



Sixth International Roma Women Conference

“Women and Political Representation:

The Case of Roma and Traveller¹ Women”

6-7 November 2017
Strasbourg, FRANCE

#ROMAWOMENCANDOIT

DRAFT REPORT (12.03.2018)

All presentations from the conference and the recordings of the live broadcast can be accessed on the [Roma Women website](#) of the Council of Europe

¹ The term “Roma and Travellers” is used at the Council of Europe to encompass the wide diversity of the groups covered by the work of the Council of Europe in this field: on the one hand a) Roma, Sinti/Manush, Calé, Kaale, Romanichals, Boyash/Rudari; b) Balkan Egyptians (Egyptians and Ashkali); c) Eastern groups (Dom, Lom and Abdal); and, on the other hand, groups such as Travellers, Yenish, and the populations designated under the administrative term “Gens du voyage”, as well as persons who identify themselves as Gypsies. The present is an explanatory footnote, not a definition of Roma and/or Travellers.

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Introduction

This biennial event is an opportunity for politicians, policy-makers and others to learn from Roma and Traveller women.

Mr Thorbjørn Jagland, Secretary General of the Council of Europe

The reality of Roma women's political underrepresentation is dire. Progress in our member states is slow with respect to women's political representation overall. An Analytical report on the implementation of CM Recommendation Rec(2003)3 on balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision-making² found that the average proportion of elected women stood at a mere 25,6% in Council of Europe member states, which is well below the recommended target of 40%. However, the representation of Roma women is a far cry from these figures, as there are currently almost no Roma women elected to national parliaments in the CoE member states. When compared to the European Roma population, which is estimated to be anywhere between 10 to 12 million people, the scale of disenfranchisement amounts to a gross violation of the rights of Roma and Roma women in particular.

Consistent with the priorities outlined in its Thematic Action Plan on the Inclusion of Roma and Travellers (2016-2019), as well as the Strategy on the Advancement of Romani Women and Girls (2014-2020), the Council of Europe organized and hosted the Sixth International Conference of Roma and Traveller Women. This sixth event ensures continuity in the efforts supported by the Council of Europe to provide Roma women with a wide platform for strategising over a common agenda, which commenced in September 2007, with the 1st International Conference of Roma women in Stockholm, organised with the Swedish Government. Since then, there have been 5 International Roma Women's conferences which took place as follows: 2nd International Conference of Roma Women in Athens, together with the Greek government, in January 2010; 3rd Roma Women's Congress in Granada, together with the Spanish Government, in October 2011; 4th International Roma Women's Conference in Helsinki, in co-operation with the Government of Finland, on 17-18 September 2013; and 5th International Review Conference of Roma Women, in Skopje, in co-operation with the Government of "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" on 6-7 October 2015.

² Gender Equality Commission. Balanced participation of women and men in decision-making. Analytical report – 2016 data. Council of Europe, Strasbourg, October 2017. Available at: <https://rm.coe.int/analytical-report-data-2016-/1680751a3e>

The concept of this conference was initially proposed by the International Roma Women's Network Phenjalipe ("Sisterhood"). IRWN-Phenjalipe also chose the theme of Roma women's political representation for the conference.

The conference, which took place in Strasbourg, on 6 -7 November 2017, was attended by over 100 participants; of which about 70 were Roma and Traveller women, alongside representatives of political parties, current and former MPs, and representatives of international organisations. The List of participants is appended to this report as Annex II.

The 6th International Roma Women Conference provided a forum to address the obstacles to Roma and Traveller women's participation in political processes. It also served as a capacity building event. The immediate output of the conference was a pledge by political parties/groups to promote gender equality and the participation of women from minority groups, in particular Roma and Traveller women, in decision-making bodies and in political representation at the next European, national, regional and local elections. The Pledge and its current list of signatories is appended to this report as Annex III.

On the first day of the conference, discussions were held on the **barriers** to increasing the political participation of Roma women, and on the experience of running as candidates from a number of MPs and Roma women themselves, who shared lessons learned and identified opportunities for further engagement in politics. On the second day, participants debated strategies for empowering Roma and Traveller women to enter politics and the conference heard from several Roma women politicians, including former Roma women MPs, who can serve as role models for those interested in following their path. The conference participants formulated a set of recommendations for improving Roma women's participation in political life, as well as in community life.

Context and background: Multiple inequalities resulting in the lack of representation of Roma women in politics

The barriers that stand in the way of Roma women's involvement in politics are manifold, but they are rooted in the persistent inequalities that affect their lives. It was argued that racism and racial discrimination is the biggest barrier to Roma women's participation, as the conference heard from the Chairperson of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. Racism is structural and institutionalized in political structures and political life. So is sexism, and the conference heard many testimonies and personal experiences of Roma women who faced gender stereotypes (such as being labeled 'bad women' if they travel or spend the night out of the home for political campaigning) and violence when they are present in the public space.

As a consequence of the interlocking structures of racism and sexism, Roma women have minimal representation at all levels of government and are largely

absent from key decision-making positions. For example, with one exception, there are no Roma women represented in national parliaments and in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, there are no Roma at all, men or women. At the same time, national decision-makers are not prioritizing the rights of Roma women and girls, governments are largely unaccountable for the commitments they made to Roma rights in various international settings, and there is a conspicuous absence of gender analysis in Roma inclusion policies.

Racism and racial discrimination is the biggest barrier to Roma women's participation. Yet, what Roma and traveller women have managed to achieve is remarkable.

Ms Anastasia Crickley, Chairperson, UN Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, Vice-President International Association for Community Development, Department of Applied Social Studies, Maynooth University, Ireland

Despite the systematic and widespread multiple discrimination they face, Roma women have made important strides in coming together and organising to claim their rights. Roma women's issues first emerged in the mid-90s with the support of international organisations. One of the first important opportunities for Roma women to make their voices heard was the First Congress of Roma from the European Union, organised with the support of the European Commission, in May 1994, in Seville, Spain, where Romani women from all over Europe discussed their problems for the first time. The outcome of the meeting was a Manifesto of Roma Women, which referred to the situation of Roma women in Europe and stressed the need for having access to education as a means to empower their fight against discrimination and patriarchal rules within and outside the family. Similar notable transnational networking of Roma women took place in 2000 at the Beijing Plus Five meeting in New York and at the UN World Conference against Racism in Durban, South Africa, in 2001, where Roma women raised issues such as forced sterilisation, unemployment and domestic violence.

Among other international organisations, the Council of Europe (CoE) started to raise awareness on Roma women's rights in 1995, when the Steering Committee for the Equality between Women and Men held a Hearing of Romani Women in Strasbourg. The same year, the Youth Directorate of the Council of Europe organised a training session for young Roma leaders and as a result, the Forum of European Roma Young People was established in 1998. A series of seminars on Romani women and discrimination of youth have been organised since.

In 2003, the Council of Europe raised the issue of Roma women's rights again through a series of training, campaigns, meetings and studies. The same year, the Council of Europe and the Fundamental Rights Agency, in partnership with national governments, started to support initiatives by and for Roma women, such as the establishment of the International Romani Women's Network (IRWN), and to provide fora for Roma women to define policy priorities and

facilitate exchanges of information and country experiences. Since 2007, a number of member States have joined the Council of Europe in an effort to increase the visibility of Roma women's issues at the international level, while providing a bigger forum for Romani women to exchange experiences and elaborate a common agenda, including through the organisation of a biennial international conference of Roma women.

Gender mainstreaming and a focus on Roma women are an increased priority for the Support Team of the Special Representative for Roma issues since 2014, when the first Gender Equality Strategy was adopted by the Council of Europe member states. The Support Team of the Special Representative for Roma issues included in its activities the objective of mainstreaming gender among its programmes. The Council of Europe Committee of Experts on Roma issues (CAHROM) appointed a Gender Rapporteur (from Finland) with the aim to mainstream gender within the work of the Committee and endorsed several thematic reports with a specific focus on Roma women and girls: on school enrolment, and on trafficking of Roma women and girls. A joint paper by the European Roma and Travellers Forum and Phenjalipe on early marriages was also presented at the CAHROM (May 2014). In 2014, a thematic visit was held in Lithuania on the empowerment of Romani women and the gender dimension of Roma integration policies. Finland, Italy, the Republic of Moldova and Spain were among partner countries. In addition, in 2014 and 2015, CAHROM also set up thematic groups on child and early marriages in Roma communities and on human trafficking, with a particular focus on Roma women and children. In December 2017, a Study visit to the UK Forced Marriage Unit was organised as a follow-up to previous Council of Europe and national activities on child and/or forced marriage within Roma and Traveller communities.

Besides the Council of Europe, the OSCE/ ODIHR, European Commission, FRA and Open Society Foundations also consistently supported strategies and programmes aimed at promoting Roma women's rights and their empowerment.

Through the efforts of international organisations, Roma women are recognised at the international level as one of the categories most vulnerable to (multiple) discrimination, social marginalisation and poverty. However, this recognition has not yet permeated the political and policy agendas at the national levels. Actions should focus on raising awareness of local authorities and national decision-makers on the necessity to include Roma women and girls in their priorities. The Council of Europe Thematic Action Plan for Roma and Travellers (2016-2019) has included the empowerment of Romani women and girls and promotion of gender equality as one of its main priorities of action among member states. The Mid-term review of the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies (2012-2020) also found that explicit attention should be paid to the exclusion of Roma women from administration and political life.

We are all constituted by multiple identities; nobody inhabits a firm and singular identity.

Ms Nawel Rafik Elmrini, Deputy to the Mayor of Strasbourg, responsible for European and International Relations, City of Strasbourg, France

Roma women are under-represented not only on grounds of ethnicity, but also on grounds of gender. It is therefore important to recall that the Council of Europe has lead efforts to close the democratic gap and increase women's participation in political life. In 2003, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe adopted [Recommendation Rec\(2003\)3](#) on balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision-making. The Recommendation indicates that, "the representation of either women or men in any decision-making body in political or public life should not fall below 40%". This percentage should be understood as a minimum target and not the ultimate goal. The Recommendation calls on member states to adopt legislative reforms to introduce parity thresholds for candidates in elections at local, regional, national and supra-national levels. The Recommendation also calls on Council of Europe member states to put in place supportive measures to "encourage greater involvement of ethnic and cultural minorities, and especially women from these minorities, in decision making at all levels". Clearly a lot more needs to be done in this field.

Furthermore, the Congress Recommendation 390(2016) on Women's political participation and representation at local and regional levels encourages governments to support the establishment of gender equality committees to advocate for women's political participation and support women candidates and to consider adopting legislative reforms in order to implement quotas for candidates in elections. The PACE Resolution 2111(2016) Assessing the impact of measures to improve women's political representation supports the principle of gender parity as the ultimate goal in political representation.

While the discrimination of Roma women has long been present in European societies, it has become more pronounced with the current increase of support for far right, radical parties all over Europe, which indicates that harmful attitudes are on the rise in Europe today. While focusing on the issue of equality for Roma women, participants in the conference noted the importance of the ongoing discussions at the Forum of Democracy regarding populism.

Making electoral systems and quotas work for Roma and Traveller Women

We need to carefully examine the findings related to women's representation in politics and see what we can learn from it with regard to Roma women's representation in politics. In particular, a double quota system may be needed to achieve progress.

Ms Mirjam Karoly, Expert, former Head of the OSCE/ODIHR Contact Point on Roma and Sinti Issues

Several speakers recalled the international and regional frameworks, including the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and the Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, and numerous commitments that have long established a right for minorities to be represented in politics. There is a long list of recommendations, resolutions and declarations that specify measures to be taken by countries in order to ensure such representation. The same goes for women's political representation, which is a cornerstone of democracy.

Ms Rita Izsak-Ndiaye, former UN Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues observed that every multilateral organization and international human rights monitoring body had issued standards and guidelines on how to ensure minority inclusion in politics. These include the OSCE's Lund Recommendations on the Effective Participation of National Minorities in Public Life (1999), the recommendations of the UN Forum on Minority Issues, and most recently the Saint Petersburg Declaration of the Inter-Parliamentary Union on interfaith and inter-ethnic dialogue, which was adopted by more than 1500 parliamentarians from 155 countries during the latest General Assembly in October 2017.

Ms Anastasia Crickley, Chairperson of the UN Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination remarked that the International Covenant on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination (1965), which has been ratified by all Council of Europe and European Union member states, prohibits racism on purpose and/or in effect. The Covenant has been given authoritative interpretation in a number of General recommendations, which are relevant to improving the situation of Roma women: General Recommendations on Racism and Roma (27), Women (25), which also addresses the intersectionality between racism and sexism, Administration of Justice (31), Hate Speech (35), Non-Citizens (30) and Special Measures (32). The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) addressed the racial discrimination of Roma in all their concluding observations to all CoE and EU member states. The issues that are most commonly taken up by the CERD in relation to Roma and Traveller women are health, including reproductive rights, education and employment, violence and life choices. International organisations also increasingly recognise the importance of addressing multiple discrimination and intersectionality, in

order to properly respond to the situation of women affected by multiple inequalities, such as Roma women.³

There are various commitments, recommendations and resolutions on women's political participation for Council of Europe Member States too. **Mr Tomas Hrustic**, Elected Expert from the Slovak Republic on the Advisory Committee for the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities noted that political representation of national minorities was explicitly discussed in Article 15 of the Framework Convention (*The Parties shall create the conditions necessary for the effective participation of persons belonging to national minorities in cultural, social and economic life and in public affairs, in particular those affecting them.*)

Therefore, the challenges to Roma women's political participation and representations are not chiefly of a legal nature. They are rather present in the fabric of European societies, which are still exclusionary towards Roma and in the hearts and minds of citizens, as anti-gypsyism is still deeply engrained in European mentalities.

The findings of the Analytical report on the implementation of CM Recommendation Rec(2003)3 on balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision-making⁴ highlight the deficit as regards women's participation in the democratic processes of European societies. Presenting the findings of this report, **Mr Charles Ramsden**, Vice-Chair of the Council of Europe Gender Equality Commission (GEC) showed that the average percentage of women's representation in national lower/single house was 25,6% in 2016. This number is not far from the world's average of 23,6%, published by the [Inter-Parliamentary Union](#). The report presents an interesting finding concerning gender quota laws: when they are strong and well-designed (i.e. with high quota percentage, rules on rank order of women and men, and strict sanctions for non-compliance), quota rules or parity systems prove efficient. On the contrary, when quota measures are weak and rather symbolic, they are ineffective. The most successful countries in terms of balanced representation of women and men in political decision-making are those with political party quotas (with 28,8% of women, compared to 23,1% in countries without quotas or parity system). This demonstrates that the support and engagement of political parties is critical to effectively improve women's representation.

Multiple speakers emphasised that involvement at local and regional level is key. **Mr Thorbjørn Jagland**, Secretary General of the Council of Europe stated that supporting the participation of Roma and Travellers in local decision-making in particular is key to build inclusive societies. **Mr Xavier Cadoret**, Vice-President

³ See, for example: [CEDAW General Recommendation 28 and EU ...](#)

⁴ Gender Equality Commission. Balanced participation of women and men in decision-making. Analytical report – 2016 data. Council of Europe, Strasbourg, October 2017. Available at: <https://rm.coe.int/analytical-report-data-2016-/1680751a3e>

of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe recalled that there is no democracy without local democracy. He further referred to the 2016 recommendation of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities on women's political participation and representation at the local and regional levels, which envisaged the adoption of legislative reforms to introduce quotas and the overhaul of the electoral systems to counter the negative impact on women's political participation. Furthermore, the Congress, through the European Alliance of Cities and Regions for the Inclusion of Roma and Travellers, promotes the political participation of Roma at the local level, including the representation of Roma women.

While measures to increase political participation of women and of Roma are included in different EU frameworks as well, in **Ms Gesa Bockermann's** (Policy Officer, DG Justice and Consumers, Non-discrimination policies and Roma Coordination, European Commission) opinion, progress should be embedded in a wider strategy for gender equality. Therefore, the focus at the European Commission is on Roma empowerment; Roma women gender mainstreaming in the national platforms; and the joint programme on access to justice with the CoE. Since 2015, the **Rights, Equality and Citizenship** program of the European Commission supports national Roma platforms and also has a focus on empowerment of Roma women.

In order to ensure effective participation, it is important that the elected minority representatives be involved and have a real possibility to influence decision-making processes, including those not strictly related to national minorities, have speaking and voting rights and not be limited to a mere observer status.

Mr Tomas Hrustic, Elected Expert from the Slovak Republic on the Advisory Committee for the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities

The support of men is also needed to have more women in elected positions. Furthermore, member states and political parties should be encouraged to take more specific actions to promote gender equality, such as: adopt more comprehensive strategies for Roma inclusion, overcome gender stereotypes, promote training and mentoring of Roma women and their involvement in politics. While the above-mentioned frameworks provide templates for how to improve the situation of Roma women, implementation depends on national states and on political parties. The obstacles are to be found in deeply rooted patriarchal mentalities, which still construct the public domain as an overwhelmingly male space.

In order to overcome structural discrimination, quotas were discussed as an important measure to increase women's and minorities' representation in politics. The Venice Commission had stated ten years ago already that quotas were powerful tools to achieve political representation for disenfranchised groups. **Ms Catarina Marcelino**, MP from the Socialist Party in Portugal gave the example of the 2006 Law in Portugal that introduced the principle of balanced participation

(at least 30%) in European, national and local elections, with penalties for non-compliance. This was applied for the first time in the 2009 elections, when women became 34% of the Parliament.

The conference speakers and participants offered, however, a critical perspective on the effectiveness of gender or minority quotas for improving Roma women's political participation.

Quotas only benefit women from the majority population. Just because we have women in politics, it does not mean it will benefit all women. The solidarity of women does not cross over to Roma and traveller women, because of the bias and racism that exist.

Ms Maria Joyce, Coordinator of the Irish National Traveller Women's Forum

Ms Milana Rikanovic, Gender Specialist at the UN Women Programme Office in Serbia showed that in the past decades, gender quotas have been introduced in half of the countries of the world. There are three main types of political quotas:

- *Voluntary party quotas* have been adopted by political parties in many countries and involve a party committing itself to nominating a certain percentage of female candidates on electoral lists.
- *Candidate quotas* are required by the law of a country and stipulate that a certain number of candidate positions must be reserved for women. They sometimes include conditions on the position of women on the electoral list, for instance by requiring that every second entry on the list must be a woman.
- *Reserved seats* are positions for which only female candidates can compete and are used as a more direct way of regulating the number of women in elected positions.

Ms Rikanovic further assessed that the low proportion of women in many countries is not a consequence of an absence of willing female candidates. The barriers to women getting elected are negative attitudes towards female leaders, failure by political parties and systems to promote female candidates and the existence of the overall systemic discrimination of women. These structural barriers are much higher for Roma women. UN Women recommends a dual approach: gender mainstreaming and affirmative action, as Roma women are underrepresented both among women and among Roma, even in countries with gender and minority quotas.

Several approaches were also discussed for improving electoral systems to increase the representation of Roma women. It is widely accepted that proportional systems are the most effective in securing a higher representation of women in politics. Among proportional systems, as **Mr François Friederich**, Head of the Electoral Assistance Division of the Council of Europe explained, countries with blocked lists are those where the representation of women is most

facilitated. In such systems, the parties decide the order of the candidates on the lists and the voters cannot change the order. The combination of quotas and blocked lists is conducive to better representation. In 2000, the Venice Commission issued an opinion that stated that the representation of national minorities was better where there were parties representing those national minorities. In the case of more dispersed communities, the chance of success were smaller. It follows from these findings, **Mr François Friederich** concluded, that a proportional representation electoral system, coupled with quotas in the legislation, as well as a geographical distribution that facilitates the participation of minority communities would facilitate a higher participation and/ or representation of Roma women in politics.

However, many more preconditions need to be met. Monitoring is needed to ensure that quota laws are respected. And those laws need to provide for adequate sanctions when political parties violate the quotas for electoral lists. At the same time, if the sanction is a fee, it will affect smaller parties much more than bigger, mainstream parties, which is not a good outcome.

Roma women need to have access to resources in order to become political candidates, most notably for campaigning. And, finally, Roma women should be encouraged to vote. Absenteeism is a growing issue in the general populations and for the Roma electorate there is the additional issue of registration as voters.

Mr Tomas Hrustic, Elected Expert from the Slovak Republic on the Advisory Committee for the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities focused on the electoral provisions foreseen in the Thematic Commentary no. 2 (adopted on 27 February 2008) on the Effective Participation of Persons belonging to National Minorities in Cultural, Social and Economic Life and in Public Affairs and in particular the reserved seats system (designed for one group or shared between several national minorities). There are examples of reserved seats in national parliaments, such as Croatia (8 mandates shared for all minorities), Kosovo*⁵ (20 seats for all minorities), or Romania (18 seats reserved, one for each minority); and in local/ municipal councils, such as in Croatia (minorities with representation between 5 and 15% in the population have the right to one seat, while those with more than 15% also have one seat in the executive body, usually that of Deputy Mayor), Bosnia and Herzegovina (reserved seats where the national minority represents more than 3% of the population); Slovenia (20 municipalities where one local councillor seat is reserved for Roma).

The practice of filling these reserved seats shows that it is overwhelmingly Roma men who benefit from this provision. In national parliaments, the Roma political representation is exclusively male: Croatia (1 Roma MP, a man); Kosovo* (4 Roma/Ashkali/Egyptian MPs, all men); Romania (two Roma male MPs, one on the reserved minority seat and one elected on mainstream party list). In local/

⁵ All reference to Kosovo, whether to the territory, institutions or population, shall be understood in full compliance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999) and without prejudice to the status of Kosovo.

municipal councils, a few Roma women are represented: Bosnia and Herzegovina - 14 Roma elected, 13 men and 1 woman; Slovenia, 20 municipalities, 15 men and 5 women. In Slovakia, a country with no quotas, the representation of Roma women in local/municipal councils has increased over the past 10 years, from 11 councillors (4.4%) out of 250 Roma elected in 2006 to 38 (7.5%) out of 505 in 2014. One Roma woman was elected mayor in 2010 and one in 2014.

It was suggested in the discussion that a double quota system may be needed for minority women. **Ms Mirjam Karoly**, Expert, former Head of the OSCE/ODIHR Contact Point on Roma and Sinti Issues recalled the Council of Europe *Report on the impact of electoral systems on women's representation in politics*, which stressed that *"It is generally acknowledged that women need to reach a critical mass of at least one third of the seats of a legislative body in order to be able to exert real influence on the decisions taken by this body."* She pondered whether a similar concept of critical mass would apply to Roma representation in a legislative body and what would be the threshold of that critical mass.

Running as candidates on political parties lists

Political parties have a crucial role to play in addressing the heavy under-representation of Roma and Traveller women in political life.

Ms Snežana Samardžić-Marković, Director General of Democracy (DG II) of the Council of Europe

Political parties have the power to promote Roma women.

Ms Soraya Post, Member of the European Parliament, Feminist Initiative, Sweden

Two words are raising fear in the Roma community: police and politicians.

Ms Miranda Vuolasranta, President, European Roma and Travellers Forum

The participants in the two parallel conference workshops on the topic of running as candidates on political party lists raised for discussion a great number of challenges and obstacles for Roma women who would like to enter the field of politics. First and foremost, the persisting discrimination against Roma and women in European societies is difficult to overcome. This translates into exclusion of Roma, specific forms of hatred (anti-gypsism) and often poverty of Roma. All these factors effectively create a situation of disenfranchisement of the Roma people. In France, for example, there are no elected Roma, manoush or gitane in representative bodies. In Spain, there are no Roma represented in the national parliament.

Mainstream political parties often reflect the wider culture of discrimination against Roma and the societal stereotypes of Roma women and, therefore, they are often obstacles rather than platforms for greater political participation of Roma women. **Ms Rita Izsak-Ndiaye**, Expert, former UN Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues outlined in her speech several of the challenges posed by political parties. Among them is the often problematic approach to Roma issues in both right-wing and left-wing political parties. Right-wing parties in general hold that certain social hierarchies are inevitable and natural, even desirable, as they stem from natural law, economics or tradition. If they decide to engage with Roma, right-wing parties will prefer to work with some selected intellectual Roma individuals and use tokenism to demonstrate that by hard work and good behaviour it is indeed almost automatic that one gets higher in the social ladder. Left-wing politicians support social equality and egalitarianism and are usually concerned about disadvantaged communities with the belief that there are unjustified inequalities that need to be tackled. And, therefore, left wing parties would be the natural allies. In fact, they often treat Roma in a paternalistic way, as needy people in poverty who must be uplifted, and consequently these parties often have difficulties to forge real partnerships with those who come from a well-educated and strong middle class background.

Roma women are left with far less than ideal choices. Do we accept to join a party where we might be the only Roma face and be used to support the argument that everything is possible only depending on our own personal efforts and be pressured to deny existing forms of structural and institutional racism? or we get ourselves into an eternal struggle of trying to take the Roma issue out of the poverty paradigm and place it into the rights context with clear obligations on States?

Ms Rita Izsak-Ndiaye, Expert, former UN Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues

There are opportunities for mainstream political parties to encourage more cultural dialogue, acknowledge that the diversity of the population is not reflected in the parliament, and reveal both the open and latent racism. For example, **Ms Katju Aro**, Chair of the Feminist Party of Finland explained that the Feminist Party was trying to recruit more candidates from different backgrounds. The Feminist Party of Sweden had successfully supported the candidature of Ms Soraya Post for the European Parliament.

However, participants repeatedly emphasized that there is a major risk of co-optation and pressure to compromise on the strength of the Roma rights platform when joining a mainstream party. In addition, those Roma women who have tried to enter politics on mainstream party lists have had disappointing experiences. Therefore, many examples were given of the opportunities offered to Roma women by running on ethnic party lists or as independents. This provides a way of overcoming institutional racism and garner the power of voters who are ready to support Roma women candidates. Ms Sarita Jasarova, President of LIL NGO, “The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” shared the experience of setting up an informal Roma women’s network, which was accepted as a partner by two of the four Roma parties in the country. One participant from the Republic of Moldova shared plans to establish the Women’s Democratic Party in the Republic of Moldova, in reaction to the fact that only two Roma women were elected at local level, out of 200,000 Roma.

Everything is about politics- no matter if we are politically oriented or not.
Workshop 1 participants

Box 1. Becoming a political candidate: 10 Steps for Roma women*

1. Cultivate political leadership, starting with your own family to gain respect in the community.
2. Nurture a general interest in the society and how it functions in order to have the right knowledge base and understanding.
3. Build charisma and speaking skills.
4. Get involved in monitoring, advocacy and civic initiatives to build capital for becoming a politician; NGO experience is important to understand the grass-root level.
5. Get involved young (18-25 years old).
6. Be aware of what is involved in choosing a party: ideology, religion, even history; ethnic Roma party or non-Roma party. Negotiating membership with the mainstream or Roma political parties requires "marketing and selling yourself".
7. Define your values and priorities - your programme. This should include elements addressing not only the rights of Roma, but also those of other people in disadvantaged societal positions and general issues important to the majority voters. As a woman politician, you may want to identify as a feminist, while showing that feminism and traditional Roma values and way of life are not opposites.
8. Good planning is essential. Prepare the campaign and slogans in time. Do the lobbying in time. Get support and funding for campaigning. Public grants may be available in your country.
9. Connect to voters. Participate in organizing the Roma communities as voting communities. Candidates should stay on the side of the Roma and not take the non-Roma side for political gains.
10. Recognise and avoid traps: misperceptions that "politics is a men-only field", or that "Roma cannot succeed in politics, only in music"; avoiding/ hiding one's cultural identity as Roma; limiting activism to the NGO sphere; limiting the activism to the local level, not progressing to the national level.

*) Based on Workshop 1. *Running as candidates on political parties' lists: Sharing experiences and lessons learned*. Participants: **Ms Mara-Daniela Calista**, MP, National Liberal Party (PNL), Romania, **Mr Robert Cerari**, Leader of the Social Political Movement of Roma, Republic of Moldova, **Ms Rozsa Hoffmann**, MP, Christian Democratic People's Party (KDNP), Hungary, **Ms Sarita Jasarova**, President of LIL NGO, "The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia", **Ms Saska Jovanovic**, Consultant/Facilitator, CoE/EC Joint Programme on Roma and Traveller Women's Access to Justice (JUSTROM), President of Association Romni onlus, Vice-president of the ROWNI-Roma Women Network Italy onlus, Italy, **Ms Catarina Marcelino**, MP, Socialist Party, Portugal, **Mr Gheorge Raducanu**, former MP and founder of the Party of the Roma, Romania, **Ms Miranda Vuolasranta**, President, European Roma and Travellers Forum (ERTF))

Workshop 2: *Running as candidates on political parties' lists: Exploring opportunities and identifying challenges.* Participants: **Ms Katju Aro**, Chair, Feminist Party, Finland, **Mr Gabor Harangozo**, MP, Socialist Party, Hungary, **Mr Emil Kirjas**, Secretary General of Liberal International, **Ms Karolina Leaković**, Co-ordinator on Human Rights Policies in the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and acting President of SDP Women's Forum, Croatia, **Ms Valentina Leskaj**, Member of the Chairmanship of the Socialist Party, Albania, **Ms Gisèle Wurm**, MP, Social Democratic Party (SPÖ), Austria

Box 2. Becoming a political candidate: Opportunities and challenges

1.

Empowering and mentoring Roma and Traveller Women

We must identify ways of encouraging Roma women to get into the world of politics, to help them understand its importance and benefits together with the challenges, to arm them with all the necessary tools and right attitudes to survive and overcome difficult situations, to build their self-confidence so they are strong and vocal enough to stand up for the interests of their constituencies, and to establish support for them in balancing their career with the family duties at their homes.

Ms Rita Izsak-Ndiaye, Expert, former UN Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues, Member of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD)

Several speakers at this conference connected the participation of Roma women in political life with other forms of participation. **Ms Rita Izsak-Ndiaye** observed that nowadays there were diverse platforms where ordinary citizens' activities affect politics and the disappearing borderline between political and non-political societal spheres stimulated various new forms of participation. Speaking up publicly on social media, taking part in flash mobs, casting a vote, joining a demonstration, signing a petition, or volunteering to support an electoral candidate are all examples of different forms of participation. Roma and Traveller women should be encouraged to consider taking part in such actions too. Several participants also concurred that community participation is an essential precondition for political participation.

Mr Tomas Hrusic suggested that existing structures for civic engagement at local level, such as the network of Roma women mediators could be better used for political engagement. Roma women mediators are already working on building Roma women's capacities at the community level and these capacity building efforts could include support for becoming engaged in local politics.

Other strategies to support Roma women who want to become political candidates are training, and networking and mentoring among women. **Mr Thorbjørn Jagland** gave the example of recent training for nearly 1000 female candidates, which helped elect eight mayors and ninety local councillors, including the first two Roma women councillors ever elected in the Republic of Moldova. In Ukraine, Roma women created a political platform to support their involvement in politics.

Roma feminism is key to Roma empowerment.

Ms Ursula Till-Tentschert, Senior Programme Manager, European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA)

Ms Ursula Till-Tentschert, Senior Programme Manager for Statistics and Surveys in the Freedoms and Justice Department of the European Union Agency

for Fundamental Rights (FRA) gave the example of the Local Engagement for Roma Inclusion (LERI) programme (2014-2016). The project is implemented in 21 localities in 11 EU member states, with 4 localities focusing on women's participation in Spain, Hungary and Finland. The programme support the participation and engagement of local level stakeholders. Among the preliminary findings from the programme relating to Roma women's empowerment are the need to facilitate Roma girls' and women's participation in education, training and labour market; the need to challenge stereotyped gender roles; the importance of facilitating women networks and spaces for women only discussions. Based on the consultations and focus groups organised so far, LERI showed that Roma feminism can be key to Roma empowerment. And that political participation can come about as a consequence of empowerment.

It often feels as if the Roma women have to fight alone for their rights. We need to fight for respect of our culture and identity in order to be able to continue to live as Roma.

Ms Sonja Barbul, NGO Papusza, Austria

Empowerment often starts with the recognition of the challenges to overcome. Roma women spoke about needing to name racism and its specific anti-Roma manifestation, anti-gypsyism, in order to address it. The sexualized and violent racism experienced by Roma women needs to be named as well.

Challenges for Roma women's involvement in politics also come from within their own communities. Roma women who tried to get involved into politics warned that it takes a long time alongside effort and determination to become a political woman in a traditional and conservative environment. Roma women's family commitment and responsibilities often deter them from pursuing any political aspirations.

The Roma women present at the conference spoke about having come to look for inspiration and mutual support. Their most important allies and mentors in the struggle to overcome the sometimes seemingly insurmountable challenges are other Roma women and men who have succeeded in this path. The conference offered the example of many role models who spoke about their own experiences in formal politics.

The power of role models

We seldom speak about Roma women as agents of change, as leaders and role-models, as women who can effectively drive social progress through their action.

We need to fill this gap. Our pledge today is a key action towards empowering Roma and Traveller women and promoting gender equality.

Ms Oana Bîzgan-Gayral, President of the Commission for Equality between women and men, Chamber of Deputies of Romania

Ms Rita Izsak-Ndiaye (Hungary) is the former UN Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues (1 August 2011 – 31 July 2017). Her mother is of Romani origin and she has directly experienced prejudice and discrimination. Ms Rita Izsak-Ndiaye holds a Masters in Law diploma from the Péter Pázmány Catholic University, Budapest, Hungary.

Ms Izsak-Ndiaye stressed that the challenges to Roma women's political participation were also personal, both external and internal.

“External when us, Roma women are treated with suspicion, reservation, doubt, prejudice, when our loyalty, professionalism and preparedness is constantly questioned. And such encounters are not even unique for Roma women or minority women but indeed affect women in general. I know that many of you also identify as feminists. The blunt truth is that men still make the most important decisions in the world. Women face real obstacles in the professional world, including blatant and subtle sexism, discrimination and sexual harassment. Too few workplaces offer the flexibility and access to childcare and parental leave that are necessary for pursuing a career while raising children. Men have an easier time finding the mentors and sponsors who are invaluable for career progression. And women have to prove themselves to a far greater extent than men do. And all this hits Romani women harder whose networks of support might be narrower and their ability for self-advocacy hindered by the lower status that they are often assigned to compared to majority women.

Unfortunately, personal challenges are also internal. We, women, especially minority women who are often born and suffer of an inferiority complex build barriers that exist within ourselves. We tend to lack self-confidence, we are often easily discouraged to raise our hands and voices and express our opinions, we internalize negative criticism, we are afraid of being labelled as bad women if we happen to travel and stay in hotel rooms alone, we fear to be labelled as becoming like men by being outspoken, clear or strict, claiming our power and assigned responsibilities. We are scared that if we don't give birth to children or enough children, we will not be regarded as real Roma women. We compromise our career goals to take care of our family members, from young to old. Moreover, we always thrive to be nice and caring because these are the qualities that society expects from us. But this is a trap. Because if we behave

professionally and efficiently, we will be regarded as too competitive, not very good to work with or just not nice enough. If we are indeed kind and nice and understanding, we will be considered weak and not competent enough. So we often choose the sacrifice to try to be liked than being considered successful.”

Ms **Rita Izsak-Ndiaye**’s example of success is a powerful one and she inspired the Roma women in the audience to *“find ways and solutions to continue our joint walk on this long road of establishing full equality of Roma women in rights and dignity”*.

Ms Soraya Post (Sweden) is a Member of the European Parliament from the Feminist Initiative. She is the daughter of a Romani mother (Norwegian and Swedish Travellers) and a Jewish father. She identifies as Roma. In her video intervention at the conference, she spoke about her own path into politics and recalled that she started her civic engagement at the age of 21, at the grassroots level. She knows from her long experience in grassroots activism, media and public service that Roma women face double discrimination, as women and as Roma. In the early 2000s, Ms Post became involved in the International Roma Women’s Network (IRWIN) and became its president. She decided to stand for European elections at the age of 57. The party she chose, the Feminist Initiative, voted for her as the first person on the list for European elections. When the party gained one seat in the European Parliament, she was the one who took it. Ms Post advised the Roma women present at the conference that political participation means first and foremost the right to vote. She called on political parties to sign the pledge to promote gender equality and the political participation of Roma women.

Ms Miranda Vuolasranta (Finland), President, European Roma and Travellers Forum (ERTF) is a role model for many young Roma women who would like pursue a political career. Ms Vuolasranta was born in a caravan and has worn the traditional Roma dress all her life.

At the 6th International Roma Women Conference, she spoke about her own path into politics. It all began in her early years of school. She recalled for the participants in the conference that the teachers, who were advising her about future studies, told her at one point that if she continued to wear the traditional Roma dress, there was no point in continuing her studies, as she would never be able to get any job. She was told she had to hide the fact that she was Roma in order to continue her studies. That was in 1976.

“I had to consider whether my own history, that of my mother’s and my father’s was so unacceptable that it did not have place in the modern life.”

She decided she would not give up on her Roma culture and moved to Sweden. She continued her studies. She became a teacher of Romani language. From being once told that she could not show her Roma identity, she became an

outspoken defender of that identity and leader of the Roma movement. She was involved in a number of international bodies, including the European Roma and Travellers Forum (one of the founders and currently its President), the European Roma Information Office, the International Roma Women's Network (one of the founders). However, she did not succeed on the national/ local electoral levels. She joined the Social Democratic Party of Finland and took part in national elections, but was never able to gather enough Roma votes, as the Roma minority is dispersed. **Ms Vuolasranta** advised the audience that *"If you have enough power, commitment and hunger for knowledge, you will be accepted no matter what your clothing is or the colour of your skin"*.

Ms Natasa Tasic, Opera singer, Serbia inspired the audience at the 6th International Roma Women's conference to feel pride in the Roma culture. She insisted that cultural politics plays an important role in a larger notion of politics. Ms Tasic spoke about her own upbringing and the inspiration and strength she found in her mother, who raised three children as a single mother. Her mother supported and encouraged her to finish university studies. In addition to her musical training, Ms Tasic has a degree in air traffic engineering. Ms Tasic spoke about the influence of Roma on classical art and in particular opera and several Romantic composers, such as Franz Liszt or Dvorak, both of whom lived with Roma for periods of their lives. At the same time, Roma women are portrayed in stereotypical fashion in many classical operas. The most famous Roma woman character in opera is Carmen (Bizet), who is a seducer. Other Roma women characters in opera are thieves, witches or wrong-doers.

Ms Tasic led an emotional moment at the conference, when she asked the audience to stand up and sing the Roma anthem, Jelem, jelem.

Ms Ágnes Osztolykán (Hungary), former Member of Parliament, Lehet Mas a Politika Green Party spoke about her experience of becoming a candidate and then in politics. She shared with the audience that, when she ran as a candidate, it was the party who found her and invited her to be on the list. She asked at that point: why? Was it because she was Roma? Was it because she was a woman? The party said "both". When she ran for the Parliament, the party (the first Green political party in Hungary) did not have money for political campaigns, but the candidates participated anyway out of motivation and commitment. In 2010, she was on the second place on the party list. The party gained 7% of the votes and she became an MP.

As a member of the Hungarian Parliament, her main focus was education. She felt alone in politics many times and often not supported by her party. Eventually, she gave it up because of family responsibilities (she is a single mother of a 12-year old boy).

Ms Indira Bajramovic, UŽR "Bolja Buducnost" Tuzla, Bosnia and Herzegovina shared her experience of running for local elections several times. The Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina recognizes only three nationalities: Bosnian, Croats and Serbian, so Roma cannot become candidates as Roma. However, in 2008, this possibility was open, but only in local elections. As soon as that was possible, she brought her candidacy forward. After four years, four more Roma women ran for election. They were not successful either times. In Ms Bajramovic's opinion, gender inequalities in the Roma community played a part, as men believe that women's place is in the kitchen. In the last local elections, five Roma women were elected to municipal councils and Ms Bajramovic became the president of the Municipal Counselling Body.

Ms Maria Joyce (Ireland), Co-ordinator of the Irish National Traveller Women's Forum spoke about the specific experiences and challenges for Traveller women. Ms Joyce is a Traveller woman herself and has witnessed the exclusion and discrimination of the group first hand. As only one measure of the inequalities they face daily, the life expectancy of Traveller women is 11,5 years less than that of majority women. Significant gaps exist between Traveller women and majority women in educational attainment, labor participation and on all aspects of public life. To date, there are no Travellers in the Irish parliament. Since the 1960s, when the first official government response to Travellers was issued, the Irish government pursued a policy of assimilation and segregation of the Traveller community. The State recognized the Traveller ethnicity only in March this year (2017) after a long struggle. Ms Joyce encouraged Roma and Traveller women to keep demanding "*nothing about us, without us*".

Mr Gheorghe Raducanu (Romania), former MP and founder of the Party of the Roma shared some insights from his rich political experience. He was born in a caravan and his mother tongue is Romanes. He learned Romanian only later in life. From these beginnings, he considers himself an example that everything is possible, since he became a member of the Parliament twice and adviser to the Prime minister. He attributes much of his success to the desire to participate in politics and speak up. He urged the audience to always stay faithful to their Roma identity, as he is aware that many Roma politicians hide their ethnicity.

Ms Sarita Jasarova, President, NGO LIL, "The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" spoke about her involvement in civic activism. She was inspired to get involved as a way of being accepted on an equal footing with her husband. She found it unfair that he would get to participate in activism and she could only be home with the children. She remedied that by getting a first job at the European Roma Rights Center in Budapest. She later worked at the Roma and Sinti point of the OSCE, where her mentor was the late Nicolae Gheorghe. She then decided that the best way for her to make a change was to set up her own organization and help people at the grassroots/ local level. Suto-Orizari, her community, is the only Roma municipality in the FYR of Macedonia that has a Roma mayor. In her work at the community/ municipality level, she found that the

budget was not equally allocated in that Roma communities were getting less funding than the non-Roma (gadajikane). Ms Jasarova initiated projects such as mobilization of Roma women to address issues of health.

Conclusions, Recommendations and Next steps: Towards equality in political representation

Conclusions

Ms Claudia Luciani, Director of Democratic Governance and Anti-Discrimination, Directorate General of Democracy, Council of Europe and **Ms Manjola Veizi**, Executive Director, Roma Women Rights Center, Albania, Vice-President of IRWN – Phenjalipe jointly presented the conclusions of the 6th International Roma Women conference.

The immediate outcome of the conference was a pledge endorsed by 13 signatories⁶ from political parties or groups around Europe, which committed them to promoting Roma and Traveller women as candidates in the next European, national, regional and local elections.

As the only European wide network of Roma women, IRWN-Phenjalipe requested additional support from the Council of Europe and asked for a dedicated co-ordinator within the CoE for the work of the network. Phenjalipe could also help promote and monitor the pledge signed by the political parties and encourage other political parties to sign it.

Conference speakers and participants stressed the need to garner the **power of civil society to support Roma women's political participation**. Roma women's engagement in civil society organizations / NGOs is an important way for Roma women to build skills, confidence and motivation to participate in politics. Some may 'cross over' from civil society to politics, but civil society has a crucial role in maintaining the dialogue and pressure needed to bring and keep Roma women's issues on the political agendas.

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

⁶ The signatories are: CALISTA Mara-Daniela, National Liberal Party (PNL), Romania, CADORET Xavier, Socialist Party, France, ARO Katju Feminist Party, Finland, BIZGAN-GAYRAL Oana, Socialist Party, Romania, CERARI Robert, Social Political Movement of Roma, Republic of Moldova, LEAKOVIC Karolina, Social Democratic Party (SDP), Croatia, LESKAJ Valentina, Chairmanship of the Socialist Party, Albania, MARCELINO Catarina, Socialist Party, Portugal, RADUCANU Gheorge, Party of the Roma, Romania, WURM Gisela, Social Democratic Party (SPÖ), Austria, HARANGOZO Gabor Socialist Party, Hungary, KIRJAS Emil, Liberal International, NUREDINI Albana, Democratic Party, Albania

systems. To promote minorities' participation, the **legal threshold for parties under proportionate representation systems should be low enough**.

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). However, quotas for women alone or for national minorities alone do not ensure that Roma women are represented on party lists. There was a call for 'double or intersectional quotas' at this conference.

The importance of access to resources for political participation was repeatedly emphasised. There is a pressing **need to make funding available for Roma women who want to campaign in elections**. Party financing/ campaign funding is an important area to increase Roma women's chances to become involved in politics. In every country where there is a law regarding the use of election funding, financial resources should be available also to the Roma candidates in equal proportion. The conference participants called for international and regional organisations, including the European Commission to make available more targeted funding for this purpose, including for networking of Roma women.

Politicians speaking from their personal experience, and more significantly Roma women who ran as candidates in elections advised that "courage is needed for politics". One has to build confidence, develop public speaking skills and build resilience in the face of attacks and confrontation in order to become a candidate. Conference participants called for a number of measures to encourage Roma women to enter the world of politics, through **training, mentorship, career advising and peer networking**. Roma women candidates should also **be supported after their election**.

Political parties, international organisations, governmental and European representatives should **train Roma women to stand for political office**, by facilitating mentorship programmes for Roma women (utilising existing role models from within the Roma community and mainstream politicians), by supporting exchange of expertise between Roma 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.

Where mainstream political parties are not open to the candidacy of Roma women, they may consider **running as independent candidates**. Roma women's networks are important in supporting Roma women political candidates, whether with mainstream political parties or those running as independents. Some Roma women called for setting up a **European political party for Roma women** in order to provide a platform for Roma women to become political candidates and counter the discrimination faced from political parties.

International organisations, governments, civil society, practitioners and academics should invest in the capacity building of Roma women. In addition to designing specific initiatives, where needed, it is important to ensure that Roma women have **access to capacity building initiatives** that exist in the countries, as well as access to resources.

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**.

While the focus of the conference was on political participation, the participants repeatedly stressed the need to ensure **Roma women's participation in all decision making bodies and administrative structures that affect their lives, including national and local government structures, law enforcement bodies and the judiciary**. Roma women called for continued support to good practices of participation, in particular support to mediators at community level.

The conference also discussed the importance of **increasing Roma women's participation as voters** in order to act as a powerful electoral constituency.

One way to support Roma women's political participation is to **support the education/ training of voters and sensitisation campaigns targeting women**. Action needs to be taken to eradicate obstacles facing Roma women to fully exercise their electoral rights, by ensuring that all Roma have identity documents and are included in the voters registration list; 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.

Measures to increase Roma women's political participation need to be embedded in a larger gender equality strategy for Roma women, that also includes actions to overcome gender stereotypes in society and in Roma communities and support for the reconciliation of family and work. 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, leading to appropriate measures in legislation, policies and practice. Furthermore, all Roma related policies, frameworks and programmes at international, European, national and local level should integrate a strong gender mainstreaming component.

There is still a pressing need to collect gender-disaggregated data about Roma 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**.

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 so that positive actions are supported as long as necessary.

Participants in the conference underlined the importance of language in reproducing, but also countering racist and sexist mind-sets. Awareness should be raised among political parties, media and the general public on the use of **non-sexist language** when speaking about Roma women candidates.

The Roma women who participated in the conference repeatedly raised the issue of the trade-off that is often expected between preserving one's cultural identity as a Roma and participating in mainstream politics. **Roma women strongly called for treating culture and identity as human rights issues.**

Partnerships and co-ordination between and with 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 women, in the political decision-making processes.

Roma women expressed concern at the current increase of support for far right or radical parties all over Europe, which makes it harder to get support for an inclusive agenda addressing the interests of Roma and promoting social justice. Now more than ever, Roma women need **strong alliances with other women leaders from different communities** to claim effective representation of diversity in politics and policies.

Roma women's empowerment and **collective action are the only way to break prejudices and stereotypes within and outside the communities** and claim their rights, including the right to run and be elected as a political representative.

Their political representation is a democratic imperative and there should be no policies for Roma women without their participation. Only Roma representatives can secure long-term interest in Roma issues.

Recommendations:

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.
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 6th International Roma Women Conference in Strasbourg on 6-7 November 2017** (available online at: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/portal/roma-women/>).

Next steps

- The pledge by political parties/groups to promote gender equality and the participation of women from minority groups, in particular Roma and Traveller women has been made public on the Council of Europe Roma women website. The pledge is open for additional signatures. It is hoped that it will lead political parties across Europe to support at least one Roma woman candidate in elections at every level, European, national, regional and local, starting already in 2019. The Roma women NGO IRWN-Phenjalipe could also help promote and monitor the pledge signed by the political parties and encourage other political parties to sign it.

- Empowerment of Roma women through political participation will remain a key priority of the Council of Europe Thematic Action Plan on the Inclusion of Roma and Travellers. Addressing this priority requires capacity building of Roma women, as candidates and as voters. There is also an urgent need to fight against anti-gypsyism and hate speech. The recommendations of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) are particularly relevant to fighting anti-gypsyism.
- Balanced participation of women and men in decision-making remains high in the political agenda of the Council of Europe and its work to promote gender equality. Under the next Gender Equality Strategy for 2018-2023, the Gender Equality Commission will continue to support measures and good practices that promote gender equality in relation to: electoral systems, training of decision makers, gender-sensitive functioning of decision-making bodies, parity thresholds, effective quota laws and voluntary party quotas, and the regulation of political parties including public funding.
- The future Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy for 2018-2023 recognises the important challenge of ensuring that all women benefit from gender equality policies and the protection provided by relevant standards, including disadvantaged groups of women (Roma and Traveller women, among others). The Strategy will be implemented in a co-ordinated way with other Council of Europe strategies and action plans, including the Thematic Action Plan on the Inclusion of Roma and Travellers, and in co-operation with relevant CoE bodies, including the Ad Hoc Committee of Experts on Roma and Traveller Issues.
- The European Commission organised a Colloquium on fundamental rights in November 2017 on the theme of women's rights in turbulent times. It discussed misogyny in society, the need for political participation of women, international women's movement, and specific talks on engendering democracy.
- The discussion on the evaluation of EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies is on-going and it provides an opportunity to demand that a post EU-2020 Roma Strategy will ensure gender mainstreaming throughout all its areas and promote gender equality and targeted interventions and funding for Roma women.

APPENDIX I PROGRAMME

Monday, 6 November 2017

08.30-09.30 Registration of participants

Opening session

Moderator: Ms Snežana Samardžić-Marković, Director General of Democracy (DG II)

09.00-10.00 **Mr Thorbjørn Jagland**, Secretary General of the Council of Europe

Ms Rita Izsak-Ndiaye, Expert, former Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues,
Member of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD)

Ms Nawel Rafik Elmrini, Deputy to the Mayor of Strasbourg, responsible for European and International Relations, City of Strasbourg, France

Ms Oana Bizgan-Gayral, President of the Commission for Equality between women and men, Chamber of Deputies of Romania

Ms Soraya Post, Member of the European Parliament, Feminist Initiative, Sweden (video message)

10.00-10.30 Coffee break / Press Conference

Panel discussion: Gender equality and electoral systems

Moderator: Ms Miranda Vuolasranta, President, European Roma and Travellers Forum (ERTF)

10.30-12.00 **Mr Xavier Cadoret**, Vice-President of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, Mayor of Saint-Gérard-le-Puy, France

Ms Gesa Böckermann, Policy Officer, DG Justice and Consumers,
Non-discrimination policies and Roma Coordination, European Commission

Mr Cristi Mihalache, Associate Programme Officer on Roma and Sinti Issues,
OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
(ODIHR)

Mr Charles Ramsden, Vice-Chair of the Council of Europe
Gender Equality Commission (GEC)

Ms Milana Rikanovic, Gender Specialist, UN Women Programme
Office, Serbia

*"Effects of quota in the electoral system to the advancement of
gender equality and women's rights"*

Questions and answers

Plenary Session 1 - Electoral Quota Systems for Roma/Travellers

*Moderator: **Mr Robert Rustem**, Roma and Travellers Team, Council of Europe*

12.00-13.00 **Ms Anastasia Crickley**, Chairperson, UN Committee for the
Elimination of Racial Discrimination, Vice-President International
Association for Community Development, Department of Applied
Social Studies, Maynooth University, Ireland

*"Special Measures to promote and support participation and
political representation by Roma/Traveller Women: a global
perspective"*

Mr François Friederich, Head of the Electoral Assistance
Division, Directorate General of Democracy, Council of Europe

*"Electoral systems, gender quotas and women's representation in
Parliament. Systematic considerations, and relevance for Roma
and Traveller Women"*

Mr Tomas Hrustic, Elected Expert from the Slovak Republic on
the Advisory Committee for the Framework Convention for the
Protection of National Minorities

*"Increased voice of Roma women. Do quota systems lead to
higher representation of Roma women in elected bodies?"*

Discussion

13.00-14.30

Lunch break

Participants are invited to organise informal meetings between
representatives of political parties and Roma and Traveller women
during the break

Parallel workshops

14.30-16.00

Workshop 1: Running as candidates on political parties' lists: Sharing experiences and lessons learned (Room 9)

Languages: English-Romani

*Chair: **Ms Alice Pop**, Romania Resident Director, National Democratic Institute (NDI)*

*Rapporteur: **Ms Henna Huttu**, Member of the Ad hoc Committee of Experts on Roma and Traveller Issues (CAHROM), Finland*

Open to all participants (registration required)

Panelists

Ms Mara-Daniela Calista, MP, National Liberal Party (PNL), Romania

Mr Robert Cerari, Leader of the Social Political Movement of Roma, Republic of Moldova

Ms Sarita Jasarova, President of LIL NGO, "The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia"

Ms Saska Jovanovic, Consultant/Facilitator, CoE/EC Joint Programme on Roma and Traveller Women's Access to Justice (JUSTROM), President of Association Romni onlus, Vice-president of the ROWNI-Roma Women Network Italy onlus, Italy

Ms Catarina Marcelino, MP, Socialist Party, Portugal

Mr Gheorge Raducanu, former MP and founder of the Party of the Roma, Romania

Ms Miranda Vuolasranta, President, European Roma and Travellers Forum (ERTF)

14.30-16.00

Workshop 2: Running as candidates on political parties' lists: Exploring opportunities and identifying challenges (Room 14)

Languages: English-French

*Chair: **Mr Branko Sočanac**, Chair of the Ad hoc Committee of Experts on Roma and Traveller Issues (CAHROM), Croatia*

*Rapporteur: **Mr Michaël Guet**, Head of the I-CARE Unit, Roma and Travellers Team, Council of Europe*

Open to all participants (registration required)

Panelists

Ms Katju Aro, Chair, Feminist Party, Finland

Mr Gabor Harangozo, MP, Socialist Party, Hungary

Mr Emil Kirjas, Secretary General of Liberal International

Ms Karolina Leaković, Co-ordinator on Human Rights Policies in the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and acting President of SDP Women's Forum, Croatia

Ms Valentina Leskaj, Member of the Chairmanship of the Socialist Party, Albania

Ms Gisèle Wurm, MP, Social Democratic Party (SPÖ), Austria

16.00-16.30 *Coffee break*

Plenary session: presentations and conclusions of the workshops

16.30-17.30 Oral reports by workshop rapporteurs

Discussion

Pledge by political parties on promoting gender equality and participation of Roma and Traveller Women in politics

17.30-18.00 Official signature ceremony covered by the press
Moderator: Mr Thorsten Afflerbach, Head of the Division for Roma and Travellers Team, Council of Europe

18.00 Reception
Lobby of the Hemicycle

Tuesday, 7 November 2017

Plenary Session 2: Empowering and mentoring Roma and Traveller Women: role models

Moderator: Ms Sonja Barbul, IRWN-Phenjalipe

9.30-11.30 **Ms Sarita Jasarova**, President, NGO LIL, "The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia"

Ms Miranda Vuolasranta, President, European Roma and Travellers Forum (ERTF)

Ms Natasa Tasic, opera singer, Serbia

Ms Ursula Till-Tentschert, Senior Programme Manager - Statistics and Surveys, Freedoms and Justice Department, European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA)

Ms Maria Joyce, Co-ordinator of the Irish National Traveller Women's Forum

Ms Ágnes Osztolykán, former Member of Parliament, Lehet Mas a Politika Green Party, Hungary

Ms Mirjam Karoly, Expert, former Head of the OSCE/ODIHR Contact Point on Roma and Sinti Issues (CPRSI)

Discussion

11.30 – 12.00

Coffee break

10.00 - 11.30
women

Individual photo shoot with the participating Roma and Traveller women
The photographer will have a mobile studio set up by the conference room, interested participants can sign up at the Secretariat's desk.

Closing session

*Moderator: **Mr Thorsten Afflerbach**, Head of Division for the Roma and Travellers Team, Council of Europe*

12.00 – 13.00

Ms Claudia Luciani, Director of Democratic Governance and Anti-Discrimination, Directorate General of Democracy, Council of Europe

Ms Manjola Veizi, Executive Director, Roma Women Rights Center, Albania,
Vice-President of IRWN – Phenjalipe

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APPENDIX III
**Pledge on political representation
of Roma and Traveller women**

Following the discussions held at the 6th International Conference of Roma Women “Women and Political Representation: The Case of Roma and Traveller Women” held at the Council of Europe in Strasbourg, France, on 6-7 November 2017,

and taking into account that:

- in spite of the progress being made in Europe in terms of improving equal opportunities and rights for women and men, the Council of Europe notes a persistently low level of participation by women in decision-making processes and in political life;
- women from ethnic minorities, and Roma and Traveller women in particular, remain severely under-represented in European, national and regional parliaments, regional and municipal councils, governments and posts of responsibility in political parties;
- considering that balanced participation by women and men in decision-making is a precondition for improving the functioning of democracy and society;
- on-going under-representation of women in political decision-making reflects a basic democratic deficit in both the member States of the Council of Europe and the broader international context;
- national electoral and party systems have an important responsibility for ensuring a balanced representation of women at all levels of government and parliament;
- electoral quotas are often effective means of achieving significant, rapid progress, provided that they are correctly designed and consistently implemented;
- quotas should be adapted to the electoral system in force and set ambitious yet achievable targets and where possible, such quotas and other positive measures should also be introduced for women from minority groups, including Roma and Travellers;
- political parties have a crucial role to play in improving the political representation of women in general and women from minority groups in particular, including Roma and Traveller women, as by selecting and supporting the candidates, they act as gatekeepers of elected positions, and their choices determine to a large extent the final outcome of elections concerning gender-balance and minority representation;

We, members of political parties, pledge to promote gender equality and the participation of women from minority groups, in particular Roma and Traveller women, in decision-making bodies and in political representation at the next European, national, regional and local elections.

Signed by (in order of signature on the pledge):

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3	ARO, Katju	Feminist Party	Finland
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5	CERARI, Robert	Social Political Movement of Roma	Republic of Moldova
6	LEAKOVIC, Karolina	Social Democratic Party (SDP)	Croatia
7	LESKAJ, Valentina	Chairmanship of the Socialist Party	Albania
8	MARCELINO, Catarina	Socialist Party	Portugal
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10	WURM, Gisela	Social Democratic Party (SPÖ)	Austria
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12	KIRJAS, Emil	Liberal International	n/a
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