

DRTO(2022)1

Strasbourg, 31 March 2022

13th Meeting of the Council of Europe Dialogue

with Roma and Traveller¹ civil society

“Defending the rights of Roma and Traveller children”

10-11 May 2022

Online / Strasbourg, Council of Europe, Palais Room 3

Concept Note

BACKGROUND

Most Roma and Traveller children are members of segregated and discriminated communities in Europe and while some have escaped from material deprivation, millions still face discrimination and human rights violations on a daily basis. This is due to factors such as prevalent antigypsyism and weaknesses in national legislation as well as in its implementation, slow progress and systemic failures of Roma and Traveller inclusion policies regarding segregated housing and education policies, insufficient Traveller site provision and slum clearance policies, lack of access to and short-comings of local family and social protection systems, family benefits and services, lack of access to justice and health care services, which all increase Roma and Traveller children’s plight and vulnerability.

Discrimination against Roma and Traveller children starts early, often already before they are born, as both mothers and babies suffer from inadequate and dangerous living conditions, malnutrition, and lack of access to pre- and postnatal care, including immunisation. According to data of UNICEF² and European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) surveys³, Roma infants in many European countries are still more likely than others to be born underweight, less likely to be registered at birth, and many lack birth certificates that would entitle them to a whole range of services, including early childhood education. Roma children are also less likely than non-Roma children to start or complete primary school, and Roma girls, in particular, are far less likely to attend secondary school. This kind of discrimination has a life-long impact on their social well-being and lives. Discrimination fuels Roma and Traveller children’s socio-economic and cultural exclusion and so do their poverty and poor living conditions which often reinforce

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 UNICEF’s internationally comparable Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) Monitoring the situation of Roma and Traveller children and their health, education, child development and child protection which measure the progress made in the EU member states towards the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), available at: [Surveys - UNICEF MICS](#).

³ European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) survey data, available at: [Roma | European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights \(europa.eu\)](#).

the stereotyped and prejudiced views regarding them among policymakers, the public and other children.

Regardless of many inner strengths and survival mechanisms of Roma and Traveller communities, the above-mentioned factors, together with the pervasive social norms that condone violence against children and deny their agency as human rights holders, make Roma and Traveller children often hardest hit by any social, economic, sanitary crisis or war. Therefore, there is a clear need for strengthening children's rights and rule of law-based approaches both in the work of the Council of Europe, its member States and the Roma and Traveller civil society and for protecting Roma children through humanitarian aid, immediate sheltering and evacuations and asylum, if needed.

Complying with article 2 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and by applying an anti-discrimination approach in line with article 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights, the Council of Europe accounts for children's varied situations and fights discrimination against all groups of children in conditions of vulnerability, including Roma and Traveller children, children with disabilities, children living in poverty, children living and/or working on the streets, children without parental support (including children left behind by their parents due to labour migration) and in alternative care, LGBTI children, children whose parents use drugs, children in the context of migration and forced displacement and children belonging to national or ethnic minorities.

In order to encourage progress in these policy areas, the Council of Europe has developed a [new Strategy for the Rights of the Child \(2022-2027\)](#) which will be launched in Rome in April 2022. The new Strategy aims at developing actions supporting the Council of Europe's strategic agenda for human rights, democracy and the rule of law in the digital age. At the same time, it aims at finding synergies with priorities and actions proposed by other Council of Europe strategies and action plans, such as the Disability Strategy (2017-2023), the Gender Equality Strategy (2018-2023), the Youth Sector Strategy 2030, the Council of Europe's Action Plan on protecting vulnerable persons in the context of migration and asylum in Europe (2021-2025) and the [Strategic Action Plan for Roma and Traveller Inclusion \(2020-2025\)](#).

When implementing the Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2022-2027), the Council of Europe and the Steering Committee for the Rights of the Child (CDENF) will adopt the following approaches:

- 1) Gender-sensitive approach;
- 2) Anti-discrimination approach; and
- 3) Child participation approach.

The six priority areas of the aforementioned strategy are:

- Freedom from violence for all children,
- Equal opportunities and social inclusion for all children,
- Access to and safe use of technologies for all children,
- Child-friendly justice for all children,
- Giving a voice to every child, and
- Children's rights in crisis and emergency situations.

Under these priority areas, special measures have been planned regarding Roma and Traveller children, for example in the following fields:

- Raising awareness and adopting stronger action to end **gender-based violence** (including **forced and/or early marriages of Roma children**), **violence against children in situations of vulnerability, bullying, cyberbullying and peer violence**, including harmful sexual behavior by children (part 1.2.1).
- Combatting **racism/antigypsyism** and tackling issues related to **the exclusion of Roma and Traveller children, including poverty, inadequate access to education and healthcare, early and/or forced marriages, or human trafficking** (part 2.2.7).
- **Fighting digital exclusion and ensuring equal access to the digital environment**, including for children with disabilities and children belonging to national minorities, in particular Roma and Traveller children, as well as in the context of distance learning (part 3.1.7).
- Working on **child-friendly justice**, the Council of Europe will consider the needs of children in situations of vulnerability, including Roma and Traveller children.
- Working on **child participation**, the Council of Europe will follow a gender-sensitive approach by ensuring girls' full and effective involvement in child participation processes and anti-discrimination approach by including children in situations of vulnerability in participatory processes, such as children on the move, children belonging to national or ethnic minorities, including Roma and Traveller children, children in institutional and alternative care or children with disabilities.

The last measure is particularly important because many negative stereotypes of Roma and Traveller people persist, and children are particularly vulnerable to their harmful impact. In order to combat these stereotypes existing among children, the Council of Europe has earlier developed a child-friendly version of the [Dosta! Campaign "4Children-by-Children"\(2019\)](#). This initiative has strengthened children's participation and produced child-friendly materials through a child consultation process and specially designed 'think tank' activities, which involved altogether 70 children between the ages of 12 and 15 from Albania, Hungary and Spain. A historically significant step forward is also the Council of Europe's 2020 [Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to member States to include the history of Roma and/or Travellers in school curricula and teaching materials](#). The Council of Europe has earlier also created and implemented a [Roma Youth Action Plan](#), which includes numerous trainings, events and political schools in order to empower young Roma and Traveller people and to support their full participation in public decision-making processes and structures. These emancipatory and empowering lines of Council of Europe youth work will be continued in the future to foster democratic youth participation.

Other significant Council of Europe's long-term investments in Roma children's rights have been made through the implementation of the [Council of Europe Strategic Action Plan for Roma and Traveller Inclusion \(2020-2025\)](#), including through the implementation of European Union and Council of Europe Joint Programmes such as "Inclusive schools: Making a difference for Roma children (INSCHOOL)", which promotes the rights of Roma children by undertaking activities to facilitate their access to inclusive quality education, "Roma Women's Access to Justice – JUSTROM" (2016-2022) and "ROMACT – Building Capacity for Roma Inclusion at Local Level" (2013-2024)⁴, which provides also direct support to schools as well as social and child protection services to address the issues of Roma children in disadvantaged communities.

The 13th meeting of the Council of Europe Dialogue with Roma and Traveller civil society will take stock of the current state of the Roma and Traveller children's rights protection in

⁴ [ROMACT | Support and coordinate actions to assist the Roma community \(coe-romact.org\)](#)

Council of Europe member states and Roma and Traveller communities. Participants are also invited to discuss the impact of the COVID-19 crisis in this context and to present examples of good practice developed by member states and civil society organisations. The meeting will also discuss the [new Strategy for the Rights of the Child \(2022-2027\)](#) its future implementation, as well as the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights which Roma and Traveller children everywhere are entitled to benefit from. The discussions will also draw attention to the question of how international and Council of Europe bodies such as the European Court of Human Rights, GREVIO, GRETA, the [Committee of Experts on Roma and Traveller Issues \(ADI-ROM\)](#) and its Rapporteur on Children's Rights, civil society, government representatives and local service providers can monitor and evaluate the situation of Roma and Traveller children and work together with them in order to ensure that their access to rights will improve.

OBJECTIVES OF THE 13TH DIALOGUE MEETING

The meeting will:

- bring together representatives of different Roma and Traveller civil society organisations and different services of the Council of Europe Secretariat and member state authorities currently working for the protection and promotion of the rights of Roma and Traveller children;
- aim to develop co-operation between these organisations and the Council of Europe Secretariat to promote active measures at member state level to safeguard and develop Roma and Traveller children's access to rights, and to promote children's active participation in decision-making;
- take stock of current violations of the rights of Roma and Traveller children in member States and of states' responses to these infringements;
- provide an overview of the new Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2022-2027) and relevant legal instruments, policies and practices to support the full realisation of the rights of Roma and Traveller children at European and national level;
- identify different authorities that have specific roles and responsibilities concerning the protection of the rights of Roma and Traveller children and discuss concerns and possible gaps in national legislation, policy and practice in relation to children's rights; and
- share examples of good practice and children's rights initiatives implemented by member states' governments, municipalities and civil society organisations.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

- Increased knowledge of the situation of Roma and Traveller children and of the realisation of their rights;
- increased understanding of the role of Roma and Traveller civil society organisations and the tools available to them for actively contributing to the work of promoting the rights of Roma and Traveller children; and
- increased awareness of Council of Europe instruments, tools and activities supporting the full realisation of the rights of Roma and Traveller children and current responses regarding their neglect or violation.

PARTICIPATION

25 civil society participants will be chosen through an open call disseminated via the public website of the Council of Europe's Roma and Travellers Team. Participants will be representatives of Roma and Traveller organisations, including representatives of youth and women's organisations, and experts from international, national and local civil society organisations. Priority will be given to representatives who hold specific experience and expertise regarding the five priority areas of the previous Council of Europe [Strategy for the Rights of the Child \(2016-2021\)](#), which are:

- 1) equal opportunities for all children;
- 2) participation of all children;
- 3) a life free from violence for all children;
- 4) child-friendly justice for all children; and
- 4) rights of the child in the digital environment;

Participants must be competent to work in English, French or Romani, which are the working languages of the meeting.

The call is open to **representatives of Roma and Traveller civil society** organisations. Interested candidates must complete an online Application Form **by Monday 18 April 2022, midnight, Central European Time (CET)**.

Incomplete applications or applications received after that deadline will not be considered.

Please note that only successful applicants will be informed. Notifications will be sent out by the end of April 2022.

Participation is subject to existing travel, public health and sanitary restrictions applicable in France and/or other countries during the time of the 13th Dialogue meeting (10-11 May 2022).

DATES AND VENUE

The meeting will take place on 10 May 2022 from 09:30-16:45 and on 11 May 2022 from 9:00-15:15 in person in Strasbourg and via the KUDO conferencing system.

13th Dialogue meeting – working and background documents:

- Agenda of the 13th Dialogue meeting
- Concept Paper of the 13th Dialogue meeting
- Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2022-2027)
- Council of Europe Strategic Action Plan for Roma and Traveller Inclusion (2020-2025)