

Forum on Minority issues
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Participation of minority youth in public life

At the outset, I would like to thank for the opportunity to address this forum and to exchange information on minority youth participation, in particular on those most vulnerable, the Roma minority. In this respect, allow me to acquaint you with some of the relevant recent development in the Republic of Croatia.

Croatian Government considers that *"ethnic and multicultural diversity, the spirit of understanding, mutual respect and tolerance contribute to the enhanced development of Croatia"*. The legal basis for regulating the rights and protection of national minorities, 22 of them, is enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of Croatia and the Constitutional Law on the Rights of National Minorities (CLRNM). The Government recently adopted Operational Programs for National Minorities 2017-2020 (OP), in order to further improve the position of national minorities in Croatia.

Allow me to introduce just a few most recent examples of the activities aimed at improvement of participation of minority youth in public life, including cooperation with UN agencies. With the support of UNICEF we have worked on the new Action Plan (AP) for the National Roma Integration Strategy (NRIS) implementation for the period 2018-2020, in collaboration with a broad range of stakeholders. Following an external evaluation in 2015, we wanted to make qualitative improvements of the previous document. We always pay attention to gender and age aspects, and therefore conducted focus groups with Roma youth and Roma women in order to gain better insight into lives of Roma youth in marginalised communities. In order to overcome barriers that rural Roma face, we brought activities to them instead of bringing them to the place of activity, and conducted focus groups with young Roma women in Romani settlements.

Low capacity of, particularly Roma youth associations and Roma women associations, is also addressed. One of the specifically youth oriented activities is regularly organising trainings for minority youth and particularly Roma youth on participation and self-organisation in Croatia. Participation and self-organisation of young people are important processes to promote inclusion and equality; it is also a way to promote autonomy and responsibility of young people. Youth participation includes young people being included and involved in decision making at all levels and leads them in taking more responsibilities, face them with challenges and directs them in becoming more active in terms of realising their own needs and aspirations.

With the support of EC grant, GOHRRNM has also successfully implemented a project ***Living Equality*** with the goals of improving the involvement of all relevant stakeholders in the National Roma Inclusion Strategy (NRIS) implementation, strengthening and deepening local and regional stakeholder accountability, including Roma and their ownership of the results and commitment to the outcomes of the process of Roma integration. In addition, it was aimed at raising awareness on, and addressing the gaps and challenges of local/regional/national NRIS implementation.

These are just a few of recent activities, also exemplary in their focus on the efforts Croatia has invested in increasing and improving minority youth participation in public life of our society, especially in regards to most vulnerable in an already extremely vulnerable community, such as Roma. As you can see, our example is also of benefits of cooperation and support we have enjoyed from all stakeholders, including UN agencies, such as UNDP, UNHCR and UNICEF.