

Romani Rose

OSCE Human Dimension Meeting, Statement of the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma, September 2014, Warsaw

*Taking into account the desperate living conditions of huge parts of the Roma in Europe, the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma considers that alternative funding streams, particularly for the construction of housing, are required urgently. Therefore, the Central Council urges the establishment of a **Roma Housing Fund**, similar to the fund which has already been set up by the Central European Bank (CEB) for the West Balkan region. The Central Council of German Sinti and Roma asks participants in this OSCE Meeting to express a concrete recommendation for the establishment of such a fund, following the implementation of the OSCE Action Plan.*

The Central Council of German Sinti and Roma has always stressed that the responsibility for Roma minorities and thus the implementation of Roma strategies lies with the individual member states in which Roma people live. Equally, the Central Council has always underlined that programmes should not be directed exclusively towards Roma people but should rest on a needs analysis of the entire local situation. These two principles are fundamentally sensible and necessary.

During the last decade(s), any communication from any commission regarding the implementation of the strategies in the various OSCE member states is disappointing, however. The situation of many Roma people in Europe often remains catastrophic. Both of the aforementioned criteria must therefore be reconsidered. In the view of the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma, there is now a need for a financing instrument which can be used to intervene directly at a local level. A direct expression of the desperate situation of many Roma people is their living situation. There is urgent need for action here with regard to the very large number of families affected.

The often catastrophic living situation of many Roma people is also a result of the structural racism in many countries. Many individual regions of the member states, particularly in eastern and south-eastern Europe, contain hundreds of "informal settlements" where in some cases over 1000 people are forced to live outside of towns with no running water and no infrastructure. The fact that people are stigmatised by living situations such as this and that access to education, work and health care is almost impossible for them as a result has been amply documented. The particular danger of this situation is that through their living conditions the people become the target of right-wing extremism and violent propaganda which is legitimised right at the heart of society by populism in politics and the media.

A change in this living situation is urgently required but for a variety of reasons the individual member states are often overwhelmed by this task. Not the least of these reasons is that the political will to draw down funding from the EU for Roma people is often limited.

The specific form of the Roma Housing Fund must of course be considered in detail. However, it is essential for a programme such as this that the starting point for planning is concrete need at a local level.

The budget for this fund should come in part from the monies still to be drawn from the European Social Fund and from other donor countries. This would create an instrument which can be used to act directly at the local level. It would be possible to develop the programme in a largely non-bureaucratic manner through the CEB, as well as to conduct strict monitoring.

At the local level the people affected must be directly involved in the planning and implementation. There are already, for example in eastern Slovakia, appropriate models in which Roma people are building accommodation for themselves and are gaining professional qualifications in the construction industry as they work. Investment in infrastructure and housing construction such as this would not least mean a long-term recovery programme for the regions concerned.

The right to an adequate standard of living is a fundamental human right. It is the prerequisite for equal participation in all areas of society, in particular in access to education and training. The Central Council of German Sinti and Roma expects the Roma Summit 2014 in Brussels to give a clear signal that concrete instruments for the improvement of the living situation of Roma people in Europe will finally be created.

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