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# Task Force ROMA YOUTH PARTICIPATION

## Report of the first meeting (online) 18-19 June 2020

### 1. Background

The Roma Youth Action Plan (hereafter [RYAP](#)) was a project of the Council of Europe to respond to the challenges faced by Roma young people in Europe. Initiated in 2011, the RYAP was developed on the basis on the recommendations from the [first Roma Youth Conference](#) organised in September 2011. In March 2016, the Joint Council on Youth (CMJ) adopted the [Guidelines for the Implementation of the Roma Youth Action Plan 2016-2020](#). These guidelines provided the strategic framework, priorities and main approaches for the implementation of the RYAP for the period of 2016-2020. The Council Europe commissioned in 2019 a [study about the results achieved and the impact of the RYAP \(2016-2019\)](#) at national and European level. The conclusions of the study were reviewed and complemented during the seminar [Roma Youth Participation: What Now?](#) And were submitted to the CMJ.

The Task Force was set by the Joint Council on Youth, to whom it reports. The COVID-19 pandemic has forced the meeting to be held online; practically all invitees took part in the meeting representing the youth and Roma sectors of the Council of Europe, Roma youth organisations and partners working on Roma youth participation such as the Congress of Local and Regional authorities and the European Youth Forum.

## **2. Introduction of participants and expectations from the Task Force**

The meeting started with a round of introductions where participants members also presented their expectations:

- Making the work of the Task force as a milestone of the work with Roma youth;
- To understand the situation with Roma youth in different countries and understand better what can be done by the youth policy;
- To reflect on the priorities for Roma youth in times of the pandemic COVID-19;
- To promote the participation of Roma youth and Roma youth organizations in the CoE structures and make sure that Roma youth issues are well articulated both in Roma and non-Roma policies and structures (double mainstreaming);
- To use the possibility to work on a Council of Europe Recommendation on Roma youth participation and to start identifying the issues / areas addressed by such document;
- To share the work from the Congress and encourage young Roma to be more involved in the democratic process and for human rights.

## **3. The role of the Task Force**

The Joint Council on Youth at its 41<sup>st</sup> meeting took note of the results and conclusions of the [Study](#) on the impact of the Roma Youth Action Plan (2015-2019) and decided to set up a Task Force on Roma Youth Participation to:

- Prepare a proposal for the continuation of the work on Roma youth participation in the 2020-2021 biennium and within the 2030 Youth Strategy;
- Identify priorities and specific missions of the youth sector, in articulation with the Roma and Travellers Division and safeguard the necessary role of Roma and non-Roma youth civil society;
- Assess the opportunity and feasibility of preparing a recommendation by the Committee of Ministers on Roma youth participation, notably by identifying the possible substance of the recommendations and their relevance for youth (and Roma) policy stakeholders in Member states.

The Task Force should meet twice in 2020.

## **4. The Council of Europe and Roma youth**

The work of the Council of Europe with Roma youth was presented by the Roma and Travellers Team and the Youth Department. The presentations focused on:

- Roma youth in the Council of Europe Strategic Action Plan for Roma and Traveller Inclusion (2020-2025) which was introduced by Thorsten AFFLERBACH, Head of Division, Roma and Travellers Team and Aurora AILINCAI, Deputy Head of Division, Roma and Travellers Team. They presented areas where Roma youth are implicitly included and explicitly referred to in the Strategic Action Plan, e.g. in specific actions of projects and programmes or in the Roma Political Schools. Moreover, the Roma and Travellers Team is supporting the participation of young Roma in the implementation of all activities of the Action Plan, as the composition of the national and local teams shows, and the presence of young Roma among the staff members of the Council of Europe. They also encouraged young Roma to participate more in the biannual meetings of the Council of Europe Dialogue with Roma and Traveller civil society and in Roma Political Schools.
- The place of Roma youth issues in the Council of Europe youth sector strategy and in the Youth for Democracy programme 2020-21 introduced by Rui GOMES, Head of Division Education and Training, Youth Department

Their presentations are available [here](#).

## **5. priorities of Roma youth organisations and other youth policy actors**

### *European Roma Grass Roots Organisations Network*

Mustafa and Carmen shared ERGO's experience that during the COVID-19 pandemic Roma people have disproportionately more obstacles in access to primary needs such as access to food, water or infrastructure priorities, including access to Internet and other services. The pandemic also highlighted the digital inequalities which became visible with clear examples of discrimination such as the fact that Roma children could not follow education online and their parents are not prepared to support them at home.

ERGO worked with the European Youth Forum (YFJ) to secure that the Youth Guarantee scheme is open and accessible for young Roma, as well as, to secure that the needs, issues and ideas of young Roma are reflected in the YFJ response to COVID-19.

ERGO is currently running a campaign "A place for all" which is focused on access to employment for all. In the framework of the campaign it launched a pledge for businesses to be open and inclusive for young Roma and hire more Roma young people.

The main campaign hub is the [Facebook page](#). The campaign materials are available at [www.ergonetWORK.org/employment](http://www.ergonetWORK.org/employment). There is also a link to sign the pledge - a form where employers (or civil society partners) fill their information in order to obtain the badge.

### *Phiren Amenca*

Marietta shared the update from Phiren Amenca, starting with an overview of its work on promoting Roma youth issues in the EU framework of the national minority strategies. The association is actively engaged in discussions with the European Commission to secure that Roma young people can benefit from the EU national funding programmes. Phiren Amenca is conducting a survey for young Roma for the preparation of the new EU framework. The survey offers an overview of the main challenges and issues faced by Roma youth with over 600 responses so far. The preliminary results will be ready by September. They are also organising a discussion with the EU Commission and the Council of Europe focused on Roma youth. The EU Roma youth prize is an initiative aiming to make the youth organisations and their projects more visible.

One of the expectations shared by Marietta is to push more the member states to engage on Roma youth participation, this is where the potential new Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers would have an impact on national level. Once the member states engage, it is also important to follow-up how they commit to supporting Roma youth on the long-term.

The pandemic has worsened discrimination towards Roma and made access to basic goods and services more limited. This has pushed some Hungarian civil society organisations to create coalitions which mobilise leaders from communities to get engaged in the network which results in pressure to the governments where there is a need. The pandemic showed the difficulty of not having a representation of Roma, where it was needed.

More about the survey and research: <https://phirenamenca.eu/survey-for-young-roma/>

Competition for Best Roma youth projects and initiatives: <https://phirenamenca.eu/best-european-roma-youth-projects-2020>

Discussion on the future of EU Roma youth policies: <https://phirenamenca.eu/discussion-on-the-future-of-eu-roma-youth-policies/>

### *TernYpe*

Vivian shared about the work of Ternype, especially with the Dikh he na Bister activities. This year's project has exceptional changes due to COVID-19 starting from the cancellation of the pre-meeting which was due to happen in Zagreb, and the actual commemoration on the 2 August in Auschwitz. This year there will be no mass event for Dikh He Na Bister, but the partners will mobilise for the remembrance activities online. The 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the activity will be online.

Ternype intends to organise a Roma Youth Summit in October 2020 in Heidelberg, also subject to confirmation due to travel restrictions caused by the pandemic. In November 2020, Ternype will organise a commemoration of Raymond Gureme, a Holocaust survivor who was actively supporting the Dikh he na Blister initiative.

#### *Forum of European Roma Young People*

Alexandra Raykova shared the conclusion that FERYP has not been active for several years now, as the last bureau of the organisation did not manage to secure the transition of the organisation. She underlined that FERYP was voluntary based organisation and not being able to secure the administrative aspect also contributed to deactivation of the organisation. Even though it is not active for the last years, Alexandra pointed that the primary goal of FERYP which was to develop a generation of ROMA youth activists working in their local communities was achieved. Also FERYP used mainly Human Rights Education as an approach in its activities. She also informed the Task Force about the dire situation of some Roma communities in Bulgaria who have been totally isolated/locked in due to COVID-19.

#### *Advisory Council on Youth of the Council of Europe*

Pia and Georgina presented the work of the Advisory Council on Youth (CCJ). One of the intentions of the CCJ is to act as an extended hand of the Roma youth movements and organisations, so that their needs, ideas and proposals reach the Council of Europe's Joint Council on Youth. The CCJ members have outlined the importance of securing continuity of specific programmes for Roma youth, and securing that Roma youth organisations are closely connected with the Youth for Democracy programme.

Another initiative of the CCJ is to sensitize the European Youth Foundation for the issues Roma youth organisations are facing when applying for grants and seek ways to mitigate these obstacles.

#### *European Steering Committee on Youth*

Juozas and Irina from the European Steering Committee on Youth (CDEJ) gave an overview of the activities they are undertaking as Ministries of Youth and offered support for the task force by bringing closer the discussion to the governments.

The examples shared from Lithuania are connected with inclusion programmes in different cities. The major issue is to identify Roma youth leaders who could create informal groups or formal organisations which would then directly benefit from the funding and programmes set up by the government. Another question that Juozas raised for the task force is to look at ways to support follow-up activities for young Roma. The presentation of Juozas is available [here](#).

Irina started the presentation by providing an estimate that currently there are around 100 thousand Roma young people in Ukraine. With the Council of Europe there was a specific project which included young women and girls. The new programme Youth in Ukraine has inclusion as one of the key thematic areas, for which the Ministry would like to develop specific projects in cooperation with Roma youth organisations. Another good practice from Ukraine are the national Forums of Young Roma which last year were organised in the format of a hackaton. These fora is useful to discuss the issues of Roma in Ukraine and the Ministry gets information directly from young Roma on their needs, issues and proposals.

#### *European Youth Forum (YFJ)*

The YFJ was represented by Alex (National Youth Council of Ireland). He presented the work of NYCI for inclusion and participation of Roma and Traveller youth as an example of the existing needs.

#### *Congress of Local and Regional Authorities*

John Warmisham, member of the Current Affairs Committee, recalled the support of the Congress for Roma youth participation as visible in the report "Forever Young?" and in the two resolutions of the Congress. He underlined that it is the role of local and regional authorities to put in place structures in which young Roma can participate for better integration into political life. He mentioned the Alliance of cities and regions for Roma inclusion set up by the Congress as an important partner. He regretted that despite campaigns such as the *Declaration of Mayors against anti-gypsyism*, and *Dosta!*, antigypsyism is on the rise and offered the support of the Congress to the Task Force.

## **6. Existing gaps on Roma and youth policies regarding Roma youth participation**

### *Introduction by Margareta Matache*

Margareta Matache, Director of the Roma Programme at Harvard University, was contracted by the Council of Europe to prepare a study about the gaps on policy documents about Roma youth participation and the possible added value of a Council of Europe recommendation.

She presented her initial findings and questions including the questions of representation of Roma youth in decision making processes, and further expanded on the lack of access to information for Roma youth, especially those who live in rural and isolated areas.

One of the conclusions was to look into ways for purposefully and proactively involve Roma youth in projects, consultation processes, seminars, training courses. Furthermore, the role of non-Roma allies to contribute to that growth and share connections, resources, and power with Roma youth was also outlined.

She also raised issue of inclusion of Roma youth as a priority in the National Roma Integration Strategies, as well as the need to create safer spaces for Roma youth to participate in mainstream actions for youth. Several questions related to systemic change were also opened such as:

- The need to address the impact of racism on Roma youth people's access to social rights;
- Need for data collection on structural racism against Roma youth that can inform the youth and Roma policies;
- The involvement of local politicians, decision-makers, and public authorities remains important to secure that the measures, policies, laws do not reflect anti-Roma racism.
- Addressing school segregation with involvement of all stakeholders and providing proper anti-racist training;
- When looking into potential policies to also reflect if these policies support LGBTQ+ Roma, Roma girls, migrants, and Roma with disabilities.

### *Working groups*

Three working groups explored the gaps in Roma and youth policies regarding Roma youth participation. The groups were facilitated by Laszlo, Pia and Mustafa, and each of the group had rapporteurs: Georgina, Marietta and Alex who presented back the main findings. Each group had at one point a specific thematic focus either on Roma inclusion policies, Youth policies or the youth participation mechanisms.

### **Roma policies and Roma youth participation**

The first working group focused on Roma inclusion policies and the space for young people to participate therein. There was a general conclusion that young people in these policies are limited only to the area of education and capacity building, but not much in decision-making. It seems that the policies for Roma are built looking at young people as a group that needs to be trained, educated and prepared for the future. But there is not much left for Roma youth to participate in

shaping these policies or their implementation in the present, and be an active stakeholder, rather than a beneficiary of these policies.

The group looked at the RMSOS model (rights, means, space, opportunity, support) as a starting point for their discussion<sup>1</sup>. The group concluded that there is a lack of spaces, opportunities and support for Roma youth to participate actively in the construction of policies that should address discrimination against Roma or support the inclusion of Roma in the local communities. Furthermore, Roma youth is not mentioned in many National Roma Strategies which creates an obstacle for these strategies to take into account the specific issues and experiences of Roma youth when proposing interventions.

The working group proposed that until the next meeting of the Task force, a mapping of the National Roma Integration Strategies and the National Youth Strategies, is done in order to identify the policy gaps based on the criteria of the Revised Charter for youth participation in local and regional life..

The group added that the possible Recommendation is relevant because the majority of Roma people are young. This Recommendation should focus on:

- Youth work but not only, it should also include the work done on cultural heritage, linguistic issues and open the possibility for Roma youth organisations to work on youth-led projects beyond youth work.
- Outlining the role of young people (both Roma and non-Roma) to address antigypsism and clearly outline the discrimination faced by Roma youth.
- Encouragement of the decision and policymakers to clearly mention and involve Roma youth in the mainstream policies (Roma policies, Youth policies but also all other policies which are relevant for Roma young people such as Social rights – education, housing, health, employment, culture etc.)
- Addressing emerging issues such as environmental racism and digitalisation gaps, appearing and targeting Roma youth in the recent years.

## **Youth Policies and Roma Youth Participation**

The second working group started with a reflection on the question who do we identify as young Roma? Further, they shared that when discussing with young Roma the division is mainly made between those with family and those without a family. The group proposed a reflection about whether youth policies at all are addressing the needs of these two sub-groups of Roma youth and their organisations.

The group concluded that there is no representation in youth councils for Roma youth, as it is difficult to access information online on how to join these youth participation structures. Furthermore, the calls and selection criteria for youth councils does not always come easily to the target group, or often looks discouraging. It is not only the young people who face this problem, but also Roma youth organisations do not always have the access to information.

The working group discussed that there is no link between strategies – Roma strategies and youth strategies - as they often are narrow in scope and do not consider the intersectional discrimination faced by Roma youth. That's why the impact of these strategies remains limited for Roma youth, as often their needs and experiences are different from those addressed by youth strategies. Young Roma do not feel comfortable to access or being involved in either mainstream platforms or youth platforms. This is due to the continuous discrimination and discouragement which makes such participation platforms seem unsafe. The group referred to this issue as the *safe space gap*.

Further to the gap in youth participation, it is also clear that the access to these fora for young Roma women is even smaller, making gender balance a challenge. It is important when looking at possible solutions to understand the specific needs of young Roma, but also the specific groups

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<sup>1</sup> HAVE YOUR SAY!, Manual on the revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life

within this group. The following issues are defined as most relevant issues/policy gaps for Roma youth participation, by the second working group:

- Improvement of the capacity of youth organisations, including improved access to information and ability to feedback on this information. Youth organisations should also have a better capacity to address the difficulty in outreaching young Roma and to challenge the situations when youth and Roma issues are represented by old male Roma leaders
- Roma youth representation in mainstream and / or youth structures, including the safe space for Roma youth to take part in these structures and not to be tokenised.
- Stronger and clearer link between strategies (Roma, youth, equality, anti-discrimination etc.). For example, in mainstream youth policies Roma youth issues are not included, they usually mention vulnerable groups or young people with fewer opportunities. Another issue is the difficulty to define who are young Roma (according to the CoE and European Commission, young people are age between 18-30) as very often it depends on if they have a family or not, because they status limits their participation as well.

A potential Council of Europe Recommendation can address the specific needs and diversity of Roma youth and civil society organizations. Some of the policy gaps that exist which should be directly addressed include the lack of information, capacity and understanding of the intersectional experiences of Roma youth. It could also address the gap that mainstream youth structures are not inclusive for Roma and minorities and that many Roma youth structures are not classical youth organizations, so often they are not recognized as youth organizations.

### **Youth Participation mechanisms and Roma youth**

The group started with an invitation to look at the social determinants of youth participation which must be addressed to secure that Roma youth has access to the right to participate. The technological issues, connection and access to technology were listed, but also issues of social rights such as access to housing or simply access to water and food in some. They also questioned if the outcomes of youth participation should be the same for all youth, further addressing the following questions that the Task Force can reflect upon:

- Is there an enabling environment for youth participation? What would make an enabling environment?
- To what extent the existing mechanisms on a national level support Roma youth to participate? Many national youth councils have difficulty to connect with informal Roma youth groups as they are not registered as separate organisations, but exist as informal groups or clubs. This creates a formal obstacle for participation which leaves many Roma young people unrepresented in the formal youth participation structures.
- Finally, the group asked for a reflection on ways to support young people to take part and participate? The group wondered if the existing organisations and youth work systems have the capacity to involve more and new young people locally. They identified that this is a precondition for any meaningful participation.

In this regards the group looked into ways to secure that newly involved Roma young people also have access to the participation mechanisms. Raising awareness among Roma youth about different ways they can participate and what are the existing mechanisms to do so (youth councils, student councils etc.) is also important. A specific proposal in the group was directed to national youth councils including the county / regional / local youth councils which should seek to have several seats allocated to Roma youth. The youth councils and their work are perceived as very political by young people, including Roma young people, so they are not at first attractive for young people who do not want to become politicians.

Participation should not only be about making quotas for Roma youth, but also how to make people aware about these places and how to support more Roma youth to use the mechanisms and not end up in tokenism. The context in which Roma youth organisations and non-Roma organisations

participate in the national youth councils is not the same. For example: a Roma organisation working on the law on youth standard in North Macedonia realised that there is an additional issue to actually benefit from youth standard policies – that the living conditions of young Roma and non-Roma are not the same, so the starting point is also very different.

The group concluded that there are different ways to support to Roma youth to take part in the general youth participation structures, or to strengthen the Roma youth organisations to the level that they can actually be a stronger voice of Roma youth. Finally the issue of youth participation and the digital divide is also important, to ensure that Roma youth are not forgotten.

## **7. Conclusions and preparation of the second meeting**

The main conclusion of the meeting was that a CoE Recommendation on Roma youth participation has an added value in addressing the policy gaps that often leave Roma youth out of the “mainstream” Roma policies or youth policies. The group has suggested to continue the work on gathering information and present a more specific report for the second meeting of the Task force while keeping in mind:

- The “huge pressure” placed on Roma youth networks which are actually few and with limited resources
- The need to take into account the specificities of “Roma youth organisations” and possible forms of exclusion based on a narrow understanding of a youth-led organisation; more information about levels and forms of participation of young Roma would be useful
- That participation is a starting point or a means for improving basic access to rights and combating discrimination.

To further root the possible recommendation on the needs of Roma young people, it was suggested to use the results of the survey conducted by Phiren Amenca for a secondary analysis in cross-checking the needs and issues of young Roma related to participation before launching a new one. Margareta may use and supplement this information with interviews.

A mini-survey, with the support of Pia and Alex, should also be circulated among member organisations of the YFJ, especially national youth councils.

Henna Huttu proposed to organise a meeting in the Roma and Travellers Team to discuss the proposals of the Task Force.

The second task force meeting should happen on 15 and 16 September 2020, at the European Youth Centre Strasbourg and focus on the added value of a possible recommendation. The secretariat will confirm this as soon as possible, based lifting the COVID-19 health related restrictions.

## **8. Evaluation of the meeting**

The meeting was evaluated in general as a positive and constructive space with room for improvement in the time taken by speakers.



**Conclusions and recommendations adopted by the Joint Council on Youth regarding the follow-up to the Roma Youth Action Plan (RYAP)**

1. The RYAP set an example in inclusion of Roma youth in the development of interventions and actions in the Council of Europe. In the period of restructuring CAHROM, it would be essential to secure that the new committee on Roma and Travellers keeps a Rapporteur on Youth issues, as well as, that the CMJ continues to have a rapporteur on Roma inclusion.
2. Human Rights Education training courses based on Mirrors, as well as *Dikh he na Bister* activities should be promoted as approaches for capacity building in identity, history, access to rights and other related topics. These courses, based on the needs and input from the Roma young people, should seek to involve Roma trainers and become replicable by Roma youth organisations to the extent possible.
3. Further project management and networking programmes are needed to increase the capacity of Roma youth organisations to develop and implement their own projects and to build lasting horizontal and vertical networks at local, national and European levels.
4. Education and information resources should be further made available in user-friendly language and terminology, taking into account the interest and experiences of Roma young people.
5. For the upcoming programme of the youth sector, the Roma Youth Participation activities should have clear and specific monitoring and evaluation indicators that can be agreed and followed by all the relevant partners.
6. It is crucial for the Council of Europe to consolidate their experiences from the RYAP with a new policy standard in the form of a Committee of Ministers recommendation on Roma youth participation. This standard should reflect the experiences from the double mainstreaming approach, used in the RYAP, and provide Member States with clearer guidelines to support Roma youth participation.
7. The Youth Department should maintain its focus on Roma youth participation activities. This should be not so much in the form of an action plan, but rather a continuing internal programme focus that will ensure that Roma youth participation and empowerment.
8. It is crucial to increase the number of human rights education training, and human rights and anti-racism activities at the European, national and local levels for Roma youth, but also for Roma, minority youth, and generally for European youth. Such activities can have clear indicators through which it is possible to measure the progress of capacity building activities, allocation of resources, and access to the stakeholders (dialogue).
9. The Roma Youth Academy remains an important project which should be pursued in the next years.
10. Educational activities at the European, national, and local levels on anti-Roma racism should create understanding and knowledge regarding all layers and manifestations of racism and to encourage solidarity among Roma people and their allies. Furthermore, specific workshops, seminars, and training courses on human rights, anti-racism, and anti-Roma racism should become available for local politicians, decision-makers, and public administration.

The recommendations specifically aimed at the member states are the following:

11. To recognise and commemorate state-sponsored injustices against Roma, such as the Roma Genocide, the enslavement in Romania, Great Gypsy-Round up in Spain, the forced transfer of Yenish children from their parents to foster care/adoption in Switzerland, etc.
12. To create opportunities and spaces for young Roma people to foster their identity and ability to reflect and react to encounters of injustice. These can be official activities at the European, national, and local levels to commemorate and memorialise (through museums, memorials, statues, names of streets, digital content, etc.) critical elements in building a positive sense of and confidence in Roma identity among Roma youth;
13. To support Human Rights Education focused at anti-racism and addressing antigypsyism both in formal and non-formal education and include Roma history as an integral part of national history books and school curricula;
14. To support the involvement and membership of Roma youth organisations in National Youth Councils (NYCs) to bring different perspectives in the work of NYCs and indirectly sensitise NYCs members to minority topics and Roma.
15. To initiate legislation against structural anti-Roma racism and discrimination including policies, and laws to dismantle the exclusion and segregation of Roma children and youth in schools, as well as, preventing discrimination in public institutions, including by employing Roma and training public authorities on anti-bias and anti-Roma racism.

## LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

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