

TO: European Commission, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion
Council of Europe

For the attention of: Mr László Andor, Commissioner
Thomas Hammarberg, Commissioner for Human Rights

Re: Recommendations to address the problems of Roma in Europe

Issue and Context

The Roma, estimated at between 10 and 12 million people, constitute the largest minority in Europe and are present in virtually all European countries. This minority has been suffering profound discrimination for centuries and, even today, is still frequently rejected by the rest of the population because of deep-seated prejudices. Moreover, in times of economic crisis, this highly vulnerable minority presents an easy target and is used as a scapegoat. The efforts undertaken to improve the situation of Roma have produced very limited results so far. The situation faced by Roma in terms of access to education, employment, health services and housing or in terms of social integration is still very often deplorable. Roma are also extremely under-represented in political bodies. Positive measures should be taken to remedy this situation and enhance the participation and representation of Roma in public and political life. Source: The situation of Roma in Europe and relevant activities of the Council of Europe, 26 February 2010. "Tens of thousands of Roma live in Europe without a nationality. Lacking birth certificates, identity cards, passports and other documents, they are often denied basic rights such as education or health care. This problem exists in many countries in Europe, but it is particularly acute in the Western Balkans where restrictive citizenship rules have been adopted. In Slovenia, thousands of people, a considerable number of them Roma, were erased from the registry of permanent residents in 1992, while in Serbia and Croatia, Roma who seek regularization often face complicated administrative procedures and excessive fees." Furthermore, conflicts worsened the situation. "Many Roma from Kosovo were forced to flee for their lives, and documents were lost, destroyed or displaced. With lower levels of education and a problem of missing papers it was all the more difficult for many of them to acquire the documents necessary for life and rights in hosting countries." Source: declaration, Council of Europe Commission for Human Rights.

Criteria

The right to a nationality is a basic human right, enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It amounts to a 'right to have rights' and must be enforced for everyone, with more energy and determination than has been the case so far. Even with papers, France expelled nearly 100 Roma, to their native Romania.

The situation of Roma needs long-time integrated policies both at European and country levels, benefiting from funding that would provide access to basic human rights and social services. Thus, education, employment, housing and health care need to be accessible services for Roma. As one of the largest minority in Europe, members of this community need access in elected bodies and appointed public offices, in order to enhance their participation in public and political life that would consequently better address Roma challenges. The members of this minority should not be victims of intolerance, discrimination and rejection based on prejudices that are present in many European states. Thus, European states need effective and sustainable access to education and decent housing as the first decisive steps towards breaking the vicious circle of discrimination in which most of the Roma are locked. Source: The situation of Roma in Europe and relevant activities of the Council of Europe, 26 February 2010.

Options

Maintaining the status quo: a lack of intervention and of a holistic approach will further worsen the situation of Roma, affecting their lives and the communities they settle down in. It is very likely that more of them will choose mass illegal movements to Western European countries in search for a better future. This will generate increased political tensions at a local, national and European level. A chronic lack of education gives Roma no ability to access employment. As a result, criminal rates will go up and communities may face increased problems of prostitution, drug trafficking, organization of Roma in criminal groups, and street fights. If documents will not be provided to them, Roma communities will lack descent places to live, will not have the ability to legalize their houses, will lack proper health care and will not be perceived as true citizens of the community. Roma children are often abused and forced into beggary. This further lacks them of education when they need it the most. On a long term, the number of Roma will increase because of their birth rate. As a result, no effective prevention, intervention and re-entry strategies to address their problems will fuel racist and xenophobic behavior. As a result, Roma communities will continue their lifestyle and traits of being underground, out of society and will be more and more excluded and separated.

Stimulating economic activities through employment and business ownership: activities aimed at generating revenue for Roma through labor and entrepreneurial endeavors are a major tool to improve their standard of living and their appreciation in the community. Governments could be encouraged to collaborate with local NGOs and the private sector, to identify ways to stimulate Roma people to work and eliminate double standards in terms of providing electricity, social security and housing. Some communities might consider hiring Roma people in the administration or constantly consulting their leaders about policies aimed at improving their standard of living, especially when considering economic policies. Tax reliefs for employers of Roma could also be considered. Moreover, NGOs that are working with/for Roma communities could be trained to write projects and take advantage of EU funding, ensuring economic growth and competitiveness. Governments could also support vocational training programs that would help Roma find jobs that don't require broad knowledge. These training programs could help them develop skills to make hand-made objects that would be sold in the craftsmanship markets worldwide.

The entrepreneurial behavior of Roma could be developed by providing loans at lower interest rates. To improve their capacity to start an economic activity, policies providing micro finances could be launched, supported by consulting services that would provide roma entrepreneurs much needed guidance for running their businesses successfully and obeying the laws. Economic policies could pay greater attention to the music and entertainment sectors, which are particular areas where Romas have skills. Also, a traineeship program could be established, where business ownership could be promoted gradually by encouraging Roma to develop their skills as trainees first, for example performing in restaurants as a paid job and later by participating in the business or starting their own business.

Developing educational programs and insertion/reinsertion in the formal educational system: the rule of law should be applicable to every citizen and education, as well as basic social services should be guaranteed by every government. Children who are used as beggars should be protected from parents or caretakers that allow or force them to beg in the streets and taken to care centers. This will ensure that children are educated and brought up with positive values. At the same time, there is a need for stricter enforcement of laws on mandatory education.

Awareness raising campaigns in media and within Roma communities could be supported, to promote the benefits of education and its opportunities. At the same time, Roma culture and tradition could be taught in schools using both formal and non-formal tools, in order to prevent xenophobic and racist

behavior. This would also overcome stereotypes and negative attitudes towards Roma culture among parents and teachers. Local communities could greatly benefit if citizens are exposed to information about ongoing Roma projects and future integration strategies. New educational policies could be launched that are aimed at employing more qualified Roma teachers in schools, improving overall teacher training to create a more socially inclusive atmosphere, distributing Roma pupils in various classes in the school, to ensure a mixed environment, educating parents about positive aspects of Roma culture through brochures, campaigns, or discussions, and overcoming stereotypes towards Roma Culture and language in schools by teaching Roma language as elective courses. Other policies could support cultural programs to celebrate days of Roma Culture and Tradition, allowing more information about Roma history and achievements in the school curriculum, not allowing separate schools within Roma neighborhoods to avoid segregation and ensure a mixed environment and contact with other cultures. Roma who have not finished mandatory education while being children, should be offered optional government-sponsored evening schools for adults. The top-of-the class graduates from evening schools could be considered for jobs in public administration.

Governmental representation and the rule of law: members of the Roma community could be hired as social workers whose main job would be to explain the advantages of having Roma children go to school and not be used to work or beg. This policy could be supported with measures such as creating centers for social services, offering in-kind assistance like books, shoes, school uniforms for the children who go to school. Roma social workers could also be trained to establish NGOs and apply for EU funding or other donors. A pilot project could focus on identifying and training Roma leaders and then sending them inside their communities to engage in grass roots activities. Roma people should be entitled to the right of nationality and citizenship and should be guaranteed the right to vote in order to choose their representatives. Public administrations could be encouraged to consider hiring Roma, especially in ID departments and other social and economic departments. Law enforcement is a key issue in Roma communities. The rule of law should be applied equally to all citizens of the community and enforcement should not depend on cultural or social situations. Also, social security payments should be applied to Roma people as well.

Recommendation

To effectively address the problems of Roma in Europe, a holistic and integrated policy could be launched both at a European level and at country levels. The policy should be supported by good funding and the allocation of grants should be made with the involvement of consulting companies that are proficient in dealing with the bureaucracy. This will make sure that Roma organizations focus on the activities of the projects and their effective impact in the community and not on doing paper work. We call upon the Council of Europe and the European Commission to join their resources and efforts to urge member states start implementing Roma policies more efficiently and effectively, but at the same time to offer adequate funding. By 2020, no Roma should face hunger and discrimination and should be offered the chance to have a decent place to live, access to education and access to entrepreneurial opportunities within the legal system. The holistic policy should contain at least three areas of concentration: stimulating economic activities through employment and business ownership, developing educational programs and insertion/reinsertion in the formal educational system and governmental representation and the rule of law. Member States could be encouraged to adjust the specific measures taking into consideration the situation of Roma from their countries, but they should all have the same goals for 2020: no Roma in Europe without guaranteed basic access to education, social services and economic opportunities.

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The solution/s herein recommended are based on the active participation of citizens on the citizen engagement platform www.Public-Policies.eu. This policy paper is not official unless signed, sealed and bearing the logo of one of the Managing Partners implementing “SMART Method of Public Policy.”