

To the Council of Europe – Youth department
To the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Roma Issues

Declaration of the Roma Youth Conference 2015

We, more than 100 Roma and non-Roma participants from 30 countries, representing Roma youth organizations, stakeholders and networks at the 2nd Roma Youth Conference (October 19th-22nd 2015 in Budapest), acknowledge the efforts of the Council of Europe and its Youth Department towards Roma youth empowerment, active youth participation and towards combating antigypsyism by creating the first Roma Youth Action Plan in 2011. We also acknowledge the investment of funds and time that went into creating a number of comprehensive tools for that purpose, such as the publications *Mirrors*, *Right to Remember* and *Barabaripen*.

During the conference, we evaluated its positive impact though as participants we express our continued concern about the neglect of a number of important aspects by policy makers when it comes to Roma youth inclusion.

Antigypsyism remains and is an even greater challenge in today's Europe. We express our deep concern about the rise of antigypsyism, the anti-Roma rhetoric and the violent attacks against Roma in Europe. The recent riots of far right activists in Germany, the forced evictions of Roma in France, laws supporting a segregated school system in Hungary, discriminative legislation, and Holocaust denial are all symptoms of a rising racism throughout Europe. This is not only among the general population but also at the national and international administration level. There is a lack of knowledge among the majority of society about Roma history, culture, antigypsyism, and the Roma Genocide that took place during World War II. This lack of knowledge needs to be identified and recognised as an important reason for these recent developments. Following the recognition of the 2nd August as the European Roma Holocaust Memorial Day on April 15, 2015, we call upon the member states of the Council of Europe, to adopt the resolution of the European Parliament.

We therefore demand the inclusion of these topics into educational curricula. We also want to see the recognition of the advocacy work being done in this field by Roma youth organisations and the important role they have on the local, national and international level, in order to achieve societal change.

The increasing wealth divide and exclusion of the poor as a result of the European economic crisis have worsened the situation for Roma. **Social and economic exclusion** still represents the biggest challenge for Roma youth participation and results in political and cultural exclusion as well. This in turn leads to marginalisation and discrimination in all fields of society. Roma youth are the youngest minority in Europe and strive for economic empowerment and participation. We insist that all necessary measures are taken and funded in order to encourage their economic and educational efforts and enable their transition into national labour markets. We want to see Roma youth entrepreneurship highlighted and promoted as an important aspect that could, not only contribute to economic empowerment but also strengthen the path of social inclusion and active citizenship of young Roma. Studies have shown that diversity enhances productivity and innovation and thus also improves the national economy.

It is still evident that many Roma young people are suffering from **multiple discrimination** that hinders their participation as citizens of their countries and members of their societies; this concerns LGBTQIA+ Roma, Roma girls, Roma

migrants and Roma with disabilities. They are still being ignored by both national and international policy makers. As an example, we recommend taking into account the recently published *Prague Declaration* which names important aspects and offers relevant expertise on the question of Roma LGBTQIA+ across Europe.

We call on the Council of Europe, its Youth Department and to the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Roma Issues:

- To improve the **good practice of Roma youth involvement** in processes of policy making.
- To improve the coordination of policies concerning Roma youth among European institutions and stakeholders and to improve the communication between these institutions.
- To integrate Roma youth expertise into decision-making structures.
- To invest in strengthening the capacity and structures of Roma youth organisations.
- To enable the monitoring of policies being implemented by setting up a constant working group consisting of Roma youth and evaluating the measures of the Roma Youth Action Plan.
- To call upon the European Union and its member states to put Roma Youth as a priority into the National Roma Integration Strategies, as well as to call all European institutions to fight against antigypsyism and to end discrimination against Roma.

We encourage the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Roma Issues and the Joint Council on Youth to emphasize the importance of **double mainstreaming** – including Roma issues in youth policies and youth issues in Roma policies. We also ask for assurance that the needs and demands of Roma Youth are the core criteria for all measures of the next Roma Youth Action Plan. Under these conditions it will be our responsibility as Roma youth to ensure that the Roma Youth Action Plan creates a visible impact.

We demand the return to the values that have enriched Europe. These values such as **solidarity, respect for diversity and human rights** need to be continuously and consistently respected. The European society can only be powerful if it has a strong Roma youth. Therefore, all relevant policy measures have to be done, by, with and for the Roma Youth in respectful and equal cooperation with the majority society.

Budapest, 22.10.2015.

On behalf of the participants of the 2nd Roma Youth Conference:
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Phiren Amenca International Network
FERYP – Forum of European Roma Young People