
Council of Europe High Level Meeting on Roma Strasbourg, 20 October 2010

“The Strasbourg Declaration on Roma”

(1) Roma¹ in many parts of Europe continue to be socially and economically marginalised, which undermines the respect of their human rights, impedes their full participation in society and effective exercise of civic responsibilities, and propagates prejudice.

(2) Any effective response to this situation will have to combine social and economic inclusion in society and the effective protection of human rights. The process must be embraced and supported by society as a whole. A genuine and effective participation of our fellow Europeans of Roma origin is a precondition for success.

(3) While the primary responsibility for promoting inclusion lies with the member states of which Roma are nationals or long-term legal residents, recent developments concerning Roma in Europe have demonstrated that some of the challenges we face have cross-border implications and therefore require a pan-European response.

(4) As situations differ from country to country, the role of international organisations should be first and foremost to support and assist the efforts carried out at national, regional and especially local level.

(5) Based on these considerations the member states of the Council of Europe have adopted the following “**Strasbourg Declaration**”:

(6) *Reaffirming* that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights;

(7) *Reaffirming* their attachment to human dignity and the protection of human rights for all persons;

(8) *Recalling* the fundamental values, norms and standards of democracy, human rights and the rule of law, which are shared by the Council of Europe member states and which must guide action at all levels;

(9) *Confirming* their commitment to promote social inclusion and create the conditions for an effective exercise of civic rights and responsibilities by every individual;

(10) *Recalling* that active participation of the Roma is crucial for achieving their social inclusion and encouraging them to participate in addressing the problems of, inter alia, relatively low rates of education and employment;

(11) *Bearing* in mind that the process of inclusion of Roma contributes to social cohesion, democratic stability and to the acceptance of diversity;

(12) *Recalling* that in the exercise of his/her rights and freedoms everyone must respect the national legislation and the rights of others;

(13) *Condemning* unequivocally racism, stigmatisation and hate speech directed against Roma, particularly in public and political discourse;

¹ The term “Roma” used throughout the present text refers to Roma, Sinti, Kale, Travellers, and related groups in Europe, and aims to cover the wide diversity of groups concerned, including groups which identify themselves as Gypsies.

(14) *Recalling* the obligations of States Parties under all relevant Council of Europe legal instruments which they have ratified, in particular the European Convention on Human Rights and the Protocols thereto, and, where applicable, the European Social Charter and the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages;

(15) *Recommending that State Parties* take fully into account the relevant judgments of the European Court of Human Rights and relevant decisions of the European Committee of Social Rights, in developing their policies on Roma;

(16) *Recalling* their commitment to the principles of tolerance and non-discrimination, as expressed in the statute of European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI);

(17) *Drawing on* the initiatives, activities and programmes already developed and conducted by member states aimed at the full inclusion of Roma;

(18) The member states of the Council of Europe agree on the following non-exhaustive list of priorities, which should serve as guidance for more focused and more consistent efforts at all levels, including through active participation of Roma:

Non-discrimination and citizenship

Non-discrimination

(19) Adopt and effectively implement anti-discrimination legislation, including in the field of employment, access to justice, the provision of goods and services, including access to housing and key public services, such as health care and education.

Criminal legislation

(20) Adopt and effectively implement criminal legislation against racially motivated crime.

Citizenship

(21) Take effective measures to avoid statelessness in accordance with domestic law and policy and to grant Roma legally residing in their national territory access to identification papers.

Women's rights and gender equality

(22) Put in place effective measures to respect, protect and promote gender equality of Roma girls and women within their communities and in the society as a whole.

(23) Put in place effective measures to abolish where still in use harmful practices against Roma women's reproductive rights, primarily forced sterilisation.

Children's rights

(24) Promote through effective measures the equal treatment and the rights of Roma children especially the right to education and protect them against violence, including sexual abuse and labour exploitation, in accordance with international treaties.

Empowerment

(25) Promote effective participation of Roma in social, political and civic life, including active participation of representatives of Roma in decision-making mechanisms affecting them, and co-operation with independent authorities such as Ombudsmen in the field of human rights protection.

Access to justice

(26) Ensure equal and effective access to the justice system, including where appropriate through affordable legal aid services.

(27) Ensure timely and effective investigations and due legal process in cases of alleged racial violence or other offences against Roma.

(28) Provide appropriate and targeted training to judicial and police services.

Combat trafficking

(29) Bearing in mind that Roma children and women are often victims of trafficking and exploitation, devote adequate attention and resources to combat these phenomena, within the general efforts aimed at curbing trafficking of human beings and organised crime, and, in appropriate cases, issue victims with residence permits.

Fighting stigmatisation and hate speech

(30) Strengthen efforts in combating hate speech. Encourage the media to deal responsibly and fairly with the issue of Roma and refrain from negative stereotyping or stigmatisation.

(31) Remind public authorities at national, regional and local levels of their special responsibility to refrain from statements, in particular to the media, which may be reasonably understood as hate speech, or as speech likely to produce the effect of legitimising, spreading or promoting racial hatred, xenophobia, or other forms of discrimination or hatred based on intolerance.

(32) Consider joining the campaign of the Council of Europe and the European Commission "Dosta! Go beyond prejudice, discover the Roma!" and enhance activities in this framework.

*Social inclusion**Education*

(33) Ensure effective and equal access to the mainstream educational system, including pre-school education, for Roma children and methods to secure attendance, including, for instance, by making use of school assistants and mediators. Provide, where appropriate, in service training of teachers and educational staff.

Employment

(34) Ensure equal access of Roma to employment and vocational training in accordance with international and domestic law, including, when appropriate, by using mediators in employment offices. Provide Roma, as appropriate, with possibilities to validate their skills and competences acquired in informal settings.

Health Care

(35) Ensure equal access of all Roma to the healthcare system, for instance, by using health mediators and providing training for existing facilitators.

Housing

(36) Take appropriate measures to improve the living conditions of Roma.

(37) Ensure equal access to housing and accommodation services for Roma.

(38) Provide for appropriate and reasonable notice and effective access to judicial remedy in cases of eviction, while ensuring the full respect of the principle of the rule of law.

(39) In consultation with all concerned and in accordance with the domestic legislation and policy, provide appropriate accommodation for nomadic and semi-nomadic Roma.

Culture and language

(40) Where appropriate, take measures to foster knowledge of the culture, history and languages of Roma and understanding thereof.

International cooperation

(41) Ensure focused, sustained and effective co-operation regarding Roma, at the pan-European level, between member states, regions, local authorities and European organisations, drawing on the many examples of good practice which exist at European, national, regional and local levels. In particular, encourage co-operation with the European Union, including through joint programmes such as the intercultural cities, as well as the OSCE;

(42) Ensure close cooperation with Roma communities at all levels, pan-European, national, regional and local, in the implementation of these commitments;

(43) Recognising the need to contribute to the implementation of these priorities through the use of good practices, expertise and available financial resources which exist at European, national, regional and local level, the member states of the Council of Europe:

- (44) welcome the decision of the Secretary General to re-organise resources in a transversal manner within the Council of Europe Secretariat with the task of further developing co-operation with national, regional and local authorities and international organisations in collecting, analysing, exchanging and disseminating information on policies and good practice on Roma, providing advice and support upon the request of national, regional and local authorities as well as practical assistance in the implementation of new policy initiatives, especially at the local level, and providing access to training, capacity-building and educational material;
- (45) encourage close co-operation with member states, other Council of Europe institutions, other international organisations, especially the European Union and the OSCE, as well as civil society, including Roma associations and relevant non-governmental organisations, in order that its work complements rather than duplicates that of other bodies;
- (46) agree to set up a European Training Programme for Roma Mediators with the aim to streamline, codify and consolidate the existing training programmes for and about Mediators for Roma, through the most effective use of existing Council of Europe resources, standards, methodology, networks and infrastructure, notably the European Youth Centres in Strasbourg and Budapest, in close co-operation with national and local authorities;
- (47) encourage member states to use a coordinated, inter-agency approach to dealing with issues which affect Roma;
- (48) take note of the list of good practices elaborated by the Secretary General, entitled "Strasbourg Initiatives" for which he calls for support. This open catalogue of projects having an immediate and measurable impact could serve as a catalyst for future action;
- (49) invite the Secretary General of the Council of Europe to present a first progress report on the implementation of the "Strasbourg Declaration" to the Council of Europe Ministerial Session in Istanbul in May 2011.