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ROMA YOUTH CONFERENCE 2015

A Council of Europe conference to discuss current Roma youth issues and future policy orientations for the participation and inclusion of Roma youth

19-22 October 2015, European Youth Centre Budapest

Conference conclusions

The document represents a reflection of the conference proposals towards the challenges and needs of Roma young people in Europe. The secretariat of the Youth Department together with Roma youth networks and international partners will work together in developing the new operational Roma Youth Action Plan.

The Conference in brief

The second Roma youth conference, organised by the Council of Europe from 19 to 22 October 2015 in Budapest, gathered 110 participants from 30 European countries, out of which around 80 Roma youth leaders and members of Roma youth organisations and 30 institutional representatives. The conference took stock and drew lessons from the last years of implementation of the Roma Youth Action Plan based on the external evaluation, associate new partners to “double mainstreaming” processes of Roma youth matters and set foundations of future Roma agenda for the participation and inclusion of Roma youth.

The main objectives of the conference were:

- to discuss, promote and learn from the Roma Youth Action Plan experiences and practices
- to promote and enable the participation of young Roma in policy making process at all levels
- to emphasize the role of Roma youth in fighting antigypsyism
- to enhance the inclusion of youth matters in policies and programmes dealing with Roma issues and promoting the inclusion of Roma youth issues in youth policies and programmes within the Council of Europe and all relevant stakeholders
- to shape the future of the Roma Youth Action Plan in coordination with young people in relation to the Council of Europe’s policies and programmes and other relevant Roma and youth stakeholders
- to analyse the current place of Roma youth issues in regards of the national Roma inclusion policies, such as the National Roma Integration Strategies and other relevant policies.

The Conference was first of all a learning and networking experience for Roma youth and about Roma youth issues. In addition to this, the conference resulted in:

- A better understanding of the current situation of Roma youth in Europe
- More visibility for Roma youth activities and policy efforts
- Greater awareness about Roma youth issues (policies, organisations agenda, etc.) and proposals on how to address Roma youth issues at national, regional and local level
- Revised orientations for the Roma Youth Action Plan in the future
- More networking, engagement and coordination among RYAP partners
- A declaration by the participants in the conference.

The conference was designed as a multi-stakeholder and non-formal intercultural learning environment, where young people and stakeholder representatives can exchange their experience in working with Roma and young Roma, and build upon previous experiences and results. The conference participants included both former participants and partners from the Roma Youth Action Plan, as well as Roma youth leaders for whom this was the first involvement in a Council of Europe’s activity.

The Conference did more than allowing for participants to learn from each other and learn about current programmes. It provided a space where participants could make proposals for a future European Roma youth agenda, specifically also about the future of the Roma Youth Action Plan. To a great extent, the proposals by participants refer to the work to be carried out by the Council of Europe. However, considering that many international organisations and institutions have affirmed their interest to reinforce their Roma youth agendas, the following proposals are relevant for many other partners of the Council of Europe. What follows is a summary of the proposals by the Conference participants related to future Roma youth initiatives, programmes and priorities.

Input for a Roma youth agenda: priorities, interventions, support from the European level

The following proposals are the result of the discussions of the Roma Youth Conference participants related to what needs to happen in order to respond to the needs and aspirations of Roma youth people. The proposals are a response to the perceived challenges and needs of young Roma throughout Europe, and are based on the principles of inclusive and non-discriminatory societies. They aim to provide young Roma with equal opportunities as their non-Roma peers and to be recognised as full and active citizens in their communities. Additionally, as many participants have recalled during the conference, they represent the legitimate necessities for which democratic countries stand for, all in the framework of international human rights standards as well as the on-going commitments of the Council of Europe's member states to achieve full inclusion of the Roma.

The proposals are based on concerns that were discussed during the Conference at length, for example:

- *The situation of discrimination affecting Roma young people* (including multiple discrimination) in various fields of life
- *The limited capacities among Roma young people* for community organising, leadership, fundraising, and genuine political participation, due to the pressures they have to tackle at different levels (earning, providing for others, dealing with discrimination etc.)
- The absence of *spaces and opportunities* for young Roma to learn about their own Roma culture, history and language that very often results with low individual self-esteem, motivation and vision for personal and community development
- *Lack of access to social rights*
- *Wide-spread antigypsyism*, that hinders the access of Roma young people to quality education, employment, affordable housing as well as access to quality health care services
- *Hate speech*, particularly hate speech fuelled by political representatives.
- *The need for coordination and information sharing*. The increased attention that Roma youth as a specific target group has received among international stakeholders in recent years requires a much stronger coordination and information sharing mechanism, by complementing each other's efforts and avoiding any duplication of activities.

During the conference, participants came up with:

- Priority areas to respond to the needs and aspirations of Roma young people.
- Ideas of interventions needed in order to address these priority areas on the local and national levels.
- Proposals regarding the support needed from the European level in this process.

PRIORITY AREAS

The priority areas identified were:

1. Strengthening Roma youth identity (strengthening confidence, pride, self-esteem)
2. Roma youth participation, youth leadership, advocacy and building a stronger Roma youth movement
3. Education for political participation and human rights education

4. Access to social rights (for example, employment, housing, health and education, including sexual and reproductive health education)
5. Intercultural dialogue and combating antigypsyism (raising awareness among non-Roma, enhancing co-operation between Roma and non-Roma, positive image of the Roma in the media)
6. Addressing multiple discrimination
7. Employment, employability and entrepreneurship
8. Gender equality.

LOCAL AND NATIONAL INTERVENTIONS

The interventions needed on the local and national levels were identified as:

- Effective cooperation between Roma youth groups and organisations and local authorities
- Involvement of Roma youth in local and national political processes
- Processes of Roma youth consultation on the local level (listening to the needs of Roma young people)
- Support for starting Roma youth local initiatives to get Roma young people motivated and active on the local level
- More capacity building on advocacy and lobbying
- Better access to mobility programmes for Roma young people
- Support to Roma youth and community work (local youth centres that are inclusive, more local Roma youth organisations, community centres)
- More human rights education among young Roma
- Local and national campaigns for Roma youth issues (for example, combating discrimination)
- Networking between different organisations, including with national or local youth councils
- Inclusion of Roma youth as a specific chapter of National Roma integration strategies and other relevant policies and inclusion of Roma youth organisations in policy monitoring and evaluation
- More research about the situation of Roma young people in Roma communities
- Education programmes for teachers about Roma culture and history
- More accessible services in the area of health, housing, employment (for example, apprenticeships and support to Roma entrepreneurship), education (affirmative measures, more Roma teachers)
- Adequate and accessible funding for Roma youth initiatives and Roma youth organisations (including grants to ensure their functioning).
- Enabling the transfer of knowledge, practices and resources from local, national and European levels and vice versa.

EUROPEAN LEVEL SUPPORT

Regarding what participants expect from the European or international levels (and, notably, from the Roma Youth Action Plan), they mentioned:

- Support, spaces and mechanisms for Roma youth issues to be advocated on the international level

- Capacity building for Roma youth organisations and further support for them to do advocacy for Roma youth issues
- Support exchange of good practices on Roma youth issues
- European youth programmes must be accessible to Roma youth projects (European Youth Foundation, Erasmus plus)
- European institutions must push national authorities to implement Roma Integration strategies as well as the Youth Guarantee and support to mainstream Roma youth issues in the strategies
- Organise social media campaigns
- Training courses on project management and youth participation for Roma young people
- Organise and orientate the funding and support to the national level more strategically, responding to the needs of the countries
- Consult and coordinate with Roma youth organisations on any Roma youth related process or programme and ensure appropriate follow-up
- Institutional and financial support to current and emerging Roma youth networks at national and European level.

Input about the implementation of the Roma youth action plan

International organisations and partners of the RYAP have their adopted strategies which guide them through their work. Many have explicitly announced that Roma youth will stay in their priority agendas. Double mainstreaming is required to ensure that Roma youth issues do not get isolated into the youth sector of the Council of Europe only and that each stakeholder takes certain part in the new phase of the RYAP.

In order for a future Roma youth agenda (including a Roma Youth Action Plan) to have credibility and chances for success, the following aspects should be clarified:

- a budget, clear indicators, visibility, a monitoring mechanism and a promotion strategy;
- a coordination team with an allocated budget to follow the implementation of the RYAP and the communication with the international partners;
- an online database portal for sharing information and upcoming calls for proposals, projects, and trainings;
- a strong coordination mechanism among the RYAP partners in order to avoid duplication of efforts;
- target the European Commission to become a partner of the RYAP, and to enable a mainstreaming approach for the efficient implementation of the new RYAP;
- ensure double mainstreaming within and beyond the Council of Europe' structures, notably by reinforcing the cooperation with CAHROM and, particularly, bringing the input from CAHROM to the national level;
- include Roma youth in the monitoring of the Roma Action Plan of the Council of Europe;
- provide support to Roma youth networks to create National Contact Points for the implementation of the new RYAP;
- promote the translations and usage of *the manuals produced by the RYAP* in formal and non-formal education (including schools, institutions and activists) (Right to Remember, Barabaripen, Mirrors).