

Brussels, 12 September 2008

European Roma Summit (Brussels, 16 September 2008)

What is the EU Roma Summit?

The Summit will be the first time that EU institutions, national governments and civil society organisations from around Europe come together at the highest level to discuss the situation of Roma communities in the EU and find ways to improve it.

The event – taking place on 16 September in Brussels – is being organised by the European Commission together with the French Presidency of the EU.

It is a follow-up to the Commission's July 2008 report on the EU instruments and policies available to support Roma inclusion, which called for a joint response to tackle Roma exclusion and discrimination in the EU (see [IP/08/1072](#)).

Why is the Commission organising this event?

In December 2007, EU leaders acknowledged for the first time that the Roma face a very specific situation across the EU and called upon Member States and the Union to use all means to improve their inclusion.

The Commission responded in July 2008 with a Communication and accompanying Staff Working Document setting out a renewed commitment to non-discrimination in general and action to improve the situation of Roma in particular.

The Summit forms the next step in this process and aims to support and promote a joint commitment by the Member States, the EU institutions and civil society.

Why does the Summit only focus on Roma?

The situation of Roma is far more difficult than the situation of other ethnic minorities. In 2007 the High Level Advisory Group of Experts on the social integration of ethnic minorities and their full participation in the Labour Market (High Level Group on ethnic minorities) identified 14 barriers to ethnic minorities in getting a job ([IP/07/1833](#)).

The problems of most ethnic minorities can be explained by a limited number of obstacles. Roma, however, are affected by nearly all of them (the 14 barriers are: lack of education and training; lack of language skills; lack of recognition of skills and qualifications; lack of access to professions; lack of access to citizenship; lack of integration policies; stereotypes, prejudices and negative attitudes; industrial change; disincentives through welfare systems; discrimination; lack of information; labour market competition; and undeclared work).

What are the main challenges for Roma in the EU?

The Commission's July report described the situation of the Roma as characterised by persistent discrimination – both at individual and institutional level – and far-reaching social exclusion.

The problem is a complex one that requires a complex response – there is no quick-fix solution and all aspects of the question need to be taken into consideration.

The main priorities, however, are pretty clear: education, employment, health and housing.

Who is participating at the Summit?

More than 400 representatives of EU institutions, national governments, parliaments and civil society will take part, including Roma organisations. European Commission President Barroso, Vice-President Barrot (Justice and Home affairs) and Commissioners Špidla (Employment, social affairs and equal opportunities), and Figel (Education, training, culture and youth) will be among the speakers.

They will be joined by Bernard Kouchner, Minister of Foreign and European Affairs and Christine Boutin, Minister for Housing and Urban Affairs (on behalf of the French EU Presidency), several ministers from EU Member States and candidate countries as well as George Soros, Chair of the Open Society Institute, Shigeo Katsu, Vice-President of the World Bank, and Romani Rose, President of the German Central Council of Sinti and Roma.

The direct involvement of Roma organisations and representatives is a key feature of the event. These include two Members of the European Parliament of Roma origin, Livia Járóka (EPP-ED, HU) and Viktória Mohácsi (ALDE, HU).

Will the Summit launch a new European Roma policy?

The inclusion of Roma is a joint responsibility of the Member States and the European Union. The European Commission is determined to act where it has the competence, in particular by ensuring that the legislation already in force (the Race Equality Directive) is properly enforced.

However, it recognises that this can be only successful if done in close cooperation with the Member States. Many of the key areas for Roma inclusion – education, employment, social inclusion, health services or the infrastructure and urban planning – are national responsibilities. So the Commission is committed to supporting Member States in implementing policies to improve the living situation of Roma. This coordination of national policies supports benchmarking and mutual learning and considerable resources in the framework of the EU Structural Funds can be mobilised to implement respective policies.

What has the EU done so far to improve the situation of Roma?

The EU has for some years taken action in four key areas: Rights, policies, financial support and awareness-raising. In particular,

- Roma are fully covered by EU legislation which prohibits discrimination on grounds of ethnic origin in employment, social protection and education as well as access to goods and services, including housing.

- The coordination of Member States' policies on education, employment and social inclusion provides for a framework for mutual learning and the identification of good practice.
- The European Social Fund is a powerful tool to improve the employability of Roma and can be mobilised for a broad range of actions, such as tailor-made vocational training. During the last programming period 2000-2006, some EUR 275 million were devoted to projects specifically targeted at Roma. During the same time approx. EUR 1 billion was spent on measures targeted at vulnerable groups, including the Roma.
- There is a persistent need for information and campaigning in order to highlight the right to live a life free of discrimination, but also to underline the richness which Roma contribute to European civilisation.

The Commission also organises an internship scheme for young Roma graduates in partnership with the Open Society Institute. 10 young Roma join the Commission for five months to work as trainees twice a year.

What will happen next?

The Summit will discuss the implementation gap in instruments and policies to address Roma exclusion that was highlighted in the Commission's July report.

The results of the debates and conclusions of the Summit will be submitted to the French Presidency for further consideration in the Council of Ministers ahead of the December 2008 European Council meeting of EU leaders. The Commission will use all the means at its disposal to support this process looking forward to a clear commitment from the European Council at the end of the French Presidency.

Conference website

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=88&langId=en&eventsId=105&furtherEvents=yes>

Video News Release: Defending Roma Rights in the European Union

http://ec.europa.eu/avservices/video/video_prod_en.cfm?type=detail&prodid=6383&src=1