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Concept Note

6th MEETING OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE DIALOGUE WITH ROMA AND TRAVELLER CIVIL SOCIETY

15-16 October 2018

Civil Society assessment of the implementation of the Council of Europe Thematic Action Plan on the Inclusion of Roma and Travellers (2016-2019)

PREFACE

“Roma and Travellers¹ together comprise the largest set of minority groups in Europe (10 to 12 millions)”.² Various Council of Europe bodies have observed during their visit to Council of Europe member states that discrimination and other human rights abuses against Roma and Travellers have become severe and that no European government can claim a fully successful record in protecting the human rights of the members of these minorities/communities³.

A major objective for the Council of Europe has been to help contribute to the full inclusion of Roma and Travellers in their local communities. Moreover, the Council of Europe has played a central role in the promotion and protection of the human rights of Roma and Travellers.

The first Council of Europe text on Roma and Travellers was a Recommendation adopted by the Parliamentary Assembly in 1969, highlighting the Roma contribution to Europe’s cultural diversity and the need to guarantee their rights. It was followed by a Committee of Ministers Resolution in 1975. A review of the materials produced by Council of Europe bodies such as the Committee of Ministers, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe (Congress), the Commissioner for Human Rights, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), the European Committee of Social Rights (ECSR), the Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM) and the Committee of Experts of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (ECRML) reveals that the human rights of Roma 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 “Human Rights of Roma and Travellers in Europe” – Report of the Commissioner for Human Rights, Council of Europe 2012.

³ Roma and/or Travellers are covered under the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM) in at least 30 Council of Europe member states (out of the 39 State Parties to the FCNM) Parties. Furthermore, out of the 25 State Parties to the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (ECRML), 17 have officially recognised Romani as a minority language traditionally present on their territory.

Travellers have increasingly gained traction in the activities and output of these Council of Europe bodies over time. The Roma and Traveller related case-law of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) has also expanded.

The Council of Europe also created specific intergovernmental bodies dealing with the human rights of Roma, such as the Group of Specialists on Roma/Gypsies (MG-S-ROM), set up in 1995 as the first Council of Europe intergovernmental body responsible for regularly reviewing the human rights situation of the Roma and Travellers in Europe, and later renamed Committee of Experts on Roma and Travellers (same acronym). The MG-S-ROM, was replaced in 2011 by the Ad-hoc Committee of Experts on Roma and Traveller Issues (CAHROM) and now includes designated members from 41 member states (all those which have a Roma and/or Traveller population however small it may be).

On 20 October 2010, the Council of Europe strengthened its political commitment to the inclusion of Roma and Travellers through the adoption of the "[Strasbourg Declaration on Roma](#)". On 2 March 2016, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe adopted the [Thematic Action Plan on the Inclusion of Roma and Travellers \(2016-2019\)](#) which focuses on three major priorities:

- 1) Tackling anti-Roma and anti-Traveller prejudice, discrimination and crimes more effectively;
- 2) Demonstrate innovative models for inclusive policies for the most vulnerable;
- 3) Promote innovative models for local-level solutions.

IMPLEMENTATION STATE OF PLAY

During the first two years of implementation, the Thematic Action Plan (TAP) has ensured a coherent approach to the Council of Europe's work on the inclusion of Roma and Travellers, helping to demonstrate both the Organisation's capacity to apply its instruments and tools towards the achievement of this goal, as well as the commitment of member states to furthering the inclusion of Roma and Travellers.

The main achievements so far include the development and adoption of new standards, such as Recommendation [CM/Rec\(2017\)10](#) on improving access to justice for Roma and Travellers in Europe, the provision of peer reviews through the thematic work and reports of the Ad hoc Committee of Experts on Roma and Traveller Issues (CAHROM) and the organisation of co-operation and capacity-building activities in the framework of Joint Programmes implemented with the European Commission, such as INSCHOOL, JUSTROM, ROMACT, ROMACTED and ROMED.

Member states have supported the implementation of the Thematic Action Plan through voluntary contributions (in 2016-2018 from Finland, Germany, Greece and Hungary) and staff secondments (Austria, Greece, and Poland). The Parliamentary Assembly and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe have also given political support to the implementation of the Thematic Action Plan. The Council of Europe has also co-operated with international partners, including UNESCO, OSCE/ODIHR, OSF, ECMI and IHRA for the implementation of several activities.

This Thematic Action Plan has enhanced the commitment and co-operation between the various sectors of the Council of Europe and strengthened synergies. Furthermore, it has contributed to the implementation of the Action Plan on "Building Inclusive Societies" (2016-2019).

BACKGROUND TO THE TOPIC FOR THE 6th DIALOGUE MEETING

Despite the above-mentioned progress, Roma and Travellers in many Council of Europe member states continue to be socially and economically marginalised, in particular in their countries of origin which impedes their full participation in society and effective exercise of civic responsibilities. This undermines the respect of their human rights and propagates prejudice and anti-Roma rhetoric (including in public and political discourse).

Any effective response to this situation will have to combine social and economic inclusion / integration in their country of origin and the effective protection of human rights. The process must be embraced and supported by society as a whole - both by those to be included and those who should include. A genuine and effective participation of Roma and Travellers, as citizens, is a precondition for success. As situations differ from country to country, the role of international organisations should be first and foremost to support and assist the efforts carried out at national, regional and especially local level.

Given the huge challenges, but also taking account of the present budgetary climate, the Council of Europe must carefully select its strategic priorities and combine its core competencies, build upon the initiatives which have proven the most valuable and innovate through the development of new initiatives. The work of the Council of Europe on Roma has **three priorities: the fight against anti-Gypsyism, stronger local-level implementation and improving the situation of the most vulnerable - women, children and young people.** The Council of Europe supports national, regional and local authorities in their implementation of their commitments on Roma and Travellers and development of inclusive policies and institutions.

OBJECTIVE OF THE 6th DIALOGUE MEETING

Taking into consideration the:

- (i) [Strasbourg Declaration on Roma](#), where member states have agreed to promote effective participation of Roma in social, political and civic life, including active participation of representatives of Roma in decision-making mechanisms affecting them, and cooperation with independent authorities such as Ombudsmen in the field of human rights protection and ensure close cooperation with Roma communities at all levels, pan-European, national, regional and local, in the implementation of these commitments;
- (ii) [Thematic Action Plan on the Inclusion of Roma and Travellers \(2016-2019\)](#) and its identified priority on supporting the participation of Roma and Travellers in local decision-making;
- (iii) [First Progress report](#) (2017) on Implementing the Thematic Action Plan on the Inclusion of Roma and Travellers (2016-2019);
- (iv) [Second Progress report](#) (2018) on Implementing the Thematic Action Plan on the Inclusion of Roma and Travellers (2016-2019);

the 6th meeting of the Council of Europe Dialogue with Roma and Traveller Civil Society will focus on a **Civil Society assessment of the implementation of the Council of Europe Thematic Action Plan on the Inclusion of Roma and Travellers (2016-2019) and will:**

- **Provide an opportunity for reflection;**
- **Assess the relevance** of the topics in the Thematic Action Plan on the Inclusion of Roma and Travellers (2016-2019) and **identify and propose** topics that should be included in the Council of Europe's post-2019 Roma and Traveller agenda, whilst taking in consideration recent developments and political trends in the member states;
- **Identify and propose** additional key stakeholders at national level who could become partners in the implementation of the Thematic Action Plan and help to ensure its sustainability;

- **Identify and propose** appropriate **measures and tools** to fight anti-Gypsyism and to improve the situation of Roma and Traveller women, children and young people in Europe;
- **Discuss possible ways of establishing** early warning and response mechanisms;
- **Highlight examples** of good practices in the member states.

EXPECTED DIALOGUE OUTCOMES

The involvement of Roma and Traveller communities, at every level of policy formulation, implementation and monitoring is an essential component of the Council of Europe's policy regarding Roma and Travellers.

Whilst recognising that the responsibility of Roma and Traveller integration lies first and foremost with the member states, the Council of Europe considers that other actors (local and regional authorities, civil society and international organisations) have an important role to play in terms of policies and practices.

Civil society has the necessary network and knowledge about the situation of Roma and Travellers on the ground and can contribute to assist member states and the Council of Europe in meeting their commitments. The role of Roma and Traveller civil society is to provide support and be the bridge between Roma and Traveller communities and decision and policy making. As complementary actors, they can facilitate the directions of Council of Europe actions through constructive and mutual dialogue.

The 6th Dialogue will serve as a consultation platform for assessing the successes and challenges resulting from the implementation of the [Thematic Action Plan on the Inclusion of Roma and Travellers \(2016-2019\)](#) and for identifying and proposing the priority areas, key targets and effective strategies which should be incorporated in the Council of Europe's post-2019 Roma and Traveller agenda.

It will also serve as a policy-making forum for Roma and Traveller civil society organisations and other stakeholders to improve their knowledge, exchange experiences and share best practices, plan future co-operation activities and identify possibilities for promoting Roma and Traveller political and public participation.

PARTICIPATION

Taking into account the:

- **Thematic Action Plan on the Inclusion of Roma and Travellers (2016-2019)**, which seeks to empower the most vulnerable among Roma and Travellers by strengthening their protection against all forms of discrimination, and the
- **Roma Youth Action Plan** of the Council of Europe, which supports the development of leadership and advocacy competencies among Roma youth leaders;

Roma and Traveller experts from local civil society organisations and representatives of Roma and Traveller organisations, including youth and women organisations that have been working with the Council of Europe and with expertise in the areas covered by the Action Plan will be invited to participate.

The final evaluation of the implementation of the Thematic Action Plan in 2019 will also include broad stakeholder consultations, including governments of member states through their Permanent Representations and CAHROM members and partner international organisations.

DATES AND VENUE

The meeting will take place at the Council of Europe in Strasbourg, France, in the Agora Building, Room G.01, on 15 October 2018 from 9.30 a.m. to 6.00 p.m, and on 16 October 2018 from 9.30 a.m. to 1.30 p.m.

Travel and subsistence expenses, as well as visa fees, if necessary, related to the participation in this 6th Dialogue meeting will be reimbursed according to Council of Europe rules and regulations.