

Action plan for improvement of the living conditions of Roma in Oslo

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Foreword

The Norwegian Roma are a small group, currently estimated at no more than approximately 700 persons, of whom the majority live in Oslo. The Roma are one of five national minorities in Norway¹. Norway ratified the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities in 1999. The Norwegian authorities therefore have a particular responsibility for ensuring that the Roma, as a national minority in Norway, are given a genuine opportunity to take part in Norwegian society on the same terms and with the same potential as other people. On the basis of the Government's social and welfare policy, all people, including the Roma, shall have the opportunity for inclusion in the Norwegian community and be able to take part in education and working life.

Although living conditions vary considerably within the group, it is well known that many Roma face major challenges in a number of areas. Discrimination, lack of schooling and problems in gaining access to the housing market and the labour market are examples of everyday difficulties for Roma people. The Government has therefore found it necessary to draw up a special action plan for improvement of living conditions of Roma.

By means of this action plan, the Government will seek to develop measures to provide Roma with genuine opportunities to take advantage of established welfare schemes in, for example, education, employment, health care and housing. The measures outlined in the action plan have also been designed to combat the discrimination that Norwegian Roma are daily subjected to. This action plan must therefore be viewed in the context of the Action Plan to Promote Equality and Prevent Ethnic Discrimination and the Action Plan against Poverty.

One of the main measures of the plan involves establishing and developing a guidance service which, among other things, can assist Roma in their dealings with public authorities. Fora will be set up for consultation and dialogue between the various public bodies and the Roma community, and measures will be implemented to raise the knowledge and competence of public employees. It is my belief that these and other measures will gradually provide us with a broader and clearer picture of the situation of the Norwegian Roma community. The experience so gained will enable the formation of a basis for efforts of a more long-term nature. Not least, I hope that we will be able to further develop the constructive dialogue that we have now commenced with the group itself.

June 2009
Dag Terje Andersen
Minister of Labour and Social Inclusion

¹ Translator's note: In Norway, a distinction is made between Roma ("Gypsies") and Romani people/Taters. Groups defined as national minorities in Norway are Jews, Kvens, Roma, Romani people/Tater and Forest Finns.

A broad, long-term initiative for improvement of the living conditions of Norwegian Roma

Many Norwegian Roma have difficult living conditions. Descriptions provided by experts, the Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombud, the Ombudsman for Children and the Roma themselves confirm that many Roma experience multiple challenges in relation to living conditions. Factors such as lack of schooling, problems in gaining access to the housing market and the labour market, discrimination and the lack of sound structures for cooperation between the Roma and the Norwegian authorities exacerbate the living conditions of many members of the group.

It is regrettable that, in 2009, there is still a group in Norway where many individuals fall outside the structures of the welfare state, and to such an extent live on the periphery of Norwegian society. The Norwegian authorities have a particular responsibility for ensuring that the Roma as a national minority in Norway are given a genuine opportunity to benefit from established welfare schemes. The Government wishes to implement measures in relation to the Roma to encourage their inclusion in the Norwegian community.

The Roma's problems as regards living conditions are complex. It is therefore the Government's view that changes must be brought about by means of a holistic approach involving targeted and systematic measures.

By means of the measures proposed in this action plan the Government wishes to

- combat discrimination of Roma in Norwegian society
- secure better living conditions for Norwegian Roma by means of special measures in the various social sectors

The Action Plan has been prepared in consultation with representatives of the Roma and the Municipality of Oslo. We have also had contact with [the Swedish Delegation for Roma Issues](#).

On commission from the Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion, the consultant Torbjørg Bay has now informed the Roma concerning work on the Action Plan, and has conducted interviews with representatives of eight extended families in Oslo.

The Action Plan for Improvement of the Living Conditions of Roma in Oslo must be viewed in the context of [the Action Plan to Promote Equality and Prevent Ethnic Discrimination](#) and [the Action Plan against Poverty](#).

The target group of the Action Plan

The target group of the Action Plan is the national minority consisting of Roma of Norwegian or foreign nationality who are registered in the Norwegian National Population Register and refer to themselves as Roma.

No statistics are currently kept on the basis of ethnic background². However, on the basis of information provided by the Roma and persons who have contact with the Roma, it is possible to estimate the number of Norwegian Roma registered in the Norwegian National Population Register at approximately 700 persons. Of these, the majority reside in Oslo. The measures outlined in this action plan will therefore be primarily designed for Roma in Oslo.

The Government wishes nevertheless to encourage other Norwegian municipalities to use the Action Plan as a tool for development of measures in relation to the Roma who have settled in municipalities other than Oslo. We must assume that people of Roma background came to Norway during the 1990s owing to the conflict in the Balkans, and that they settled in other places than Oslo, for example in Bergen. The Directorate of Integration and Diversity (IMDI) and the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI) have confirmed to the Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion that measures have been implemented to settle individuals of Roma background who have been granted residence after being subjected to human trafficking³.

Roma recently arrived in Norway

During recent years, an increasing number of Roma have arrived in Norway, particularly from Romania. In response to an enquiry from the Council of Europe, the Norwegian authorities have informed that no special measures have been established in relation to this group beyond those that apply to all other foreign nationals residing in Norway. The situation of this group of people, who support themselves, among other ways, by means of begging and busking, has been raised by the Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombud, inter alia, with regard to the right to free food in connection with food distribution and the possibility of selling the magazine =*Oslo*⁴.

Follow-up of the Action Plan

In annual reports, the Municipality of Oslo will provide information on results and experience gained from projects and measures for Roma. The effects of the measures set out in the Action Plan will moreover be discussed in consultations between the Norwegian authorities and the Roma, cf. measure 5. When the plan has been in action for some years, the Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion will survey the situation in order to establish whether the measures function effectively in relation to consumption of resources and organisation.

The Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion will coordinate the follow-up and development of objectives and measures of the Action Plan. The ministry designated as responsible for a specific measure described in the Action Plan has responsibility for implementation of this, including organisation, funding and safeguarding of the gender perspective in connection with planning and implementation of measures. The measures set out in the Action Plan are, in principle, to be implemented within the budgetary framework of the ministry concerned. The

² Cf. the definition of “sensitive personal data” in Section 2 of the Personal Data Act. In addition, Roma and a number of other national minorities oppose ethnic registration owing to the use of made of this type of information in earlier times.

³ Human trafficking is defined in section 224 of the Penal Code as exploitation of another person by force, threats, misuse of another person’s vulnerability or other improper conduct for the purpose of prostitution or other sexual purposes, forced labour, war service in a foreign country or removal of any of the said person’s organs.

⁴ Translator’s note: A magazine sold by disadvantaged persons on the streets of Oslo

implementation and scope of the measures in the Action Plan will be adapted to the annual budget proposals and the Storting's consideration of these.

Historical background

Roma have been sporadically present in Norway since the 18th century depending on the stringency of the restrictions placed by the Norwegian authorities on their access to the realm. From 1956, Roma, including those without Norwegian nationality, were allowed to immigrate freely.

Until about 1950, Roma supported themselves by means of traditional crafts such as coppersmithing and by peddling wares. However, structural changes in society led to a gradual worsening of the Roma's income potential. This resulted in difficult living conditions and problems concerning children's welfare and schooling.

In 1960, the media focused on the deplorable living conditions among the Roma. A radio programme about the Roma, "*A stain on the welfare state*", gave rise to political initiatives. Attention was drawn to the need for measures, among other reasons, to avoid compensation claims for lost schooling. It was also proposed that Roma be placed at the Svanviken labour camp which was part of the "Norwegianisation" measures brought to bear on the Romani people/Taters. However, this idea was dropped owing to conflicts between the Roma and the Romani.

In 1962, the Norwegian Gypsy Committee was established. The committee consisted of representatives from the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, the Municipality of Oslo's Department for Social Affairs, the Oslo Municipal Education Department, the Oslo police force and the Roman Catholic parish in Oslo. In consultation with the committee, the Municipality of Oslo set up a special school for Roma children. The authorities considered that the way of life of the Roma and the attitude of the general public rendered normal social measures inappropriate.

In 1967, the Norwegian Roma community consisted of approximately 100 persons⁵.

In 1969, the Norwegian Gypsy Committee wished an overall assessment to be made by a fast-track committee. In a letter to the authorities, the Norwegian Roma leader at the time, Polikarp Karoli, requested cooperation on schooling and employment opportunities. A committee was set up consisting of the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Local Government and Labour and the Municipality of Oslo.

In January 1973, owing to the media's focus on and criticism of marginalisation and unfavourable living conditions of Roma in Oslo, the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs submitted the white paper, Report No. 37 (1972-73) to the Storting *Om tiltak for de norske sigøynere* [On Measures for the Norwegian Gypsies]. In the white paper, the responsibility and work on ensuring improved living conditions for the Roma were divided between the Municipality of Oslo and the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs.

On the basis of the white paper, an official with responsibility for Gypsy affairs was appointed at the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs in 1973. An agreement was concluded

⁵ The Roma group was assumed to number approximately 120 and 180 persons respectively in 1972 and 1977, cf. O.K. Hjemdal 1982.

between the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs and the Municipality of Oslo concerning full reimbursement of the cost of the municipality's services for Roma. The Department for Gypsy Matters (Gypsy Office) was established in the municipality of Oslo. In compliance with the intentions of the white paper, the Gypsy Office was to coordinate all services for Roma which, in the case of the population at large, were divided between various different agencies and institutions.

The tasks of the Gypsy Offices were as follows⁶:

- providing advice and guidance and making recommendations and decisions pursuant to the Social Welfare Act and the Child Welfare Act.
- carrying out settlement work among Gypsies (neighbourhood work, residential training, site procurement, planning of accommodation with the extended families concerned and following up building projects).
- coordinating work on health issues among Gypsies in close cooperation with Sagene Health Clinic.
- cooperating with other bodies/agencies:
 - foreign language teaching for the primary and lower secondary school
 - adult education for Gypsies
 - Gaustadbekkdalen day care institution for Gypsy children
 - a youth club for Gypsies
 - County Employment Office (with responsibility for labour market measures for Gypsies)
- providing advice and guidance to other municipalities and agencies, and assisting foreign Gypsies travelling in Norway.

Special teaching arrangements for Roma were established in 1973 in the form of special classes for Roma at certain schools in Oslo. Roma women were periodically attached to these classes as mother tongue assistants. A number of teaching aids were developed in Romanes.

At the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s, the teaching arrangements for Roma children were changed from special classes to attendance⁷ of normal classes with mainly the same rights as minority language children (Lars Gjerde: *Rom i Norge – en historikk* [Roma in Norway – a historical account]).

Adaptive training for adult Roma was begun in 1973 in order to provide Roma with elementary reading and writing skills and to provide social and vocational training. Attendees were paid daily cash benefits.

From 1986, reimbursement by the state was replaced by block grants to municipalities. This change in addition to the continued rise in costs resulted in a review of the efforts relating to Roma. In July 1987, a working group submitted to the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs the report *Arbeidet med de norske sigøynerne* [Efforts relating to the Norwegian Gypsies]. The working group concluded that “*continued investments will be needed in relation to settlement, teaching of children and adults, day care institutions and the labour market*”. The need for continued investment in measures for Roma was reiterated by the employees of the Gypsy Office in May 1990. They proposed that an executive post be established in the

⁶ This list is derived from Torbjørg Bay's master's thesis in social work *Før det er for sent* [Before it is too late], 2001.

⁷ Mother tongue reading and writing instruction.

municipality of Oslo to safeguard competence and a holistic approach following the closing of the Gypsy Office.

However, in 1990, the Oslo City Council decided that special measures for Gypsies were to be abolished completely on the grounds that “*Norwegian Gypsies should as far as possible be treated in the same way as any other inhabitant of Norway*”, cf. case No. 585/90:1017. The minority, i.e. the Labour Party and the Socialist Left Party, referred to reports from experts and argued against completely abolishing the measures, which they said would have negative consequences for the Gypsies’ school attendance, housing situation and implemented employment measures.

Prior to the decision to abolish the measures, there had been considerable media coverage of Gypsies and the Gypsy Office. This included critical articles and reports concerning, among other things, house building for Gypsies. The negative focus on the Roma was further reinforced following a major fraud case⁸.

The measures for Roma were abolished in 1991, among other reasons, because their effect was considered to be limited. The responsibilities of the Gypsy Office were now to be transferred to the urban district authorities and the ordinary public services. The day care institution and the youth club for Gypsy children were closed down the same year. The adult education provision had been gradually wound up the previous year and the post of employment adviser for Gypsies at the County Employment Office had been abolished in 1988. The special educational provision for Gypsy children was also abolished.

Until 1990, the annual fiscal budget included an item (Adult education, etc. for other specific target groups) for training grants for adult Roma, among other groups. However, there were few explicit references to the Roma population in the budget or in allocations. The circular (F-16/90 concerning allocations to directors of education) states in chapter 0250 item 61 “Please note that Oslo must cover the cost of training for Gypsies from this budget.”

From 1991, funds for education of adult Roma were included in block grants to the Municipality of Oslo. The Department for Gypsies in the Municipality of Oslo’s Agency for Alcohol and Drug Addiction Services was closed down by Oslo City Council in 1991 owing to a move away from special care. The same rules for municipal and state benefits were to apply to all citizens.

Several bodies (among others, the Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombud and the Ombudsman for Children) have later maintained that the ordinary public services (including schools, day care institutions and health and welfare services) function inadequately for Roma. There has also been a rapid deterioration of the positive results of efforts for Roma in the form of processes, institution building, development of trust between the Roma and the authorities and the competence both of the Roma and of Norwegian public employees.

⁸ A Roma person was convicted of swindling the Norwegian bank Kreditkassen of NOK 24.6 million.

The current situation of the Roma in Norway

As mentioned, no person-related statistics exist regarding Roma⁹. The account of the current situation of the Roma is based on information/input from the following:

- experts/organisations
- the competent ministries
- the Roma
- the Municipality of Oslo
- the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Service (NAV)
- the Media

On commission from the Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion, the consultant Torbjørg Bay conducted a questionnaire survey among Roma. The survey was completed in January 2009, and Bay's report was submitted to the Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion in February 2009. Bay has acquired a considerable knowledge of Roma in Norway. Through her work with Roma at the former Gypsy Office she built up practical experience, and also developed a large network within the group. In her social work thesis *Før det er for sent* [Before it is too late] (2001) Bay also described the situation for Roma in Oslo.

On the basis of previous contact with Roma, Bay was able to conduct interviews with a total of 18 representatives of the eight extended families that constitute the Norwegian Roma in the Oslo Area. The interviews form the basis of Bay's report to the Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion. Prior to the interviews, the respondents were informed that the information would be used in connection with work on the Action Plan for Roma. The respondents included both men and women.

On the basis of Bay's survey, the Roma are estimated to number approximately 700¹⁰ persons, the majority of which are registered in the Norwegian National Population Register as residing in Oslo. Of these persons, approximately 200 are assumed to have permanent residence abroad. In Bay's survey, there are assumed to be approximately 116 children of pre-school age, of which 35 abroad, approximately 105 children of primary school age, of which 31 abroad, and approximately 73 persons of 14 to 19 years of age, of which approximately 40 abroad.

According to the report, problems regarding living conditions in the Roma community have increased since Bay's previous survey (2001) up to the present day. There is also less unity within the group and greater conflicts between families and within individual families than there were previously. The main impression is therefore that Norwegian Roma are still marginalised, have unfavourable living conditions and participate little in society.

The problems referred to by the respondents are discrimination, financial problems/poverty, alcohol and drug addiction, lack of education and employment opportunities, cultural decline and housing problems. As regards solutions and measures, the respondents propose information and guidance adapted to their needs, educational provision, a meeting place, a culture and resource centre, adapted housing and measures against alcohol and drug addiction.

⁹ Cf. the chapter *The target group of the Action Plan* in the present report.

¹⁰ This figure may be larger, either because not all Roma were contacted or because persons whose date of birth was unknown were not included.

Another impression from the report is that many continue to practise travelling, with the exception of a few who lack the economy for this.

In the report, Bay refers to an impression that there is a major need for help in the group, but that they receive little assistance and understanding from the public services. The main impression is one of dependence on social welfare and/or various social security benefits. There is a considerable degree of functional illiteracy in all age groups. Roma have expressed a wish for Norwegian reading and writing training for adult Roma, cf. measure 11. Roma otherwise communicate orally in Romanes. As yet, there has been no request from Roma for reading and writing training in Romanes for adult Roma.

There are few other Norwegian studies concerning the situation of the Roma, and there is little other systematised knowledge of the Roma. In connection with its contact with parts of the Roma community, *Selvhjelp for innvandrere og flyktninger (SEIF)* [Self-Help for Immigrants and Refugees], has reported the same problems as those Bay describes. The same impression of the Roma as a marginalised group is also given by input to the Action Plan from the Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombud, the Ombudsman for Children and the Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion on the basis of their talks and meetings with Roma.

In meetings with the Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion, the Roma have signalled that the most fundamental challenge for the group is the issue of housing. For many Roma children, unstable housing conditions involve frequent changes of school, and thus little continuity in their schooling. Many Roma parents are also anxious that their children will be bullied at school owing to their ethnic background. According to the Roma, it is important that arrangements are made to help Roma parents to feel secure when their children are at day care institutions or at school. Experience from other countries, particularly Sweden, shows that teaching assistants of Roma background in schools and day care institutions help to create this kind of security while also providing valuable role models for the children. Such arrangements could also be considered in Norway.

Political basis

As a follow-up of Norway's ratification of [the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities](#) in 1999, the white paper, Report No. 15 (2000-2001) to the Storting [Nasjonale minoriteter i Norge - Om statleg politikk overfor jødar, kvener, rom, romanifolket og skogfinnar](#) [Norwegian National Minorities - State Policy regarding Jews, Kvens, Roma, Romani people/Taters and Forest Finns] (available in Norwegian only) was submitted in December 2000. The white paper gave an account of the situation of the Roma and the requirements and needs that the Roma regard as most relevant. The report also proposed measures to help secure the rights of the Roma pursuant to the provisions of the Framework Convention. The report states as follows:

Following the abolition of special measures in 1991, the group lost its point of contact with the public authorities. Many Roma miss having such a point of contact. The Roma feel that they are given stricter treatment by the police than other groups of the population, and say that it is not unusual that they all must suffer when a few persons do something wrong. A point of contact might increase public knowledge of the group and prevent it from being misunderstood. Roma in Oslo wish for a permanent caravan site. They have also requested a permanent community centre/culture centre in Oslo.

They also want the public authorities to make further arrangements to facilitate itinerant trading activities.

(...)

Both the Romani people (Taters/Travellers) and the Roma (Gypsies) are ethnic groups with travelling as part of their way of life. School routines are not always compatible with this way of life. The Government nevertheless takes into consideration that the right and obligation to attend school applies equally to all children. It may therefore be necessary to develop methods of instruction suitable for pupils who travel for parts of the year.

(...)

The Government will consider whether ICT combined with a school-supported contact network in the area concerned can be adapted to the schooling needs of Roma (Gypsies) and Romani people (Taters/Travellers) who travel for parts of the school year.

(...)

The Centre for Combating Ethnic Discrimination has informed that it has been contacted by Roma who feel subjected to discrimination in Norway, for example, when seeking accommodation. Owing to the travelling way of life, Roma may have difficulty in meeting the requirement regarding continuous residence in a municipality for allocation of municipal accommodation. The Ministry particularly calls attention to the fact that the Municipality of Oslo, on the basis of a letter from the Centre for Combating Ethnic Discrimination, has dropped the requirement of three years' continuous residence for Roma. This is an example of the fact that genuine equal treatment sometimes requires paying regard to different conditions.

(...)

The policy of the state regarding national minorities is based on the principle of equal treatment and non-discrimination. This is a fundamental principle of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and of international human rights conventions. An overall objective of the Government is that all Norwegian residents, regardless of background, shall enjoy genuine equal opportunities, equal rights and equal obligations to participate in all parts of society and to use their own resources.

Nevertheless, national minorities still experience discrimination, although this may differ from group to group. Reports from the organisations of the national minorities and from the Centre for Combating Ethnic Discrimination show that persons belonging to the national minorities experience discrimination as a problem. This applies both to contact with the public authorities and to the private sphere. National minorities experience bullying and harassment at school and in other everyday situations. This partly involves open discrimination, where strong negative attitudes are expressed. Many people who belong to a national minority therefore prefer not to advertise their backgrounds.

The Centre for Combating Ethnic Discrimination has provided assistance in cases where Roma or Romani families have experienced discrimination when turned away from caravan sites without just cause. The Centre also reports cases where loan applications have probably been rejected owing to the ethnic origin of the applicant. Other enquires received by the Centre concern the social services, the national health service and the police.

Report No. 15 (2000-2001) to the Storting outlined a number of specific measures designed to safeguard Roma rights. Although it has been difficult to follow up the intentions of the report, some measures have been implemented.

An important consequence of Norway's accession to the Framework Convention is the establishment of a state grant scheme for national minorities. The budget item *Grants to national minorities* has been increased by approximately NOK 3 million since it was established in 1999. One of the two Roma organisations¹¹ has been granted organisational support by the Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion.

Grants are also allocated from this budget item to other NGOs and projects. The allocation in respect of this grant item has been increased by NOK 2.4 million since 2005, and is now NOK 5 489 000.

In the Fiscal Budget for 2006 a separate grant item, *Measures for Roma*, was established. The purpose of this grant item is, among other things, to provide support for measures to help improve the school situation for Roma. The measures are to be developed and implemented in close cooperation with the Municipality of Oslo. Since 2006, the Government has increased the grant item by NOK 3 297 000 from NOK 2 million to NOK 5 297 000. The allocation is intended, among other things, to cover continuation of the adult education project for young adult Roma under the auspices of the Municipality of Oslo and the establishment of a guidance service for Roma in Oslo.

The joint political platform of the coalition government – the Soria Moria Declaration – expresses the goal of securing the national minorities' basis for their own culture while helping to ensure that children and young people of the Roma national minority are given a genuine opportunity for education.

Obligations under international law

Norway's policy regarding national minorities is based on the principle of equality and non-discrimination. This principle is a fundamental principle of human rights laid down in several places in the human rights conventions ratified by Norway, among others, the UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (the Human Rights Convention), the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination.

The Roma are recognised as a national minority¹² in Norway pursuant to the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. Through ratification of the Framework Convention, the Norwegian authorities (both state and municipal) have committed themselves to combating discrimination of the national minorities and, in dialogue with these groups to facilitate preservation of their culture, language and identity. Pursuant to the Framework Convention, the needs of national minorities are to be met by means of ordinary welfare schemes and through special adaptations or measures, where deemed necessary.

¹¹ In 2004, two organisations were founded by persons within the Roma group, the Norwegian Roma Association and the Norwegian Roma Population.

¹² In Norway, Jews, Kvens, Roma, Romani/Taters and Forest Finns are defined as national minorities.

The following articles of the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities are of particular importance in the work on improvement of Roma living conditions in Norway:

Article 4

2. The Parties undertake to guarantee to persons belonging to national minorities the right of equality before the law and of equal protection of the law. In this respect, any discrimination based on belonging to a national minority shall be prohibited.
3. The Parties undertake to adopt, where necessary, adequate measures in order to promote, in all areas of economic, social, political and cultural life, full and effective equality between persons belonging to a national minority and those belonging to the majority. In this respect, they shall take due account of the specific conditions of the persons belonging to national minorities.
4. The measures adopted in accordance with paragraph 2 shall not be considered to be an act of discrimination.

Article 5

1. The Parties undertake to promote the conditions necessary for persons belonging to national minorities to maintain and develop their culture, and to preserve the essential elements of their identity, namely their religion, language, traditions and cultural heritage.
2. Without prejudice to measures taken in pursuance of their general integration policy, the Parties shall refrain from policies or practices aimed at assimilation of persons belonging to national minorities against their will and shall protect these persons from any action aimed at such assimilation.

Article 15

The Parties shall create the conditions necessary for the effective participation of persons belonging to national minorities in cultural, social and economic life and in public affairs, in particular those affecting them.

Every fifth year, in the same way as other countries that have ratified the Framework Convention, Norway reports to the Council of Europe on follow-up of the obligations of the Framework Convention. To date, Norway has submitted two reports, one in 2000 and one in 2005. Both reports have been made available at [the Norwegian Government website](#), cf. [Norway's Initial Report on the Implementation of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities](#) and [Norway's second report on the implementation of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities](#).

The Council of Europe has issued comments on Norway's reports and has requested further measures for improvement of the living conditions of the Roma.

Norway is due to submit its third report in July 2010. A presentation of the Action Plan for the Roma in Norway's third report will constitute an important verification to the Council of Europe that Norway responds seriously to its comments regarding the implementation of special measures to improve the living conditions of the Roma.

It will also be possible to present the Action Plan in the next reports to other international bodies that have criticised Norway concerning the living conditions of the Roma. These

bodies are ([ECRI](#)) and the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination ([CERD](#)). ECRI submitted its [Report on Norway](#) in February 2009. CERD's report on Norway is to be submitted in autumn 2009

The [UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#) of 1966 and [the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) of 1989 have been implemented in [the Norwegian Human Rights Act](#) and thus have the status of Norwegian law, cf. section 2 of the Human Rights Act. The provisions of the Conventions shall take precedence over any other provisions of Norwegian law, cf. section 3 of the Human Rights Act.

The UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights of 1966 contains the most fundamental provision on the rights of ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities. It is laid down in article 27 that in those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practise their culture, to profess and practise their own religion, or to use their own language.

The UN Human Rights Committee, which monitors implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, has interpreted the provisions in such a way that state parties must, if necessary, implement positive measures, inter alia, to safeguard a minority's right to retain and develop its identity, its culture and its language. The Committee has also stated that the provision requires the implementation of measures to ensure minorities' effective participation in decisions that affect them.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989 applies to all children and young people. The Convention contains a number of articles underlining the rights of children and young people who belong to the various minority groups. Article 2 states that state parties shall respect and ensure the rights set forth in this Convention to each child within their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child's or his or her parent's or legal guardian's race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status. Article 30 of the Convention has particular significance for national minorities since it establishes that a child belonging to a minority or who is indigenous shall not be denied the right, in community with other members of his or her group, "to enjoy his or her own culture, to profess and practise his or her own religion or to use his or her own language".

The purpose of [the Anti-Discrimination Act](#) of 3 June 2005 is to promote equality, ensure equal opportunities and rights and prevent discrimination based on ethnicity, national origin, descent, skin colour, language, religion or belief. The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination of 1965 is implemented in Norwegian law via the Anti-Discrimination Act. In the Convention, racial discrimination is defined as any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life. Pursuant to the Convention, discrimination on grounds of association with a national minority shall be deemed racial discrimination. The Convention provides detailed rules for positive measures to be implemented by a state, as regards both civil and political rights and social and cultural rights.

Recommendations from advisory bodies and committees

Norwegian policy regarding national minorities is founded on both international human rights conventions and on recommendations from advisory bodies and committees of the Council of Europe and the United Nations. The international human rights conventions ratified by Norway are legally binding. The recommendations of advisory bodies and committees of the Council of Europe and the United Nations are not legally binding, but function as advice to states.

The provisions of the Framework Convention must help to secure the rights of persons who belong to national minorities. However, owing to discrimination and unfavourable living conditions for Roma in Europe, the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers has found it necessary to make special recommendations to member states, including Norway, concerning the nature of the states' policy and measures regarding Roma. The Committee of Ministers' recommendations are intended as an aid to the states in the practical design of policy regarding Roma¹³ in the main areas of living conditions. The Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers has submitted the following recommendations regarding Roma to member states:

- [Recommendation Rec\(2008\)5 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on Policies for Roma and/or Travellers in Europe](#)
- [Recommendation Rec\(2006\)10 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on better Access to Health Care for Roma and Travellers in Europe](#)
- [Recommendation Rec\(2005\)4 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on improving the Housing Conditions of Roma and Travellers in Europe](#)
- [Recommendation Rec\(2004\)14 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the Movement and Encampment of Travellers in Europe](#)
- [Recommendation Rec\(2001\)17 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on improving the Economic and Employment situation of Roma/Gipsies and Travellers in Europe](#)
- [Recommendation Rec\(2000\)4 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the Education of Roma/gipsy children in Europe](#)

A further account of the various recommendations is given in the chapter "Improving Roma's Living Conditions".

International cooperation

During the last 10 years, Norway has had contact with Sweden and Finland concerning the development of policy regarding national minorities. The Nordic working group on national minorities was established in 2010 and the situation of the Roma has also been raised there. In Norway, the Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion has responsibility for reports on implementation of the Council of Europe's Framework Convention while the Ministry of Culture and Church Affairs has so far been responsible for reporting on implementation of the [European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages](#). It is now planned to transfer this responsibility to the Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion.

As coordinating ministry for policy regarding national minorities, the Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion represents Norway on the Council of Europe's Expert Committee on Roma and Travellers, MG-S-ROM. Meetings between the Committee's secretariat and the Norwegian Roma are held in Oslo as necessary. The Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion also represents Norway on the Council of Europe's Expert Committee for National Minorities

¹³ These conventions and recommendations apply both to Roma and to Romani/Taters. Where both groups are not mentioned, Roma is used as an umbrella term.

(DH-MIN), and also participates on the Council of Europe's Social Committee, where the situation of the Roma is also a topic. The Ministry of Education and Research represents Norway on the Council of Europe's Education Committee. The Education Committee has assisted the Ministry of Education and Research in matters concerning education of Roma.

The Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) has its own Roma coordinator, and has Roma as a topic at its annual meetings concerning the states' implementation of the OSCE's objectives. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs takes part in these meetings and the Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion participates as necessary in meetings concerning the Roma. The OSCE has prepared a separate [Action Plan on Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti within the OSCE Area](#). The main message of the Action Plan is that member states should develop national action plans for the Roma. The OSCE regularly requests member states to report on follow-up of the plan. The Action Plan is not binding for the states, but is intended as an aid in line with the above-mentioned recommendations from the Council of Europe.

From 10–11 July 2008, the OSCE held a conference focusing on integration of the responsibility and role of the Roma and the local authorities. Recommendations from the conference to member states included the following:

- Complex problems demand complex solutions that must be developed in cooperation with the Roma
- Strategies in relation to the Roma will only succeed by involving the local authorities.
- Policy regarding Roma should focus on education as the key to successful integration.

The Roma have established international cooperation in a number of different NGOs. Norwegian Roma have so far little involvement in this. The following is a list of some of these organisations:

- *The Nordic Association for Roma and Romani* with its seat in Sweden has currently no permanent Norwegian participation, but Norwegian Roma youth took part in the youth conference in Sweden in 2008.
- *The European Roma and Travellers Forum (ERTF)* of the Council of Europe has one place for Norway, but Roma and Romani in Norway have not yet succeeded in agreeing on a joint representative. Representatives from Norway have sporadically attended other topic meetings for Roma and Romani.
- *The OSCE's meetings on Roma are open to* Roma and Romani organisations, and Norwegian Roma and Romani have occasionally taken part.
- *International Romani Union (IRU)* The Norwegian representative is Raya Bielenberg.
- *The Roma National Congress (RNC)* has no Norwegian representative.
- *The International Roma Women's Network (IRWN)* has no Norwegian representative.

Responsibility for the follow-up of international human rights obligations

Follow-up of international human rights conventions is the responsibility of both central and municipal authorities. As regards national minorities (in this case Roma), international obligations include non-discrimination of Roma. The authorities must moreover make provisions to ensure that the Roma are able to preserve their language, their culture and their identity.

Local autonomy has a strong position in Norway. The municipalities are independent legal entities, with independent authority and independent responsibility for their activities. The

state has no general authority to issue instructions to municipalities. State control of municipalities is therefore exercised by means of legislation and budgetary decisions.

In an action plan such as this, the primary responsibility of the central government authorities is to review statutes and rules to ensure that they do not directly or indirectly discriminate against Roma. Furthermore, the central authorities must consider measures that can be implemented directly through state bodies, and clarify any new budgetary needs resulting from increased state or municipal investments. The practical implementation of amendments to statutes and regulations and/or implementation of any special measures will mainly take place where Roma live, i.e. in the municipality.

Norwegian Roma live mainly in Oslo. The Municipality of Oslo must consequently be a major actor in efforts to implement many of the measures proposed by this action plan. In certain cases, general municipal services will only be available to Roma in a specially adapted form. This applies, for example, in connection with the adult education project under the auspices of the Municipality of Oslo. The measure is financed via the fiscal budget item *Measures for Roma*.

The Roma's new status as a national minority

For the period from 1991 to 1999, little information is available concerning the situation of the Roma. When Norway was to consider the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and which groups might be affected by the Convention, some Roma were contacted via teachers, who had a certain amount of contact with the group. The Roma that the Norwegian authorities were then in contact with expressed a wish to be included in the Framework Convention as one of the five national minorities. In meetings with the Ministry, Roma have expressed a need for specific measures, such as support for self-organisation, for establishment of meeting places/points of contact and for literacy training via adult education.

The establishment of the adult education project for young adult Roma in Oslo is a result of dialogue and cooperation between the Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion and the Municipality of Oslo. The dialogue with the Municipality of Oslo has mainly been conducted at the administrative level but, in 2004, a meeting was also held at the political level between the Municipality of Oslo and the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development¹⁴. At this meeting, it was agreed to cooperate further on establishing a separate adult education measure for young adult Roma. The Municipality of Oslo now has day-to-day responsibility for organisation and operation of the adult education project. The state contributes funding of the measure via the budget of the Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion.

In 2005, the Ministry of Children and Equality commissioned a survey of Nordic knowledge about children and young people belonging to national minorities, including Roma (Gypsy) children as well as Romani (Tater), Kven, Forest Finnish and Jewish children.

In the report "*Barn og unge fra nasjonale minoriteter*" [Children and young people from national minorities] Hilde Lidén of the Institute for Social Research gives a picture of daily lives and challenges of children and young people belonging to national minorities. She

¹⁴ The Department of Sami and Minority Affairs was transferred to the Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion in autumn 2005.

concludes that children of national minorities are well integrated and have few conflicts with society at large. The exception is Roma/Gypsy children. Lidén finds Roma children to be poorly integrated; few attend school; the parents lack regular employment; they have problems with housing, health care, poverty, alcohol and drug addiction and crime. The report proposes increased research in four areas: 1) minority childhood, 2) language learning and other educational provision, 3) identity construction and culture mediation and 4) children and young people democratic participation.

Roma are referred to in Report No. 44 (2003-2004) to the Storting *Erstatningsordning for krigsbarn og erstatningsordninger for romanifolk/tatere og eldre utdanningskadelidende samer og kvener* [A compensation scheme for “war children” and compensation schemes for Romani people/Taters and elderly Sami and Kvens suffering loss of education]. The report *Undervisning av de norske sigøynere 1971–2002* [Education of the Norwegian Gypsies 1971–2002] by Berit Molander (Municipality of Oslo, Education Authority), outlines the Municipality of Oslo’s adaptation of primary and lower secondary education and adult education for Roma. The investigation was conducted because a group named Roma applied to the state for ex gratia compensation owing to loss of education that they considered they had a right to by Norwegian law. The Norwegian Civil Affairs Authority (SSRF) informs that a total of 79 claims for ex gratia compensation for loss of education were filed by Roma. The SSRF reports that 22 decisions have so far been made. All of these were rejections based on lengthy general grounds. As an expert body, the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, on the basis of background work conducted by the Ministry of Education and Research, mainly concluded that the Municipality of Oslo had made efforts to effectuate the individual claimants’ right to education. Sufficient basis was therefore not found to recommend ex gratia compensation. According to information from the SSRF, the remaining 57 cases were dealt with on the 11 March and 13 April this year. Rejections were made in all cases.

No claim was made and no basis found for collective compensation to the Roma, as given to the Sami and Romani people/Taters, for whom were established, respectively, the Sami Peoples’ Fund and the Romani people’s/Taters’ Culture Fund.

International experience

Marginalisation, discrimination and poverty are common features of Roma in Europe. Most countries have therefore complied with the recommendations of the Council of Europe and the OSCE to prepare national action plans for the Roma and to establish central and local administrative units with responsibility for Roma. Many of these countries have considerably larger groups of Roma than Norway. Countries such as Sweden and Finland also have more Roma than Norway. It is therefore useful for Norway to cooperate with these countries and learn from their experience.

Since 1999, Norway has cooperated to some extent with Sweden and Finland, among other ways, through the Nordic Working Group for National Minorities. As well as inviting experts from Sweden to seminars in Norway, Norway has taken part in seminars in Finland and Sweden, most recently in Södertälje in October 2008. The seminar *Med romer för romer* [By Roma for Roma] was the largest conference so far held in Sweden to call attention to the situation of the Roma. The conference was primarily directed at the municipalities in order to enhance knowledge of the status of the Roma as a national minority and to provide good

examples and ideas concerning the municipality's discharge of its responsibility regarding the Roma and in order to enable their integration and enjoyment of human rights.

Sweden

The Roma population in Sweden is estimated at approximately 50 000. In Sweden, the Roma have had their own organisations since 1967, and the authorities have had a dedicated unit for Roma in the central government administration. The Roma were recognised as a national minority in 2000. The Delegation for Roma Issues was established by the Swedish government in February 2007. The delegation's responsibilities involve taking a proactive role at the national level in efforts to improve the Roma's situation in Sweden, promoting the Roma's rights and helping to bring to an end the Roma's cultural, political and social marginalisation.

The work of the delegation requires close cooperation with the Roma, among other ways, in a reference group with Roma representatives from the whole country. Work is also carried out on cooperation with other institutions, such as the Swedish Equality Ombudsman, the Swedish Ombudsman for Children, the Swedish National Agency for Education and the Swedish Delegation for Human Rights.

The delegation's mandate is time-limited, and a final report will be submitted on completion of its work. The report is expected to outline proposals on continuation of work on improvement of the Roma's situation following completion of the work of the delegation. The report is due to be submitted to the Swedish government by 31 December 2009 at the latest.

In meetings with the Delegation for Roma Issues and at the delegation's national seminar *Med romer för romer* [By Roma for Roma], the Norwegian Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion has been informed that lack of school attendance by Roma children is still a problem in Sweden. It is also usual that Roma children drop out of school between the primary and lower secondary levels. This applies particularly to girls, who leave school when they are about 13 years old. The contact between the family and the school is crucial to the success of the children's schooling. School teaching assistants of Roma background play a vital role in this cooperation. The Swedish school imposes no sanctions on truancy. There is a lack of approved mother tongue teachers of Romanes, but more are currently under training.

Many Swedish Roma are illiterate. Various forms of project-based education of adult Roma are provided under the auspices of NGOs.

Most Roma in Sweden have permanent residence, but many move from municipality to municipality owing, for example, to family conflicts. In Sweden, there are no state loan schemes specifically designed for Roma, but the municipalities may assist Roma in finding suitable accommodation. In its efforts to integrate Roma into the Swedish community, the Delegation for Roma Issues regards stable housing conditions for Roma as crucial.

The Roma Cultural Centre in Stockholm issues a journal by and on the Roma, *E Romani Glinda* [The Roma Mirror]. School textbooks have been published in Romanes and novels about the Roma have been published in both Swedish and Romanes. One folk high school has developed adapted education for Roma.

According to the report *Diskriminering av Romer i Sverige – rapport från DO:s projektåren 2002 och 2003 om åtgärder för att förebygga och motverka etnisk diskriminering av Romer*

[Discrimination of Roma in Sweden – report of years 2002 and 2003 of the Swedish Equality Ombudsman’s project on measures for preventing and combating ethnic discrimination of Roma], the Roma are one of the most discriminated groups in Sweden today. The Roma differ from the remainder of the Swedish population in almost all areas, such as the school, the labour market and the housing market.

Finland

Approximately 10 000 Roma currently reside in Finland, and approximately 3 000 Finnish Roma reside in Sweden. Roma became a national minority in Finland in 1998.

The Finnish Delegation for Roma Issues was established in 1956, and became a permanent public administrative body in 1989. The delegation is an agency for liaison between the Roma and the authorities. The delegation’s main responsibilities involve increasing the social participation and improving the living conditions of Roma, combating discrimination and promoting Romani and Roma culture. The delegation has a separate unit for education of Roma. From 1996, regional delegations have been established, which cooperate with the authorities at county and local levels.

Since 1999, the language of instruction in schools can be Romani¹⁵, and mother tongue teaching in Romani is provided. In the final examination of the upper secondary school, Romani can be examined as the second mother tongue.

For over 20 years, the labour market authorities have provided adult vocational education courses in cooperation with the Roma. This has helped to enhance the level of education of the Roma, but the situation of Roma in the labour market is still difficult.

Finland has vigorously advocated the Council of Europe’s involvement in Roma issues, and the European Roma and Travellers Forum was established on Finland’s initiative. Finland has also made financial contributions to a number of Roma activities under the auspices of the Council of Europe.

Design of measures - some challenges

The objective of this action plan is to bring about long-term changes in Roma living conditions. The measures proposed by the Government therefore have a long-term perspective. In this way, we wish to ensure a continuity of effort. Annual reports and evaluations of the measures will maintain control of the achievement of objectives and provide a basis for the continuous adjustments that are needed.

The policy development regarding national minorities concerns, among other things, defining the content of and clarifying the relationship between the various human rights conventions that Norway has undertaken to follow up.

Article 27 of the UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights of 1966 and article 5 of the Council of Europe’s Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities accord to the Roma, as a national minority, a special right with regard to the safeguarding and development of their own language, their own culture and their own identity. Many Roma define travelling as part of their culture and way of life, and feel travelling to be closely bound up with their identity. When making provisions for the safeguarding and development of

¹⁵ In Finland the language of the Roma is called Romani, whereas in Norway it is called Romanes.

culture and identity, regard could be paid to the issue of travelling in the development of certain state measures.

Pursuant to article 3 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration in all actions concerning children. The principle of the best interests of the child is also laid down in the Act relating to Child Welfare Services, cf. section 4-1 of the Act. Furthermore, article 30 of the Convention establishes that a child or young person who belongs to one of the various minorities “*shall not be denied the right, in community with other members of his or her group, to enjoy his or her own culture*”. It may pose a challenge to reconcile the principle of the best interests of the child with the child’s right to live in harmony with his or her own culture. This has, for example, proved particularly challenging in cases of care orders involving children of national minorities, Sami children and children of immigrant backgrounds, cf. Children and young people – activities, participation in decision-making, proper care.

According to the Act relating to Primary and Secondary Education (Education Act), all children have a right and obligation to attend primary education. The obligation may be met by means of publicly maintained primary and lower secondary schools or by means of other equivalent education. Experience indicates that it can be difficult to find satisfactory solutions for safeguarding Roma children’s right to education while also enabling them to develop their cultural identity and way of life, of which travelling is a major feature. Cf. Knowledge development.

The success of special measures is dependent on a change of attitude in the broader population regarding Norwegian Roma. Achieving this is partly made difficult by the negative media focus on Roma. Establishing a common understanding by the general public of the need to implement measures for the Roma is therefore a particular pedagogical challenge. It is also important that the Roma themselves take responsibility for the development of constructive measures to improve their situation.

Combating discrimination of Roma

[Recommendation Rec\(2008\)5 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on Policies for Roma and/or Travellers in Europe](#), requests the states to consider the following measures, among others:

- adopt a [...] national and regional strategy with short- and long-term action plans, [...] (with regard to) legal and/or social discrimination [...] and enforce the principle of equality;
- [...] evaluation reports on the state of the implementation and impact of strategies [...];
- bring this recommendation to the attention of [...] national and local or regional, self-governing public bodies, Roma [...] and the broader population [...].

In Norway, as in other European countries, Roma have been subjected to discrimination. However, Roma were not in the same way as the Romani people/Taters subjected to processes of assimilation (“Norwegianisation”). Unlike the case of the Taters, there is no knowledge of any cases of coercive sterilisation of Roma or of internment of Roma in the Svanviken labour camp. Nor is there any knowledge of systematic use of placement in foster homes for the purpose of Norwegianisation. Intervention by the child welfare service is known to have occurred, but this was on the basis of what was considered to be in the best interests of the child, and not part of a deliberate process of Norwegianisation.

As regards the current situation, the Roma themselves consider there to have been an increase in discrimination. This is also confirmed by Torbjørg Bay's report on the Roma's situation, submitted to the Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion in February 2009.

In 2008, the Roma were focused by the media owing to power struggles and internal physical conflicts in the group and to cases involving unlawful exploitation of the social security system. There has also been increasing focus by the media on the entry into Norway on tourist visas of foreign Roma who make their living, among other ways, by begging. In meetings with the Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion, Roma have stated that they experience increased discrimination owing to a one-sided negative exposure of Roma by the media. Roma maintain that many are therefore reluctant to make themselves known or to send their children to school.

Roma experience discrimination both from the broader population and in their dealings with service institutions/offices in particular. This view is supported by experts, organisations and the Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombud (LDO). To date, only a small number of cases have been considered by the LDO. These involved discrimination at caravan sites and one case concerning allocation of municipal housing.

Improving Roma living conditions

It is a primary objective that Roma shall be able to live their lives in Norway in the same way as other Norwegian citizens – in suitable housing, with gainful employment and with normal access to the services and provision of the welfare state, for example within health care and education. However, many have difficulty in availing themselves of these services, among other reasons, because they are functionally illiterate. In most cases, Roma need help in making use of written information and have problems in communicating in writing when necessary. This results in unnecessary misunderstandings, experience of discrimination and, at worst, that Roma are unable to take advantage of their rights. A further problem is that Roma themselves perceive that the various public sectors do not adapt their services in such a way that Roma can take advantage of them while retaining a foothold in their own culture.

According to, the Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombud, the Roma themselves and Torbjørg Bay, the Roma experience a considerable need for information and guidance in their dealings with public offices and to obtain the necessary knowledge of their rights and obligations. The former Centre for Combating Ethnic Discrimination and *Selvhjelp for innvandrere og flyktninger* [Self-help for Immigrants and Refugees] have until now attempted to assist Roma in resolving this need. Oslo schools with Roma pupils report considerable time and effort spent on providing guidance to parents on matters unrelated to the school. Roma also receive assistance from private individuals with whom they have contact. This assistance has consisted of communicating the content of letters and information from the public authorities, helping them to write letters and/or providing guidance on where and how Roma can consult public offices and, in some cases, accompanying them there.

During their contact with Torbjørg Bay and the Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion, the Roma requested that a guidance service be established to function as a mediator in meetings with public offices, particularly when Roma feel discriminated, and do not receive the treatment or the rights to which they believe themselves entitled.

Education

[Recommendation Rec\(2000\)4 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the Education of Roma/gypsy children in Europe](#) includes the following recommendations:

- educational policies in favour of Roma/Gypsy children should be backed up by an active adult education and vocational education policy
- the authorities should provide adequate resources and flexible structures in order to meet the diversity of the Roma/Gypsy population and take into account the existence of Roma/Gypsy groups that lead an itinerant or semi-itinerant lifestyle
- In order to secure access to school for Roma/Gypsy children, pre-school education schemes should be widely developed and made accessible to them
- Particular attention should also be paid to the need to ensure better communication with parents, where necessary using mediators from the Roma/Gypsy community
- The curriculum, on the whole, and the teaching material should therefore be designed so as to take into account the cultural identity of Roma/Gypsy children
- In the countries where the Romani language is spoken, opportunities to learn in the mother tongue should be offered at school to Roma/Gypsy children
- The evaluation of the results of educational policies towards Roma/Gypsy children should take account of many criteria, including personal and social development, and not be limited to estimates of school attendance and drop-out rates

The recommendations are in accordance with article 5 of the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, whereby the parties undertake to promote the conditions necessary for persons belonging to national minorities to maintain and develop their culture, and to preserve the essential elements of their identity, namely their religion, language, traditions and cultural heritage.

The purpose clause (section 1) of the Day Care Institutions Act states that "day care institutions shall provide children of under school age with good opportunities for development and activity in close understanding and collaboration with the children's homes." Section 2, fourth paragraph, of the Act states that "day care institutions shall take account of children's age, level of functioning, sex, and social, ethnic and cultural background [...]."

All children have the right and obligation to attend primary and lower secondary education, and the school owner must ensure that they receive schooling adapted to their abilities and learning needs, cf. sections 1-3 and 2-1 of the Education Act. In addition, young people and adults who have completed primary education are entitled to upper secondary education. Section 2-1 of the Education Act regulates the right and obligation to attend primary and lower secondary education while section 3-1 regulates young people's right to upper secondary education. Section 2-1, fifth paragraph, of the Education Act states the consequences of failure to attend compulsory schooling.

Pursuant to section 2-8 of the Education Act, pupils with a mother tongue other than Norwegian or Sami "*have the right to adapted education in Norwegian until they are sufficiently proficient in Norwegian to follow the normal instruction of the school. If necessary, such pupils are also entitled to mother tongue instruction, bilingual subject teaching, or both. The mother tongue instruction may be provided at a school other than that normally attended by the pupil.*"

Pupils attending private primary and upper secondary schools have a corresponding entitlement pursuant to section 3-5 of the Private Education Act. This arrangement also applies to Roma. According to *Grunnskolen informasjonssystem (GSI)* [the Primary School Information System], no Roma pupils have received education in accordance with this provision. However, the GSI's census is taken on 1 October each year, when many Roma are still travelling.

There is no specially adapted provision for Roma in upper secondary education. Since August 2008, pupils attending the upper secondary school who have a mother tongue other than Norwegian or Sami *“have the right to adapted education in Norwegian until they are sufficiently proficient in Norwegian to follow the normal teaching of the school. If necessary, such pupils are also entitled to mother tongue instruction, bilingual subject teaching, or both.”*, cf. section 3-12 of the Education Act.

It is important that the Day Care Institutions Act and the Education Act be practised in such a way that Roma children receive the educational provision to which they are entitled.

Torbjörg Bay's report of 2009 states that the Roma would like schooling and education to be available to both children and adults. However, the Roma point out that they often experience discrimination at school, and that it is difficult to combine travelling with the children's schooling. Roma have responded positively to the adult education project for Roma that has been established in Oslo.

Apart from the adult education project for young adult Roma, no state funds are currently specifically allocated to measures for Roma. Since 1991, the Municipality of Oslo has taken responsibility for measures for Roma in day care institutions, primary schools and adult education.

Day care institutions

In 1978, a day care institution for Roma children was established in Gaustadbekkdalen in Oslo. This was operated as an experimental day care institution until 1988, and was then approved as a permanent day care institution by the former Ministry of Consumer Affairs and Government Administration. The day care institution was owned by the Municipality of Oslo. The state covered 25% of the operating deficit of the day care institution until it was closed down in 1991. It was then intended that Roma children would be integrated in the municipality's ordinary day care institutions. Since then, no day care institution projects/measures have been specially designed for Roma.

Primary and lower secondary education

In 2007, the Municipality of Oslo provided stimulative funds to improve follow-up of and counteract dropout among Roma pupils in Oslo schools. Schools were allocated funds on the basis of pupil numbers and action plans. The action plans emphasised strengthening of the contact between home and school, building of mutual trust, individual follow-up, reinforcing the contact teacher function, surveying skills, providing suitable materials for better adapted instruction and implementing routines and clear agreements in connection with travelling. Schools mainly used these funds for increased staffing and for purchasing materials for monitored instruction, PCs, food and books about the Roma. The results indicated the necessity for close and personal contact between parents and school, which improves the basis for communication, not least concerning agreements in connection with travelling. The increased staffing enabled improvement of individual follow-up including use of a “reading assessment form”, which proved to have a positive effect on the pupils' skills. All schools

stressed the importance of increased staffing as a condition for progress. The use of contracts in connection with travelling has had positive effects in some cases. The stimulative funds were provided for autumn 2007, but a number of schools followed this up by allocating funds from their own budgets. Stimulative funds were also provided to schools in autumn 2008. Seventy-one Roma pupils have been registered, divided between 22 schools, each of which has from one to eleven Roma pupils.

On 22 October 2008, the Ministry of Education and Research invited Oslo schools with Roma pupils, the Ombudsman for Children and the Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion to a discussion of challenges affecting the conditions for education of Roma children and to gain the best possible insights into improvements that can be made.

The representatives of the schools had adopted different approaches to the organisation of instruction for Roma pupils. Some stressed the parents' responsibility for ensuring the children's attendance. Emphasis is placed on pupils using computers and the virtual learning environment, ClassFronter¹⁶, while they are out travelling. The PCs are paid for by the parents. It is viewed as positive that pupils keep in contact with the school, but computer-based instruction can never replace schooling. Some choose to travel later in the year and return in time for the start of the school year in the autumn, but this does not function satisfactorily. Irregular schooling is partly a result of unstable and unfavourable housing conditions¹⁷. Very few Roma pupils do well enough to earn a school-leaving certificate from the primary and lower secondary school.

During the meeting, the Oslo schools expressed that they found attendance to be a general problem where Roma pupils were concerned. In a number of cases, teaching assistants have fetched the children from their homes. Building trust between the school and the Roma is crucial for ensuring that the children come to school and that they feel secure. Once this trust is in place, pupils and parents often contact teachers and other school employees when they need help and support. Some of these lack reading and writing skills, and these people need a support framework or support persons they can talk to. Most parents want their children to attend school, but are anxious of what might happen to them and that they might be bullied.

Some of the Oslo schools offer Roma pupils home schooling¹⁸, which is particularly challenging, partly with regard to supervision and rules. Parents often prefer home schooling because they often feel insecure in sending their children to school even when the children say that they are happy there. Their reluctance may also be associated with the poor education of the parent generation, which makes it difficult for them to follow up their children's schooling.

According to the head teachers, the obstacles to Roma children's attendance are many and complex. Conditions for attendance include satisfactory housing, parents' confidence in the school and a support framework to ensure that the children are brought to school and followed

¹⁶ Classfronter is a software tool that can be used in Internet-based education to support the learning process. It can both be used in distance education via the Internet and also serve as an aid to teaching and organising full-time students. Only registered users have access to the software. In order to log in, you need a key consisting of a user name and password.

¹⁷ This is also confirmed in the report by Torbjørg Bay, 2009.

¹⁸ In the sense used in the Education Act, home schooling is understood to mean teaching provided by the parents.

up. Many Roma find the Norwegian rules difficult to understand. Furthermore, the schools have no way of knowing where the children are at any given time.

According to the head teachers, instruction must often be specially adapted for Roma children. Emphasis is placed on instruction in basic skills, particularly reading and writing. This applies to instruction in Norwegian, not Romanes. It is also important that there are funds available for a support framework to ensure that children come to school. There is uncertainty regarding whether Roma children should be placed in separate schools/classes or whether they should attend the school closest to where they live. There are also differing views as regards whether guidelines for absence and home schooling should be the same as those that apply to other pupils. The possibility of providing Romanes instruction should nevertheless be considered, but it is difficult to obtain teachers with the necessary competence.

The head teachers proposed no specific approaches to improving attendance and completion of schooling for Roma children, but called attention to a number of challenges that should be given further consideration by both state and municipal authorities.

Norway has entered into cooperation with Sweden on Internet resources for mother tongue instruction for linguistic minorities, and resources have been developed for Roma pupils too.

The schools inform that there is a tendency for girls to drop out of school earlier than boys.

Adult education

The main reason for transferring the responsibility for education of Roma from the state to the municipalities in 1991 was that the instruction provided should be as consistent as possible with the provision for other social groups. During the transitional phase, it was sometimes proposed that Roma should be offered instruction in Norwegian language and civic life similar to that provided to immigrants and refugees. However, Roma have different learning needs, long-established connection with Norway and a knowledge of Norwegian society, although they may be said to live outside of it. In a number of connections, considerable illiteracy has been revealed among Norwegian Roma. Remedying this is in many cases dependent on specially adapted educational provision. Within the existing arrangements, there is no reason why literacy training, for example, should not be offered. Such instruction is already part of the statutory primary education, and is required to be adapted to the learning needs of the participants. Additional educational adaptations needed by the Roma population may involve further expense. The Roma have themselves expressed a need for subsistence support while attending courses.

Adults are entitled to primary and lower secondary education if they require it (section 4A-1 of the Education Act), and are entitled to upper secondary education from the year they reach 25 years of age if they have completed primary and lower secondary education but have not completed upper secondary education (section 4A-3).

Responsibility for primary and lower secondary education and for upper secondary education is held respectively by the municipality and the county authority.

Adult Roma have the same right to education as other Norwegian citizens, and no earmarked state support for education is normally provided to Roma. The Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion provides support for educational provision at the Oslo Adult Education Centre at

Skullerud. Since December 2007, the centre has held regular ICT courses in word processing using Microsoft Word, searching the Internet and using e-mail. In addition, educational software is used for training reading and writing skills and for Norwegian language instruction for those who need it. Course participants are able to stay in contact with the teaching staff while travelling, and some make use of this. According to the course participants, experience of using ICT at school has, enabled them to “chat” on the Internet in their free time with Romanes speakers in other countries. As otherwise in society, there is a tendency for young people to learn more rapidly how to use ICT, and to begin using it actively. The focus on e-learning is continually being developed, and efforts are now being made to make more active use of the virtual learning environment ClassFronter with a view to closer cooperation with primary and lower secondary schools.

In the view of the Government, educational provision for adult Roma should as far as possible comply with current guidelines, mainly providing adapted instruction within these arrangements, and that the cost of the instruction should be covered within the existing grant schemes. However, measures for Roma sometimes require additional resource input, and the state has, for example, contributed to the funding of the adult education project under the auspices of the Municipality of Oslo.

Housing

[Recommendation Rec\(2005\)4 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on improving the Housing Conditions of Roma and Travellers in Europe](#) includes recommendations concerning:

- Affirmation of the right of people to pursue sedentary or nomadic lifestyles according to their own free choice
- Systematic review of housing legislation, policies and practices and removal of all provisions or administrative practices that result in direct or indirect discrimination against Roma
- Provision of sites for caravans/mobile homes

[Recommendation Rec\(2004\)14 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the Movement and Encampment of Travellers in Europe](#) provides further recommendations concerning:

- Provision of caravan sites

For many years, the Roma have called attention to their particular difficulty in obtaining suitable housing. The problems are partly due to the unwillingness of banks to regard many Roma as creditworthy. Roma also maintain that, when allocating municipal housing, the urban district authorities do not give priority to Roma. According to the Roma, they also feel discriminated in their dealings with the housing authorities and in situations where they themselves attempt to obtain accommodation in the private housing market.

The distribution of roles in Norwegian housing policy is such that the central government defines major objectives, issues statutes and sets up financial arrangements for loans and grants, while the municipalities have responsibility for providing housing for disadvantaged groups and ensuring that they have suitable and satisfactory housing.

The Norwegian State Housing Bank administers the financial instruments and is a resource centre within the housing sector. The Housing Bank is a major partner for the municipalities

in efforts to provide housing for disadvantaged groups. In 2009, the Housing Bank will increase its efforts in relation to the municipalities in order to raise their competence in housing social work, thus improving their basis for increased efforts in providing housing for disadvantaged groups in the housing market. The Norwegian State Housing Bank has entered into a three-year cooperation agreement with the Municipality of Oslo in order to raise competence in housing social work.

Some of the Housing Bank's loan and grant schemes, such as initial loans, personal home improvement loans and housing grants, are means-tested. These instruments are intended to make it easier for young people and other disadvantaged groups to establish themselves in the housing market. Alongside housing allowances, these instruments are intended to help low-income households to obtain suitable and satisfactory housing at an acceptable cost. Everyone has an equal right to apply for these loan and grant schemes.

Roma do not comprise a special group in relation to any of the Norwegian State Housing Bank's loan and grant schemes, but can, in the same way as other people, apply for and be considered for these schemes. However, experience shows that the ordinary schemes are less available to Roma, among other reasons, owing to illiteracy in the group. Extended arrangements and increased focus on housing allowances and rented accommodation will therefore be of little help to many Roma unless they are also provided with the necessary information and guidance regarding the schemes, cf. measure 2 Guidance service for Roma.

Children and young people – activities, participation in decision-making, proper care

Measures to counteract marginalisation and measures for increased activity and participation in decisions

One of the main responsibilities of our society is that of ensuring secure and satisfactory living conditions for children and young people. This means that equivalent provision and opportunities shall be available to all. A central place is occupied by efforts to counteract marginalisation, level out differences in living conditions and promote participation in decision making and in various areas of society by children and young people. Many Norwegian Roma currently fall outside the structures of the welfare state, which is particularly serious for the children, who should have the same rights and opportunities as other children, regardless of their parents' economy, ethnicity, education, geographical ties, etc., cf. the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989.

Bay's report (cf. the chapter on the current situation of Roma) shows that Roma experience financial problems and poverty. Surveys have shown that poverty can have a reproductive effect, i.e. it can be transmitted from one generation to the next. Children who grow up in socially deprived families (i.e. where the parents have low income, little education and a low involvement in working life), have a greater likelihood of inheriting the same characteristics. This also has socio-economic consequences. The effect of poverty on children is that both individuals and society risk the loss of educational potential and future manpower.

The Soria Moria Declaration focuses on measures to combat child poverty. The Declaration states that the Government wishes the measures to have a specific child policy focus. All children and young people are to have the same rights and opportunities for development, regardless of their parents' economy, ethnicity, education and geographical ties. This is reiterated in the Government's Action Plan against Poverty, where the fight against child

poverty is deemed important for counteracting marginalisation in later adult life. The Action Plan states that the Government will seek to ensure that the municipalities provide all children and young people, regardless of their families' financial or social situation, with open and inclusive meeting places for development and participation. It is further stated that the Government will strengthen its efforts on behalf of vulnerable groups of children and young people in order to prevent problems regarding living conditions and poverty from being transferred to the next generation.

The proportion of children and young people subject to unsatisfactory living conditions is higher in the large towns than in the country as a whole. There is therefore a need for efforts directed particularly at children and young people in the large towns. The objective of the grant scheme *Measures for children and young people in large urban communities* (Chapter 857, item 73) is to improve the living conditions of children and young people. The scheme focuses particularly on children, young people and families affected by poverty. The funds can be used for worthwhile holiday and leisure activities and for labour market attachment for young people who lack educational qualifications. In 2009, a total of approximately NOK 50 million was allocated for these purposes via the budget of the Ministry of Children and Equality. Over half of the total allocation was divided between the Municipality of Oslo and seven prioritised urban districts of Oslo. In addition, approximately NOK 10 million was allocated via the child welfare service. The efforts in the large towns and within the child welfare service are viewed in a single overall context. It is possible within this scheme to give priority to measures for Roma. See measure 9.

In 2008, the Ministry of Children and Equality launched *Nattergalen* [the Nightingale], a pilot mentor scheme for 8–12 year-olds managed by Oslo University College. The scheme involves using students on child welfare or social studies programs as mentors for children of minority backgrounds in the primary and lower secondary school. The scheme will be evaluated following a three-year pilot programme. The scheme aims to help children of minority backgrounds to complete the upper secondary school and go on to take higher education, while also increasing the students' competence for working in a multicultural environment. This scheme is also relevant for Roma children (cf. measure 10).

Measures in the child welfare service

The Act relating to Child Welfare Services applies to all children who reside in Norway. Measures under the Child Welfare Act can be implemented for children and young people under 18 years of age. With the consent of the young person concerned, measures implemented prior to his or her reaching the age of 18 may be continued or replaced by other measures under the Act until he or she reaches the age of 23. The Act relating to Child Welfare Services provides that child welfare must take as its starting point the individual child, his or her family and the environment he or she belongs to. In its decisions and measures in relation to the client, the child welfare service must pay regard to the cultural perspective. However, it must also decide what measures are in the child's best interest on the basis of an overall professional assessment. For example, the child's nature and need for care and instruction in a stable environment shall be borne in mind when selecting a foster home or institution. Due consideration must be given to the desirability of continuity in the child's upbringing and to the child's ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic background. When placing a child in a foster home, the child welfare service must always consider whether a foster home could be provided by anyone in the child's family or close network.

The Child Welfare Act and regulations issued pursuant to the Act define a framework for the work and measures provided by the child welfare service in relation to national minorities. During recent years, both municipal and state child welfare services have become more competent, or even highly competent, in assessing the significance of cultural, linguistic and religious affiliation. The child welfare service may however lack specific knowledge of the Roma and of the importance of Roma family relations, as well as of the various traditions, values and attitudes prevailing within and between the various Roma families. In 2007, the Ministry of Children and Equality entered into cooperation with four university colleges on developing and providing a course programme targeting the municipal child welfare services. The course is partly based on the report *Flerkulturelt barnevern. En kunnskapsoversikt* [Multicultural Child Welfare. A Survey of Knowledge] (NIBR 2007), which provides a useful overview of effective measures and methods/instruments available for use by the child welfare service. As regards further strengthening of the municipal child welfare services' specific competence on Roma, see measures 2 and 3.

It is not easy to find child welfare measures that both safeguard the child's linguistic and cultural affiliation and are seen to be the best measures as regards the other personal needs of the child. For example, it is generally difficult to find foster homes at all, and is often particularly difficult to find foster homes for Roma children. In this connection, it has been asked whether it is possible to use Roma foster homes or other measures in the other Nordic countries. The point of departure must be that one attempts to find child welfare measures that are located close to the place where child has his or her roots, and to view this in connection with factors such as the relationship with parents, the local community, enrolment at a school, possibility of supervision, etc. In each case, assessment must be based on a concrete assessment. However, the Child Welfare Act does not prohibit the use of foster parents who live abroad. Such placements require thorough preparation and the consent of the parties involved.

A method often appropriate for Roma families is the family counsel. The family counsel is a decision model where, by means of meetings, the child welfare service enables the family and its network to reach its own solutions and to take responsibility for implementing them. The model is derived from work with the Maori people of New Zealand. Experts take part in the meetings in order to provide the necessary information to the family. The purpose of the family counsel is to arrive at a plan for the child or young person concerned. The child welfare service engages an independent coordinator to help the family in planning and implementing the family counsel. The Norwegian Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs has responsibility for national implementation of the method. The family counsel may be an appropriate method for use with Roma families.

Health care

[Recommendation Rec\(2006\)10 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on better Access to Health Care for Roma and Travellers in Europe](#) requests member states to consider measures including the following:

- Establish health services adapted to persons with a semi-itinerant culture
- Assess the health services in relation to other factors affecting living conditions
- Consider establishing arrangements involving health mediators of Roma background

The Norwegian Institute of Public Health and the Directorate of Health have reported to the Ministry of Health and Care Services that no specific surveys have been made of the state of

health of Roma and/or use of health services for this group in Norway. However, the experience of the Roma community itself indicates that there is little contact between Roma and the health service. Furthermore, the Roma has reported on problems with alcohol and drug addiction and inadequate health care. There is a need for guidance on the Norwegian health service and on how Roma can make use of the existing services, cf. measure 2 Guidance service for Roma.

The Government aims that the Norwegian population shall enjoy equal health and social services regardless of linguistic and cultural background. It is therefore important that the health service has competence in and knowledge of Roma culture, identity and way of life, cf. Measure 2 Competence development in state and municipal agencies.

In relation to the municipal sector, the Ministry of Health and Care Services will attach importance to knowledge development and use of educational measures. In the specialist health service, the Ministry of Health and Care Services will ensure the provision of services to Roma by means of ownership management.

Employment

[Recommendation Rec\(2001\)17 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on improving the Economic and Employment situation of Roma/Gipsies and Travellers in Europe](#) includes the following recommendations:

- National action plans for employment should pay particular attention to the labour market problems of Roma/Gypsies and include specific measures to improve their situation
- Arrangements should be made for training in traditional skills
- Particular emphasis should be placed on providing opportunities for Roma/Gypsy women
- Governments should remove barriers to the creation of small businesses
- Governments should be encouraged to provide long-term budgetary support for Roma/Gypsy development and income-generating programmes
- Governments should introduce positive incentives such as grants and mentoring support to encourage young Roma/Gypsies to complete their secondary education and to attend higher education institutions or take up apprenticeships
- Roma/Gypsy culture and identity should be introduced as an integral part of the design and delivery of vocational education. For example, a system of accreditation should be developed for skills in traditional crafts and trades

According to Torbjørg Bay, most Roma currently subsist on various forms of social security benefit.

The Norwegian Labour and Welfare Service has a broad range of instruments that can be used to improve individuals' potential for gaining employment. One of the main points of Report No. 9 (2006-2007) to the Storting, *Work, Welfare and Inclusion* was better adaptation of these instruments for users in need of assistance. These efforts will be followed up by implementation of systematic assessment of needs and working capacity by the Labour and Welfare Service and a focus on adaptation of the provision to the needs of individual users.

The Norwegian Labour and Welfare Service (NAV) cooperates with the municipalities on a number of initiatives including implementation of the Qualification Programme. This

programme and the associated benefit were introduced on 1 November 2007, and are being implemented in Norwegian municipalities in pace with the establishment of NAV offices. The target group for the Qualification Programme comprises persons with a considerably reduced working and earning capacity and with only a limited right or no right at all to national insurance benefits. Labour market measures form central elements of the programme, and the objective is to help more people to obtain employment.

Measures

Financial problems are a major problem for many Roma and, when the only source of income is social security benefits, many of the group's members are caught in a poverty trap that is difficult to escape from. The Government's Action Plan against Poverty also concerns Roma. The Action Plan against Poverty emphasises the importance of sufficient basic skills as a major condition for inclusion, employment and earnings. The education system therefore plays an important role in combating poverty and marginalisation. A major objective for the Government will be to develop measures to ensure that Roma too have genuine access to the education system.

The Government's aim in the present action plan has been to develop measures to better assist Roma in using the existing well functioning welfare schemes, in sectors such as education, housing, health care and employment. It has also been an important aim of the Government to facilitate measures that in the long term can build up trust between Roma and the Norwegian authorities. In compliance with the Action Plan to Promote Equality and Prevent Ethnic Discrimination, the plan also aims to help in combating the discrimination that Norwegian Roma are subjected to on a daily basis.

Measure 1. Develop the adult education project for young adult Roma under the auspices of the Municipality of Oslo

In cooperation with the Roma, the Municipality of Oslo has developed a model for adult education of young adult Roma. The educational provision was inaugurated on 1 October 2007. The aim of the project is to improve the reading and writing skills, computer skills and mathematics knowledge of young adult Roma. It is hoped that, by ensuring the basic competence of the parent generation, it will in the long term be possible to improve attendance and completion of the compulsory primary and lower secondary school by Roma children. The Government's main strategy in the fight against poverty is employment-related. The labour market is the most important arena of the fight against poverty. However, owing to discrimination and lack of schooling, Roma fail to gain entry to the ordinary labour market.

Implementation and activities:

Establishing the adult education project for young adult Roma in Oslo as a permanent arrangement

In cooperation with the Municipality of Oslo, the Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion will establish the adult education project as a permanent arrangement.

Investigating alternative education measures for Roma

The Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion and the Ministry of Education and Research will examine Sweden's experience of educational provision specially adapted for Roma. This includes vocational courses and primary and lower secondary education provided at Sundbybergs Folkhögskola since 1989. However, the Swedish experience will not be entirely transferable to Norwegian conditions, among other reasons, because the Roma population in Sweden (approximately 50 000 persons) is much larger than that of Norway (approximately

700 persons). The reason for studying Sweden's experience is nevertheless to obtain ideas on adapting the various arrangements to Norwegian conditions.

Investigating the question of developing the adult education project to include more vocational training

The Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion will investigate the question of developing the adult education project to include more vocational training. The goal must be to qualify Roma for gainful employment. Further measures may be considered for persons belonging to the Roma community, for example better adapted use of the Qualification Programme and preparatory training for employment. Assessment of these questions must be carried out in a dialogue between the Roma, the Municipality of Oslo and the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Service (NAV).

Investigating the question of qualifying Roma assistants

The Government aims to provide satisfactory educational programmes for all children, including Roma. However, many Roma are anxious that their children will be bullied at school and in the day care institution owing to their ethnic background. The experience of Sweden, among other countries, shows that teaching assistants of Roma background in schools and day care institutions help to alleviate this anxiety, while providing valuable role models for the children.

The Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion and the Ministry of Education and Research will investigate the need for assistants of Roma background in day care institutions and schools, and of training of such assistants, including competence-raising courses in connection with the adult education project for the Roma who wish to work as Roma assistants. This question must be investigated in cooperation with the Municipality of Oslo and the Roma.

Responsible: The Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion and the Ministry of Education and Research in cooperation with the Municipality of Oslo.

Measure 2. Establish a guidance service for Roma

In meetings with the Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion among others, Roma have stated that they find it difficult to approach state/municipal agencies such as the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Service (NAV), municipal housing offices, social welfare offices and medical centres/hospitals/health clinics. Equal access to service provision is dependent on information being made available to Roma and on facilitation of the Roma community's contact with both local authorities and first-line services. It should be a public responsibility to ensure provision of services to all Roma who need them regardless of their association with organisations or individuals. Such a provision should be established in Oslo, where most Roma live.

In dialogue with the Municipality of Oslo, the Government will provide support for establishment of a guidance service for Roma in Oslo. Such a guidance service should have a permanent staff of persons with special competence on the Roma and with a knowledge of the main service bodies in Oslo. The principle function of the guidance service should be to provide information and guidance to Roma and be able to refer or accompany Roma to the appropriate public body to deal with questions concerning, for example, school, day care institutions, employment, housing, health care or social security benefits. First-line services must also acquire a knowledge of Roma culture and way of life in order to improve their competence in work on these matters.

A reference group should be established to assist the guidance service and to increase the competence on Roma of municipal and state agencies. The reference group must be able to

give advice and feedback to the guidance service on the way the service functions. It should consist of representatives of the Roma, relevant ministries, the Municipality of Oslo and relevant public agencies with responsibility for housing, employment, social services, school, health care, etc.

Implementation and activities: The Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion transfers funds to the Municipality of Oslo which, in cooperation with Roma, establishes a guidance service with the necessary competence to provide advice and to refer/accompany Roma to relevant municipal or state offices or agencies. It is desirable that the agencies to which Roma are referred have resource persons with special competence on the Roma and on assisting Roma. Arrangements could also be made for staff from the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Service (NAV), health clinics, etc. to be located at the premises of the guidance service.

Responsible: The Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion in cooperation with the Municipality of Oslo and the Roma.

Measure 3. Competence development in state and municipal agencies

In public administration and in first-line services, there is little knowledge of the Roma and of national minorities in general. In dealings with Roma, this obstacle is further reinforced by illiteracy among Roma.

Positive contact between public agencies and Roma is dependent on agencies having the necessary knowledge of Roma culture and way of life. Courses and seminars must therefore be held to raise the competence of employees in agencies such as the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Service (NAV), the Norwegian State Housing Bank, local housing offices, the primary health service and the school sector.

Implementation and activities: in cooperation with relevant institutions, the Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion will take the initiative to ensure the development of various competence-raising measures, including courses and seminars on Roma culture and way of life.

In developing and implementing this competence raising, Roma will be major dialogue partners and resource persons, cf. article 15 of the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities.

Responsible: The Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion.

Measure 4. Providing information about Roma to the broader population

The Council of Europe has called attention to the need for increased knowledge in Norwegian society about the national minorities in general. There is also little knowledge about Roma apart from the often negative coverage in the media. There is therefore a need to inform the broader population about both Roma and Roma culture and about what it means to be protected as a national minority.

Many decisions concerning national minorities' opportunities to increase their influence and to conserve their language and culture are made at the local level. In efforts to improve Norway's implementation of its obligations under the Convention, it is therefore important to monitor this work at the local level. In 2007, Sweden solved this by means of a simple, anonymous questionnaire survey of the country's municipalities conducted by the ministries with responsibility for national minorities in cooperation with the Swedish Association of

Local Authorities and Regions. The questionnaire included questions on the municipalities' knowledge of national minorities in the municipality, on dialogue and on the municipalities' need for competence measures. The conclusion was that the municipalities needed more information concerning obligations and political objectives regarding minorities.

Implementation and activities: Information and increased knowledge about Roma and Roma culture may help to combat negative attitudes concerning Roma and Roma cultural expression. The Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion will therefore increase its coverage of Roma in its newsletter on national minorities.

In cooperation with appropriate specialist ministries, the Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion will prepare information material about national minorities, including Roma in consultation with the national minorities, cf. article 15 of the Council of Europe's Framework Convention.

In talks with the Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities, the Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion will discuss ways of organising closer cooperation on the municipalities' work on national minorities, including Roma. Among other things, the Ministry will propose that a survey be made of the municipalities' knowledge of national minorities.

The Council of Europe has developed a "teaching kit" for Roma children of pre-school age. The Ministry of Education and Research will translate this into Norwegian, and arrange for its distribution to appropriate municipalities/urban districts. The original material is also available at the website of the Council of Europe, cf. http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/roma/default_en.asp.

In cooperation with the Municipality of Oslo, the Ministry of Education and Research will disseminate information about Roma culture to appropriate day care institutions, both by means of training activities for employees and by cultural activities in the day care institution, cf. experience gained from the project "The Romani people – from childhood to adulthood" at "Queen Maud University College of Early Childhood Education.

Efforts must be made to ensure that Roma attending upper secondary education are informed through information and guidance materials of the flexible range of options available at the upper secondary level. This must include information about the training candidature scheme. The scheme is particularly suitable for pupils who have a need for adapted and/or short course programmes at the upper secondary level. In cooperation with the Swedish National Agency for Education, the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training will further develop Internet resources (Topic - Mother Tongue Instruction) both about the Roma and in Romanes. The work should be carried out in cooperation with the Municipality of Oslo. The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training is preparing Internet-based information and guidance materials on the Roma as a minority in a multicultural society, which is due to be completed by the start of the 2010 school year, cf. the booklet for primary and secondary schools on "Tatars as a minority in a multicultural society" to be published at the start of the school year.

In 2009, the Ministry of Children and Equality will prepare information on the Roma directed at bodies that come into contact with children, i.e. the child welfare service, day care institutions and schools. The information will be prepared in close cooperation with the Roma community.

Responsible: Specialist ministries in cooperation with subordinate agencies and the Municipality of Oslo.

Measure 5. Establish consultation between the Roma and the Norwegian authorities

As a follow-up of article 15 of the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, a dialogue with the Roma has been established jointly with other national minorities in the contact forum between the national minorities and the authorities under the auspices of the Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion. There is also an ongoing dialogue between the two recently established Roma organisations (the Norwegian Roma Association and the Norwegian Roma Population) and the Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion.

Not all Roma wish to be organised or wish necessarily to emphasise their status as a national minority. However, these also meet the authorities at central and local levels in accordance with article 3 of the Framework Convention, which states that "*Persons belonging to national minorities may exercise the rights and enjoy the freedoms flowing from the principles enshrined in the present framework Convention individually as well as in community with others.*" The Government regards it as important to maintain varied and flexible fora and points of contact so that non-organised Roma too shall have arenas where they can take part in dialogue with the authorities at the various administrative levels.

In response to feedback from the Roma itself, the Government proposes to establish permanent consultations between the Roma and the authorities under the auspices of the Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion. Consultations will concern issues of importance to the Roma. These may include topics such as the housing situation for Roma, Roma children's everyday experience of school and discrimination of Roma in contact with the various public authorities. The objective of consultations will in the long term be to develop measures that may help in addressing challenges associated with Roma living conditions. The Municipality of Oslo and appropriate ministries and expert bodies will be invited to participate in consultations as needed.

Implementation and activities: The Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion will invite Roma to an initial meeting of the consultation committee in autumn 2009. At this first meeting, various organisational aspects of the consultations will be discussed.

Responsible: The Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion.

Measure 6. Self-help through organisational development

Norway has a long tradition for interest organisations, and they play an important role in the interaction between the authorities and civil society. This also concerns minorities, as stated in Report No. 39 (2006-2007) to the Storting *Frivillighet for alle* [Voluntary Activities for All]:

Full employment, sound welfare schemes and a strong community are all of crucial importance to creating a good society. A sound and well functioning public sector plays an important role in this. However, only when there is a strong civil society where individuals actively participate in sound and stable local communities, can we succeed in creating a society that includes everyone.

The Government wishes to ensure the development of a dynamic civil society by fostering close interaction with NGOs and by establishing favourable conditions for voluntary activities. Voluntary work enables people to take part in meaningful and socially beneficial activities.

Sami organisations have mainly emerged since the end of World War II. The Sami Reindeer Herders' Association of Norway was founded in 1948 and the Norwegian Sami Association in 1968. In recent decades, the Sami NGO community has shown considerable variety. Cultural organisations have been established, such as the Sami Film Association, the Sami Writers and Translators Organisation, the Sami Museum Association, Sami artists' organisations and Sami women's organisations. The Sami Parliament, which was established in 1989, is the Sami representative body and the Government's main contributor and dialogue partner in relation to Sami policy. The Sami Parliament currently allocates operating capital to cultural organisations, trade associations and "central organisations".

The number of organisations for persons of immigrant background (immigrant organisations) has grown from between 40–50 in 1979 to approximately 1 000 today (Predelli 2006). The reason for providing support to immigrant organisations is to encourage increased civil and political participation. These organisations are also important meeting places, where social participation has an intrinsic value beyond the primary purposes of the organisations. Organisations provide identity, social ties and self-confidence, which are often major premises for a person's participation in society.

The budget item *Grants to national minorities* was established in 1999. Both basic support (organisational support) and project support are allocated via this budget item. A major aim of the grant scheme is to help in ensuring effective participation of the national minorities, particularly in decisions that affect them. This aim is in compliance with article 15 of the Framework Convention.

The Government gives priority to work on facilitating development of the national minorities' organisations. This improves the capacity of the groups to define their own needs and to present their own demands. Since 2005, the Government has increased the budget item *Grants to national minorities* by approximately NOK 2.4 million, to the current amount of NOK 5 489 000.

Like other national minorities, organised Roma can apply for grants from the state support scheme, *Grants to national minorities*. The purpose of the scheme is to support NGOs and other organisations that serve the interests of national minorities. Both basic support (organisational support) and project support are allocated via this budget item.

Traditionally, the social life of the Roma has been associated with their extended families or clans. However, we know that the interest organisations of the minorities are an important instrument in their dialogue with the authorities. To date, only one of the Roma organisations has made use of the scheme. Development work among Roma is therefore necessary to stimulate organisation, so that Roma too can qualify as good dialogue partners in their contact with the authorities. Information on and training in organisational work among the Roma will therefore be important.

Implementation and activities: The Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion will give priority to applications for projects that aim to provide information and training in organisational work

among the Roma. Furthermore, the Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion, on the basis of applications from organisations associated with the Roma, is prepared to give priority to further support of such organisations.

Responsible: The Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion.

Measure 7. Provision of day care facilities in connection with adult education of young adult Roma in Oslo

The right to a place in a day care institution will be introduced from 1 August 2009. There is reason to believe that this right will have a positive effect for families that have not traditionally been users of day care institutions.

There is furthermore reason to believe that the same uncertainty/scepticism that Roma have shown in relation to school applies to day care institutions too. It is therefore challenging to devise provision that gives rise to trust and can be combined with other activities, for example adult education. The framework plan for day care institutions stresses that the day care institution must support children on the basis of their own cultural and individual background and needs.

When designing day care provision for Roma children, there should be extensive cooperation between the various services and expert bodies. Representatives of health clinics, the child welfare service and the day care institution should cooperate on achieving a close and trusting dialogue with Roma parents.

Implementation and activities: In cooperation with the Municipality of Oslo, the Government is prepared to establish a day care provision in connection with the adult education provision. Family learning is a form of instruction where children and parents (usually mothers) learn together. If the children are small, day care facilities are made available in connection with the instruction. This gives both parents and children the security of being in the same location. Family learning as a model has been developed and tested under the auspices of the National Centre for Multicultural Education (NAFO) in Norway in connection with provision to minority language children and families. The provision is organised as integrated learning in the various arenas. Family learning, language portfolio methodology¹⁹ and e-learning are already central components of the adult education provision for young adult Roma under the auspices of the Municipality of Oslo. The day care provision²⁰ may for example be in the form of an open day care institution coupled with day care facilities for schoolchildren.

Responsible: The Ministry of Education and Research in cooperation with the Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion, the Municipality of Oslo and the Roma.

Measure 8. Recruiting Roma children to day care institutions

In accordance with the intentions outlined in Report No. 16 (2006 -2007) to the Storting *Tidlig innsats for livslang læring* [Early Intervention for Lifelong Learning], attention must be directed to the various measures for recruiting Roma children to day care institutions. A closer

¹⁹ Language portfolio methodology is a framework developed on the basis of “The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment”. Versions exist for the age groups 6–12 and 13–18. Various curricula have been developed on the basis of this framework.

²⁰ In Malmö, Sweden, a day care institution has been organised in association with the Roma Culture Centre. *Musikanten Barnehage* has 15 children between 1 and 5 years of age. The staff includes a pre-school teacher and a special teacher, while parents and other Roma are also present and are involved in the day care institution. Cf. *Førskolan* 4/08.

examination should be made of the experience gained regarding recruitment of other groups of minority language children in the municipality of Oslo, such as free core time in day care facilities and home visits. Experience with home visits has proved positive. Such a measure can help the municipality to identify parents who need day care for their children while enabling the municipality to provide information to motivate the parents to send their children to day care institutions.

Implementation and activities: The Ministry of Education and Research will investigate the possibility of using visiting teachers to provide language stimulation to four–five year-olds who do not attend day care institutions. The aim of the measure would be to encourage recruitment to ordinary day care institutions. In cooperation with the Municipality of Oslo, the Ministry of Education and Research has previously funded visiting teachers in some urban districts of Oslo as an experimental arrangement²¹.

Mapping of the language proficiency of four year-olds at child health clinics, free core time in day care institutions and the Language Promotion strategy²² together constitute a comprehensive chain of measures aimed at ensuring that children have the necessary language skills to cope with starting school. This chain of measures is a central component of the Government's urban district development in the Oslo districts of Grorud and Søndre Nordstrand. These are areas with major challenges where living conditions are concerned, while also having large populations of residents of immigrant background. The Government wishes to find ways of solving these specific challenges, and has entered into a long-term binding cooperation with the Municipality of Oslo. Other objectives of these two initiatives for children and young people are improvement of learning results and throughput in the schools, and ensuring that leisure facilities for young people are attractive and inclusive. The aim of the initiative is to ensure access to working life for more vulnerable groups.

Since 2008, the experimental scheme providing free core time in day care institutions has included all four and five year-olds in Oslo districts of Grorud (four areas) and Søndre Nordstrand. The allocation of NOK 50 million was renewed in 2009.

The purpose of the scheme is, through increased attendance of day care institutions, to prepare the children to start school, to foster general socialisation and to improve Norwegian language proficiency for minority language children. A major aim of the experiment is to ensure targeted follow-up of parents of minority background, so that they can ensure that their children are able to attend normal school classes. A further purpose of the measure has been to increase the parents' understanding of the importance of language and of participation in social activities. As well as compensating for the municipality's costs, the funds are used for recruitment of children in cases where the parents have not applied for a place in a day care institution, and for systematic language stimulation in the day care institutions. The free core time scheme may also have a positive effect on Roma children's day care institution

²¹ In autumn 2005, the municipality of Oslo began a development project involving use of visiting teachers. The aim was to provide additional language stimulation for four and five year-olds in Oslo not attending day care institutions. Evaluation of the project shows that the children who participated have benefited linguistically from the provision. For many families, the provision has been well adapted to their way of life. A number of the children have also begun attending day care institutions as a result of their participation in this language stimulation measure. The project was completed in summer 2007, but the municipality of Oslo has decided to continue the measure, and to extend it to apply to all urban districts that do not offer free core time in day care institutions for four and five year-olds.

²² Translator's note: Norwegian national strategy to enhance language proficiency and social competence in young speakers of minority languages

participation. Continuation of the scheme is planned. The scheme was evaluated by the Institute of Applied Social Science in 2009, and this evaluation will be studied with a view to identifying appropriate measures for recruiting Roma children to day care institutions.

Responsible: The Ministry of Education and Research in cooperation with the Municipality of Oslo and the Roma.

Measure 9. Measures for children and young people in large urban communities

The objective of the grant scheme *Measures for children and young people in large urban communities* is to improve the living conditions of children and young people in 23 towns and 7 districts of Oslo. In 2009, the allocation amounted to a total of approximately NOK 50 million. Over half of the total grant has been allocated to Oslo. The scheme includes a special initiative aimed at providing support for children, young people and families affected by poverty.

Implementation of activities: Applications are accepted each autumn for the following year's activities. The towns and the seven districts of Oslo prioritise the measures that are to receive support. Measures appropriate for consideration include measures for young people, holiday measures and labour market measures for children and young people of Roma background.

Responsible: The Ministry of Children and Equality and the Municipality of Oslo.

Measure 10. Further development of the mentor scheme Nattergalen

In 2008, the Ministry of Children and Equality began a trial of the mentor scheme *Nattergalen* [the Nightingale], a mentor scheme for 8–12 year-olds managed by Oslo University College. The scheme involves using students on child welfare or social studies programmes as mentors for children of minority backgrounds in the primary and lower secondary school. The scheme will be evaluated following a three-year pilot programme. The scheme aims to help children of minority backgrounds to complete the upper secondary school and go on to take higher education, while also increasing the students' competence for working in a multicultural environment.

Implementation and activities: The Ministry of Children and Equality will make a closer examination of whether positive experience of the mentor scheme *Nattergalen* is transferable to Roma children (cf. experience from Leeds in England).

Responsible: Ministry of Children and Equality.

Knowledge development

As regards national minorities in general and Roma in particular, there is a need for increased knowledge as a basis for policy development in relation to these groups. Research and development is being conducted in relation to several of the national minorities (including the Romani people and the Kvens). This type of development work is carried out in consultation with the groups pursuant to article 15 of the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities.

The Roma have expressed that they wish priority to be given to specific measures to rapidly improve their living conditions. However, there is a need for some clarification as regards

international obligations in relation to Norwegian legislation and Roma housing conditions. The Government will therefore give priority to the following investigations:

Clarify the relationship between national and international law in the area of education with a view to improving the follow-up of the Roma's right to conserve their culture, language and identity

For many Roma, travelling is an important part of their culture. Experience shows that the semi-itinerant Roma lifestyle poses particular challenges as regards Roma children's right and obligation to attend primary and lower secondary education.

In its report of June 2000, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child commented on Norway's second report on follow-up of the Convention on the Rights of the Child as regards Roma/Gypsies in particular. The Committee stated:

(paragraph 46) The Committee is concerned that many Roma children, and the children of other itinerant groups, in the State party do not complete the required years of obligatory education. (paragraph 47) The Committee recommends that the State party explore means of making formal education more accessible to children who travel for a part of the year, such as through the use of mobile communications facilities and distance learning programmes.

In Norway's third report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2003, paragraphs 455–457), reference was made to assessments by the Ministry of Education and Research of whether ICT in combination with a school-based contact network in the areas in question can be adapted to meet the educational needs of the Roma and Romani peoples who travel for parts of the school year. Reference was also made to a Comenius project which has aimed at promoting cooperation with the parents of children with a Roma or Romani background.

Norway's fourth report (2008) comments on "Educational provision for children of Roma and Romani background as follows:

387. The majority of Roma students live in the City of Oslo. Work is done at the local primary and lower secondary schools to create good local and flexible solutions for Roma pupils. It is a goal to prevent absenteeism and drop outs and receive good school-home cooperation. [...] The measure's main focus will be on basic skills, reading, writing and arithmetic and thus raise their competence.

388. The Ministry of Education and Research, the Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion and the City of Oslo have close contact concerning questions connected to school attendance for Roma pupils. There is also contact with the Council of Europe which has a number of measures directed toward the Roma people [...].

389. Many Roma (Gypsies) wish a better culturally adjusted education programme which to a greater extent takes into account language and culture, including travelling. Over several years, funding has been given according to the budget section, Measures for Roma. The funding is, inter alia, allocated to improve the school situation for Roma, to establish a meeting place for Roma and to stimulate to their own responsibility in the group.

390. The Ministry of Education and Research, the Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion and the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training support the

project “Romani/travelling people - from child to adult”. The project is led by Queen Maud’s College (College of Early Childhood Education) and Sør-Trøndelag University College. The aim of the project is to implement measures and development work directed toward children of Romani people in day care centres and schools. In the work, identification of environmental factors that are of significance for Romani pupils and pre-school children’s prosperity in school and day care centre are emphasised. A distance-learning programme for Romani traveller pupils at a number of schools has been established. The measures are carried out in cooperation with one of the Romani peoples’ interest organisations.

It is a major wish of the Roma community that their children shall go to school, but that schooling should be adapted to the situation of the Roma and to the fact that many travel for parts of the year. It is not clear how far the school should go to meet wishes for culturally adapted education, nor is any clear answer given by the Council of Europe’s Framework Convention or the Council of Europe’s recommendations on education and the Roma.

The Ministry of Education and Research will launch a study to clarify the relationship between Norwegian and international law in the area of education.

Survey of Roma housing conditions

The overall aim of Norwegian housing policy is that all residents shall have secure and satisfactory housing. Satisfactory housing is a precondition for integration and participation in society. There is currently no systematic knowledge of the Roma housing situation but, according to the Roma themselves and according to Torbjørg Bay, there is reason to believe that many Roma have very unstable and unsatisfactory housing conditions. Moreover, there is little access to information concerning their incomes. There is also reason to assume considerable variation in the municipalities’ competence concerning Roma.

In order to increase knowledge of Roma housing conditions, the Norwegian State Housing Bank will conduct a survey, assess the results and propose measures for further efforts by 31 December 2009.

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