

**SAVE THE CHILDREN STATEMENT TO HIGH-LEVEL
CONFERENCE ON ROMA AT COUNCIL OF EUROPE,
Strasbourg 20 October 2010**

On 20 October 2010, Ministers from the Council of Europe Member States and representatives of the European Commission and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) meet in Strasbourg to discuss the situation of Roma living in Europe today. European governments are expected to confirm their joint will to fight discrimination against Roma and to help improve their economic and social integration.

Save the Children welcomes this initiative and would like to draw the attention to Roma children, who represent half of the estimated 11 million Roma living in Europe.

"We strongly welcome regional initiatives to ensure that European governments assume their obligations under international and regional human rights instruments. Europe can not ignore the extensive violations of Roma children's rights to life and development, non-discrimination and the right to be heard. Our focus must go beyond visibility of the issue and political rhetoric – participants must strive to define concrete action, with real impact" Ulla Armyr, Head of European Programmes, Save the Children Sweden

Regardless of their legal status and/or geographical location, Roma children enjoy the same rights, set out in UN Convention on the Rights of Child, as all other children living in Europe.

However, Roma children are often the first to suffer violations of their rights to education, the right to health and adequate housing, and the right to be protected from discrimination, violence and exploitation. They are also often the last to enjoy holistic and comprehensive strategies that prevent and address these violations.

"We see large gaps in the fulfilment of the fundamental rights of children living across Europe, but also in European countries. Poverty, discrimination, social exclusion and lack of education is more common among the Roma children than other children in Europe.

In Romania, illiteracy among Roma people is still very high, and 20% of the Roma children do not have access to formal education. Out of those Roma children who do go to school, 50% experience discrimination and/or bullying. It is our hope that the results of the conference generate both regional and national response towards a Europe where all children enjoy the same rights, regardless of their ethnic origin."
Gabriela Alexandrescu, Save the Children Romania CEO

Save the Children urges the participants of the conference to ensure that the rights of Roma children are placed at the centre of European and national strategies to fight discrimination of Roma, and that holistic and comprehensive measures are sought to ensure that Roma children enjoy access to mainstream education, to health and social services and to child protection and justice systems.

Brussels, 19 October 2010

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Save the Children's vision is a world in which every child attains the right to survival, protection, development and participation. As the world's leading independent organisation for children, Save the Children's mission is to inspire breakthroughs in the way the world treats children, and to achieve immediate and lasting change in their lives. We are 29 national organisations working in 120 countries worldwide. In Europe, 13 national Save the Children from Denmark, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Italy, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Romania, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the UK work together to promote children's rights with European policy and decision-makers.

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