

## Sixth International Roma Women Conference

### “Women and Political Representation: The Case of Roma and Traveller<sup>1</sup> Women”

*Council of Europe, Strasbourg, FRANCE 6-7 November 2017*

**#ROMAWOMENCANDOIT**

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS EMANATING FROM THE CONFERENCE**

1. More political parties should design measures to **promote minorities’ participation, including Roma and Traveller women’s**, in elections, including through the inclusion of quotas. **Quotas** are a powerful tool to achieve better political representation. Member states should consider setting strong quota laws or parity systems (with high quota percentage, rank order rules, strict sanctions).
2. **Electoral systems and the geographical boundaries of electoral constituencies** matter. Proportional electoral systems with closed lists have shown to increase women’s political representation, and countries should consider switching to such systems.
3. To promote minority participation, the **legal threshold** for parties under proportionate representation systems should be low enough.
4. **Voting mechanisms** should be designed to provide the possibility for Roma and Traveller women to be voted all over the country in those countries where the minorities are scattered.
5. **Funding** should be made available for Roma and Traveller women who want to campaign in elections. In every country where there is a law regarding the use of election funding, financial resources should be available also to the Roma and Traveller candidates in equal proportion.

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

6. Measures should be put in place to encourage Roma and Traveller women to enter the world of politics, through **training, mentorship, career advising and peer networking**. Political parties, international organisations, governmental and European representatives should train Roma and Traveller women to stand for political office, by facilitating mentorship programmes for Roma women (utilising existing role models from within the Roma and Traveller communities and mainstream politicians), by supporting exchange of expertise between Roma and Traveller women in politics but also with other women representing diverse community interests or the mainstream. Support should be given on longer-term and in consistent manner, building on experiences, which led to effective participation.
7. International organisations, governments, civil society, practitioners and academics should invest in the **capacity building** of Roma and Traveller women. In addition to designing specific initiatives, where needed, it is important to ensure that Roma and Traveller women have access to capacity building initiatives that exist at national level, as well as access to resources.
8. **Women's organisations and feminist parties** should examine their own agendas and practices to ensure that Roma and Traveller women's issue are included in the women's movements and political agenda.
9. Action should be taken to **train leaders and executives of political parties**, as well as the bodies responsible for choosing the candidates for elections, so they can reflect on their party's structure and address gender biases in the functioning, recruitment and selection practices in order to become inclusive, including by adopting strong political party quotas.
10. Participation of Roma and Traveller women should be promoted in all decision-making bodies and administrative structures that affect their lives, including national and local government structures, law enforcement bodies and the judiciary.
11. Good practices of Roma and Traveller women's participation should be supported, in particular **mediators at community level**.
12. **Participation of Roma and Travellers, especially young people and women, as voters** should be increased in order to act as a powerful electoral constituency.
13. One way to support Roma and Traveller's political participation, in particular women, is to support the **education/training of voters and sensitisation campaigns targeting women** by addressing family (group) voting and securing that women can take an informed, free and secret choice for casting the ballot, and by taking **actions against vote manipulation and vote buying**.
14. Action needs to be taken to **eradicate obstacles facing Roma and Travellers, including women, to fully exercise their electoral rights**, by ensuring that all Roma and Travellers have **identity documents** and are included in the **voters' registration list**. The travelling way of life of some communities should also be taken into consideration and appropriate measures taken to ensure the exercise of their electoral rights.

15. Roma and Traveller women candidates should also be **supported after their election**.
16. Measures to increase **Roma and Traveller women's political participation should be embedded in a larger gender equality strategy for Roma and Traveller women**, which should also include actions to overcome gender stereotypes in society and in Roma and Traveller communities, and support for the reconciliation of family and work. Furthermore, all Roma-related policies, frameworks and programmes at international, European, national and local level should integrate a strong gender mainstreaming component.
17. There is still a pressing need to **collect gender-disaggregated data about Roma and Traveller women's participation in political life**. More research is needed, such as a report on the impact of electoral systems on Roma women's representation in politics.
18. **Awareness should be raised among the media and the general public** about the importance of having balanced participation in political and public decision-making, and the obstacles faced by women, including Roma and Traveller women, so that positive actions are supported as long as necessary.
19. **Awareness should be raised among political parties, media and the general public on the importance of language in reproducing, but also in countering racist and sexist mind-sets**. The use of non-sexist language when speaking about Roma women candidates should be promoted.
20. International organisations, governments, political parties and civil society should design actions aimed at engaging Roma and Traveller women girls so that they consider political careers, including through **role models and networking**.
21. **Partnerships and co-ordination between and within governments, civil society, international organisations, media, political parties, practitioners and researchers** are critical to the success of efforts to tackle the democratic deficit resulting from the unbalanced representation of women, and the severe under-representation of Roma and Traveller women, in the political decision-making processes.
22. All decision makers, including those in government and political parties, should make a strong commitment to gender equality and balanced participation in political and public decision-making from a gender and minority perspectives, leading to appropriate measures in legislation, policies and practice. Therefore, **all political parties/groups in Europe should sign the "Pledge on political representation of Roma and Traveller women" launched at the Council of Europe's 6<sup>th</sup> International Roma Women Conference in Strasbourg on 6-7 November 2017** (available online at: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/portal/roma-women/>).