

The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities



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The situation of Roma¹ in Europe: a challenge for local and regional authorities

Current Affairs Committee
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Summary

Roma have faced a long history of social exclusion and marginalisation within European society, exclusion which is compounded by severe disadvantage across a number of inter-related fields: lack of education, unemployment, poverty, lack of access to healthcare, poor housing and residential segregation, etc. Recent events are proof that this marginalisation and severe discrimination are on-going.

Anti-Gypsyism has deep roots in European history. Myths and stereotypes about Roma continue to prevail in the minds of the non-Roma population, rooted in ignorance, fear and segregation, and still largely unchallenged by education. The recent resurgence of extremism targeted at Roma and other groups, fostered by the economic recession, fomented by demagogues, and fed by media reports, demonstrates that anti-Gypsyism continues to be potent as a populist political force.

Local and regional authorities have a responsibility to protect and promote the human rights of their citizens and they have a wide range of powers they can use for this purpose. They have, therefore, a duty to take effective action at the local level to address Roma issues in order to remedy the situation of the social exclusion of Roma.

¹ The term "Roma" used at the Council of Europe refers to Roma, Sinti, Kale and related groups in Europe, including Travellers and the Eastern groups (Dom and Lom), and covers the wide diversity of the groups concerned, including persons who identify themselves as "Gypsies".

²L: Chamber of Local Authorities/R: Chamber of Regions
ILDG: Independent and Liberal Democrat Group of the Congress
EPP/CD: European People's Party – Christian Democrats of the Congress
SOC: Socialist Group of the Congress
NR: Members not belonging to a Political Group of the Congress



DRAFT RESOLUTION³

1. Recent events have highlighted the continuing discrimination and disadvantage faced by the estimated 10-12 million Roma in Europe. Roma have faced a long history of social exclusion within European society, exclusion which is compounded by severe disadvantage across a number of inter-related fields (lack of education, unemployment, poverty, lack of access to healthcare, poor housing and residential segregation, etc).
2. Anti-Gypsyism is a specific form of racism targeted at Roma and has deep roots in European history. Myths and stereotypes about Roma continue to prevail in the minds of the non-Roma population, rooted in ignorance, fear and segregation, and still largely unchallenged by education. The recent resurgence of extremism targeted at Roma and other groups, fostered by the economic recession, fomented by demagogues, and fed by media reports, demonstrates that anti-Gypsyism continues to be potent as a populist political force.
3. Discrimination against, and enforced segregation of, Roma are widespread, both at national and local levels. Roma are frequently victims of acts of physical violence, forced evictions, ghettoisation, expulsion and deportation regardless of citizenship status and associated rights. Research shows that Roma continue to face severe exclusion, poverty, disadvantage and lack of access to a wide range of social rights.
4. Representatives of the Roma population are rarely involved in the definition of policies and actions and little is done to empower Roma to represent their interests.
5. In view of the measures taken by some member states in 2010 which were widely covered in the media, the Secretary General of the Council of Europe decided concrete action must be taken urgently and priorities agreed upon to improve the inclusion of Roma in Europe. He called a high-level meeting to discuss how to overcome the immediate and long-term challenges related to the rights and obligations of Roma communities throughout Europe.
6. In the resulting Strasbourg Declaration, the Council of Europe renewed its commitment to address human rights issues relating to Roma and recognised that the primary responsibility for promoting inclusion lies with the member states at national, regional but especially local level.
7. Local and regional authorities have a responsibility to protect and promote the human rights of their citizens and have a wide range of powers they can use for this purpose. They have, therefore, a duty to take effective action at the local level and must show leadership and vision, as well as win support from all sections of the community for addressing Roma issues in order to remedy the situation of the social exclusion of Roma.

³ Preliminary draft resolution and recommendation approved by the Current Affairs Committee on 29 June 2011.

Committee members:

E. Yeritsyan (Chair), B. Toce (Vice-Chair), F. Mukhametshin (Vice-Chair), C. Abela Baldacchino (Vice-Chair), T. Ali, S. Aliyeva, E. Ampe, P.D. Andersen, A. Antosova, G. Arnardottir, T. Badan, S. Barnes (alternate: F. Butler), B. Belin, A. Beskow, A. Boff, N. Boltenko, E. Brogi, A. Bryggare, E. Campbell-Clark, Y. Celik, P. Chesneau, V. Chilikov, E. Chrysanthou, A. Cook, E. Costello, F. Dal, D. Davidovic, I. De La Serna Hernaiz, J. Demeter, N. Dudov, B.M. D'Angelo (alternate: M. Toscani), M. Fiasella, J. Fischerova, B. Fleck, D. Ghisletta, V. Groysman (alternate: T. Savchenko), L. Güven (alternate: G. Doganoglu), H. Himmelsbach, P. Hugon, P. Jansen, Y. Karayiannis, H. Klamm, V. Konstantinov, A. Koopmanschap, A. Kordfelder, L. Kovacs, A. Kurti, J. Landberg, P. Leuba, I. Linge (alternate: A. Svensson), J. Lobnig, M.S. Luca, F. Madsen, F. Maitia, P. Matvienko, I. Milatic, Y. Mildon, Y. Mishcheryakov, M. Nagel, C. Naudi Baixench, O. Olavsen, K. Ölcenoglu, C. Oliver Jaquero, C. Oppitz-Plörer, S. Orlova, A. Pellizzari, J. Petusik, N. Pilyus, C. Raimbert, F. Ramos, A. Ravins, V. Rossi, Y. Rzayeva, O. Sainsus (alternate: S. Bohatyrychuk-Kryvko), I. Schrick, H. Skard, J.-L. Testud, G. Tkemaladze, A. Toader, N. Toncev, S. Toscani, I. Tzaki, E. Van Vaerenbergh, L. Vecchi, E. Villaroya Saldana, C. Vosschulte, J. Warmisham, J. Watson, L. Zukauskas.

NB: The names of members who took part in the vote are in italics.

Secretariat of the Committee: D. Marchenkov, J. Hunting and M. Grimmeissen

8. In addition, as the public authorities closest to citizens, local and regional elected officials are best placed for devising policies to facilitate Roma access to rights, and for combating anti-Gypsyism, prejudice, discrimination and racist violence.

9. Some local and regional authorities have already committed to improving the situation of Roma and the Congress welcomes the recent emergence of a number of regional and national-level networks or platforms of municipalities working on Roma issues.

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

a. implement the decisions taken during the Summit of Mayors on Roma, organised by the Congress on 22 September 2011 in Strasbourg;

b. publicly commit to addressing Roma issues and remedying the situation of the social exclusion of Roma;

c. monitor and analyse the local situation to provide a sound evidence base for the development and implementation of strategies and action plans for Roma inclusion, taking into account the diversity in the identity and circumstances of different Roma groups, as well as measure the outcomes so as to show whether the desired impact has been achieved;

d. devise strategic action plans with clear objectives, setting out targets and stages for achievement, using an integrated approach which recognises the inter-connected nature of problems in the specific fields. In particular:

with regard to education:

- i. discontinue any segregated schooling for Roma children;
- ii. make pre-school provision for Roma children where necessary to prepare them for school so that they can enter on the same footing as non-Roma children;
- iii. ensure all Roma children enter primary school and attend on a regular basis, encourage them to continue into secondary education, or ensure those who left school early return to obtain basic skills and occupational qualifications. In this context, have recourse to Roma school mediators appointed for this purpose;
- iv. make arrangements to ensure continuity of education of “travelling” and migrant children eg through coordination between schools, records of progress, and making provision for educational activity while ‘on the road’;
- v. provide training for teachers and engage Roma ‘teaching assistants’/mediators to support Roma children in class;
- vi. organise out-of-school educational activities to engage Roma children and young people, and to bring them into contact with non-Roma children, especially in fields such as culture and sport.

with regard to employment:

- i. work with local employers to encourage recruitment of Roma, including ‘on-the-job’ training to develop occupational skills, and engage Roma mediators to assist with this;
- ii. introduce measures to promote recruitment and training for Roma employment within the local authority’s own workforce;
- iii. encourage and support self-employment and small business development, including skills training and advice on business and financial management, as well as small loans for example in cooperation with local banks;
- iv. promote and support the use of Roma cultural activities and crafts, particularly those practised by women, as a basis for small business development;
- v. provide advice services regarding local employment opportunities and how to access them, as well as about appropriate action to take in the case of discrimination.

with regard to health:

- i. identify the health situation and needs of Roma and assess the effectiveness of current service provision;
- ii. ensure Roma, especially in segregated settlements and travelling/migrant communities, have access to local health services, including provision of outreach and mobile facilities and of interpreting services where necessary;
- iii. ensure health services reach women and children and include preventive care, especially immunisation for young children, and that health information is readily available;
- iv. work with local health agencies to ensure services are sensitive to Roma culture and circumstances and are responsive to Roma health needs;
- v. appoint Roma mediators to facilitate access to health care for Roma.

with regard to housing:

- i. develop strategies to end Roma residential segregation, to replace or improve the quality of existing housing, or to give Roma access to housing with all basic amenities (fresh water, drainage, gas, electricity, refuse collection, and paved roads) so as to facilitate social inclusion;
- ii. ensure access to adequate accommodation on suitable sites for travelling/migrant families with basic amenities and effective site management, ensuring consultation with settled residents in the area to address any concerns and promote social cohesion;
- iii. regularise the tenure of Roma in their homes or on sites, avoid forced evictions, and arrange agreed alternative accommodation of appropriate standard wherever necessary;
- iv. identify land where, if purchased or rented by Roma, non-permanent accommodation can be installed while respecting environmental and sanitary regulations.

with regard to Roma empowerment and participation:

- i. engage leaders of the Roma community to work in partnership on the implementation of strategies and undertake capacity-building in the Roma community for this purpose. Specifically, ensure a senior official has overall responsibility for work on Roma issues as well as Roma mediators to assist in the implementation of strategies;
- ii. establish structures to ensure the voice of Roma is heard by those responsible for Roma issues (including the voice of women and young people), either in the form of Roma-specific consultative bodies, or by involving Roma in representative bodies for minorities and community groups generally;
- iii. provide information and civic education programmes to promote active citizenship in the Roma community;
- iv. promote and support the development or strengthening of local Roma associations that can mobilise and articulate this voice in appropriate forums as well as act as partners for the local authority;
- v. recruit, train and provide properly-established employment for Roma mediators, drawn where possible from the local Roma community, including those trained through the Council of Europe ROMED training programme. When training mediators, make use of the curriculum of the ROMED programme;
- vi. promote intercultural understanding by organising activities, together with Roma associations, to promote Roma culture and identity both within the Roma community and the wider community (including schools);
- vii. promote Roma participation in local authority activities, including in local politics (eg by voter registration and by standing as candidates for election), and especially encourage participation by women and young people.

e. take action to combat ignorance, myths and stereotypes among the non-Roma population, including via local media and especially provide awareness training and practice-oriented workshops for both managers and staff on Roma issues, with Roma participation in both planning and delivery:

- i. produce and disseminate materials (leaflets, booklets, CDs, web-pages, etc), including materials already available through the Council of Europe Dosta! Campaign, and work in schools and with the local mass media, to raise awareness on Roma culture and history to counter negative myths and stereotypes and bring together Roma and non-Roma communities;
- ii. design activities to bring visible benefits to both Roma and non-Roma communities, and enable both groups to work together thus building mutual understanding and respect;
- iii. avoid using negative stereotypes and terminology relating to Roma, especially in statements by political leaders and senior officials;
- iv. actively and publicly condemn and counter any public manifestations of anti-Gypsyism in the form of hate speech, discrimination, threats, intimidation and physical violence, whether by individuals or organised groups, and take steps to ensure that the law is enforced effectively and in a non-discriminatory manner by police and other responsible agencies.

f. secure the necessary financial and other resources for the implementation of action plans, from internal and external sources as appropriate;

g. mainstream addressing Roma-specific issues into the core functioning of the local and regional authority;

h. join or create national networks of municipalities and/or regions which aim to improve the situation of Roma;

i. draw on previous Congress resolutions, such as those relating to migrants and minorities, aspects of which may be relevant for the work on Roma issues, while also ensuring that the specific features of the situation of Roma are appropriately addressed.

11. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities:

a. recalling its Resolutions 249 (1993), 16 (1995) and 44 (1997) and the Club de Strasbourg's declaration of October 2010 which all call for the establishment of cooperation structures, undertakes to facilitate the setting up of a pan-European framework of cooperation between local and regional authorities, existing networks and other structures, in order to share experience, identify and promote good practice, and facilitate joint working;

b. calls on local and regional authorities to join this structure to work together to promote Roma inclusion and strengthen their capacity in this respect;

c. invites the member states to include, where possible, Roma mayors in their national delegations to the Congress;

d. is committed to cooperating with the Committee of the Regions of the European Union in order to achieve the inclusion of Roma, inter alia through exchanges of best practice.

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION⁴

1. Many of the 10-12 million Roma living in the 47 member states of the Council of Europe suffer extreme marginalisation and live in very poor conditions. They are denied full access to their social rights, such as quality education, employment, healthcare and housing. Not only are their human rights not respected, they are also trampled under foot. In addition, they suffer widespread discrimination and anti-Gypsyism, and are victims of hate speech, harassment and violence.
2. Member states are responsible for protecting the human rights of all members of society and, considering that economic and social rights are human rights, they must ensure they are also accessible to the Roma population.
3. Achieving the social inclusion of Roma has been included in the policy programmes of many member states although national responses have been variable. National action plans full of good intentions have been drawn up, but their impact has been limited.
4. Local and regional authorities have been criticised for inaction or for failing to carry out central government policies on Roma issues, however government policies have not always included provisions for translation into local action and the division of competencies between the different levels of government is not always clear.
5. Local and regional authorities may also face obstacles such as limitations on their legal competencies or inadequate financial means.
6. In light of the above and of the conclusions of the Summit of Mayors on Roma organised by the Congress on 22 September 2011 in Strasbourg, *the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe recommends that the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe call on member states to:*
 - a. consider recognising Roma as a 'national minority' (where this has not yet been done) in order to ensure that Roma have protection under international law (and in particular the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities), especially as regards their access to rights at the local level;
 - b. ensure that national strategies on Roma issues incorporate appropriate provision for effective implementation at the local level, including by ensuring that local and regional authorities have the necessary powers and responsibilities to undertake this task as well as access to sufficient resources and expert support;
 - c. support local and regional initiatives for Roma inclusion and establish appropriate frameworks for close cooperation to ensure that national strategies to promote Roma inclusion are implemented effectively at local level;
 - d. explore how Roma can contribute to and benefit from social security and taxation regimes;
 - e. include representatives of local and regional authorities in the design and monitoring of national strategies/action plans for Roma, making use of national networks of municipalities and/or regions.
7. The Congress requests that the Committee of Ministers reiterate its call for all member states to implement its recommendations on Roma and particularly CM/Rec(2008)5 on policies for Roma and/or Travellers in Europe;

⁴ See footnote 2.

8. The Congress recommends that the Committee of Ministers, in line with the political priority given by the Council of Europe to social inclusion of Roma and respect for their human rights, set up, in cooperation with the Congress, a European programme for capacity building at local and regional level, to complement the Roma mediators training programme (ROMED) and operate in the context of the pan-European framework of cooperation between local and regional authorities. Voluntary contributions could be the basis for the kick-off of this programme.

EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM⁵

1. Introduction

1. Roma have faced a long history of social exclusion within European society, exclusion which is compounded by severe disadvantage across a number of inter-related fields (lack of education, unemployment, poverty, access to healthcare, poor housing and residential segregation, etc). Recent events are proof that this marginalisation and severe discrimination are on-going. Governments at both national and local levels have engaged in a series of expulsions, evictions and other exclusionary actions against Roma which have received widespread publicity in the mass media. There has also been an increase in anti-Roma activity by extremist organisations, including manifestations of hate speech and physical violence.⁶

2. Migration of Roma, particularly to western Europe from countries formerly in the Soviet Bloc, the enlargement of and opening of borders within the EU, and the demand for cheap unskilled labour in the West, are among the factors that may prompt responses leading to increased marginalisation and discrimination. Other important dimensions include the growth in trafficking in women, mainly from Eastern Europe to the West, and the problems faced by Roma displaced persons and asylum-seekers, from Kosovo and other parts of the Balkans.

2. The Council of Europe's high-level response

3. The Council of Europe, notably the Human Rights Commissioner Thomas Hammarberg and the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), has repeatedly expressed its concerns about some measures adopted by member states with regard to Roma. In 2010, in view of the measures of some member states which received wide press coverage, the Secretary General decided concrete action must be taken urgently and priorities agreed upon to improve the inclusion of Roma in Europe. He called a high-level meeting to discuss how to overcome the immediate and long-term challenges related to the rights and obligations of Roma communities throughout Europe. This was to be the starting point for a joint effort by the European institutions and the member countries to address together this pan-European challenge and to take on the situation of the Roma in a constructive and sustainable way.

4. In the resulting Strasbourg Declaration, the Council of Europe renewed its commitment to address human rights issues relating to Roma and recognised that the primary responsibility for promoting inclusion lies with the member states at national, regional but especially local level.⁷ Over the past decade, concern has been expressed by monitoring bodies and NGOs that national plans and major programmes are having limited impact because they are not being implemented effectively at the local level.⁸ It is crucial that local and regional authorities across Europe not only take up but also meet this very substantial challenge of Roma exclusion.

⁵ This report has been prepared with the contribution of R. Oakley, expert consultant, United Kingdom (see study in the appendix to this report ([CG\(21\)8 appendix](#))).

⁶ See in particular Doc 12174 of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on "The situation of Roma in Europe and relevant activities of the Council of Europe", Rapporteur: Jozsef BERÉNYI, para 7.

⁷ See especially para 44 of The Strasbourg Declaration on Roma of the Council of Europe High Level Meeting on Roma, CM(2010)133 final, 20 October 2010, Strasbourg (France).

⁸ See Nadir Redzepi and Alexandra Bojadzieva, *Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015: Institutional Set-Up*, Roma Democratic Development Agency SONCE, 2009, and in other monitoring reports produced by bodies such as the EU, OSCE and the Open Society Institute.

3. The Roma population in Europe

5. The generally accepted estimate for the overall number of Roma resident in Europe is between 10 and 12 million persons, and in some member states Roma make up to around 10% of the population. Roma are therefore the largest 'minority' (in terms of ethnic/cultural identity) in Europe, and the only such minority not to have a national 'homeland' either in Europe or elsewhere. In this sense, Roma may be regarded as a truly 'European' people, while they take their national status from their country of residence.⁹

6. Roma are widely distributed throughout Europe, in towns and cities, rural and urban areas, and virtually all member states have a Roma population. While the great majority of Roma are sedentary, phenomena of nomadism and migration make it relevant and necessary to address Roma issues in all states and in all regions and municipalities, even where numbers currently appear to be very small.

4. The challenge for local and regional authorities

7. Although local and regional authorities have been criticised for inaction or for failing to carry out central government policies on Roma issues, government policies have not always included provisions for translation into local action. Local and regional authorities may also face obstacles such as limitations on their legal competencies or inadequate financial means. The fact remains, however, that local and regional authorities have a responsibility to protect and promote the human rights of their population and they have a wide range of powers they can use for this purpose (although levels vary between member states). They have, therefore, a duty to take effective action at the local level to address Roma issues and thus remedy the situation of the social exclusion of Roma. In addition, as the public authorities closest to citizens, local and regional elected officials are best placed for devising policies to facilitate Roma access to rights, including education, employment, housing and healthcare, and to ensure social inclusion.

8. This is why the Secretary General of the Council of Europe is looking to the Congress to take the lead in promoting action to address Roma issues at the local level within member states.¹⁰ The role of towns and cities, and thus of the Congress, has also been highlighted in the recent report of the Group of Eminent Persons of the Council of Europe, *Living Together: Combining Diversity and Freedom in 21st-century Europe* (May 2011), which identifies Roma inclusion as one of the key challenges for member states.

9. One dimension of the Roma population is changing: there is an increasing amount of NGO activity, mobilising and representing Roma opinion and campaigning for remedial action, and there has been a gradual increase in the (still low) level of Roma participation in national and local politics. A new generation of young educated Roma leaders is emerging who are increasingly taking the lead, and they provide new opportunities for partnership and cooperation to public authorities at all levels. Local and regional authorities need to be ready to recognise and respond to these potential developments, and find ways to work with a new generation of young Roma leaders to the advantage of all sections of the community generally.

10. To meet the challenge posed by the social exclusion of Roma, local and regional authorities will need to not only address the individual problems already mentioned, ie anti-Gypsyism and discrimination, and access to social rights, but also work in partnership with the local Roma community, in all its diversity to develop and implement strategies for Roma.

11. Without an effective response from local and regional authorities to Roma needs in the coming decade, little improvement in the current situation of Roma in Europe can be expected.¹¹ Poverty and exclusion will persist, the human rights deficit will continue, frustration and resentment in the Roma community will continue to increase, and progress in building social cohesion across Europe will be

⁹ See BERÉNYI, paras 4-7.

¹⁰ Statement to the Congress by Jeroen Schokkenbroek, Special Representative of the Secretary General for Roma issues, 22 March 2011.

¹¹ In its report 'Roma Inclusion: An Economic Opportunity for Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Romania and Serbia', September 2010, the World Bank has warned about the massive economic costs associated with allowing Roma exclusion to persist unchecked, and the potential economic benefit to be gained by developing the vast human resources within the Roma population across Europe.

undermined. It is crucial therefore that local and regional authorities take the appropriate action to address this challenge, and do so urgently throughout the whole of Europe.

5. Appropriate action for local and regional authorities

12. Although a variety of types of action are likely to be needed, it is important that these are not planned and implemented in isolation from each other, an integrated approach which recognises the inter-connected nature of problems in specific fields is essential. This holistic response needs also to be strategic, with clear objectives and an action plan setting out the targets and stages for their achievement, so outcomes can be measured.

13. The two broad areas in which local and regional authorities need to take specific action are:

- a. combating anti-Gypsyism in the wider population, in the form of myths, stereotypes, prejudice, discrimination and racist violence, and promoting Roma empowerment and participation; and
- b. combating poverty and social exclusion and promoting access to social rights, in specific fields such as education, employment, health and housing.

5.1 Anti-Gypsyism: myths, stereotypes, prejudice, discrimination and racist violence¹²

14. Anti-Gypsyism, as a specific form of racism targeted at Roma, has deep roots in European history. Surveys show that negative attitudes relating to Roma continue to be the strongest and most pervasive among those for all minority groups.¹³ Myths and stereotypes about Roma continue to prevail in the minds of the non-Roma population, rooted in ignorance, fear and segregation, and still largely unchallenged by education. The recent resurgence of extremism targeted at Roma and other groups, fostered by the economic recession, fomented by demagogues, and fed by media reports, demonstrates that anti-Gypsyism continues to be potent as a populist political force.

15. Discrimination against and enforced segregation of Roma continue to be widespread all over Europe, both at national and local levels. Forced evictions from residential sites and ghettoisation of Roma persist, as do segregated educational provision in schools. Migrant Roma seeking new opportunities in western Europe may face the added dimension of being corralled in camps, and in some cases may face expulsion and deportation, regardless of citizenship status and associated rights.

16. Acts of physical violence against Roma, designed both to hurt and to intimidate, and including by mobs and organised extremist groups, continue. In surveys, Roma are the group with the highest level of self-reported incidents which are perceived as being racially motivated. Effective police protection against racist attacks on Roma has been minimal, and offenders are rarely brought successfully to justice.¹⁴ Indeed, on occasion, police themselves have been agents of violence and abuse against Roma, as well as regularly engaging in ethnic profiling.

17. Promoting Roma empowerment and participation should be understood broadly, so as to include supporting the maintenance of ethnic and cultural identity among Roma, as well as capacity to self-organise and represent Roma interests, together with participating as individuals and groups in wider structures and social contexts in the local area.

18. Combating anti-Gypsyism and promoting Roma empowerment and participation are 'two sides of the same coin', and many actions to address one will also contribute to the other. Both are fundamental to the achievement of successful Roma inclusion, and there are a wide range of actions that can be taken at the local and regional levels to address them. Materials, such as leaflets, booklets, CDs, web-pages, etc, which provide accurate information and positive images of Roma and which counter negative myths and stereotypes can be disseminated in schools and by the media for example. In the context of its Dosta! Campaign, the Council of Europe has developed many valuable materials to counter stereotypes and prejudice against Roma that are available for use. Any activity that will bring visible benefit to both Roma and non-Roma communities, and that will enable members of both groups to work together and so build mutual understanding and respect, should be promoted.

¹² See BERÉNYI for specific examples.

¹³ Eurobarometer surveys, 2006/2008.

¹⁴ European Roma Rights Centre, *Imperfect Justice: Anti-Roma Violence and Impunity*, 2011.

Most importantly, political leaders and senior officials in particular must avoid the use of negative stereotypes and terminology relating to Roma in their discourse. Actions such as that of the group of more than 60 Czech mayors, who signed a declaration on the “socially inadaptability”, largely understood as targeting Roma, in February of this year, must stop.

19. It is essential to ensure that the voice of Roma communities is heard by those responsible for addressing Roma issues (including the voice of women and young people), either in the form of Roma-specific consultative bodies, or by involving Roma in representative bodies for minorities and community groups generally. The setting up or strengthening of local Roma associations should be promoted and supported. These can mobilise and articulate this voice in appropriate forums, act as partners for the local authority for specific initiatives, and undertake activities to meet needs of the Roma community internally.

5.2 Poverty and social exclusion: education, employment, health, housing

20. Discrimination and segregation have been compounded by poverty and general exclusion from access to a wide range of social rights in fields such as education, employment, health and housing.¹⁵ A number of organisations, including the Council of Europe, has examined the situation and research shows continuing severe exclusion and disadvantage for Roma in Europe in all fields. They also highlight how exclusion and disadvantage in each of these fields are interconnected and thus mutually sustaining. To combat this situation, an integrated, holistic approach is required rather than treating individual fields in isolation which has major implications for the way in which local and regional authorities need to approach the situation of Roma in their areas. The four main fields of access to social rights are education, employment, health and housing, and key actions to take in each field are identified in the following sections.¹⁶

5.2.1 Education

21. Levels of education, literacy and sustained school attendance still remain extremely low among the Roma population across Europe. Access to good quality education has been widely identified as the crucial long-term need so far as Roma inclusion is concerned, and should therefore be considered a priority by local and regional authorities in developing and implementing local strategies. Actions should be targeted at all levels of education, but should be particularly targeted at ensuring that all Roma children complete at least their primary education,¹⁷ and thus obtain essential literacy and other core skills which can be foundations for them to become active and informed citizens. Member states will vary in the extent to which local and regional authorities have responsibility for provision of education, and local and regional authorities will therefore need to take account of national policy and administrative frameworks, and cooperate with relevant national bodies as appropriate.

22. A priority has to be to discontinue any segregated schooling for Roma. The case-law of the European Court of Human Rights has made it very clear that such segregation constitutes a violation of human rights. Another is to make pre-school provision for Roma children (and their families) where necessary to prepare them for school so that they can enter so far as possible on the same footing as non-Roma children and then work together with Roma parents and NGOs to ensure that all Roma children enter primary school and attend on a regular basis. Roma ‘teaching assistants’ can support Roma children in class, especially in the first year of primary school, both to assist the professionally-trained teachers in their work, and to help the children to integrate effectively into the school environment. Arrangements must also be made to encourage Roma children who have completed primary school to continue into secondary education, so as to obtain occupational qualifications and skills, but also children and young people who left school early should be able to return to education and obtain basic skills and occupational qualifications. Arrangements should be made to ensure continuity of education for children from migrant families eg by promoting coordination between schools, providing families with records of the child’s progress, and making provision for educational activity while ‘on the road’.

¹⁵ See BERÉNYI for specific examples.

¹⁶ See also the Committee of Ministers’ Recommendations for each of these fields, referred to above.

¹⁷ The common goal in education set for member states in the new EU Framework Strategy (see above). A valuable source for further guidance, information and resources for local and regional authorities is the Council of Europe’s ‘Education of Roma Children’ project (2002-2009): www.coe.int/T/DG4/education/roma.

5.2.2 Employment

23. The loss of traditional occupations due to modernisation and globalisation has meant that Roma have been left with low levels of marketable skills and high levels of unemployment (up to 80% in some states). This in turn has led to extensive poverty, which – while not of course exclusive to Roma – when combined with discrimination and segregation is particularly severe and very difficult to break out of when there is also a lack of education and qualifications. Promoting employment is essential for enabling Roma families to become economically self-sufficient and to overcome dependency on benefits. In the long run, of course, the solution is primarily one of access to and achievement in education. However, there is also an urgent need in the short run to promote access to paid employment for Roma, and to create opportunities for acquiring ‘catch-up’ education and skills that can facilitate such access. Creating opportunities for self-employment and business development from within the Roma community are also part of the way forward in this situation. Measures to access employment are therefore a key component of strategies to address the situation of Roma and to break the cycle of poverty and exclusion.

24. Local and regional authorities may have less ability to address this field than others, but there are still a number of important actions that they can take, for example they can work with local employers to encourage recruitment of Roma, provide ‘on-the-job’ training to develop occupational skills, and engage Roma mediators to assist with this. Targets for Roma employment can be set within the local authority’s own workforce, and measures introduced to promote recruitment and training for this purpose. Alternatively, initiatives can be established with cooperation from local banks (eg for advice on financial management and small loans) to encourage and support self-employment and small business development, including provision for skills training and advice on business management.

5.2.3 Health

25. The average lifespan of Roma is lower than that of the majority population by about 10 years.¹⁸ Residential segregation compounded by language barriers, lack of education and discrimination by health-care professionals result in widespread lack of access to health services and preventive health care on the part of Roma throughout Europe. Health problems are aggravated by poverty, and the absence of basic amenities such as fresh running water,¹⁹ electricity and sanitation in many areas where Roma live. These problems may particularly affect women (who in some countries have also been subject to forced sterilisation) and young children, as well as those with disabilities of any kind. The specific location of Roma settlements near refuse dumps, motorways, or factories may also have adverse effects upon health.

26. Local and regional authorities can and need to take various actions to help to ensure that Roma have access to social rights in the health field, including where appropriate by working in cooperation with local health agencies and Roma NGOs for this purpose. For example, they can undertake surveys to identify the health situation and health needs of Roma in the local area, and assess the effectiveness of current service provision in relation to these. They can take action to ensure that Roma, especially in segregated settlements and travelling/migrant communities, have access to local health services, including by provision of outreach and mobile facilities, and by provision of interpreting services where necessary (particularly for migrant families). They can ensure that health information (including preventive advice) is made available, especially to women, using a variety of appropriate means including DVDs and personal visits/meetings, undertaken where appropriate in cooperation with local Roma community associations.

5.2.4 Housing²⁰

27. Housing as a social right, and a condition for access to other social rights, is also a key field for addressing the situation of Roma. The findings of the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) in its report on the housing situation of Roma in the European Union also represent the wider situation for Roma across Europe as a whole:

¹⁸ OSCE Status Report 2008.

¹⁹ See Amnesty International, *Parallel Lives: Roma Denied Rights to Housing and Water in Slovenia*, 2011.

²⁰ By housing should be understood not merely the fabric of buildings, but also their occupancy levels, tenure, location, amenities and environment, as well as provision of sites and facilities for Roma and Travellers who continue to follow a travelling life-style.

“Roma and Travellers are strongly disadvantaged in private and social housing throughout the European Union. This includes discrimination in access to housing, poor housing conditions, segregation, and forced evictions. Sometimes, Roma live in squalid shanty-towns and temporary camps, often in segregated and environmentally hazardous areas. Very often, Roma housing areas have poor access to public services, employment and schools, and are without adequate access to public utilities such as water, electricity or gas.”²¹

28. The FRA report also highlighted forced evictions from municipal accommodation (both housing and traveller sites), even of Roma who are regular rent payers. It noted that these evictions often happen without prior notice, and may involve police violence and destruction of personal property. In addition, there have been many cases where authorities fail to provide alternative accommodation and/or adequate compensation for expropriation.

29. These findings underline the way in which housing too is an integral part of the interconnected dimensions of the process of deprivation and exclusion of Roma. They also highlight the key role of local and regional authorities, which while they may often have played a role in exacerbating the problems – if only by their inaction – are also crucial players in promoting solutions at the local level.

30. There is variation between member states in the extent to which local and regional authorities have responsibilities in this field, though provision of social housing is widely administered at the local level. Whatever their responsibilities, authorities need to develop strategies for ending Roma residential segregation, and enable Roma access to housing generally across the local area so as to facilitate social inclusion. Another measure would be to undertake projects to replace, or improve the quality of, existing housing occupied by Roma families where this is sub-standard, including by employing Roma to work on such projects and by equipping them with occupational skills.

6. Conclusion

31. It is clear that local and regional authorities have a major role to play in the action to promote the full respect of the Roma population’s human rights and their social inclusion, as well as to combat the anti-Gypsyism and discrimination prevalent in today’s society. Their role will be made all the more easy if they work together, in partnership, with the Roma community and in the frame of specific coordination mechanisms. Most importantly, the political will to improve the situation of Roma must be publicly expressed by mayors and presidents of regions.

32. It should be noted that in all of these areas, the experience of local and regional authorities in taking action in relation to migrants and minorities more generally is likely to be relevant and should be drawn on, while also ensuring that the specific features of the situation of Roma are appropriately addressed. The Congress has in recent years adopted a number of resolutions and recommendations which are more broadly based in this way, but which are also relevant for the work of local and regional authorities on Roma issues.²²

²¹ *Housing Conditions of Roma and Travellers in the European Union: Comparative Report*, FRA, 2009: findings as summarised in FRA, *Annual Report*, 2010, p.62.

²² For example texts on intercultural cities; on equality and diversity in local authority employment and service provision; on meeting the challenge of inter-faith and intercultural tensions at local level. Other resolutions in fields such as youth (eg on Integration of young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods) may also be relevant.