



INTERNATIONAL LEGAL GUARANTEES FOR THE PROTECTION OF NATIONAL MINORITIES AND PROBLEMS IN THEIR IMPLEMENTATION

WITH SPECIAL FOCUS ON MINORITY EDUCATION

Equal Access to Education by National Minorities Discussion Paper submitted by Ms Miranda Vuolasranta European Roma and Travellers Forum ERTF

The issues to be addressed in this session have been formulated as:

- **Equal opportunities for access to education by national minorities at all levels**
- **History, language and religion of national minorities in school curricula**

We have got two excellent presentations from Mr Tom Hadden representing the Human Rights Centre, School of Law, Queen's University Belfast and from Mr Pádraig Ó Riagáin representing National Minorities and Minority Language Education in Trinity College Dublin, which both gave light and analyzed the ongoing policy practices to the guidelines given in the Framework Convention on Protection of National Minorities and in the Charter of Regional and Minority Languages, Recommendations Regarding the Education Rights of National Minorities (OSCE 1996) as well as other similar legal frameworks to be found in this field. So I'm not going to spend the time given to me by repeating those legal and logical conclusions already presented here.

I am here, representing the European Roma and Travellers Forum (ERTF or the Forum). The ERTF was created in 2004 and has a strong connection with the Council of Europe as we have an extraordinary legal partnership agreement with the 46 Council of Europe member States. We are an independent international organisation and we have a mandate to provide expertise to all those working on Roma and Travellers issues.

The core aim of the European Roma and Travellers Forum is to address what is mostly ignored by many of the European Governments respectively the human rights and social exclusion of Roma. We also try to raise awareness about rampant, widespread and ironically often "invisible" European anti-Gypsyism, about our culture and history.

The Roma and Traveller minority is the only pan-European minority to be found in all European countries, including the 25 EU-member States.

Educational priorities of the European Roma and Travellers Forum ERTF¹

The European Roma and Travellers Forum, started its work year 2005. The first formal policy paper was prepared by an ad-hoc expert group for the Committee of the Experts of the Charter for the Regional and Minority Languages in October 2005. This position paper was designed to guide and clear the outline of the scope of the protection afforded to Romani language under the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages.

The Forum is not intending to invent the wheel in the educational issues; on the contrary. In order to mention some of these actions and actors, I would like to remind all of us of a few important milestones to be remembered. The first resolution on Roma children's education issues was done by EU already 1989 and the MG-S-ROM have done an extraordinary good work during 1990s on the same topic.

I had myself an opportunity to take part in this work on behalf of Finnish government previously, when MG-S-ROM prepared the Education Recommendation R(2000)4, to the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe. There are as well other good actors on this field such as European Roma Rights Center (ERRC), which have done very good surveys on the country situations related to Roma children's segregation. EU Parliament adopted last year 2005 a new **Resolution on Roma**, where again the education issue was raised up as one of the most important topics to be developed and improved further. So there is no reason to go back and start everything from the beginning.

What have been lacking until now is the joint Roma community and parent view, commitment and demand to make the chance in the future for our children. The unified Roma and non-Roma voice and demand of de-segregation of Roma children's education and provision of equal quality opportunities to learn for Roma and Travellers children. Now we are going towards a more balanced and stable direction of cooperation. The international agencies, national States and the Roma together.

School segregation policies are common all over Europe and existing in some form both in western States as well as eastern European States. Roma children are still mainly found in 'special schools for mentally retarded' or 'segregated substandard schools'

- Nordic countries the estimation of starts from 40%
- Central- Eastern European States from 60 – 90 %
- Central Western European States and South Europe the majority of Roma and Travellers children don't have access to schools at all or on very limited scale, because of the travelling living circumstances and because the local authorities have not organized sufficient legal encampment sites with alternative school opportunities to these Traveller families

Some general outlines on the education priorities of the ERTF

Right to quality education

- Racial segregation (apartheid) of the Roma in education have to be abolished in all countries
- States have to actively start to implement de-segregation programs and policies and secure these measures with adequate finances in the State budgets

¹ Professor Yaron Matras, linguistics at the University of Manchester (UK) contributed for the preparation of ERTF policy paper on Romani language and its education through his text **The future of Romani: Toward a policy of linguistic pluralism.**

- The access of Roma and Travellers children's to quality education in normal school system (mixed classes) have to be guaranteed in all levels of education starting from pre-school up to higher level education

Language rights

- Roma and Travellers minorities, both national and immigrated, like others, have language-related rights which should be respected; The Romani language is spoken throughout Europe and is therefore to be considered as a European language and recognised mother tongue of its speakers and of those who want to revive/resuscitate its use as their mother tongue
- Forum does not see the standardization of Romani language as a topical objective, but aims to a codification of the language in order to support the approach of the linguistic pluralism
- The lack of an internationally recognised 'standard dialect' is not a barrier to a States implementation of rights related to language use and learning; while a Standard dialect is not needed, mutual comprehension and 'linguistic pluralism' are essential;
- Roma and Travellers must have the opportunity to choose bilingual education, so that they may learn both in the national language and in their own language. This must be a choice of parents and not of the schooling system or others;
- Romani language teaching must be available in different forms for pupils who speak the language at home and pupils with no prior basis in the language;
- the acquisition of literacy itself is best carried out in the language variety that the learner – child or adult – can call their own. But subsequent language teaching can and should incorporate strategies to acquaint learners with different forms of written Romani;
- The goal of teaching Romani language is not only to enable a student to speak one dialect well but also to understand and have some knowledge of the Romani used by others across Europe.
- It is desirable to pursue international networking for the production of texts and teaching materials in Romani, even if one accepts that material creation is ultimately regional, national or local. There is every reason to draw on a wider pool of talent, experience and expertise and pursue the development of language resources for Romani in an international context;
- An electronic pool of teaching resources would allow teachers to have access to a range of materials, and to choose and adapt those that may be of use to them. The ERTF should be entrusted with funds for a project which would create such an electronic multi-dialectal resource for educators;
- much of the above goals are furthered well by the current work of the Council of Europe's ad-hoc group on a curriculum framework for Romani

Preservation of Romani cultural heritage

- there is currently a serious and unaddressed challenge to preserve the Roma identity and culture and eliminate the often extreme social stigmata, Roma are faced with having to choose between effective exercising of their right to live according to their culture and use of their mothertongue

- The recognition of the romani language, history and culture is to be seen as part of the European cultural heritage and therefore it has to be added in the national education structures such as national education legislation and curriculums, teacher training's and in teaching materials production; establishment of Roma Cultural Centers, Museums and Holocaust Remembrance Institutes and Libraries are essential
- Romani mother tongue teacher training, school mediators/assistants training have to be organized and NBE have to secure adequate support for teaching and material production
- Adult Vocational Training should be organized in all CoE member states having Roma population by the employment and education authorities
- Recognition of the rampant but often down shaped anti-Gypsism existing in our social infrastructures is essential as well as positive awareness raising campaigns on Roma as citizens of our countries recognizing the historical and topical existence of Roma in our societies and in all educational structures aiming to multi cultural societies, diversity and tolerance.

The written version of the **Policy Paper on Romani Language Education**, given to the Expert Committee of the Charter of the Regional- and Minority Languages of the Council of Europe in September 2005 is attached to this presentation.

Educational Policies in Europe

Reading all the strategies which are made from different governments and following the directions from the Strategies and legal framework on this field it should be taken in consideration the long term needs for the Roma and Traveller population in Europe. This strategies are mechanism for the implementation of the proclaimed goal in the area of education.

The main priorities should be appropriate for every Roma and non- Roma children in this correlation the quality of knowledge and education is different between the two groups. That's why the Governments and the Roma communities on national level as well with the ERTF should in the next ten-year period work on co-ordination of activities and to determine the types of services by the public, private and civil sector and the relations of these educational services with the strategic determinations of the states.

The main goal should be to increase the elementary education of all Roma and Traveller children and at the same time in the completion of the elementary education. In the long term, it should be made possible in the further straightening through education, that Roma teachers and Roma – intellectuals will lead together with national education authorities the prosperity and the development of the Roma community.

The planned priorities in the domain of the education would present a need for substantial resources by the states, donations and programs. Only like that it would be possible to avoid the impossible achievement .

The priorities should be taken in accordance with the levels of education :

- Pre school education
- Elementary education
- Secondary education
- Higher education

The states in co-operation with the representatives from the Roma community have to define some priorities that would be the strategic goals. The Ministry of education together with the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and the local authorities should work on joint programs within the bilateral and multilateral co-operation.

It is necessary and important to involve a larger number of state institutions and local level and root level actors together in order to get the wanted effect: parents, schools, mediators, school inspectors, the Ministry of Education, National Board of Education, and other relevant ministries.

It is also recommended to engage in the course of the education process in pre-school and elementary education **Romani assistants /mediators** who's role would be to facilitate the inclusion in the educational system and to mediate between the children, the parents and teaching personnel in the education process. The role of these assistants/mediators would be to build a positive image of the school as an institution and the education as whole, individual work with children, to facilitate communication with the teachers and the other environment, to provide communication, interest and attendance of parents at parental meetings, to work with parents on the importance of education, to overcome possible prejudice and stereotypes. Such engagement understands special training and upgrading of the current knowledge of the assistants/mediators but also the teaching personal so to achieve better understanding of the ethnic securities of the Roma and their needs.

Special attention should be given to the **textbooks** and to **curricula dimension** in general. The Roma and Travellers have to be present in the **History and the Culture values** of the general cultural heritage of our societies, general teaching material and in the textbooks, as well as in the targeted Romani teaching materials. The education of human rights could start even in the pre-school educational level going through elementary to the secondary and higher education.

It is necessary also to have a **constant creation of Roma personnel** with higher levels of education especially at the Pedagogical Academy in order to provide good quality teaching personal in the future employing Roma in the Ministry of Education.

After the ending of the foreign support programs the states should have a **special financial support program** for Roma children from poor families to secure the completion of their education.

All this recommendations are aiming to standardise the protection against discrimination and segregation in the process of education. In relation to this it is recommended to organise **training** that would inform the children and their parents about their **legally guaranteed rights**.

Preparation of **annual reports** for the Ministry of Education by each school where Roma learn is also recommended as an instrument to follow up the situation.

All this recommendation are fitting each other with the **Recommendation No R (2000)4 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the education of Roma children in Europe** and they have to be taken in consideration.

One of the most important recommendation is the **consultation and co-ordination** between the institutions and the parties (ministries, school authorities, Roma families, organisations etc.) not only in design, implementation and monitoring but also in evaluation because this strategies are still under process of implementation and the lack of annual reports from different countries are missing still.

In most of the countries the monitoring are planned to be done through their ministries, experts and involved parties but the Roma involvement is only through the NGO `s sector which is not visible or still not included because of lack of expert or information`s in the Roma communities.

The various Council of Europe expert committees have already started the process to involve the European Roma and Travellers Forum to their work in order to better evaluate and monitor the outcome and implementation of the activities from the National Strategies.

Romani Language

Language is perhaps the most conspicuous of cultural assets which a minority may aspire to manage and develop on its own. This has long been acknowledged in the context of international debates on human rights. While discrimination on the basis of language, is a violation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) goes further and protects the right of the child belonging to a minority to use his or her own language. The right of minority communities to use their own languages in private and in public, and to develop their own languages in various spheres of public life, is anchored in the UN Declaration of the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities (1993) and in greater detail in the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (1992). There is thus general awareness, that support for minority languages is an integral part of the package of securing the human rights of a minority.

The need for measures in support of the Romani language has been mentioned explicitly in numerous international resolutions. One of the most frequently cited is Council of Europe Recommendation 1203 On Gypsies in Europe (1993), which calls for a European programme for the study of Romanes (Romani). These language and mother tongue needs are specified in the [Recommendation No R \(2000\) 4 of the Committee of Ministers, which was prepared by MG-S-ROM, to member states on the education of Roma/Gypsy children in Europe.](#)

In several countries, including Macedonia, Finland, Sweden, and Austria, there is at least some form of legislative or even constitutional recognition of the Romani language. Several other European countries have been pursuing policies of active encouragement and support of pilot projects engaged in teaching and broadcasting in Romani.

The conclusion to recognise Romani language as a pan-European and transversally used language creates however inevitably a need for tools to codify the tuition of Romani language. Romani is only one of many languages around the globe that does not have an established tradition of a single, standard written variety. The absence of a standard is sometimes confused with the supposed lack of ‘a distinct Romani language’ and the presence instead of numerous dialects. In fact, most European languages show dialectal variation, and the type of differences found between the various dialects of Romani is not at all unusual. The absence of a Standard language for use in cross-regional communication, in writing, or in institutions does however mean that there is no obvious choice of any single variety for the more public functions of an official or written language.

A Common European Framework of Reference for Romani

Although Romani comprises various dialects, according to tradition the Romani teaching material authors and linguists consider it as important to study the possibility of creating a European framework guidelines for Romani as a mother tongue curriculum. These guidelines would build up a structure of progressively extended knowledge of Romani as a mother tongue language usable in our modern societies. The European framework curriculum could also function as a common guideline to the authors and producers of Romani teaching materials, to be taken account, when preparing national and local school curriculum

related to the Romani tuition. This would enable the member states to set up a unified strategy in their countries for the education of Romani children in the context of their particular educational system.

An ad-hoc working group has now worked with the development of the European Framework of Reference for Romani language Curriculum since 2005. The work has been done in cooperation with the Council of Europe DGIV, Directorate of School, out of school and Higher Education - Language Policy Division, DG III Social Cohesion – Roma and Traveller Division, European Roma and Travellers Forum, Graz and Manchester Universities and Roma Experts. During the development process in 2005, representant's of the European Roma and Travellers Forum (ERTF) took part in the work and assured the group its full support, visible in the Policy Paper presented by the Forum to the Expert Committee of the Regional and Minority Languages in the Hearing on Romani Language in October 2005.

The Language Policy Division was invited as well to a Hearing with the Committee of Experts for the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages on October 2005, where the importance of this project was stressed.

The Ad-hoc working group have examined a number of existing national curricula for Romani, investigated the feasibility of drawing on and adapting to the Romani education context specific elements in the existing and widely used Common European Framework of Reference for Languages developed by the Language Policy Division. The group prepared a pre-draft of elements for a prototype reference Framework document for Romani, and drafts of studies on the political status and societal linguistic status of Romani. The group also finalised plans for future work in 2007 - 2008, and in that context, made plans to add new expertise on competence-based language descriptors with the assistance of Trinity College Dublin Integrate Ireland Language and Training, and European Language Portfolio. A wider consultation consultation is foreseen with representatives of Roma educators and member states in spring 2007.

The objectives of this project are open to other partners; networking the various sectors involved in the field of Roma and Travellers education, by linking adapted action plans and the various other ongoing programs.

International Institutions

In its resolution from 24 May 1984, the European Parliament acknowledged the fact that “gypsies still suffer discrimination in law and practice” and called on the governments of the Member States to eliminate discrimination against Roma. Since then, Parliamentary activities, together with those of the European Commission, Council of Europe, and OSCE have contributed some positive steps in combating discrimination against Roma, particularly in the field of law. Yet, more than 22 years after the first acknowledgement of discrimination against them, the Roma continue to see their basic rights violated on a daily basis. Discrimination, segregation from majority schools and exclusion are integral parts of their daily life. Hate speech and incidences of racist violence against Roma are frequent, but do not receive the attention needed and are followed almost by no reaction.

In the absence of effective measures to combat racism and discrimination against Roma widespread and widely accepted form of European racism remains pervasive. Anti-Romaism or Romaphobia, more popularly known as “anti-Gypsyism,” is deeply rooted in European culture and society, and manifests itself in long-standing patterns of exclusion and segregation and the prevalence of negative stereotypes. Even in those countries where little visible Romani presence exists, such as Denmark, Luxembourg, and Malta, anti-Gypsyism forms an integral part of the common cultural heritage.

There are terrible and haunting facts in the European history and as a teacher of Romani history, I could spend hours on these. Dehumanisations, brutal mass killings, 500 years of slavery in Romania, genocide

against Roma are some will say history; pogroms, blatant abuses of our rights, abject poverty, social stigmata and exclusion are still part of the today's reality. But today, I plan to focus on the present.

I'm grateful for this opportunity to speak here and I hope to draw your attention to a few issues today. The Roma and Travellers provide an unfortunate but excellent example of existing links between discrimination, segregation, social exclusion and poverty in a Europe, still confused about its social model. The different social realities met by majority of respected countries and national and/or immigrant minorities seem often invisible to the modern and prosperous Europe. Weakly educated and/or illiterate people such as the Roma and Travellers are still mainly socially excluded and do not enjoy equal rights mentioned in law or international instruments.

I was previously working a long time for the Finnish Government and within the Council of Europe getting in this way a wide perspective on, what has been done by the Intergovernmental Institutions such as European Union, Council of Europe, the Office of European Security and Co-Operation even United Nations. Indeed a lot have been done by these institutions during the last twenty years. Resources have been used to find out, what are the problems of Roma, Sinti, Travellers and other related groups.

Pile of books and reports have been wrote and praiseworthy pile of recommendations, resolutions, national strategies targeted precisely on Roma and Travellers have been produced by these institutions in order to move on and develop the situation and better social integration of Roma and Travellers. Legal frameworks has been set up within Europe and the European Union and I will mention the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, with Protocol 14, the Revised European Social Charter, the EU Racial Equality Directive, the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, the Charter for Regional and Minority Languages, Recommendations Regarding the Education Rights of National Minorities (OSCE 1996), OSCE Action Plan on Roma and Sinti, not to even mention the pile of Roma and Traveller related Council of Europe Recommendations on education, housing, health, right to legal encampment and so on and so on.....

Unfortunately, we witness an unexpected reversal of roles, as Roma and non-Roma non-governmental organisations became more pragmatic and policy oriented while the European and international institutions grew more vocal about the situation and, arguably, a lot less effective about addressing it. Tens of reports were made available—most of them repeating the same things already made clear by previous reports.

Topical issues concerning Roma and Travellers Human Rights in Europe

The Intergovernmental Institutions receive on daily basis reports detailing violations of fundamental human and social rights of Roma and Travelers such as:

- abysmal housing which leads to unequal access to education or segregated schools for Roma children with substandard educational curricula, teachers, equipment and teaching materials
- evictions of Roma families from their homes or camping sites all around Europe are spreading and multiplying,
- shanty towns are demolished with no alternative in place for those evicted
- no vaccination for Roma children and lack of infrastructure - such as wells of drinkable water that leads to epidemic smiting diseases among Roma communities and segregated villages in many Eastern European countries police violence and prohibited entrance to public places such as camping sites, restaurants, bars, cafes
- high infant mortality, around 20 times higher in Bulgaria, and a 10 to 15 years shorter life span for Roma compared with majority populations
- limited access to public services

- denied access to prenatal and health care services because of ethnic origin
- lack of medical insurance and low income level
- numerous cases of sterilization of Roma women
- discrimination in access to labour markets, unemployment rates of Roma are from 40 to 100 % . Dire and barely talked about it is the case of Roma women that face multiple discrimination.

In April 2005 the EU Parliament adopted a Roma Resolution, where all the above mentioned facts can be found and precise recommendations are given to address these problems. The Resolution is recognizing the existence of anti-Gypsyism as a distinct form of racism and intolerance, many times silently accepted social phenomenon, leading to hostile acts ranging from exclusion to violence against Romani communities.

Current research and analyses point to a number of fundamental factors that have limited progress to date. These are:

1. high levels of Anti-Gypsyism – analysts state that the first step in fight against anti-Gypsism is for public officials to acknowledge it and to take the lead in openly condemning it in all its forms; the ministries of education and the national boards of education should take a lead in eradicating these deep rooted prejudices and raise awareness of Roma and Travellers as minorities and equal citizens having often century long common history with the majority population of the respected country though right to own cultural identity and own mother tongue
2. lack of strategic focus – there is not a common European policy targeting Roma and the goal should be a **European Charter on Roma and Travellers Rights**, done in cooperation with all relevant international actors aiming to unify the main political goals and development strategies
3. insufficient Roma and Traveller participation in all levels of societies; worst representation from all ethnic European groups within Intergovernmental Institutions and National Governments; hundred times under-represented compared with the smallest ethnic groups such as Maltese and Cypriots
 - it is not enough to agree the principle of equality for Roma; adequate resources must be allocated, public officials need to be trained, new structures need to be put in place, established way's of working need to be reformed for Roma in all levels of society structures
 - effective Roma participation in alla levels of our societies and international co-operation structors linked to Roma Traveler related activites
4. insufficient legislative frameworks, no financial resources in State budgets or local level administration
 - national governments are urged to review their legislative frameworks with a view to ensuring the dual objectives of providing accessible an appropriate means of redress for individual Roma who suffer discrimination and proactively promoting equality so as to bring about the necessary institutional chance
5. poor or no co-ordination between the various actors
 - national authorities in different levels of society, intergovernmental actors, founders of different programs and Roma/Traveller as stakeholders. Consultation and participation has to be planned and resourced and in some case may also require particular outreach activities. It has been clearly documented that the participation of Roma and Travellers to the decision-making processes related to initiatives concerning them has been inadequate.

6. need for an integrated approach; failure to tackle discrimination and link short term projects to long term systemic change
 - the problems experienced by Roma and Travellers are multidimensional and interlinked. Poor housing has impact to health and educational performance and access to public services. Low attendance rates at school and unequal treatment within the educational system affect employment opportunities, access to services, health and access to justice.
 - This interlinkage of problems experienced in the different spheres of life requires a multisectoral, or integrated approach to providing solutions,. Such an approach demands close cooperation and coordination between government departments and between national, regional and local levels of government and respected Roma and Traveller communities and their representants.
7. lack of regular evaluation and almost complete lack of monitoring of social inclusion policies when it comes to Roma
8. lack of political will and involvement at very low level of government's and intergovernmental officials in issues related to Roma
 - it is not enough to agree the principle of equality for Roma; adequate resources must be allocated, public officials need to be trained, new structures need to be put in place, established way's of working need to be reformed, officials need to be charged with responsibility, and targets must be set. It will most certainly involve making tough political decisions.
 - Cooperation and development is possible if there is political will and resources. The framework of poverty and social exclusion is depending on the opportunity to enjoy the access to equal and full human rights provided by the social infrastructure of our societies. If equal opportunities are less fully implemented than before, in the longer term this also has an impact on the development of human capital and social mobility. Many social structures are still discriminatory and do not guarantee equal opportunities for all and especially not for the Roma and Travellers.

We need to move away from bombastic rhetoric and start acting on existing reports rather than trying to have more reports which will prove practically what we all know that Roma are the most discriminated and excluded ethnic group in Europe (according to the EUMC).

Mainstreaming Social Integration

Recently the European Council adopted a new framework for the social protection and social inclusion process. While the renewed social indicators were discussed trying to fit them to the Lisbon Strategy, in order to combat the social exclusion and poverty and to promote the social integration, the Commission organized several hearings of the civil society. The question, whether the new indicators should mention some special population groups in order to secure full protection and equal investment on these groups on national levels, was one of the focuses.

Questions, such as can we be confident, that social responsibility at all levels and in all sectors is taking place, if we are underlining the principle of mainstreaming. One of the outcomes from discussions related to this issue has been, that targeted positive measures to break the underprivileged social backgrounds are needed sometimes, in order to break the vicious circle of social exclusion to secure equal access to health, housing, education, work opportunities and equal participation.

One key approach that should be adopted by national governments, in order to improve life of their Roma and Traveller populations is to mainstream Roma and Travellers issues into general policymaking. While targeted Roma policies are necessary, Roma and Travellers issues should not be ghettoized within ministries in a manner mirroring the ghettoisation of Roma within society. The perspective and particular needs of Roma and Travellers should instead be included in all aspects of general policymaking. Discrimination and social exclusion can only be overcome by comprehensive, coherent and proactive policies which ensure integration and participation of Roma and Travellers in the society in which they live and the respect of their ethnic identity.

This means that when general policies are being developed, Roma, Travellers and other groups in danger to fall on dependent on benefits category, their needs and interests should be taken account. Thus, for instance in developing their national action plans (NAPs) for social inclusion, employment and life long learning, the various actors should explicitly include Roma as a target group within these action plans. Likewise, when passing any domestic law, such as law aimed at improving housing conditions, the specific needs of Roma and Travellers should be taken account.

When Roma needs and identities are systemically taken into account, Roma and Travellers should be able to benefit from rights and services equally with other segments of population without abandoning key aspects of their identities. This goal is as well targeting the prevailing Anti-Gypsism in our societies in large, making the Roma and Traveller communities visible, making Romani individuals as citizens of the respective state where they live entitled to the same rights and opportunities as other citizens.

Economic and social rights are human rights and respect for social rights should be supported by concrete community and governmental efforts to jointly strive for solutions to related issues, facing the most vulnerable groups within society.

Eradication of poverty and social exclusion by ensuring that social inclusion policies are well-coordinated and involve all levels of government and other relevant actors such as local level authorities and people experiencing poverty and social exclusion such as Roma and Travellers themselves is needed, as well as efficient, effective and mainstreamed into relevant public policies, including economic, budgetary, education and training policies and structural programs.

How can we dismantle the kind of historical structures and attitudes that in practice lead to discrimination? The aim of coherent mainstreaming social cohesion is not dividing people into the well-to-do and dependent of benefits or suffering of poverty and social exclusion groups. Growing discrepancies in welfare have extensive negative consequences. The various stakeholders from different social and economical sides such as minorities, disabled, refuge and immigrants have to be involved to this development and cohesion process.

Consequently all these are linked to the level of democracy, rule of law, properly functioning infrastructure, non-discrimination, tolerance of cultural-, linguistic and ethnic diversity, budgetary resources and political good will from all levels of decision makers and in particular local level authorities and municipalities.

Before ending I would like to emphasize that the issues of vulnerable groups should be done through National Action Plans and designated European structures.

The European Roma and Travellers Forum is looking forward of an fruitful cooperation with all relevant actors in particular on the education topic in the entire Europe.

Thank you for your attention!

APPENDIX*

EUROPEAN ROMA AND TRAVELLERS FORUM, ERTF

Policy Paper on Romani Language October 2005

It is the view of the ERTF that;

- The Romani language must be recognised as a language, according to the Charter for Regional and Minority Languages, in every member state. It must be allocated a position in the national curriculum and afforded an appropriate budget.
- It is the belief of the ERTF that the Romani language should also have status as an European language.
- The lack of an internationally recognized ‘standard dialect’ is not a barrier to a state’s implementation of rights related to language use and learning. Roma and Travellers, like others have language-related rights which can and should be respected.
- Roma and Travellers must have the opportunity to choose bilingual education, so that they may learn both in the national language and in their own language. This must be a choice of parents and not of the schooling system or others.
- Romani language teaching must be available in different forms for pupils who speak the language at home and pupils with no prior basis in the language.
- The goal of teaching Romani language is not only to enable a student to speak one dialect well but also to understand and have some knowledge of the Romani used by others across Europe. While a Standard Dialect is not needed, mutual comprehension and ‘linguistic pluralism’ are essential.
- It is desirable to pursue international networking for the production of texts and teaching materials in Romani, even if one accepts that material creation is ultimately regional, national or local. There is every reason to draw on a wider pool of talent, experience and expertise and pursue the development of language resources for Romani in an international context.
- Teacher training should not only be carried out on the national level; teacher training organized at the European level would be valuable.
- The acquisition of literacy itself is best carried out in the language variety that the learner – child or adult – can call their own. But subsequent language teaching can and should incorporate strategies to acquaint learners with different forms of written Romani.

* Reference:

Equality for Roma in Europe; A Roadmap for Action, Open Society Institute January 2006, (European Roma Information Office, European Roma Rights Centre, Interdisciplinary Research Cell in Human Rights, Migration Policy Group and Open Society Institute)

- An electronic pool of teaching resources would allow teachers to have access to a range of materials, and to choose and adapt those that may be of use to them. The ERTF should be entrusted with funds for a project which would create such an electronic multi-dialectal resource for educators;
- Much of the above goals are furthered well by the current work of the Council of Europe's ad-hoc group on a curriculum framework for Romani.
- Young people should be able to study Romani without losing the opportunity to study other subjects.
- Whenever a country's compliance to the Charter is examined, the Secretariat of the Charter should consult the ERTF on whether a Roma or Traveller population is present and has concerns.
- There is a link between protection of the Romani language and Roma's integration in the countries where they live. Protection and promotion of Romani teaches both Roma and their non-Roma neighbours that Roma have a place in that society.
- The ERTF asks the Committee of Experts of the Charter to consider taking a Romani person with relevant expertise as a permanent member of the Committee.