



Introduction

As outlined in Recommendation Rec(2005)4 of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe to member states on improving the housing conditions of Roma and Travellers in Europe, the Roma have the right to adequate housing. Effective consultation with the Roma themselves on the issue is also imperative.

Housing issues are a priority in 2006 for the CoE (see Coordinator's report on forced evictions, HRCOM's viewpoint and activities of the Roma and Travellers Division) and need to be addressed more urgently than ever before in view of constant forced evictions, the increasing trend of anti-gypsyism, racism and discrimination against Roma and Travellers when accessing legal settlements and housing, and negotiations over the future of the Roma in Kosovo, including the rebuilding of the mahala, etc.

Activities of the Roma and Travellers Division in Housing

1. International Conference on implementation and harmonization of national policies towards Roma, Sinti and Travellers, (Bucharest, 4-5 May 2006)

A follow-up to the 2005 Warsaw Conference held on a similar theme, this Conference was co-organised by the Council of Europe, the OSCE/ODIHR, the EUMC, the European Roma and Travellers Forum, and the respective presidencies of the CoE, OSCE and EU. Bringing together both governmental and non-governmental actors, the Conference aimed to ascertain guidelines for a common Roma policy vision, notably within the areas of **housing**, employment, and relations with the police. Roma partnership, as well as measures, such as an awareness-raising campaign, to combat the ever-growing anti-gypsyism phenomenon in Europe were cross-cutting topics.

Recommendations were drawn and priority areas requiring urgent action and more long-term actions defined. The capacity of coordination and harmonisation of policies at national and international levels was challenged. While it was recognised a certain added value to have so many actors present around the same table to discuss the same issue, it was also decided that more attention should be devoted to parliamentarians, local authorities and the majority populations as there are often the obstacles for the full implementation of national policies and international standards in the field of Roma. This would have also to be reflected in the manner of organizing next activities (meetings outside the capital, new target audience, seminars open to the public, etc.).

2. Meeting with a view to setting up a task-force to combat discrimination & racism against Roma, Sinti & Travellers in access to legal settlements and housing (Belgrade, Serbia, end November, tbc)

To be jointly organized by the OSCE Mission in Serbia, ODIHR and the Council of Europe, this meeting aims to establish local task-forces on specific issues related to Roma in order to assess and discuss pilot project initiatives, as well as define more precisely the relevant

obstacles, for example, anti-Gypsyism from the majority society and local authorities (following on from Activity 1).

3. Greek Helsinki Monitor (GHM) report on Roma informal settlements in Greece (currently being finalised)

Report carried out by Greek Helsinki Monitor in partnership with the Center in Housing Rights and Evictions (COHRE), the Panhellenic Confederation of Greek Roma (PACONGR) and the Greek Roma Association (GRA) from 1 May 2006 to 30 September 2006.

4. Round Table “The Greek Roma: the long way to recognition” (Thessaloniki, November 2006)

Jointly organised by the Council of Europe, OSCE/ODIHR and the University of Macedonia, this Round Table will focus on Greek Roma as actors in the country’s political and social history, as well as underline the specific character of the Romany movement in Greece as well as its commonality with and differences to similar movements in other European countries. In doing so, the round table will highlight aspects of the institutional framework affecting (if not determining) to a wide extent Roma **living conditions**, taking into consideration the impact of supra-national politics, including those at the European level (CoE, OSCE, EU).

Activities of the Coordinator for Roma and Traveller Activities

The Coordinator sends out regular reports to colleagues in the Council of Europe on the situation of Roma in Europe. He recently prepared a report about reported evictions in Europe (see attached).

Evictions are undoubtedly the major abuse which is carried out in most countries with total impunity. Reasons given are many - lack of legal title, unhygienic conditions, etc. - and sometimes valid, but alternative accommodation is rarely provided, leaving hundreds without shelter even in the middle of winter.

In addition, there are some positive signs in some countries where attempts are being made to improve the situation of the Roma population. Judgments have been pronounced in favour of Roma in France and in Bulgaria, strong anti-discriminatory measures are being taken in the UK and Bulgaria has launched a programme against illiteracy amongst the Roma.

Activities of the Human Rights Commissioner

The Human Rights Commissioner of the Council of Europe, Mr. Thomas Hammerberg, recently called for the forced evictions of Roma families to stop.

Referring to the evictions in Kaliningrad (Russian Federation) and Elabasan, Albania amongst others, Mr. Hammerberg stated that *“in recent months a number of Roma families in several European countries have been evicted by force from their homes. In most cases the decisions were taken by local authorities. The tenants were not given adequate notice or offered a real alternative. It is clear that several of these evictions violated European and international human rights standards.”*

Mr. Hammerberg continued by remarking on the alarming trend of such evictions often being accompanied by violence, racism and anti-ziganism.

In addition, he commented that Roma exclusion in Europe stems to a large extent from poor housing conditions, as the lack of a real home makes it more difficult to benefit from other rights, for example, education and health, which in turn leads to social segregation.

To conclude, he called for national, regional and local authorities to act now.

In September 2006, the Human Rights Commissioner made a field visit to Patras Roma settlements and met with Roma and human rights NGOs, as well as Greek authorities at different levels.

Appendix: Council of Europe Coordinator's report on evictions of Roma and Travellers in Europe