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Empowering Roma youth through participation: effective policy design at local and regional levels

Current Affairs Committee

Rapporteurs:¹ Inger LINGE (R, EPP/CCE)
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Summary

The plight of Roma people, who face massive discrimination and disadvantage, was brought centre stage in 2010 when the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Thorbjørn Jagland, convened a high-level meeting to discuss the situation of Roma in Europe. Young Roma face the same discrimination and disadvantages as their elders, but also sometimes have to cope with the weight of securely anchored traditions. In addition, they have to endure the same problems as all young people today: unemployment, social and economic exclusion, difficult transitions to adulthood, and an uncertain future. With young Roma people, however, these problems are exacerbated by the fact they are Roma.

The report proposes action that must be taken by local and regional authorities when designing policies to ensure Roma youth have full access to their social rights, such as education and employment, and to combat the high levels of discrimination and anti-Gypsyism to which they are subjected. Attention also needs to be paid to young Roma women and girls and to other vulnerable groups, such as those with disabilities, LGBT persons, migrants and undocumented young people, who face multiple forms of discrimination. The report also puts forward proposals for empowering young Roma through their better participation in society, and for strengthening the Roma youth movement.

1 L: Chamber of Local Authorities / R: Chamber of Regions
EPP/CCE: European People's Party Group in the Congress
SOC: Socialist Group of the Congress
ILDG: Independent and Liberal Democrat Group of the Congress
ECR: European Conservatives and Reformists Group
NR: Members not belonging to a political group of the Congress

Empowering Roma youth through participation: effective policy design at local and regional levels

RESOLUTION 366 (2014)²

1. The history of European repression against the Roma, which has taken many forms, goes back several hundred years. This discrimination continues today, and indeed has escalated in recent years.
2. Numerous efforts have been launched at European level which aim to guarantee respect for the human rights of Roma and promote their social inclusion. The Council of Europe adopted its Strasbourg Declaration in 2010 in which it renewed its commitment to address human rights issues relating to Roma. The Declaration recognised that the primary responsibility for promoting inclusion lay within the member states at national, regional but especially local level.
3. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe responded to this Declaration by adopting Resolution 333(2011) and Recommendation 315(2011) on “the situation of Roma in Europe: a challenge for local and regional authorities” and launched, in March 2013, the European Alliance of Towns and Regions for Roma Inclusion.
4. It is debateable, however, whether these instruments, which also include the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies and the OSCE Action Plan on improving the situation of Roma and Sinti, are sufficient to cover the needs and address the problems faced by young Roma in their everyday lives.
5. The Council of Europe Youth Department launched a Roma Youth Action Plan, based on proposals made by 60 Roma youth leaders during a Roma Youth Conference in 2011, to address the difficulties encountered by Roma youth and to make proposals for action to overcome these challenges and to empower Roma Youth. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities decided to examine what strategies and policies local and regional authorities could implement to the same end.
6. Young Roma face similar challenges as the rest to the Roma community, such as discrimination, anti-Gypsyism and poor access to social rights. However, they also have to cope with the weight of securely anchored Romani traditions and cultural heritage. In addition, they have to endure the same problems as all young people today: unemployment, social and economic exclusion, difficult transitions to adulthood, an uncertain future.
7. Poor educational attainment opens up a vicious cycle of poverty and social exclusion. Without qualifications and skills, employment is difficult to find. For young people, taking up gainful employment is considered to be a crucial step in their personal development and in forming their identity. It is an important basis for securing one’s livelihood, for participating and positioning oneself in society. Paid employment is important for exiting the poverty cycle and opening up access to other social rights such as housing and healthcare. Without employment, Roma youth run the risk of being permanently excluded from mainstream society and falling into the underclass.
8. Young people today are facing challenges such as difficult transitions to autonomy and high unemployment, brought about by the economic and financial crisis. Young Roma people’s situation is worsened by the stigmatisation and discrimination to which they are subjected. This is even worse for young Roma women and girls and for vulnerable groups such as those with disabilities, LGBT persons, migrants and undocumented young people.
9. Because their knowledge of their heritage and culture is sometimes incomplete, but also because some Roma youth activists feel certain aspects of Romani traditions run contrary to the respect of human rights, young Roma are no longer sure of their own identity.
10. In order to be able to participate meaningfully in decision and policy making, Roma youth activists and organisations need to be strengthened by acquiring knowledge and skills to be able to undertake advocacy activities and formulate policy messages.

2. Debated and adopted by the Congress on 26 March 2014, 2nd Sitting (see Document CG(26)8, explanatory memorandum), rapporteurs: John WARMISHAM, Italy (L, SOC) and Inger LINGE, Sweden (R, EPP/CCE).

11. Local and regional authorities must go beyond expressions of good will and be proactive in implementing actions and policies that “support the creation of an environment where young Roma people can grow up free from discrimination and confident about their future perspectives, while appreciating their plural, cultural backgrounds and affiliations as young people, as Roma, as citizens of their countries, and as active Europeans”.³

12. Local and regional authorities can be inspired by the Council of Europe’s Roma Youth Action Plan and the EU Youth Strategy’s guidelines to develop different ways of involving Roma youth. These specific policies can empower young Roma and help their integration into society.

13. In the light of the above, the Congress invites local and regional authorities to:

a. implement the recommendations in its Resolutions 333(2011) on “the situation of Roma in Europe: a challenge for local and regional authorities”, 346(2012) on “youth and democracy: the changing face of youth political engagement” and 319(2010) on the “integration of young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods” as they pertain to young Roma;

b. publicly commit to: working with young Roma and their organisations to improve their access to their social rights; combatting discrimination and anti-Gypsyism; and promoting their participation in policy and decision making;

c. join the European Alliance of Towns and Regions for Roma Inclusion;

d. ensure youth policies are explicit but not exclusive, focusing on Roma youth as a target group but not to the exclusion of other young people who share similar realities;

e. with regard to education, invest in programmes promoting school attendance and reduce the number of dropouts; in schools, challenge non-inclusive practices and adopt a zero tolerance approach to bullying and discrimination, install complaint mechanisms; involve Roma parents to raise cultural awareness of teachers, staff and non-Roma parents; engage with Roma parents to help them to understand their rights, entitlements and duties with regard to their children’s education; arrange for extra-curricular schooling to improve pupils’ educational levels; organise information sessions for pupils with their peers having succeeded in the education system to encourage them to commit to their education; promote the recognition of competences and skills gained through non-formal education; employ members of the Roma community to liaise between schools, the education department and Roma families; raise awareness of good practices so schools can learn from one another; employ Roma teachers and teaching assistants;

f. with regard to employment, employ Roma mediators to offer career guidance and counselling; propose vocational and basic skills training; offer work placements in municipal institutions to help the transition from education to the labour market;

g. combat discrimination and anti-Gypsyism by providing grants or in-kind support to projects which strengthen young Roma people’s understanding of the key concepts of human rights, discrimination and anti-Gypsism, or informing on these concepts in schools and other institutions; organising events which bring together Roma and non-Roma youth to promote intercultural dialogue and learning to help break down prejudices and stereotypes and build trust;

h. help strengthen young Roma people’s identity by introducing Romani culture and history into school curricula or organising information activities on these subjects;

i. empower Roma youth by enabling them to participate meaningfully in joint decision-making structures by providing or funding training programmes on youth participation, human rights education and democratic citizenship or including these subjects in school curricula; supporting Roma youth organisations’ projects either financially or with in-kind contributions; ensuring local youth councils are fully representative of the local youth population;

3 Roma Youth Action Plan.

j. contribute, either financially or with in-kind contributions, to initiatives to strengthen Roma youth leaders' leadership skills and the capacity of Roma organisations, and generally create the conditions necessary for supporting the initiatives taken by the Roma youth themselves to strengthen the Roma youth movement; employ youth workers, especially of Roma origin, to work with Roma communities;

k. raise awareness of the Council of Europe No Hate Speech Movement.

14. The Congress welcomes the launch of the joint Council of Europe/European Commission ROMACT project in October 2013. It encourages the European Alliance of Cities and Regions for Roma Inclusion to ensure its participants include a youth dimension in their policies to promote Roma inclusion.

Empowering Roma youth through participation: effective policy design at local and regional levels

RECOMMENDATION 354 (2014)⁴

1. The history of European repression against the Roma, which has taken many forms, goes back several hundred years. This discrimination continues today, and indeed has escalated in recent years.

2. Numerous efforts have been launched at European level which aim to guarantee respect for the human rights of Roma and promote their social inclusion, however it is debateable whether these instruments are sufficient to cover the needs and address the problems faced by young Roma in their everyday lives.

3. The Council of Europe Youth Department drew up a Roma Youth Action Plan, based on proposals made by 60 Roma youth leaders during a Roma Youth Conference, to address the difficulties encountered by young Roma and to make proposals for action to overcome these challenges to empower Roma Youth.

4. The Congress's European Alliance of Towns and Regions for Roma Inclusion can be instrumental in promoting empowerment of young Roma at local and regional levels.

5. Young Roma face similar challenges to the rest of the Roma community, such as discrimination, anti-Gypsyism and poor access to social rights. However, they also have to cope with the weight of securely anchored Romani traditions and cultural heritage. In addition, they have to endure the same problems as all young people today: unemployment, social and economic exclusion, difficult transitions to adulthood, an uncertain future.

6. However, Roma youth are not perceived as priority stakeholders in the programmes designed within the EU Framework for National Roma Strategies and the National Action Plans of the Decade of Roma Inclusion. In general, policies at national level do not address the needs of and difficulties faced by Roma youth.

7. In the light of the above, the Congress recommends that the Committee of Ministers encourage member States to:

- a. support local and regional Roma youth policies;
- b. include the Roma youth dimension in their youth policies, and develop strategies that focus on Roma youth and reflect the reality of their everyday lives;
- c. support research on the situation of Roma youth to enable the development of evidence-based policies;
- d. set up national advisory councils on Roma youth issues, run on a co-management basis, to advise on national policies.

8. The Congress also recommends that the Committee of Ministers prolong the Roma Youth Action Plan beyond 2015 to enable its longer term objectives to be achieved.

9. Furthermore, the Congress welcomes the fact that the ROMACT project, the joint Council of Europe/European Commission ROMED programme and the Open Society Foundation project MERI (Mayors Making the Most of EU Funds for Roma Inclusion) will co-ordinate their activities within the framework of the European Alliance of Towns and Regions for Roma Inclusion, thus avoiding any duplication of efforts in municipalities' action to promote Roma inclusion. The Congress encourages the three initiatives to cooperate on the development of Roma youth policies.

⁴ Debated and adopted by the Congress on 26 March 2013, 2nd Sitting (see Document CG(26)8, explanatory memorandum), rapporteurs : John WARMISAHM, United-Kingdom (L, SOC) and Inger LINGE, Sweden (R, EPP/CCE).

Empowering Roma youth through participation: effective policy design at local and regional levels

EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM⁵

1. Introduction

1. The history of European repression against the Roma⁶ goes back several hundred years following the Roma migration from the Indian subcontinent. The methods of repression have varied over time and have included enslavement, enforced assimilation, expulsion, internment and mass killings.⁷ Events over the past few years have highlighted the continuing discrimination and disadvantage faced by the estimated 10-12 million Roma in Europe. In its Strasbourg Declaration adopted in 2010, the Council of Europe renewed its commitment to address human rights issues relating to Roma and recognised that the primary responsibility for promoting inclusion lay within the member states at national, regional but especially local level.

2. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe responded to this Declaration by adopting Resolution 333(2011) and Recommendation 315(2011) on “the situation of Roma in Europe: a challenge for local and regional authorities”. It also organised a Summit of Mayors, the participants in which committed to setting up a European Alliance of Cities and Regions for Roma Inclusion. The Alliance, with 120 participating municipalities and regions, was launched in March 2013.

3. The Congress’s actions, along with the Strasbourg Declaration on Roma, the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies and the OSCE Action Plan on improving the situation of Roma and Sinti undoubtedly constitute a significant step towards guaranteeing respect for the human rights and the social inclusion of Roma in Europe. However, in 2011, the Council of Europe’s Youth Department had doubts that these instruments would be sufficient to cover the needs and address the problems faced by Roma youth in their everyday lives as they were not considered a priority stakeholder in them.

4. As such, the Youth Department invited 60 Roma youth leaders to take part in a Roma Youth Conference to discuss the difficulties encountered by young Roma and to make proposals for action. The conclusions of the Conference were translated into a Roma Youth Action Plan. This Action Plan sets out to “support the creation of an environment where young Roma can grow up free from discrimination and confident about their future perspectives, while appreciating their plural, cultural backgrounds and affiliations as young people, as Roma, as citizens of their countries, and as active Europeans”.⁸

5. For its part, the Congress’s Current Affairs Committee charged us, its co-rapporteurs on Roma Youth, to examine what strategies and policies local and regional authorities could implement to the same end.

6. In line with the Congress’s firm commitment to youth participation, material for our report was collected on several occasions, including: during consultation meetings we held with representatives of the Roma youth movement in June 2012, and with Congress members, representatives of Roma youth organisations and other stakeholders working with Roma youth in November 2012; a seminar on the situation of Roma youth, organised by the Roma youth movement in May 2013; as well as at a hearing held during a meeting of the Current Affairs Committee with representatives of the Roma youth movement in June 2013.

7. These consultation meetings were convened to explore specifically the situation of Roma youth, the type of action and policies they want from local and regional authorities but also to see what those authorities are prepared to offer. Because of the current economic and financial crisis, there has been a rise in extremism and populism making some politicians wary of promoting policies to further Roma inclusion.

⁵ This explanatory memorandum is based on the document prepared by the Council of Europe consultant Beata BISLIM, Forum of European Roma Young People, which is available from the Secretariat upon request.

⁶ The term “Roma” used at the Council of Europe refers to Roma, Sinti, Kale and related groups in Europe, including Travellers and the Eastern groups (Dom and Lom), and covers the wide diversity of the groups concerned, including persons who identify themselves as Gypsies.

⁷ *Human rights of Roma and Travellers in Europe*, Commission for Human Rights, Council of Europe, February 2012.

⁸ Roma Youth Action Plan.

8. The report also draws inspiration from the conclusions of the Roma Youth Conference as well as from other sources: a number of recommendations drawn up by the Forum of European Roma Young People (FERYP) during a study session organised in 2009; a policy brief for the European Commission, the EU member states and participating countries in the Decade of Roma Inclusion, written by Orhan Usein and Stanislav Daniel; recommendations formulated during the International Conference on Roma Youth Activism and Participation on 18 June 2013, organised within the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015 some of which, although addressed to national governments, are also relevant to our report.

9. This report should be read in conjunction with the Congress's reports CG(21)8 on "the situation of Roma in Europe: a challenge for local and regional authorities", CG(23)9 on "youth and democracy: the changing face of youth political engagement" and CG(19)15 on the "integration of young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods". Many of the recommendations for action in Resolutions 333(2011), 346(2012) and 319(2010), as well as in Recommendations 315(2011) and 327(2012), are also valid for young Roma and will not be repeated here.

10. Finally, we should like to draw the attention of the European Alliance of Cities and Regions for Roma Inclusion to the recommendations we address to local and regional authorities. We invite the Alliance to take them into consideration in its future work.

2. Action for Roma youth empowerment and inclusion

11. Very little research has been done on Roma youth as a specific group which makes it difficult to give accurate figures and information on their situation, however it is estimated about 4 million young Roma live in the 47 Council of Europe member states. The Roma population is younger than the EU average: 26.7% of Roma are aged between 15-29 compared to 19.3% in the EU.⁹ The average age of Roma is 25 compared to 40 in the EU.¹⁰ Young Roma are denied access to their human and social rights and are, as a result, socially and economically marginalised, and thus unable to participate fully in society. In addition, they have to cope with discrimination and anti-Gypsyism.

12. "To achieve full and effective equality [...], young Roma should provoke a public debate and call upon responsible authorities and institutions to strengthen and implement vigorously anti-discrimination and social inclusion legislation and policies".¹¹ The young Roma who took part in the various consultations mentioned above and the participants in the Roma Youth Conference have provoked this public debate which is why our report uses, as its starting point, the recommendations they made on these occasions. It will suggest how local and regional authorities can respond to these requests to promote young Roma people's access to the social rights of education and employment, as well as how to combat discrimination. It will also make proposals about what is needed to empower Roma youth, and how to ensure Roma youth have their say in decision and policy making at local and regional levels. The role and responsibilities of Roma youth actors in achieving these aims will also be explored.

9 Fundacion Secretariado Gitano "Health and the Roma Community, analysis of the situation in Europe. *Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Greece, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Spain*", Madrid, 2009, p20.

10 http://ec.europa.eu/youth/news/20120419_en.htm.

11 *The right to be young*, Roma Youth Conference Report, prepared by the Youth Department of the Council of Europe, March 2013.

A. Improving access to social rights

13. The participants in the 2011 Roma Youth Conference called for the promotion of measures for real equal opportunities for Roma youth in all aspects of life, including education, employment, health and housing. Although there is no hierarchy of social rights, our report looks in particular at access to education and employment.

1. Education

14. Poor educational attainment opens up a vicious cycle of poverty and social exclusion. Without qualifications and skills, employment is difficult to find, especially in today's climate. Therefore, education constitutes one of the most important vehicles for the inclusion of Roma into mainstream society.

Recommendations from Roma youth

15. Young Roma people's access to their social rights should be monitored and programmes implemented to ensure effective access. An investment in both formal and non-formal education for Roma children and youth should be made, as well as in opportunities for life-long learning. School segregation should be eliminated, efforts made to reduce the number of school dropouts and to ensure that all Roma children complete secondary education.

The situation

16. Despite efforts to expand and improve education for Roma children, as many as 50% fail to complete primary education compared to only 3% of other children.¹² Enrolment in early childhood education for Roma is very low. This trend continues into primary education and many have already left school by the 8th grade, leaving many Roma children with very poor literacy and numeracy skills. In some countries, Roma children are systematically sent to "special schools" for children with learning difficulties. In others, they are segregated, either placed in ghetto schools where there is a majority of Roma children, or segregated into Roma only classes. Policies need to be formulated which improve Roma children's access to early education to ensure improved learning and a successful transition to secondary education.

17. Roma inclusion policies must take into account the needs and circumstances of young Roma girls and women. In particular, Roma girls are the lowest educated group and have the highest illiteracy rate.¹³ Roma girls spend an average of 5.5 years in school compared to 11 for girls in general.¹⁴ Twice as many Roma boys reach high school as girls, whereas in the mainstream population the percentage of girls in high schools is slightly higher than for boys. Research shows the main barrier to education for Roma girls lies in traditional gender patterns in Romani communities: Roma girls do not need education and are expected to marry and look after their siblings and the household.

18. The percentage of Roma children continuing to secondary and/or tertiary education is lower than that of the non-Roma population, less than 0.9%¹⁵ enrol in tertiary education for example. The reasons for this are numerous and include: a family's financial situation; discrimination, the violence and bullying experienced in educational establishments, in particular abuse of Roma girls; or a need for Roma children and young people to engage in some kind of economic activity, including begging and waste collection. Parents' attitudes to education also play a role: in those families where intellectual values are viewed positively, where parents have a higher level of education, children are more likely to attend school.

¹² "Political and Legislative Framework for the Education of Roma Children: Reference Texts and Support Systems", Council of Europe, 2006.

¹³ Chances and choices for Roma girls (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Serbia and Montenegro), study by CARE international, 2011.

¹⁴ Unique action plan to improve Roma education in Republic of Serbia, Ministry of Education and Sports of the republic of Serbia, 2004.

¹⁵ Education for Roma, 2006, A statistical baseline for Central, Eastern and South Eastern Europe, Open Society Institute.

19. In recent years, more and more young Roma have been entering university, thanks in part to organisations such as the Open Society Institutes and the Roma Education Fund which offer scholarships, for which the number of applications has risen over the past years. Higher education is seen not only as a means of economic advancement, but also as a way of advancing the rights and interests of Roma as a people, of giving something back to the community. Other young Roma acknowledge that to reach university, they not only had to prove themselves to others but to overcome their own doubts, often feeling they are worth less than everyone else.¹⁶

20. In the current climate, where youth unemployment stands at 23.4% in the EU,¹⁷ and exceeds 50% in some Council of Europe countries, for example in Spain and Bosnia and Herzegovina, even 60% in Greece, there is a greater demand for a highly educated and skilled workforce. Because of the difficulties they experience in accessing education, young Roma are entering the labour market as poorly educated, unskilled workers and are, thus, greatly disadvantaged.

Some proposals for action by local and regional authorities

21. In addition to the recommendations made in Congress Resolutions 333(2011), para 10.d (on education) and 319(2010), paras 9.e and h (on education and careers guidance), local and regional authorities should, for example: invest in programmes which will promote school attendance and reduce the number of dropouts; challenge non-inclusive practices in schools; involve Roma parents in schools to raise cultural awareness of teachers, staff and non-Roma parents; adopt a zero tolerance approach to bullying and discrimination in schools and install complaint mechanisms; engage with Roma parents to help them to understand their rights, entitlements and duties with regard to their children's education; arrange for extra-curricular schooling to improve pupils' educational levels; organise information sessions for pupils with their peers who have succeeded in the education system to encourage them to commit to their education; promote the recognition of competences and skills gained through non-formal education; employ members of the Roma community to liaise between schools and the education department and Roma families; raise awareness of good practices so schools can learn from one another; employ Roma teachers and teaching assistants.

A concrete example

22. The London Borough of Barnet has created the post of Family Liaison Officer for Gypsy, Roma and Travellers to offer help and advice to members of this community in their daily lives. The Officer is herself an Irish Traveller. Guidance and support is given to Gypsy Roma Traveller families who have recently moved into the Borough to help them to settle in. Children and young people receive assistance and advice to get them back into education and training, for example the Family Liaison Officer attends school meetings with parents and children and discusses the best way to move back into education, whether it be school, college or home education. Support is also given to children, and their families, who are being bullied in school. The Officer provides support and advocacy services, for example to assist with returning benefit help forms, or to help with housing issues; promotes partnerships and networking to schools, health centres and other community projects; organises community training programmes and youth projects to promote education and get the youth into their comfort zone ie community-run projects such as beauty and nail courses and also basic education courses. The Family Liaison Officer also has an important role to play in making people more aware of the culture and practices of the Gypsy Roma Traveller community in the Borough.

23. The London borough of Barnet seeks to address public perceptions of Gypsies and Travellers. The Family Liaison Officer and staff strive to make Gypsies and Travellers a part of the Barnet community, and by offering cultural awareness in schools and health centres they can raise awareness and combat the ignorance and stereotypes about Gypsy and Travellers that can be seen in the press and media.

24. All local and regional councils with a larger Roma community could create similar posts.

¹⁶ <http://www.csmonitor.com/2004/0413/p11s02-legn.html/%28page%29/2>, page 2.

¹⁷ Figure at July 2013, http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics_explained/index.php/Unemployment_statistics.

A concrete example

25. The Jarovnice Settlement in Slovakia is the largest Roma settlement in rural central Europe with 4,500 people of whom 2,233 are children and young people up to age 15. Education standards are low, there is widespread poverty and unemployment stands at almost 100%. The village has only 2 primary schools and one special school, the capacity of which is insufficient to cover the annual supply of first-graders. Children go to school in shifts, there are no play facilities and no community/youth centre. The children used to hang around in the Romani community, isolated from the rest of the village, unable to obtain a decent education. This project, implemented by an NGO, involved a team of volunteers - teachers, mentors, artists - who worked with the children after school to develop their education, talents and motivation, to create a motivating environment and prepare students for secondary school.

26. Local and regional authorities can either implement such projects themselves or work with NGOs and local associations, including Romani organisations, on similar projects.

*2. Employment**Recommendations from Roma youth*

27. Policies and programmes need to be developed that promote access to employment. These include career guidance and counselling services; quality internships; vocational training programmes; as well as support to entrepreneurship and self-employment, including in the shape of grants and funds.

The situation

28. For young people, taking up gainful employment is considered to be a crucial step in their personal development and in forming their identity. It is an important basis for securing one's livelihood, for participating and positioning oneself in society. In modern societies, integration into the labour market is one of the key development tasks on a young person's way to autonomy and independence.¹⁸ Paid employment is most important for exiting the poverty cycle which, in turn, will improve young Roma people's access to other social rights, such as housing and healthcare. If they are unable to find employment, Roma youth run the risk of being permanently excluded from mainstream society and falling into the underclass.

29. In addition, unemployment, job insecurity and low income can lead to de-motivation, low self-esteem, psychological distress, physical health symptoms, increased alcohol consumption, criminal behaviour, a downgrading of aspirations or resignation.¹⁹

30. The difficulty experienced in accessing quality education, and its consequences such as low educational attainment and poor qualifications, is one of the main reasons for the high level of unemployment and problems in finding skilled work for young Roma. The market for unskilled workers is limited, as a result, many young Roma end up working in the shadow economy or relying on seasonal work.

31. Discrimination and deep-rooted stereotypes on behalf of employers are a second source of difficulty to enter the labour market. It is common for a young Roma person to be able to secure employment following a telephone contact with a prospective employer only to discover that the post is no longer vacant once s/he presents her/himself in person for the job. Prejudice and discrimination is also suffered at the hands of co-workers.

32. Living in segregated settlements with poor housing conditions and the lack of a permanent address can also hinder integration into the labour market because settlements are often outside of the town and not connected by public transport routes, thus making commuting difficult. Living in segregated settlements and having quite often attended segregated schools, young Roma have had no opportunity to interact with people outside of their family and community. This can erect an additional barrier when they have to leave their safety zone to search for work.

33. The situation is worse for young Roma women who are in general marginalised from the majority communities, even more so than young Roma men. They remain almost entirely excluded from the formal

¹⁸ CG(23)9FINAL: youth and democracy: the changing face of youth political engagement.

¹⁹ Congress Resolution 346 (2012) on youth and democracy: the changing face of youth political engagement.

economy, constrained by limited educational opportunities, inadequate housing and poor healthcare.²⁰ Their traditional gender and domestic roles, for example early marriage, frequent pregnancies, adult caring roles, are further hurdles. The lack of child care infrastructure near marginalised communities means that, even if they do find employment, they have to choose between employment and looking after their children.

34. Authorities should, however, take into account that, although the Roma are Europe's largest and poorest minority group, they are also one of the fastest growing populations. This means that, in an ageing society with higher life expectancy and declining fertility rates, young Roma must form an ever larger proportion of the labour force. Increasingly, the fiscal burden will need to be carried by young Roma women and men as they join the labour market.²¹

Some proposals for action by local and regional authorities

35. In addition to the recommendations made in Congress Resolutions 346(2012), paras 9.d (on offers of training or education, work experience, training in entrepreneurship and a policy on voluntary activity) and 319(2010), paras 9.f, g and h (on work experience, skills training and careers guidance), Roma mediators can be employed to offer career guidance and counselling; skills training can be proposed, not only offering vocational and basic skills, but also softer skills such as confidence and motivation to get jobs, and training to obtain qualifications that recognise skills Roma youth already have; work placements can be offered in municipal institutions which will help the transition from education to the labour market.

A concrete example

36. The Newo Drom is a project being implemented by the city of Gothenburg, the Roma Association for Cultural Development, SENSUS, a Swedish training academy and Gothenburg Business Organisation.

37. Roma people of all ages are trained in entrepreneurship in order to obtain information, but also the courage to find new ways out of unemployment and into the labour market as both entrepreneurs and employees. The project has been running for 2 years. When asked for their opinion on the training course, the Roma participants wrote "We, Roma people, throughout generations, have always relied upon our own creativity in order to survive in this world. Newo Drom gives us a possibility to find new ways to increase our knowledge on how to develop ideas into working businesses."

38. Local and regional authorities can set up similar training courses in cooperation with partners, such as education and training institutions, business organisations or chambers of commerce and Roma youth organisations.

B. Combatting anti-Gypsyism and discrimination

39. As the Congress's 2012 report on "youth and democracy: the changing face of youth political engagement" described, being young and growing up in Europe today is not easy. The already existing challenges posed by the transition to autonomy have been made harder by the current economic and financial crisis, having in particular a drastic effect on youth employment rates. Roma youth are in the same challenging situation but theirs is worsened by the stigmatisation they face from society, the discrimination and anti-Gypsyism. As the participants in the 2011 Roma Youth Conference pointed out, the situation is even worse for young Roma women and girls, and for vulnerable groups such as those with disabilities, LGBT persons, migrants and undocumented young people.

²⁰ Open Society Institute Network Women's Programme: Your sex and race matter, Romani women.

²¹ Roma inclusion in Central and Eastern Europe, World Bank Policy Note focusing on Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Romania, and Serbia presented at International Steering Committee of Decade of Roma Inclusion.

Recommendations from Roma youth

40. Action is needed to combat the high levels of discrimination which have a deep impact on self-esteem and self-confidence, in particular the multiple forms of discrimination of particularly vulnerable groups such as young women, LGBT youth, HIV-positive individuals, migrants and undocumented young people. Not enough information is available or education proposed on human rights and citizenship. Generally, Roma are negatively portrayed in the media which reinforces prejudices, stereotypes and racist attitudes, more positive information is needed in the media, in school textbooks and other educational sources on Roma culture and the lives of young Roma. There needs to be strong political support for campaigns that address the various forms of racism and discrimination, such as the Council of Europe No Hate Speech Movement. More political will must be demonstrated to include Roma youth in mainstream youth policies and programmes. Young Roma would like to see more programmes and activities which allow for interaction between them and young non-Roma people, in particular as a tool for intercultural learning and tolerance. Measures are needed that promote effective positive measures for equality of opportunity.

The situation

41. Roma people have been subjected to a long history of hostility and discrimination which have contributed to the creation of inward-looking and alienated Roma communities leading separate, parallel lives from the wider community. Young Roma are no exception. However, human rights are universal, they apply to all human beings and allow people to live in dignity, with respect, and free from discrimination.

42. Anti-Gypsyism, as a specific form of racism targeted at Roma, has deep roots in European history. Surveys show that negative attitudes relating to Roma continue to be the strongest and most pervasive among those for all minority groups (Eurobarometer surveys, 2006/2008). Myths and stereotypes about Roma continue to prevail in the minds of the non-Roma population, rooted in ignorance, fear and segregation, and still largely unchallenged by education. The recent resurgence of extremism targeted at Roma and other groups, fostered by the economic recession, fomented by demagogues, and fed by media reports, demonstrates that anti-Gypsyism continues to be potent as a populist political force.²²

43. Roma youth face discrimination not only from the non-Roma community. "Homosexuals are not human. They do not have the same rights as everyone else" (participant in a Roma rights workshop held in 2003).²³ This quotation shows that there is a clash between cultural practices, or tradition, and the overarching human rights standards demanded by young Romani activists, resulting in a clash of cultures, ie human rights values versus Roma values.

44. Homosexuality is firmly rejected in several Roma communities, being seen by many as a disease, a shameful abomination. Patriarchy, cultural traditions and family beliefs lead to a rejection of different sexual orientations among Roma. LGBT persons are frequently excluded from the Romani community, indeed in the past the death penalty was imposed, which was later replaced with a declaration of impurity and expulsion.²⁴ Young people often suffer from a cycle of control and violence from their families, are forced to sever bonds with the community or get married.²⁵ In Roma communities, there is a strong sense of duty towards family, and members who have "come out" run a high risk of isolation and rejection by the community. There are many recorded and unrecorded acts of violence and abuse which result in unhappiness, depression or even suicide. This cultural void, in which an individual's sexual orientation is in conflict with her/his heritage or sense of identity, is also brought about by deep religious beliefs and a strict observance of faith.

45. Peer group discrimination is problematic also, starting in schools where, to avoid being bullied, Roma children and young people are often afraid to admit they are Roma. Young Roma are ostracised in schools and society and have little opportunity for contact with non-Roma youth, or to take part in mainstream youth policies and programmes. It should also be borne in mind that young Roma people's reality is often very different from those of their non-Roma peers: at the age of 17/18, for example, Roma youth are more often than not economically independent and have their own families.

22 CG(21)8, 9 September 2011, The situation of Roma in Europe: a challenge for local and regional authorities.

23 <http://www.errc.org/article/culture-roma-rights-and-human-rights-education-conjunctions-and-disjunctions/2287>.

24 Coming out: Life as a gay Roma (Documentary) produced by Jan Berousek, Nick Maslow & David Tišer 2010.

25 <http://www.parlamentnilisty.cz/zpravy/kauzy/Romsky-aktivista-Majoritni-spolecnost-by-mela-o-Romech-neco-vedet-237836>.

Some proposals for action by local and regional authorities

46. In addition to the recommendations made in Congress resolution 333(2011), paras 10.e.iv (on condemning hate speech and discrimination), para 10.d (on empowerment and participation) and j (on the implementation of the General Policy Recommendation N° 13 on combating anti-Gypsyism and discrimination against Roma, adopted by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance in June 2011), local and regional authorities must go beyond expressions of good will and be proactive in implementing actions and policies to combat and denounce discrimination.

47. Activities at international level have proven that using human-rights based approaches to address the challenges faced by young Roma can empower Roma youth and Roma youth leaders to take action against discrimination. One key aspect of this is information to strengthen young Roma people's understanding of the key concepts of human rights, discrimination and anti-Gypsyism which can be provided by local and regional authorities by means of information days or training courses in schools and youth groups. Alternatively, local Roma youth leaders can be empowered to take action and develop projects with young Roma in their communities thanks to local authority grants or in-kind support.

48. Experience shows that activities to promote intercultural dialogue and learning can be quite successful in bringing young Roma and non-Roma people closer together, in breaking down prejudices and stereotypes and in building trust. Resources can be made available to youth organisations to organise events to facilitate such interaction, such as leisure activities (eg sports programmes, trips); cultural programmes (eg cultural competitions, media programmes); or student exchange programmes. For many young people, this sort of activity is the only opportunity they have for social interaction with young Roma due to their segregated living.

49. In addition to the recommendations made in Congress Resolution 230(2007) on freedom of assembly and expression for lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgendered persons, local and regional authorities should ensure that youth departments and services, responsible for young people's welfare, receive information on the difficulties faced by Roma youth, especially those from vulnerable groups, and are in a position to advise them and signpost them to services or organisations which can help them.

50. Local and regional authorities can be inspired by the EU Youth Strategy's guidelines to develop different ways of involving Roma youth. These specific policies can empower young Roma and help their integration into society.

A concrete example

51. The Velky Meder Youth Centre (Velky Meder Centrum Mladeže) (Slovakia), ProFilo (Italy) and the Roma Academic Club (Romski Akademski Klub) (Slovenia) cooperated on an activity entitled "Let's Win this Game Together" between May and September 2013. The aim was to bring together young Roma and non-Roma from different countries and environments to promote tolerance and mutual learning about different traditions and cultures, to combat discrimination and break down stereotypes and prejudice, as well as to improve communication between Roma and non-Roma youth. Different sports activities like football and volleyball were offered as well as a presentation of traditional dances and music from each partner country. Various workshops about the discrimination and stereotypes the participants faced within their communities were organised. The expected results were that the participants would develop friendships during the exchange which would help remove the stereotypes and Roma and non-Roma youth would learn about each other's different cultures.

52. Local and regional authorities can help finance the organisation of such activities.

A concrete example

53. Leon is 17 years old and from the Czech Roma community. Although he has been in the UK for 8 years, he has no documentation to prove it and thus is unable to access state support, such as housing. He was homeless, having no regular place to stay except temporarily with relatives, thus he travelled around. As with many children in families whose first language is not English, he acted as an interpreter for his family, often having to miss school. He was bullied in school because of his sexuality and had to be tutored from home. When he "came out", his parents disowned him and he had to remove himself from the Roma community. The difficulties in his life made him suicidal, however he was supported with counselling from the Albert Kennedy Trust.

54. He first came into contact with the Ethnic Minority Traveller Achievement Service (EMTAS) when he started arranging events for the Salford Gypsy, Roma, Traveller History Month. Concerned about Leon's homeless status, EMTAS liaised with council officers to find him somewhere to live until he was eighteen and able to access social housing. EMTAS also signposted Leon to the city's Youth Service which supports the LGBT Youth Group and Leon has been attending the group ever since. He has made friends and is well supported. The Youth Service has also helped him to access a twelve week residential course with the Prince's Trust which included two weeks work experience where he helped to renovate a building. He had full attendance on the course and was awarded a level one from the Prince's Trust.

55. Leon has some experience in hairdressing and this is what he would like to do. EMTAS is helping him find a hairdressing course. Although he already speaks good English, he is now planning to do an ESOL course (English for speakers of other languages) which he hopes will help him in his hairdressing career. Recently Leon was a speaker at the council's anti-bullying conference.

56. Local and regional authorities can ensure that youth departments and services, responsible for young people's welfare, receive information on the difficulties faced by Roma youth, especially those from vulnerable groups, and are in a position to advise them and signpost them to services or organisations which can help them.

C. Empowering Roma youth

57. Some young Roma worry that integration is a threat to their identity, others question whether it is possible to have multiple identities, ie as a Roma, a citizen of their country and as a European. Empowering young Roma will enable them to "grow up free from discrimination, confident about their identity and future perspectives".

Recommendations from Roma youth

58. Investment is needed in programmes and training courses that focus on strengthening identity and community building to enable Roma youth to become active citizens and actors of change. More specifically, to foster Romani identity among Roma youth, Romani culture and history should be introduced into school curricula and into non-formal educational activities.

The situation

59. The identity of young Roma needs to be strengthened, for example by learning about Romani culture and history, and bridges between communities and generations built. Often, they do not know enough about their own history, social and cultural diversity, achievements and identity in order to be able to embrace them and to develop a sense of pride in their heritage. This pride would help them to face up to the constant stigmatisation and discrimination. Their self-loathing and self-segregation, brought about as a result of discrimination and exclusion, lead young Roma to hide their ethnic and cultural identity. The role of women in Romani culture is a sensitive issue. Traditional practices, such as early marriages, sexual harassment and the virginity cult, oppose what some consider to be the legitimate right to continue cultural practices and respect for universal human rights. More and more young Roma rights activists are beginning to accept that if they want the majority to acknowledge the injustices Roma people face, they will have to fight traditional practices in Romani communities which violate human rights. An increasing number of young Romani women have begun to voice their opposition to many of these "traditional" practices, which offers proof that they tend to be victims of these acts which they no longer view as legitimate, rather than willing participants.

60. This opposition to traditional practices results in tense relations between Roma youth and elder Roma leaders and Roma communities who put pressure on the young generation to respect their culture and traditions. This pressure contributes to their turmoil.

61. During a recent study session organised in the European Youth Centre by the Forum of European Roma Young People (FERYP), the participants remarked on the motivation they felt seeing the career the interpreter of Romani origin had forged for himself. Personal stories are a powerful tool for motivating young Roma. The positive effects of successful role models should not be under-estimated: seeing how other Roma have been able to succeed in spite of the difficulties they have encountered – they do not hide their identity, on the contrary are proud of it and want to share their “Roma-ness” with others – can be inspiring.

62. By learning about their heritage, young Roma may embrace it and feel proud of it. Once they establish their identity, young Roma can find their place in society and become actively involved in it.

Some proposals for action by local and regional authorities

63. To help strengthen young Roma people’s identity, local and regional authorities can help them to learn about Romani culture and history, for example by introducing these subjects into school curricula or encouraging the organisation of information activities.

D. Promoting active citizenship

64. Young Roma are absent from relevant decision-making bodies and processes, thus they have no possibility to influence policies that could improve their situation.

Recommendations from Roma youth

65. Pilot projects and programmes should be developed to enhance participation using the Congress’s Revised European Charter on the participation of young people in local and regional life as inspiration. Affirmative actions should be launched to ensure the participation of young Roma women. Opportunities must be developed for debate between public institutions and young Roma, this could be in the form of support to the setting up of youth structures. Adequate local youth policies for Roma must be developed in conjunction with organised and non-organised Romani youth, for example through local co-management bodies. Roma youth should be given the opportunity to do voluntary work or participate in mainstream youth organisations and projects. Roma youth have limited access to political participation, their political representation in election processes should be supported.

The situation

66. “Participation in the democratic life of any community is about more than voting or standing for election, although these are important elements. Participation and active citizenship is about having the right, the means, the space and the opportunity and where necessary the support to participate in and influence decisions and engage in actions and activities so as to contribute to building a better society.”²⁶ This goes beyond the understanding of youth participation solely as political involvement or participation in youth councils or parliaments. To participate means having influence on and responsibility for decisions and actions which affect the lives of young people. The Revised European Charter on the participation of young people in local and regional life states that participation applies to all young people, from all walks of life, regardless of their social and/or ethnic origins, without discrimination.

67. It is particularly important for young Roma to be able to take part in policy and decision making because, generally, policy-makers do not understand the problems Roma youth face and fail to design adequate policies. Policies must be developed that reflect the everyday lives and needs of Roma youth. By having their say, young Roma can be recognised as equal partners in the definition of policies and the making of decisions that concern them, and ensure policies are relevant to them. However, Roma youth are often too passive about participation, they have different priorities, having to work or help their parents. Due to their lack of education, they are not aware they can contribute to bringing about changes. And their poor living conditions, poverty and lack of equal opportunities only serve to demotivate them.

26 Preamble to the Congress’s Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life.

68. In the past, training courses have been organised by the Council of Europe, national/local structures, or funded by the Youth in Action Programme, to train Roma youth leaders in participation methods. These training courses have been very effective in helping Roma youth to understand that they have a crucial role to play in helping their peers to gain the skills, competences and political awareness needed to be able to actively promote their interests and to contribute to changing the perception of Roma in society. Roma youth leaders have been trained in how to develop and monitor the implementation of policies that affect youth and how youth policies can improve the situation of young Roma. One such training course, organised by the Roma Youth Centre (“the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”) resulted in the creation of a “Guide to Roma youth participation in youth policy development processes”.

Some proposals for action by local and regional authorities

69. In addition to the recommendations made in Congress Resolutions 346(2012), paras 9.d (on structured dialogue and co-management) and f (on the Revised European Charter on the participation of young people in local and regional life), 333(2011), para 10.d (on Roma empowerment and participation) and 319(2010), paras 8.c, d and i (on dialogue, participation and co-operation), as well as 9.i (on active democratic citizenship), local and regional authorities can help build capacity of Roma youth and leaders enabling them to participate meaningfully in joint decision-making structures by either providing training to Roma youth organisations or grants so that the organisations can set up their own training programmes; training in youth participation, human rights education and democratic citizenship should be provided in schools so a “participation culture” is learned from an early age; Roma youth organisations’ projects should be supported, this can be either financially or with in-kind contributions; various methods should be used to ensure that all Roma youth, including the most marginalised, have the opportunity to have their say, for example local youth councils must be fully representative of the local youth population.

70. It should be borne in mind, however, that Roma youth are not the only young people having a hard time. Policies should be explicit but not exclusive; they should focus on Roma youth as a target group but not to the exclusion of other young people who share similar realities.

A concrete example

71. Working with young Roma at the local level can help to raise their awareness of the importance of participating in policy and decision making. Pedro Casermeiro Cortés runs a Youth NGO called “Romane Siklövne” in Barcelona (Spain). He has been working for 10 years in his neighbourhood motivating students to go to school and helping them with their schoolwork, organising workshops and intercultural activities in schools for Roma children and migrants and teaching Romanes. After all his work raising their awareness and motivating them, the young Roma in his neighbourhood are starting to get motivated, and they are now calling him to say “we have to do something”, “let’s do this and that”. They want to play an active role in shaping the policies that affect their lives. The investment of time and effort over the past 10 years is bearing fruit.

72. Local and regional authorities could follow this example and organise activities to motivate young Roma, employ staff with this role, or provide grants or in-kind assistance to organisations for this purpose.

E. Building a stronger Roma Youth movement

73. The manifold communities and cultural backgrounds amongst the Roma and the tension that exists between these different groups limit cooperation. Add to this that the Roma youth organisations are not strong and the result is a weak position from which to lobby to improve the living conditions and lives of Roma youth.

74. It is important to build strong networks of young Romani people from all over Europe as this will bring them together and create a space where they can discuss the core problems they face and decide together on action. Roma youth actors should be called upon to take responsibility and leadership so that together, they can adopt a common position and move forward together, stronger in unity.

Recommendations from Roma youth

75. Small grant schemes are needed to support local Roma youth organisations and informal groups to enable them to implement local initiatives. Programmes and training courses should be run that strengthen leadership skills and organisational capacity so Roma youth can become active citizens and actors of change. Facilities should be provided for the setting up of Roma youth centres. Youth workers, including Roma youth workers, should be trained and employed to work with Roma communities.²⁷

The situation

76. Roma youth organisations are weak and there are not enough of them, their low levels of mobilisation make them invisible. In addition, they have only a limited capacity for managing and applying for project funding. Co-ordination and communication is poor: between Roma and non-Roma youth structures; between Roma youth and general Roma movements; and between organisations and authorities. Young Roma participate only to a limited extent or not at all in mainstream youth events and initiatives, they feel they are excluded because their organisations are weak or too specific. There is a preponderance of pilot project-based activities for Roma youth which lack strategic focus to link to sustainable policies.

77. Efforts must be made to enhance the capacity of the Roma community and this can be done by building a strong Roma youth movement. In order to be able to participate meaningfully in decision and policy making, Roma youth activists and organisations need to be strengthened, acquiring knowledge and skills to be able to undertake advocacy activities, formulate policy messages, however ways must first be found to unite Roma youth organisations and activists so they may speak with one common voice. Only then will they be better able to influence government policy and to lobby for their own needs. To do this, however, it is necessary to raise awareness of political processes and how to build relationships with decision and policy-makers to affect policies.

Some proposals for action by local and regional authorities

78. In addition to the recommendations made in Congress Resolution 319(2010), paras 8.e (provision of youth or community centres), local and regional authorities should contribute to initiatives to strengthen Roma youth leaders' leadership skills and the capacity of Roma organisations, as well as generally creating the conditions necessary for supporting the initiatives taken by the Roma youth themselves to strengthen the Roma youth movement. Youth workers, especially of Roma origin, should be employed to work with Roma communities.

3. Conclusion

79. We, the Congress co-rapporteurs on Roma Youth, invited young Roma and Roma youth organisations to discuss with us the action and initiatives they felt were needed from local and regional authorities to improve their lives and their situation. We have listened carefully to them, analysed their requirements, as well as taken into consideration our own capacity to respond to these needs. The task is great, and one that we, local and regional elected representatives cannot shoulder alone. Young Roma and their organisations need to work with us to achieve these aims. From our side, political will is of utmost importance: without it, nothing will be achieved. As far as young Roma are concerned, their rights should be respected, in the same way as the rights of all citizens in a democratic society, but as well as rights, citizens also have responsibilities, and young Roma should assume their responsibilities and help us, local and regional authorities, to help them.

²⁷ *The right to be young*, Roma Youth Conference Report, prepared by the Youth Department of the Council of Europe, March 2013.