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Strasbourg, 3 March 2021

Roma Youth: Together for Emancipation and Empowerment

(working title)

The role of history in the participation and inclusion
of Roma young people

Online conference and public event
7-8-9 April 2021

In the framework of the programme of the German Presidency
of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe

on the occasion of International Roma Day
and the 50th anniversary of the First World Romani Congress

CONCEPT NOTE CALL FOR PARTICIPANTS

Organised in partnership with



Phiren Amenca

ERCIAC

ZENTRALRAT [Deutscher
Sinti & Roma]

Roma history, remembrance and youth participation

It is widely acknowledged that remembrance of gross human rights violations, such as the Holocaust, is more than just learning about the past: it is learning from the past so that it is not repeated. This prevention function is coupled with restoring a sense of dignity and justice to the victims and to their families and communities.

The Holocaust of Roma refers to the extermination by the Nazi regime and its allies during the Second World War of at least 500 000 Roma, Sinti, Yenish and members of other communities labelled as "Zigeuner" (Gypsies). The importance of learning about the Roma Holocaust has been recognised by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe in a recommendation on the inclusion of the history of Roma and/or Travellers¹ in school curricula and teaching materials:

*Teaching about the Holocaust perpetrated by the Nazi regime and its allies as well as other acts committed against Roma and Travellers across Europe could be an effective tool in combating all forms of hatred, discrimination and prejudice, as well as radicalisation, Holocaust denial and revisionism (...)*²

The work on remembrance of the Roma Genocide has been actively pursued by Roma youth organisations and movements, notably through activities commemorating 2 August as European Roma Holocaust Memorial Day. The personal need to understand one's past and history is understandably more important in the case of a community, the Roma, whose history is largely ignored and generally side-lined by mainstream history. Remembrance and knowledge about the Roma Genocide is becoming even more important in current times of increasing history distortion and Holocaust denial as well as rising antisemitism and antigypsyism. The promotion of the teaching of Roma and Traveller history and the Roma Holocaust is one of the priorities of the current Council of Europe Strategic Action Plan for Roma and Traveller Inclusion (2020-2025).

That Roma young people acknowledge the importance of learning about their history in order to grow up confidently as young Europeans is evidence that identities do not have to be constructed in opposition to other identities or in self-defence. A community that is aware of its history and culture is more likely to look at the future with confidence. The Council of Europe supported young people to learn about the Roma Holocaust namely through the former Roma Youth Action Plan, and the former Thematic Action Plan for the Inclusion of Roma and Travellers (2016-2019). Fostering Roma identity through various strategies and actions has been central to the work of the Council of Europe with Roma youth. Mainstreaming the history of the Roma people has been one of the approaches.

Roma young people themselves consistently express their concerns and demands more vigorously and thoroughly. They have moved toward establishing more national and

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 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, adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 1 July 2020 at the 1380th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies, Preamble.

international organisations and networks. They also took leadership to connect with other campaigns, for example, commendably steering the Roma movement to participate in the European campaign on recognising and remembering the Roma victims of the Holocaust and the Roma resistance.

The Council of Europe has recognised the role of remembrance and memorialisation as a moral right that also helps young people to embrace and respect their Roma, national, and European identities equally. It has engaged in creating educational materials on the right to remember and in organising commemoration events to develop a stronger sense of a collective Roma identity around the memory of the Holocaust. The Council of Europe promotes the integration of Roma into society and knowledge about the history of the Roma Genocide is an integral part of this process. The most visible, participatory, youth-led initiative on remembrance so far has been Dikh He Na Bistar. The campaign was initiated by TernYpe and included the Council of Europe's work on the Remembrance of the Roma Holocaust such as: "Right to Remember" manual, the data base on the Roma and Sinti Holocaust³, the fact sheets on the Roma Holocaust⁴, as well as online tools and gatherings of thousands of Roma (and non-Roma) youths from all over Europe and beyond to mark August 2 (Roma Holocaust Remembrance Day) and May 16 (The Roma Resistance Day).

Yet, some European countries have yet to recognise and commemorate the Roma victims of the Holocaust.

Some still believe that we should not talk about the past, but they don't understand that this was our history, it is part of who we are, and we need to know it.

Elvis Beriša, Montenegrin Roma activist

The policy of the youth sector of the Council of Europe aims at enabling young people across Europe to actively uphold, defend, promote and benefit from the Council of Europe's core values. Combating discrimination, fostering promoting social inclusion and participation must be a central task to any youth policy. This obviously includes young people from Roma and Travellers communities. Partnerships with Roma youth organisations and networks play a central role in this work.

A recent study on Roma youth participation concludes that

in Europe, policies have yet to mention and address systematically and continuously the needs of Roma youth. To date, targeted policies, standards, and programmes specific for and with Roma youth have almost never been developed and implemented at the local, national, and European levels. National and European institutions have avoided or neglected recognising and including the specific history, needs, and challenges of Roma youth in mainstream policies and measures. This neutral, "one fits all" approach in policies and recommendations targeting a very diverse spectrum of European young people has ignored and denied the reality of racism and historical and structural inequalities faced by Roma youth and other racialised young peoples.⁵

To ensure inclusive policies, Roma young people must be included in youth and Roma policies and programmes in all stages, from design to evaluation. Moreover, to be effective and trustworthy, policies, including youth policy ought to incorporate anti-racist and social inclusion measures.

³ [Roma Genocide webpage \(coe.int\)](http://RomaGenocide.webpage.coe.int)

⁴ [Factsheets on Roma \(uni-graz.at\)](http://Factsheets.onRoma.uni-graz.at)

⁵ [Roma Youth Participation and Inclusion in Standards, Policies, and Programmes in Europe](http://RomaYouthParticipationandInclusioninStandardsPoliciesandProgrammesinEurope)

The Joint Council on Youth intends to further support the participation and inclusion of Roma young people in policies and programmes. The Covid-19 has impacted the effective policies of meeting and working together.

This conference partly remediates this by associating a wider audience of Roma and non-Roma stakeholders in the youth and human rights fields to the task of addressing persisting factors discrimination and fostering the participation of Roma and Traveller young people based on equality and dignity.

The conference is organised by the Youth Department and the Roma and Travellers Team of the Council of Europe in the framework of the German Presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe. It is prepared and implemented in co-operation with the European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture (ERIAN) and in close association with Ternype, the European Roma Grass Roots Organisations Network, Phiren Amenca and the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma.

Aims and objectives of the event

The conference aims at strengthening the knowledge of Roma and Traveller history, culture and identity as a factor enhancing social inclusion and participation of Roma and Traveller young people. Its specific objectives are:

- To support cooperation among Roma and non-Roma youth leaders by meeting, interacting and learning about the role of Roma history and culture in shaping the identities and perceptions of Roma youth in Europe today
- To support the dissemination and usage of Council of Europe standards and educational resources, in particular the Recommendation 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, the handbook "Right to Remember" and the role of the European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture therein
- To motivate participants and their organisations in their work as multipliers on education about Roma and Traveller history, culture and identity as well as Roma Holocaust Remembrance
- To reflect and about and propose action regarding expressions of antigypsyism today such as online hate speech, Holocaust denial and mis-representations of history
- To collect and disseminate experiences and expectations about promoting the participation and inclusion of Roma and Traveller young people
- To celebrate Roma cultural diversity and associate young people and youth organisations to the celebrations of the International Roma Day (8 April) and the 50th anniversary of the First World Romani Congress, held in 1971 in Orpington, Kent, United Kingdom.

Methodology and Programme

The conference will be organised as an online event over 3 days. The programme, methods and technology will be organised so as to favour mutual learning, interaction and dialogue among participants – notably in small discussion groups and workshops.

As a way of sharing experiences and connecting young people all across Europe, participants and partners will be supported to prepare and share an action that they organise or offer to celebrate International Roma Day on 8 April and the 50th anniversary of the First World Romani Congress and the awakening of a "Romani Movement" to promote Roma history, culture and identity, and to fight for human rights, justice, equality and better representation at political level. This will be broadcast in connection with a symbolic event at the Council of Europe.

Online/virtual visits to museums or places of remembrance of the Roma Holocaust and expressions of Roma culture, arts and identity will also be proposed in addition to the formal programme of the conference.

The programme contents will be structured on three main issues:

7 April: **Roma history and Roma Holocaust Remembrance**

8 April: **Celebrating Roma history, arts, culture and identity as well as the 50th anniversary of the emergence of a Romani human rights movement**

9 April: **Furthering youth action, mobilisation, inclusion and participation**

Each thematic will feature key inputs, sharing of experiences and workshops facilitated by partner organisations, including Roma youth organisations. Specific links will be made with projects of the Youth Department and of the Roma and Travellers Team that intersect with youth participation, history, and remembrance.

The conference will close with the presentation of conclusions and proposals for furthering work on Roma history with young people and ways to expand Roma youth participation based on double mainstreaming.

Participants

The conference is designed for Roma and non-Roma young people, youth leaders and representatives of organisations and networks working with Roma communities from all across Europe who are also:

- Motivated to share experiences and engage in dialogue and cooperation with other participants
- Active within a Roma organisation or a (Roma) youth organisation
- Able to work/communicate in English, French or Romani
- Able to connect to the Internet for the time of the conference.

Priority will be given to participants under 30 years of age. The Council of Europe welcomes applications from all candidates who fulfil the profile above, irrespective of gender, disability, marital or parental status, racial, ethnic or social origin, colour, religion, belief or sexual orientation.

How to participate

Participation in the whole event is subject to registration. Open until **26 March** at <https://youthapplications.coe.int/> Participants attending at least 80% of the conference will receive a certificate of attendance.

More information: eyc.programme@coe.int