

ROMA AND SINTI SIDE EVENT AT OSCE ECONOMIC FORUM, Prague, 24 MAY 2005

Intervention by Michael Guet, Head of Roma and Travellers Division, DG III Social Cohesion, Council of Europe

General remarks

- access to employment for vulnerable groups, including Roma, is part of Social Cohesion policy of Council of Europe

- in 2001 Council of Europe Committee of Ministers adopted Rec (2001)17 on improving the economic and employment situation of Roma/Gypsies and Travellers in Europe - available online at: www.coe.int/T/E/Social_Cohesion/Roma_travellers/

- Employment of Roma is one of the priority areas (see CoE recommendation, OSCE Action Plan, Decade for Roma Inclusion 2005-2015, etc.) alongside with education, housing and health...

- Employment should not be tackled separately but in conjunction with other areas, including: **education** (fighting against illiteracy and drop out of schools thanks inter alia to preschooling, courses for adults and Roma school assistants, providing vocational trainings, professional orientation in secondary school, etc.)

housing and transport (considering the impact of isolated Roma settlements or bad urbanistic planning in terms of access of Roma to employment)

migration (roots and consequences of Roma economic and/or political migration, overestimation and negative prejudices among majority population of receiving countries vehicled by the media, need to provide better information to Roma candidates for migration about the risks and the real economic situation in the receiving country via the publication of manuals adapted for each country giving details about professional skills needed in receiving countries such as traditional crafts, roof-reparation, metallurgy work, etc. that could be occupied by Roma migrants in order to reinforce the channel of legal migration of Roma. This manual could also be distributed to migration offices as it would contain some info about Roma migration specificities - see the report published by FERYP on Young Roma and Alternatives to Migration sponsored by the Norwegian government under its Council of Europe presidency - available online at the above-mentioned web address).

Approach to the issue of employment of Roma

- need to integrate factors and estimates of gray economy when analysing Roma unemployment (figures of 80-90% unemployment are often overestimated).

- need for Roma to be more open about the issue: too often we get very little info about what the members of the Roma community are doing, including for those who are traveling abroad (seasonal work), which often lead to many speculations among the majority population and authorities. Roma NGOs should work on combatting mistrust among Roma population vis a vis majority population/institutions in order to have an open dialogue and exchange of info (would be better for Roma to acknowledge if they get money on the black market rather than leaving open speculations about their involvement in drug or human beings trafficking which are probably overestimated (like Roma migration, etc.).

- need for local authorities to have a pragmatic approach by taking some specific targeted measures, like a decision to legalise a settlement or to provide infrastructure, etc since once the vicious circle has been broken, solutions can be found step by step. Local authorities and state institutions should reduce the level of requirements usually needed, accepting that during a

certain period, a number of Roma persons will have to be employed even if they have not yet the requested education level or skills (compensated by training courses)

- need to adapt the approach to the system of values of Roma: if more Roma were to be employed this would have a snowball effect within this community in terms of living conditions, dependence and integration in society as Roma put employment and money much higher in their scale of values than education. In addition, Roma live in present. envisaging the future of their children in 15 years time when they finish studies mean nothing for Roma parents. This should not be blamed, just need to be taken into account when addressing education/employment. Sending messages to Roma that their children will make more money if they send them to school will have a stronger impact than just telling them you must send their children to school because education is needed and because the rest of the population does so.

- use positive examples and good practices already implemented in Europe: community work, enrollment of Roma by the municipality under programmes for unemployed people, having short-term insertion programmes for Roma in private companies to give longtime unemployed Roma self-confidence and a professional experience to learn again how to live in a working environment, introducing orientation interviews in secondary school to direct Roma students in needed work areas, recruiting Roma as mediators in local employment offices, or in ministries for labour, incentives for self-initiatives, support to income-generating projects, etc.

- generally-speaking we focus too much on the 80% unemployment and not enough on the 20% success story. Attention of the public - in order to fight against prejudices - should be oriented towards success stories through TV interviews with Roma businessmen, Roma educated students and Roma employees, insisting in employment offices on the skills of Roma (language and communication skills, mobility, knowledge of traditional savoir-faire, etc) - see Council of Europe posters for the Skopje Conference on Roma Access to Employment.

International coordination in the field of Roma and employment

The Council of Europe, OSCE-ODIHR and the European Commission have been cooperating for five years under the Stability Pact programme for Roma in South East Europe. The Council of Europe made a two-year survey on access of Roma to employment in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia and Montenegro and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. The conclusions and recommendations of the national and regional reports drawn by two international consultants and five local consultants (three of them were young Roma) are presented today by Nenad Vladisljev from Serbia.

The Council of Europe works together with other international actors (OSCE, EC, World Bank, OSI, ILO...) on promoting national policies, programmes or action plans for the employment of Roma (Stability Pact Programme, Decade of Roma Inclusion, etc.).

The Council of Europe has recently supported activities on Roma migration which include economic migration aspects (see above FERYP's activity).

The OSCE and CoE together with Polish and Slovenian authorities will organise a Conference on the implementation of National policies for Roma, Sinti and Travellers at the local level, with specific focus on anti-discrimination ("anti-Gypsyism") in which employment issues and measures at local level will be addressed.

The European Roma and Travellers Forum which signed a specific partnership agreement with the Council of Europe will address Roma and employment issues in future.
