



OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Conference

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Contribution of the SRSG for Roma Issues and of the Youth Department

Roma and Sinti issues

Introduction

In recent years, European and national policy frameworks for the inclusion of Roma and Travellers¹ have been developed. We witnessed significant developments in terms of policy design, adoption of strategies focused on Roma social inclusion and awareness-raising. There is also small progress in increasing the representation of Roma in political life and within the national and international organisations. Unfortunately, the overall socio-economic situation of Roma remains problematic all over Europe and anti-Gypsyism strident. Lack of political will and capacity of local administrations to develop, implement and monitor effective policies and projects hamper the implementation of Roma integration strategies at local level, including the effective use of EU funds for that purpose. Often the lack of mutual trust also hinders co-operation between local authorities and local Roma communities.

Thematic Action Plan on the Inclusion of Roma and Travellers (2016-2019)

The *Council of Europe Thematic Action Plan on the Inclusion of Roma and Travellers (2016-2019)*, adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 2 March 2016, fosters the implementation of the 2010 *Strasbourg Declaration on Roma* and provides the framework for the Organisation's work on Roma and Travellers, setting out the roadmap for legislation, policy and practice that ensure the protection of their rights and dignity, provide for equal opportunities and non-discrimination, and improve their living conditions. The Plan's 21 specific actions focus on the following three priorities: fight against discrimination and anti-Gypsyism; protection of the most vulnerable, such as children, youth and women; and promotion of innovative solutions at local level. The first Report on the implementation of the Thematic Action Plan was adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 14 June 2017.

Priority area 1: Tackling anti-Roma and anti-Traveller prejudice, discrimination and crimes ("anti-Gypsyism")

OSCE High-Level Meeting on Confronting anti-Gypsyism, 6 September 2016, Berlin

The Special Representative of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe (SRSG) for Roma Issues and his Support Team co-organised together with ODIHR and the Central Council of

¹ The terms "Roma" and "Travellers" are 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.

German Sinti and Roma a high-level meeting on confronting anti-Gypsyism, held on 6 September 2016 in Berlin under German OSCE Chairmanship-in-Office. The objective of the meeting was to discuss how to strengthen coalition-building among political leaders and alliances between parliamentarians from the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the European Parliament (EP) and selected national parliamentarians, including Roma parliamentarians, to confront anti-gypsyism by countering prejudice, discrimination, hate speech and hate crimes against Roma and Sinti and publicly confront and condemn anti-Roma rhetoric and racist violence. By doing so, the meeting aimed also to strengthen the role of political leaders to promote Roma and Sinti inclusion as a part of the mainstream political agenda. Additionally, the event promoted dialogue between political leaders, parliamentarians and civil society, including Roma and Sinti representatives.

OPRE Joint Statement on evictions

On 29 June 2016, the Operational Platform for Roma Inclusion (OPRE)² published a joint statement on evictions of Roma and Travellers, calling on member States to respect human rights standards and to provide alternative accommodation prior to the eviction.

European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture (ERAC)

The European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture (ERAC) was launched on 8 June 2017 in Berlin, Germany. It aims to promote arts and culture as a means to promote human rights and thereby to tackle anti-Gypsyism and discrimination against Roma in Europe and to increase their self-esteem.

Roma history teaching, including Holocaust

Co-operation is ongoing with OSCE/ODIHR on a database containing a virtual library of the best-known and most useful publications and an interactive map where member States can indicate their special/distinctive features at national level.

DOSTA! Campaign

Co-operation between the Council of Europe's "Dosta!" campaign and the UEFA "RESPECT" campaign to stop anti-Gypsyism has been established in October 2016. Four major football games in the UEFA league opened with the "Dosta!" campaign message "Stop anti-Gypsyism" and were seen by a minimum of 11 million spectators.

Dosta! Congress Prize 2017

The 6th Dosta! Congress Prize will be awarded to three municipalities in Strasbourg on 29 October 2017 during the 33rd session of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, for their achievements and innovative projects concerning Roma and Traveller inclusion.

Improving access to justice for Roma and Travellers in Europe

A draft Recommendation to member States on improving access to justice for Roma and Travellers in Europe, finalised by the Ad hoc Committee of Experts on Roma and Traveller Issues (CAHROM), is currently being submitted to the Committee of Ministers for adoption. Training programmes for legal and law enforcement professionals continue, e.g. in Bulgaria, Poland, and the Slovak Republic.

² OPRE members and partners: Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR), European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), European Network of European National Human Rights Institutions (ENNHRI), European Network of Equality Bodies (Equinet), and the Council of Europe.

Priority area 2: Demonstrating innovative models for inclusive policies for the most vulnerable

Under this priority area, specific emphasis is put on the support and empowerment of Roma and Traveller women, children and young people.

Roma and Traveller Youth

The **Roma Youth Action Plan** is the Council of Europe's response to the challenges faced by young Roma people in Europe, particularly in relation to their empowerment and participation in policy and decision-making processes and structures at European level, as well as the realities of discrimination and particularly the antigypsyism with which they are confronted. The project aims to improve the participation of young Roma in youth and Roma-related policies from European to local level, by initiating programmes and projects to combat discrimination and enable the involvement of young Roma people in all matters that concern them.

The project includes activities of the Youth Department and of other sectors of the Council of Europe as well as activities by other partners – intergovernmental and non-governmental – co-operating with the Council of Europe in order to secure maximum impact and avoid duplication. An Informal Contact Group meets at least once a year to develop a strategy based on the Action Plan's activities and other existing programmes and initiatives. The Focal Point on Roma and Sinti of the OSCE/ODIHR is invited to take part in the Contact Group's work.

For 2017, the Plan included regional and national activities to support the self-organisation and participation of young people, such as:

- commemoration of the Roma Genocide in partnership with TernYpe International Roma Youth Network (31 July – 3 August 2017);
- regional training course on Roma youth participation and self-organisation for participants from the Republic of Moldova and Romania in co-operation with the National Roma Centre from the Republic of Moldova (25-28 October 2017);
- study session addressing antigypsyism and antisemitism in co-operation with Phiren Amenca network and the European Union of Jewish Students (October 2017);
- training seminar on self-organisation and youth participation for activists and organisations in Croatia, in co-operation with the Government Office on Human Rights and National Minorities (November 2017);
- regional training course on Roma youth political participation for participants from the Balkans or East European countries (November 2017).

The work on antigypsyism has attracted the interest of many national and local organisations seeking to promote a better understanding of the concept and to further support the work on antigypsyism and discrimination, using the manual *Mirrors* as an educational tool. In late 2016, a [Greek version](#) of *Mirrors* was made available complementing the English and French versions. The Greek translation arose from co-operation between the Bodossaki Foundation and the NGO Antirropon from Greece. Bulgarian, Hungarian and Russian versions of the manual are being finalised and published. In May 2017, a second edition of the handbook *Right to Remember* was finalised and promoted. This edition incorporates minor revisions to the original publication.

This year's activities on antigypsyism in the framework of the RYAP support activities at various levels, from local to European, such as:

- European training course on combating antigypsyism through Roma youth participation (11-16 September 2017, EYC Strasbourg);
- regional training course on antigypsyism and Roma youth participation for young people from the Baltic region (2-5 November, Lithuania);

- training course on antigypsyism and hate speech for activists and youth organisations from Italy (October 2017);
- supporting local-level responses to antigypsyism through human rights education in Bulgaria (July-November 2017);
- drafting of guidelines for project development and the implementation of activities to counter antigypsyism and support Roma youth participation (August-November 2017).

A revised concept to establish a Roma Youth Academy is being finalised within the framework of the Roma Youth Action Plan, the aim being to enhance the role of Roma youth leaders in democratic processes, to help them to become organised and to empower them economically.

Inclusive schools

The European Commission and the Council of Europe are initiating a new joint project on “Inclusive schools: making a difference for Roma children (INSCHOOL)”, targeting schools where Roma children learn, in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, the Slovak Republic and the United Kingdom. Instead of focusing on the child as the problem, INSCHOOL puts at the heart of its action the education system and its capacity to respond to the needs of Roma children, to celebrate differences and to support their learning experience. The main activities under this project will focus on two levels: the first level will be pilot schools, with the aim to increase the understanding for the benefits of inclusive education³. Within each country, the programme will target up to 4 schools in different municipalities, and will include one additional school with proven know-how in inclusive education practices per country as “national support school”. The second level of intervention will target policy review and adaptation.

Access to justice for Roma and Traveller women

The of the European Commission and Council of Europe joint programme “Roma and Traveller Women’s Access to Justice (JUSTROM)” aims to improve access to justice of Roma and Traveller women in Bulgaria, Greece, Ireland, Italy and Romania. As such, the 18-months programme aims to empower Roma and Traveller women to adequately address discrimination and other human rights violations committed against them, including early/forced marriage, trafficking, domestic violence, housing evictions, police abuse and hate crime, by raising their awareness about discrimination, complaint mechanisms, the justice system and human rights institutions. To that end, legal clinics have been set up in 11 locations in the 5 participating countries, benefiting some 40 Roma or Traveller communities. They provide information, legal advice and referral to other semi-judicial authorities (ombudsmen, equality bodies), courts, protection mechanisms (shelters, women’s centres) and assist with complaints to the police, prosecutors or other social authorities. In addition, the JUSTROM programme provides legal representation to Roma and Traveller women victims of discrimination and or violence before national courts and the European Court of Human Rights.

Political participation and representative of Roma women and youth

The 6th International Roma Women Conference “Women and Political Representation: The Case of Roma Women”, Strasbourg, France, 6-7 November 2017, aims to further the political participation and representation of Roma women at all levels of parliament and government.

Also the Ad hoc Committee of Experts on Roma and Traveller Issues (CAHROM) aims to increase the participation of Roma and Travellers in public and political life. In the framework of the Committee’s thematic work, two of its five thematic visits organized in 2016 were devoted to the participation and empowerment of Roma and Travellers in advisory bodies and consultation

³ Inclusive education (ie), as defined in the Salamanca statement promotes the “recognition of the need to work towards ‘schools for all’/institutions which include everybody, celebrate differences, support learning, and respond to individual needs”.

mechanisms with a focus on Roma women and youth (Ireland, February 2016), with participation of: Ireland, Belgium, Croatia, Norway and Spain, as well as a representative of the OHCHR Regional Office for Europe, followed by thematic visit on the empowerment and participation of Roma and Travellers in advisory and decision-making bodies, as well as in political life with a focus on Roma women and youth (Greece, October 2016) with the participation of Greece, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, the Czech Republic, and Romania as well as a representative of the EU Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA).

In both cases it was clearly stated by all participants that the level of participation is not adequate to both needs and capacities. Special attention was paid to the need for the activation of Roma women and youth, who are often the most active part of Roma communities and the main pillars of inclusion strategies in daily actions on the grass root level. Reports with conclusions from the visits will be published this autumn.

Priority area 3: Promoting innovative models for local-level solutions

European Commission/Council of Europe Joint Programmes ROMED, ROMACT and ROMACTED

Effective participation, empowerment, and capacity building are at the core of ROMED and ROMACT programmes, jointly implemented by the Council of Europe (CoE) and the European Commission (EC). The programmes provide local and regional authorities with assistance to enhance democratic participation and empowerment of local Roma communities and stimulate an increased responsiveness of local public institutions towards those communities. They also aim to provide additional technical assistance in project design, implementation and accessing EU and national funds. Both programmes are piloted at local level and affect directly not only the national policies, strategies and action plans, but also the actors targeted: local administrations and Roma citizens. Both programmes are based on bottom-up and top-down approaches and dialogue between different political and civic society layers.

ROMED: mediation processes at local level, mediators, and community action groups set up thanks to the programme, have improved the participation of Roma citizens in the decision-making processes in more than 80 municipalities in 12 member States. An external independent evaluation has confirmed the relevance of ROMED for strengthening community work, effective participation and active citizenship of Roma, in dialogue with local authorities.

ROMACT: the processes launched by ROMED are enhanced by the ROMACT programme, which assists local authorities to develop policies and public services that are inclusive of all, including Roma.

The programme is currently being implemented in about 80 municipalities in five EU countries.

ROMACTED: a regional programme combining the ROMED and ROMACT approaches works in municipalities in the Western Balkans and Turkey aiming to assist local authorities in integrating Roma-specific dimensions and measures into mainstream local policies, budgets and public service delivery, while enhancing the participation of Roma citizens in the design, implementation and monitoring of those policies and projects.

All three programmes are involving European, national and local stakeholders and are largely implemented by experts of Roma origin. Thereby, they translate into practice the commitments taken by member States at EU level. They are implemented on the ground and are directly benefitting local administrations and Roma citizens. ROMED, ROMACT and ROMACTED are programmes where bottom-up and top-down approaches meet through dialogue between various stakeholders.

Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe

On 20 October 2016, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe adopted Resolution 403(2016) on the situation of Roma and Travellers in the context of rising extremism, xenophobia and the refugee crisis in Europe.

On 29 March 2017, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe adopted Resolution 415 (2017) on a “Charter of European Political Parties for a Non-Racist Society (Revised)”.

The “Declaration of Mayors and Elected Local and Regional Representatives of Council of Europe Member States against anti-Gypsyism” was put forward in March 2017 in co-operation with the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities. It helps local and regional authorities to position themselves explicitly against anti-Gypsyism and to deepen their efforts concerning Roma Inclusion. To date, the Declaration was signed by more than 60 signatories from 29 member States.

European Alliance of Cities and Regions for Roma Inclusion

The European Alliance of Cities and Regions for Roma Inclusion was set up in 2013 by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe with the support of Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG) for Roma Issues. It provides for its 130 members from 29 countries a platform for debating and advocating Roma inclusion at local and regional level.

Accompanying measures

Ad hoc Committee of Experts on Roma and Traveller Issues (CAHROM)

The Ad hoc Committee of Experts on Roma and Traveller Issues (CAHROM) has been tasked by the Committee of Ministers to study, analyse and evaluate the implementation of policies and to identify good practices of member States concerning Roma and Travellers, with a view to promoting the implementation of relevant Council of Europe standards. To that end, CAHROM maintains a European database on policies/good practices for the integration of Roma and Travellers and has set up small thematic groups (peer groups) which keep under review the situation of Roma and Travellers in member States, according the certain pre-defined themes, and through thematic visits, such as the visits in:

- Austria (March 2017), which reviewed the situation and teaching of languages spoken by Roma, Sinti and Yenish; participants: Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Czech Republic, Finland, Germany, Poland, Slovenia, the Slovak Republic, and Switzerland;
- Ukraine (April 2017), which reviewed, amongst others, ways to improve access to personal identification documents and to public services; participants: Greece, Poland, Serbia, and “the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”, and Ukraine, as well as a representative of the European Centre for Minorities Issues (ECMI);
- Lithuania (April 2017), which reviewed the use of Roma assistants/mediators at school; participants: Latvia, Lithuania, the Republic of Moldova, Norway, Poland, Portugal, and “the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”;
- Georgia (June 2017), which reviewed the situation of Eastern Roma groups, Lom, Dom, Abdal, etc., with a focus on children; participants: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Russian Federation, as well as representatives of OSCE/ODIHR and the European Centre for Minorities Issues (ECMI).

The forthcoming visit in the Slovak Republic, in November 2017, will review the teaching of Roma history, including the Holocaust, and its reflection in textbooks and school curricula. Possible participants: the Czech Republic, Hungary, the Republic of Moldova, Romania, the Slovak Republic, and the Holy See as an observer, as well as representatives of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) Committee on the Genocide of the Roma.

Council of Europe Dialogue with Roma and Traveller Organisations

The dialogue between the Council of Europe and representatives of Roma and Traveller civil society was initiated by the Committee of Ministers at the end of 2015. To date, 3 meetings have been held, in which a total of more than 100 participants from more than 20 NGOs debated issues such as poverty, internal and cross-border migration of Roma, combating hate speech against Roma and Travellers, housing and (forced) evictions, the situation of Roma youth and of Travellers in Europe. The 4th meeting will take place in Strasbourg, 18-19 September 2017.

European Academic Network on Romani Studies

The European Academic Network on Romani Studies, originally set up thanks to a joint Action of the Council of Europe and the European Union, seeks to facilitate intercultural dialogue and support efforts towards the social inclusion of the Roma population in Europe, by offering an interface between academic researchers and political decision-makers. The project raises the visibility of existing research and fosters cooperation with policymakers in order to allow for the implementation of better conceived policy initiatives, based on reliable evidence. One of its key roles is thus to provide references and guidance to policymakers but also to young researchers, by mapping relevant research in the field of Romani studies and developing a scientifically reliable knowledge database on Roma.

The communication platforms of the network have become significant visibility tools: the interactive website (<http://romanistudies.eu>) offers access to the full list of members of the network and their main publications. The site also offers a searchable database of experts as well as regularly updated news reports. The email-group of the membership is used for internal discussions (romani_studies_network@yahoo.com); the Facebook page (www.facebook.com/romanistudies.eu) of the network attracts regular followers for dissemination of information to the wider public.