guidelines and input for the Roma Youth Action Plan
- a better understanding of the situation of Roma youth in Europe
- more awareness on the Strasbourg Declaration and how it can support work with Roma young people
- concrete recommendations on how to improve the situation of Roma youth and what international NGOs can do for this
- a sense of trust and communication for a more coordinated approach with NGOs on Roma youth issues.

The outcomes of the conference will be submitted to the Joint Council on Youth and to the Council of Europe's Ad Hoc Committee on Roma. They will also be taken into account by the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Roma Issues and by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities.

A report and video documentary may also be produced.

## **Profile of Participants**

The conference will bring together primarily representatives and active leaders of Roma youth organisations and young Roma active in other organisations and projects from the Council of Europe member states. Representatives of other European youth organisations and institutions will also be invited (in limited numbers). All participants should also:

- Be aged between 18 and 30 years (exceptions will be possible when justified);

- Be motivated and committed to contribute to the programme of the conference and its outcomes;
- Have already some experience preferably at international level;
- Be willing and able to liaise with other Roma young people, communities and organisations;
- Be able to work in English or in French or in Romani;
- Be available for the whole duration of the activity.