



EUROPEAN ALLIANCE OF CITIES AND REGIONS FOR ROMA INCLUSION

Background paper for consultation meeting – 25 September 2012

Introduction

The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe organised, on 22 September 2011, a Summit of Mayors on Roma on the theme “Building mutual trust at the grassroots”. The aim of the Summit was to discuss actions to which local and regional elected representatives and Roma could commit in order to overcome obstacles hindering Roma access to social rights at the grassroots level and to promote mutual understanding within communities, in order to achieve Roma social inclusion. One of the most important outcomes of the Summit was the participants’ commitment to set up an Alliance of Cities and Regions for Roma Inclusion.

The final declaration of this Summit expresses the commitment of the participants and presents the aims of the Alliance *“We recognise the need to pursue cooperation between municipalities and regions in Europe and we are determined to take sustained further action to build on this Summit. To this end, we support the proposal to establish a European Alliance of Cities and Regions for Roma Inclusion, to be set up as 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.”*. (Extract from the final Declaration, par. 9). The Declaration also invites *“the European Union to join and support this initiative, in line with the priority given to Roma inclusion by the EU, as we are convinced that it will help to achieve the EU’s objectives in this field”* (par. 11).

A Core Group willing to prepare this co-operation process involving eleven cities and regions¹ from seven countries, was set up to build the Alliance and prepare its launch in 2012. The initiative of the Congress has received political backing from the Council of Europe member states (Committee of Ministers) and is fully supported by the Council of Europe Secretary General, whose Special Representative for Roma Issues is actively involved in it.

The role and responsibilities of local and regional authorities are crucial for Roma inclusion. In fact, local elected representatives are confronted in their daily work to the duty of making policies and govern in favour of all citizens while addressing critical issues related to the socio-economic inclusion of Roma, including Roma access to services such as education, healthcare and social services, physical segregation, the management of interethnic tensions, the promotion of cultural diversity, and the active participation of the Roma in the local communities.

¹ City of Kavarna (Bulgaria), Cities of Aubervilliers and Strasbourg (France), Municipalities of Heraklion and Chalkidona (Greece), Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County Government and Besence Local Government (Hungary), Municipality of Bucharest 5th District (Romania), City of Nis (Serbia), Autonomous Community of Madrid and City of Malaga (Spain).

The Alliance intends to contribute to strengthening the capacity of local authorities to design and implement effective policies to achieve Roma inclusion, and to respond effectively to the existing need for cooperation and mutual support between local and regional authorities at the European level in relation to Roma issues. It will constitute an informal and dynamic framework for cooperation among local and regional representatives aimed at capacity-building and the promotion of good governance, act as a platform for the exchange of information on Roma inclusion, and provide practical support.

The Alliance intends to be a demand-driven process, adjusting its activities to the needs of the participants. After the Summit a questionnaire was sent out to the participants. More than 100 municipalities and regions from 27 countries have responded so far, and 90% of them have manifested their interest in joining the Alliance.² Among the main fields of interest and needs regarding Roma inclusion they have prioritised **education** (combating segregation, absenteeism, early drop out...), **employment and vocational training**, and **housing** (resettlement and integration processes). In addition, cross-cutting issues like **rights, duties and responsibilities**, **Roma participation, combating stereotypes and promoting mutual understanding**, **security and public order** (crime, violence, intercultural conflicts and tension prevention/management), and **access to funds**, mainly European, are considered most relevant. The kinds of activities they would wish to see developed in the framework of the Alliance include the exchange of practices, transfer of working methods and tools, training/capacity building seminars and workshops as well as study visits.

The participating Cities and Regions are expected to commit themselves to co-operating actively within the Alliance by fostering mutual learning, and to contribute to strengthening local and regional capacities for action, promoting good governance at the grassroots level and helping to ensure funding for Roma activities. Alliance partner cities and regions should demonstrate a clear commitment to creating the conditions for the effective social inclusion of Roma by mainstreaming Roma-related issues into its policies and activities, by ensuring their equal access to services, by promoting Roma empowerment, 'active citizenship' and participation, by fostering mutual understanding between Roma and non-Roma communities and by upholding the right to equal treatment of Roma, enshrined in international, Council of Europe and EU legal standards and legislation.

Connecting/bridging European processes with the local level

One of the assumptions of the Council of Europe in promoting the Alliance is that it should work in close cooperation with other initiatives and existing policies and processes, by creating mutual support mechanisms fostering complementarity and providing added value. The effective implementation of national policies at the local level represents a major challenge in many member states and is the key issue in the implementation of National Roma Integration Strategies (NRIS). The Alliance can be an important instrument for helping to bridge the gap between the national policies and implementation at the local level, and inscribe the local and regional dimensions of Roma issues into national and international agendas.

In the last years there has been significant progress at the European level on achieving a common understanding of the Roma issue and the key elements for Roma policies: the four priority areas, the ten common basic principles, the need for integrated long term actions, the importance of the data collection and monitoring processes, etc. Unfortunately these elements are not known to many regions and municipalities, or remain excessively abstract for their

² Among the respondents are large cities such as Malaga, Bucharest (5th district), Nis, Strasbourg, Kavarna, Berlin, Budapest, Turin, Seville, Padua, Belgrade, Lisbon, Barcelona, Vigo, Tirana, Ghent, Manchester, Leeds, Stuttgart, Stockholm, Gothenburg, Kosice, Gostivar, Mostar, San Sebastian and regions such as Tuscany and the Madrid region. Some of these already participate in the preparatory core group.

practical implementation; as a consequence they often are not followed up in their local policies when dealing with Roma. These principles and approaches need now to be known and be made to work at the local level and the Alliance will be a valuable instrument for supporting this process.

In 2010-2011, a strong dynamic has been developed at the European level in favour of effective Roma inclusion policies in member states. The Strasbourg Declaration on Roma, adopted by Council of Europe member states at a high-level Meeting in October 2010 led to a much stronger and more action-oriented focus on this issue in the Council of Europe. The EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies, presented by the Commission in April 2011 was endorsed by member states in June 2011. EU member states have presented their respective NRIS and it is now crucial to sustain this European momentum in favour of Roma inclusion in the coming years, in particular by supporting local and regional authorities in taking their vital share of responsibilities so that real change is achieved on the ground.

Since 2011, the Council of Europe and the EU have cooperated closely in a very practical scheme to support Roma inclusion in member states: the European training Programme for Roma Mediators (ROMED), set up under a Partnership Agreement between the two Organisations. The ROMED programme involves working with local authorities across Europe, which can be built upon for the Alliance.

As in other areas, Council of Europe member states are bound by relevant common legal human rights standards, have made relevant political commitments (notably the 2010 Strasbourg Declaration on Roma) and agreed on common policy recommendations (a set of Recommendations of the Committee of Ministers to member states relating to Roma issues). The Council of Europe provides the Alliance with an institutional environment that ensures access to expertise and is highly favourable to synergies and linkages: a dedicated intergovernmental framework (CAHROM expert committee set up to analyse national Roma policies and exchange experience and practice between member states, expert committees in relevant areas such as education policies, social cohesion...), representative European assemblies of local and regional authorities (the Congress) and of national parliaments (Parliamentary Assembly), relevant human rights monitoring (European Social Charter, ECRI, Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, Commissioner for Human Rights, Execution of judgments of the European Court of Human Rights...) as well as ongoing Roma-related EU/COUNCIL OF EUROPE cooperation programmes (notably the ROMED Programme, the Roma Academic Network, and the Intercultural Cities Programme).

Pulling municipalities and regions towards more inclusive policies

The main purpose of the Alliance is for the cities and regions that participate in it to have inclusive local Roma policies. It is expected from the partner cities and regions that they will commit to these inclusive policies, and it is expected that the Alliance will support them in this process. Having inclusive local Roma policies at the local level is also a core issue for the European Union and is essential for putting the NRIS to work. Inclusive local Roma policies mean:

1. That while governing, cities and regions make policies for the benefit of all the citizens including Roma.
2. That mayors and local elective representatives commit to protecting the human rights of the Roma and plan effective actions to counter and avoid any form of segregation.
3. That local elected representatives have an explicit public model of Roma integration, based on human rights standards and the Common Basic Principles, which guide their practical policymaking process.

That local and regional entities participating in the Alliance identify a set of measures to be taken to:

- a. Render local mainstream services in the areas of their competence more inclusive of Roma (effective access of the Roma to mainstream services).
- b. Develop specific actions (explicit but not exclusive) to compensate for Roma disadvantages.
- c. Create systems to foster Roma participation in the daily social life as well as for dialogue with the Roma.
- d. Identify ways to monitor the Roma situation and the progress made as a result of their policies.

The Alliance aims to achieve the active engagement and participation of the **regions**; in fact regional and local policies throughout Europe are not implemented in a vacuum and need to be developed in close cooperation. In addition, the distribution of competences differs between countries and while municipalities will have the key competences in some countries, in others relevant actions will be under the responsibility of the regional authorities. Many European policies have a regional component and regions can be a very useful "point of entry" for reaching out to municipalities that would be difficult to reach otherwise, as well as for creating synergies from the territorial perspective.

Supporting the cities and regions to achieve their commitments: getting practical results

The Alliance intends to be light in structure (no distinct legal personality, no complicated governance structure) and have a strong focus on strategic substantive activities. This means that it will be results-oriented by focusing on the provision of quality services and supporting municipalities and regions in the process of implementing inclusive Roma policies.

The actions of the Alliance will be demand driven and offer "à la carte activities", by grouping cities and regions that have similar interests and demands and intend to be engaged in the same processes. This will avoid big events and expensive meetings that are not focused on concrete objectives and provide little value. Training and capacity-building by different means is at the heart of what the Alliance wants to focus on. In fact the Alliance can provide added value to the training of municipal officials, e.g. by functioning as a *Training and Support Centre for local administrations* on Roma policies and issues.

The Alliance will organise and promote its activities in different ways, identifying the most appropriate format in accordance with the themes and issues under focus. Subjects will be prioritised according to the demands of the cities and regions (see those identified in the first section above). Activities will start small-scale, focusing on a few priority areas, and will be scaled up over time once the schemes have proven to work, and demand has increased further.

Pending further consultation and debate, we can foresee two main lines of action that need to go hand in hand and arise from: the need for the regional and local authorities to develop active Roma policies, which concerns primarily the local and regional elected representatives; and the need to increase the capacity of regional and local actors in order for these policies to gain efficiency, which mainly concerns the managing level.

1. The stimulation of better Roma policies and the encouragement of the cities in their work, including by fostering initiatives. These types of actions could be addressed to local and regional elected representatives, including policymakers and senior managers in the cities and regions, and could consist in:
 - study visits in the regions/cities working on a particular issue;

- exchanges between cities (training of municipal staff and elected representatives);
 - access to individual expertise, involving the analysis of the problem and proposals for action including by specific research institutions;
 - development and evaluation of impact indicators at the local level.
2. Building the capacity of the regional and local institutions, by helping them to develop plans and actions and to achieve better results by improving their work. These type of actions could be addressed to middle managers, civil servants and other actors (including Roma leaders and NGOs) and could consist in:
- seminars/workshops on thematic issues;
 - transfer of methodologies between cities (e.g. through twinning);
 - training/information sessions for staff of municipal/regional services;
 - development of tools for self-analysis, for needs assessment and the impact evaluation of initiatives;

The two previous action lines could be complemented by the provision of information as well as other activities that can support cities and regions towards more inclusive Roma policies:

- publications/handbooks/guidelines;
- dedicated website;
- feeding into and promoting the European database on Roma policies and good practices, which has been accommodated to include local and regional policies and practices;
- better use of existing economic resources and access to funds, including EU funds.

Contents

The content of the projects and activities will be defined by the demands and expectations of the participants. They will focus on subjects that are mainly under the competencies of the local (and regional) administrations and where there is a possibility of adding value in terms of knowledge and expertise.

1. Content will be determined by general parameters such as:

- Comprehensive approach of the Roma inclusion; integrated approach and integrated actions will be at the heart of all the activities
- Urban development by covering territorial issues (not only social approach)
- Taking into account the return of investments or investments with social and economic return.

2. Priority areas will be determined by needs. From the answers to the questionnaire, the following priorities emerge:

- Education (combating segregation, early child education, absenteeism...)
- Employment (vocational training, apprenticeship...)
- Housing (Resettlements, integrated processes)

3. Rather than broader subjects the Alliance will focus on specific subjects:

Key subjects that may form the basis for a local Roma policy or plan. Sustainability and continuity of the local actions, dynamism and cooperation between the cities, as well as the role of mediators will be key issues. A list of indicative subjects:

- Segregation – integration: segregated schools, housing segregation, encampments evictions, basic services...
- Access to the mainstream services: equal opportunities, access and full enjoyment of mainstream services, services adaptation...
- Social investment return: housing project and economic dynamism, replacing passive policies by active policies...
- Roma participation: participation at community level, participation in civil society initiatives, Roma political participation, local governance and Roma participation...
- Rights and responsibilities: active citizenship, school absenteeism, good use of public goods and services, early marriages...
- Diversity management: Roma empowerment, intercultural mediation, Roma culture knowledge and support....
- Conflict prevention and security: public order issues, incident management, combating stereotypes, crime violence, ethnic conflicts, domestic violence, begging practices, trafficking...

Expected outcomes

Expected mid-term outcomes foreseen for the Alliance:

- A group of cities and regions making the difference in Roma inclusion.
- The creation of methods of cooperation, mutual learning and support between cities and regions in this field.
- Better skills and capacity of the cities on how to use different existing resources, including EU Structural Funds (including multi-funds) in the implementation of integrated policies.
- Identified and systematised working methods and tools on the inclusion of Roma at the local level.
- Better conditions for the creation of synergies with other cities and regions, for transferring know-how and mutual learning, including national networks of cities.
- Positive examples of influencing the policy process at the national level and at the European level from the local perspective.

Creating synergies with other bodies and existing initiatives

The Alliance intends to work in close cooperation with other institutions and initiatives dealing with Roma issues, and especially with those depending on the EU/European Commission, notably the different DGs and the Fundamental Rights Agency. The Alliance provides a framework within which different initiatives can be developed with different partners.

The Alliance can create synergies with institutions and bodies acting at the European level and fostering regional and local capabilities, such as the Committee of the Regions and Eurocities. The Alliance can also involve in its activities institutions that can provide added value and have experience in research, data collection, planning processes, such as the FRA, the WB and UNDP. As regards the provision of hands-on assistance to municipalities in the preparation of local projects/project applications, a partnership can be envisaged with the OSI MERI network on

accessing and using EU structural funds, with the EURoma network and with the Council of Europe Bank.

Starting-up

A small unit in the Council of Europe secretariat has been set up, dedicated to servicing the Alliance, and supporting its initial activities to be carried out before the end of 2012. Additional resources are being sought for the coming years. Together with the results of the questionnaire, the 25 September consultation meeting with stakeholders will provide guidance for future priority actions. Similar consultations are envisaged at regular intervals in the future.