

## Statement of the Council of Europe-Working session 7

The Council of Europe is now entering a new phase of the implementation of the Strasbourg Declaration agreed by all member States following the high level meeting on Roma in 2010.

- The intergovernmental work on Roma issues was refocused from standard-setting towards implementation of standards: a new Committee of Experts (CAHROM) is now answerable directly to the Committee of Ministers and its terms of reference place emphasis on the analysis and evaluation of the implementation of national policies. Thematic country visits and exchanges of experience and good practices are the tools of the new Committee which examines through thematic work specific issues raised by member states related to Roma inclusion. The first two thematic reports on school drop-outs/absenteeism of Roma children (Netherlands as requesting country and Hungary, Spain and Sweden as partner countries and the one on the role of state, the local and regional authorities in implementing national policies/action plans for Roma respectively (Republic of Moldova as requesting country and Finland, Romania and Slovenia as partner countries) were endorsed at the 3rd CHAROM meeting in May 2012. The next thematic reports will address issues such as inclusive education as opposed to special schools and the problem of school drop-out/absenteeism of Roma girls. The CAHROM will also examine gender issues and questions affecting particularly Roma women and girls such as trafficking in human beings, bilateral cooperation in the field of Roma migration, freedom of movement. Through this new approach of the CAHROM, a real and very practical cooperation was established between government experts in order to identify effective ways of improving the situation of Roma and ensuring their full access to human rights.
- Policy makers have now at their disposal a database on Roma related policies and good practices accessible at the Council of Europe Roma portal: [www.coe.int/roma](http://www.coe.int/roma). This tool aims at facilitating the exchange of experience at national, regional and local level covering a wide range of areas such as facilitating access to employment, successful and non-segregated integration of the Roma children in school, mediation etc.
- Mediation is a pragmatic policy tool that the joint Council of Europe – European Commission ROMED programme is promoting in member States. Increasingly, mediation is being picked up in national Roma strategies and action plans. ROMED is being implemented in 25 countries and 850 mediators, most of them Roma, have been trained so far, as a response to the need to develop dialogue between Roma communities and public authorities and the society as whole. Mediation produces good tangible results in areas such as schooling, access to health care (Serbian example of the 60 Roma women health

mediators) and employment. To be effective, the role of mediators should be based on some key principles which the Committee of Ministers has recently set out in a Recommendation to member states on Mediation as an effective tool for promoting respect for human rights and social inclusion of Roma (adopted 12 September 2012). In particular, the Council of Europe encourages member states to officially recognise the profession of mediator.

- Earlier this week a further step was made towards the launch of the European Alliance of Cities and Regions for Roma Inclusion. Representatives of European cities and regions, EU institutions, international Roma networks and NGOs gathered on 25 September at the Council of Europe Headquarters in Strasbourg for a consultation meeting to discuss the role and action of the European Alliance of Cities and Regions for Roma Inclusion. Cooperation and interaction are the key words for the Alliance. The Alliance will be a collaborative and flexible space where exchanges, training and mutual learning can take place, where programmes and situations can be evaluated, where projects can be built and where the cities and regions can increase their capacities, especially for project implementation and for presenting integrated projects to European Union funds and other sources. The decision to establish the Alliance was taken by the participants of the Summit of Mayors in September 2011, who committed themselves to setting up "a framework for co-operation, sharing of good practices, strengthening local and regional capacities for action, identifying specific problems and proposing solutions, and helping to ensure funding for Roma activities at the grassroots level".
- Roma women empowerment has been on the agenda of the Council of Europe since 2003. Trainings, campaigns, studies and conferences were dedicated to the Roma Women issues. One of the main events is the biannual gatherings of Roma women hosted by one Council of Europe member State offering the space to the Roma women to discuss over burning issues affecting their lives and these of their families: segregation of the children in school, forced sterilisation, early and forced marriages and access to quality health care. During these conferences Roma women had the courage to address taboo issues, to teach the governments that there is an agenda to take into consideration and to campaign for justice. The 2012 judgment of the European Court of Human Rights on sterilisation of Roma women was a great achievement of women present in this room today and courageous lawyers who took their pledge to the Strasbourg Court.
- The 4<sup>th</sup> edition of the Roma women conference will take place in Finland in Autumn 2013. The Council of Europe and the Finnish government have initiated an inclusive consultation process starting with a questionnaire devised by the Finnish government and sent to a broad number of national and international Roma women NGOs. The questionnaire is requesting from roma women to prioritize the issues to be addressed in the next conference. The questionnaire is one of the ingredients of the consultation process, the next steps will be the preparatory meeting in Romania on 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> October 2012, then the online consultation on the agenda of the conference and finally the

opportunity offered by new technologies to use the remote participation tools and allow Roma women to take part in the discussions in Finland from their country. An internet page on the Conference has already been created at the official Council of Europe internet site.

- Finally, as the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Roma Issues stated in his introductory address to the HDIM last year, the CoE is deeply concerned about anti-Roma hatred and violence in member states. In February this year, Committee of Ministers forcefully denounced these phenomena in a Declaration on the rise of anti-Gypsyism and racial violence against Roma in Europe, in which it draws the attention of its member states to the notable increase of serious incidents in Europe, including racist violence, stigmatising anti-Roma rhetoric, and generalisations about criminal behaviour. The Declaration calls for a number of concrete actions by member States, ranging from vigorously, swiftly and publicly condemning all acts of racist violence against Roma and anti-roma rhetoric, to including, in national policies for Roma inclusion, measures combating discrimination and addressing anti-Gypsyism.
- For further information about the different strands of our work on Roma, I refer you to our written contribution to this meeting and to the CoE Roma Portal: [www.coe.int/roma](http://www.coe.int/roma)