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Guidelines for a European Roma Youth Action Plan

Proposed by the conference participants

Introduction

This document is the result of the Roma Youth Conference organised by the Council of Europe at the European Youth Centre in Strasbourg from 27 to 30 September 2011. The conference brought together Roma youth leaders and youth workers, representatives of Roma non-governmental organisations and of international organisations active in promoting Roma youth participation and in combating discrimination affecting Roma across Europe. The conference served as an open consultation with Roma young people about a two-year Roma Youth Action Plan led by the Council of Europe by identifying priorities, main areas of action and the principles underlying the preparation and implementation of such a plan.

Participants in the conference both reflected on the main areas of the Action Plan and worked in smaller groups on principles, objectives and activities for each area.

These guidelines are, in essence, the result of working groups and plenary discussions during the conference and reflect the aspirations of the Roma youth representatives and young people attending the conference. Although thought initially in a two-year framework, these guidelines reflect long and medium-term aims and objectives and, as such, should be regularly reviewed and updated.

The Roma Youth Action Plan herein referred should reflect the practical commitments of the Council of Europe and of other partners interested in contributing to the implementation of the plan. The plan should thus be reviewed and updated annually and potentially expand beyond the first bi-annual budget and programme of the Council of Europe (2012-2013).

These guidelines were developed as a result of the needs and challenges experienced by young Roma in Europe today and are an expression of their legitimate aspirations as citizens and holders of universal human rights. They should be understood within the framework of human rights instruments, including the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, the European Social Charter, the Framework Convention on the Protection of National Minorities and the European Union Charter of Fundamental Rights. The guidelines, and the resulting plan of action, are also understood as contributing to the application, to Roma young people, of the principles and objectives of, inter alia:

- The Strasbourg Declaration on Roma
- The Final Declaration of the Council of Europe Summit of Mayors on Roma
- The Agenda 2020 on the youth policy of the Council of Europe
- The Plan of Action on Roma of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe
- The Ten Common Basic Principles for Roma Inclusion of the European Commission
- The EU Directives on non-discrimination (Race Equality Directive 2000/43 and the Framework Directive 2000/78)
- The European Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies

1. Concerns and issues

Growing up in Europe today is, for many young people, a difficult process. To the natural challenges of gaining personal autonomy which are common to many young people, most societies in Europe experience financial and economic crises which have a particular effect on young people and their opportunities for developing “knowledge, skills and competencies to play a full part in all aspects of society”¹. Roma young people face additional hurdles, starting

¹ Agenda 2020 on the youth policy of the Council of Europe

with being denied “the right to be young”. Caught in between expectations from their families and communities and the stigmatisation from the majority societies, Roma young people have a hard time in asserting their rights, their identity and belonging, their lives. Other general problems faced by Roma communities are often reflected in the transition to adulthood of many young Roma, namely poverty and lack of opportunities within the community and when going outside the community, difficulties in accessing social human rights.

The situation can be direr for Roma girls and young women and for invisible groups among Roma youth like, as discussed in the conference, young people with disabilities, Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual and Transsexual, migrants and undocumented young people.

In a context where many European societies are becoming more closed rather than open, the room for diversity and difference is narrowing and “the Other” is increasingly regarded as a threat than as a fellow citizen and human being. This is the ground in which Romaphobia and Antigypsyism breed and upon which many children and young people grow and learn prejudice and ethnocentrism.

This is intolerable for the Roma children and young people concerned and for the societies of which they are citizens. Democracy can not be built on discrimination and exclusion. Roma young people also have a contribution to make for the development of their societies and they ought to be part of solutions, not of problems.

2. Roma youth specific issues that the Action Plan should respond to

External challenges

- Limited access to political participation and absence from relevant decision making bodies and processes
- Limited or no participation in mainstream youth events and initiatives
- Lack of political will to have a more Roma youth inclusive approach into the mainstream youth programs
- Roma youth issues are absent from related mainstream legislation and policies and from youth research studies at national and international level
- Lack of solid (or any) funding for youth activities; where they exist they often exclude Roma youth organisations due to their weakness and specificities
- Absence of effective positive measures which would allow to create any improvement in equality of opportunities
- Lack of de-segregated data and statistics making Roma youth twice invisible
- Roma youth activities are often pilot project based lacking strategic focus to link to sustainable policies
- Antigypsyism and high levels of discrimination having a deep impact on self-esteem and self-confidence and leading to further stigmatisation and exclusion of Roma young people and their families
- Lack of access to essential goods and services and of the possibility to enjoy the same opportunities and chances as other young people

- Growing up in residential and school segregated neighbourhoods, depriving them of being part of mainstream society
- Multiple forms of discrimination (including intra-community discrimination) of particularly vulnerable groups such as women, Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual and Trans-gender youth, HIV infected, migrants and undocumented young people
- A generally negative portrayal of Roma in mainstream media and online which reinforces prejudices, stereotypes and racialised attitudes
- Lack of information in the media, in school books or other means concerning Roma culture, traditions, and life of the young Roma
- Misconceptions and contempt about the life style of Travellers
- Great barriers in access to quality education, often even to education at all
- Widespread practice of disproportionately placing Roma children and youngsters in special schools for mentally retarded people
- Low levels of education and training among Roma youth making them not competitive in the labour market
- Low levels of access to high school, even lower in university-level education
- High levels of poverty in which Roma children and young people grow-up
- Lack of birth certificates, identity documents papers and citizenship status making Roma invisible to the administration and denying them the possibility to exert their rights.

Internal challenges

- Weak Roma youth organisations and lack of Roma youth structures
- Poor coordination and communication between existing structures (Roma and non-Roma youth; Roma youth and general Roma movements, organisations and responsible authorities)
- Lack of information and education about citizenship and human rights
- Low level of mobilisation making Roma youth movements invisible
- Low levels of Roma youth voluntarism and participation in mainstream youth organisations and projects
- Limited capacity to apply and manage for project funding
- Self-loathing and self-segregation as a result of discrimination and exclusion leading young Roma to hide their ethnic and cultural identity
- Early and arranged marriages pose barriers for young people, especially for young women, to continue their education or pursue a professional career;
- Disproportionate placement of Roma children and youngsters in care institutions; many of them lose their ethnic identity
- Domestic violence affecting young girls and women
- Difficult relations between Roma youth and elder Roma leaders
- Tensions between different Roma groups and communities limit cooperation between youth organizations
- Lack of youth role models within the Roma communities.

3. Purpose and values underlying the Roma Youth Action Plan

The Roma Youth Action Plan is set out in order to:

- a) Support the creation in Europe of an environment for Roma children and youth to grow free from discrimination, confident about their future perspectives and appreciating their plural cultural backgrounds and affiliations as young people, as Roma, as citizens of their countries and as active Europeans.
- b) Change prejudices and stereotypical attitudes against Roma
- c) Support and develop the participation and autonomy of Roma youth at European and national levels
- d) Defend the human rights of Roma by preventing future violations and by empowering young Roma through human rights education
- e) Promote measures for real equal opportunities of Roma young people in all aspects of life, including education, employment, health and housing
- f) Promote the desegregation of Roma schools and settlements
- g) Adopt an integrated approach in all Roma youth related policies
- h) Promote the respect and development of Roma identity and culture
- i) Support active citizenship and participation of young Roma in all aspects of society.

4. Implementation principles

The Roma Youth Action Plan should be understood as a framework or platform of action within which various stakeholders and actors at European and national level –including Roma youth organisations and networks, international organisations, institutions and initiatives – place their respective activities, projects and programmes with, for and by Roma youth for the purposes outlined above.

The Roma Youth Action plan and its activities should be based upon the following principles and values:

- a) Participation and consultation of Roma youth and Roma youth organisations
- b) Roma youth involvement in youth policy design, implementation and evaluation
- c) Comprehensive multi-sectoral approaches respecting the role of each partner
- d) Transparency in the planning, delivery and evaluation of results
- e) Regular monitoring and evaluation
- f) Integration of a gender equality dimension, including the prevention of domestic violence and gender-based discrimination
- g) Respect for and promotion of Roma identity, culture and language
- h) Linking Roma youth projects to the situation of Roma communities in Europe and the need for systemic changes to address structural forms of discrimination
- i) Human-rights based approaches to the challenges faced by young Roma and the empowerment of Roma youth leaders in addressing and finding responses to them (including human rights education as part of capacity-building projects)

- j) Explicit but not exclusive, have a strong focus on Roma, but not excluding non-Roma who face similar situations
- k) Anti-discrimination approach: eradicate ongoing discrimination, compensate for past discrimination and eliminate future discrimination
- l) Make use of disaggregated data by ethnicity in the planning, implementation and evaluation of policies and programmes.

5. Objectives and key activities

Overall objectives and activities

1. Providing political support for Roma in self-organisation at European and national level;
2. Actively promoting Roma youth representation in social and political structures at all levels;
3. Roma youth participation in the mainstream youth policy making and implementation;
4. Promote positive action for Roma youth in education, employment and other fields, including promoting positive duties to responsible authorities at national and local level;
5. Sensitise politicians and local authorities on issues that are specific to Roma young people;
6. Sensitise the mainstream media about discrimination of Roma and train journalists in addressing Roma issues;
7. Promote cultural-sensitiveness training (intercultural learning) to all relevant institutions dealing with Roma matters;
8. Empower young Roma political participation;
9. Strengthen the networking and cooperation between Roma youth, Roma youth organisations and non-Roma youth networks;
10. Promote equal treatment and non-discrimination campaigns, notably through a new “all different – all equal” campaign;
11. Ensure monitoring and impact assessment in all fields concerning Roma youth;
12. Involve Roma youth organisations in the evaluation of the Strasbourg Declaration implementation.

Specific objectives and activities

Youth policies and activities

13. Policies should encourage Roma youth to be part of mainstream youth programmes;
14. Youth policies should ensure sustainability of projects and target young Roma in all activities;
15. A Roma youth fund should be created by the Council of Europe;
16. Positive action policies and measures concerning Roma youth by the Council of Europe and its member states;

17. The Council of Europe should encourage member states to adopt positive duty policies, where national and local authorities will be responsible for the monitoring, implementation and reporting on the Roma youth actions;
18. Roma youth specific actions to be included in the follow-up of the Strasbourg Declaration;
19. The Ad-Hoc Committee on Roma (CAHROM) should ensure that Roma youth matters are part of its agenda and are also followed by member states;
20. The Council of Europe youth policy should include regular monitoring and evaluation of the Roma Youth Action Plan by a specific body to be set up;
21. Create systems and tools to share information among young Roma people;
22. Ensure access for young Roma to the decision-making process of youth policies;
23. Push for policy measures for co-funding from national and local authorities and ensure sustainable funds;
24. Include the participation of Roma youth in the criteria for the national youth policy reviews of the Council of Europe;
25. Develop programmes that strengthen the cultural identity of Roma youth;

Empowerment and Participation

26. Build the capacity of young Roma with professionally oriented training and appropriate internship and fellowship programmes;
27. Train young Roma in management and organisational skills;
28. Train young Roma rights activists of how to work with media including the usage of new technologies for Roma and non-Roma;
29. Ensure participation at all levels and all structures related to youth issues;
30. Create a platform for exchange of information and experience;
31. Provide training for trainers for Roma youth leaders and activists;
32. Initiate activities which will generate and increase mutual trust between Roma and state institutions;
33. Consider the setting up of a Roma youth mediators project as part of the ROMED programme;

Building up a Roma Youth Movement

34. Strengthening Roma cultural identity by formal and non-formal education;
35. Promote voluntarism among young Roma;
36. Ensure ongoing capacity-building activities such as training for trainers as well as training in management, advocacy and fundraising, using information and communication technologies etc;
37. Creating platforms for cooperation and exchange of information;
38. Ensure transparency in the participation and consultation processes;
39. Organise a Roma youth congress and set up a budget for Roma youth movements;
40. Ensure the necessary financial and human resources for the Roma Youth Action Plan whose coordinator should be a Roma young person;

41. Initiate activities and processes aiming at the coordination with other international stakeholders such as the European Commission and other EU bodies, the OSCE-ODHIR, UN agencies, etc.

Non-Formal Education and Formal Education

42. Initiate networking activities at local, national and European level;
43. Establish Roma youth centres at various levels;
44. Initiate training activities – topical training, after-school activities, language and other training;
45. Promote positive measures in education including after-school activities and preparatory classes for entering university;
46. Raise awareness of Roma culture through media, networks and festivals;
47. Promote cooperation between Roma and non Roma activities through exchange of experience and successful practices;
48. Ensure ongoing monitoring of Roma access and participation in formal education;
49. Challenge (denounce, prevent, research) segregation in normal and special schools;
50. Ensure equal opportunities for Roma to quality education and ensure successful transfer to higher education;
51. Ensure collaboration with local authorities and schools;
52. Promote Roma youth participation at all levels of the education system;
53. Advocate for culturally-designed school curricula which include information about Roma culture and traditions;
54. Provide intercultural training for teachers and intercultural education in schools;
55. Develop education programmes which would involve Roma families children, and young people;
56. Ensure access to vocational training opportunities for young Roma;

Human rights and human rights education

57. Raise awareness about the human rights situation of young Roma;
58. Promote and initiate activities by young people to fight and prevent discrimination and racism;
59. Develop campaigns or competitions for schools and other institutions in tolerant and non-discriminatory attitude and service (such as the DOSTA award for municipalities);
60. Empower Roma youth to take legal actions in cases of human rights abuse and discrimination;
61. Develop and hold campaigns against racism and antigypsyism similar to the “All Different- All Equal” youth campaign
62. Address the issue of hate speech and human rights violations of Roma people online through capacity-building and awareness raising actions

63. Ensure monitoring of the media and effective tools to fight hate speech and the misrepresentation of Roma in the media;
64. Organise training courses for Roma youth multipliers and include them in all human rights activities of the Council of Europe (notably those concerning education and youth);
65. Push the governments to provide disaggregated data on Roma youth and human rights cases;
66. Encourage networking on human rights issues at national and international level;
67. Involve Roma youth organisations in advocacy for human rights education;

Diversity (measures to respond to the situation of the most vulnerable groups within the Roma communities)

68. Promote activities for empowerment of different groups including young women, LGBT, religious, migrant and other groups that are minorities within Roma communities;
69. Promote activities for the empowerment of young Roma women, taking into account the specific situation of violence against women
70. Raise awareness about the diversity among young Roma and the history of Roma women and LGBT movements;
71. Organize activities and campaigns to promote diversity in the work of youth organizations;
72. Promote networking with non-Roma youth networks and organisations on specific human rights and diversity matters
73. Initiate public discussion among Roma communities and youth activists concerning gender issues, religion, early marriages, HIV, drug use and human trafficking;
74. Ensure legal protection; establish and maintain recovery centres for victims of violence;
75. Provide information and sources of knowledge on health protection;
76. Raise awareness and disseminate information about the concept of multiple discrimination;
77. Provide training for diversity in schools and within the Roma communities;
78. Initiate research on the diversity in the Roma communities, about perceptions of Roma about diversity within the community and access to basic rights;
79. Produce a video about the diversity in the Roma communities and other publications on human rights;
80. Create a website and internet forum for different people to share information and knowledge on their specific groups.