

Are six centuries of presence in France enough to be a French citizen ?

The exclusion of the Roms from political life in France

Both citizen and consultative participation are mentioned by the Action Plan as means to improve the situation of Roma and Sinti. In France, both of them are problematic.

i. Political participation: de jure discrimination and de facto exclusion

To be registered in election list, a French citizen should be resident of the municipality for at least six months. Roma in France are considered as “gens du voyage”, a concept that formally applies to everyone who has no fix residence neither domicile, and who, in these conditions, to a municipality. Homeless people have the same status from this standpoint. Nevertheless, concerning the duration of residence for voting purposes the common rule applies to the homeless, while for Roma and Sinti the minimal duration of residence is three years, be five times superior. Even though this situation is regularly denounced for several years, no legislative reform has been undertaken. From this point of view, Roma and Sinti remain discriminated against in terms of political participation.

Moreover, very often the municipality of “rattachement” is different and far away from the actual location of the Roma and Sinti concerned. This factual situation, added to the discriminatory legislation mentioned above, excludes a considerable number of Roma from political life.

ii. The consultation: a dangerous fiction

It exists in France a Consultative Commission of the gens du voyage, composed by public authorities and Romani representatives. This commission is supposed to advice State authorities in the process of decision making. In theory, this commission fits therefore with the recommendations of the Action Plan. In practice, however, this body proves to be an alibi. In the past, Romani members of this commission complained about being solicited for advice on legislation and measures already adopted. At the present, the president of the Commission, Mr. Hérisson, a French senator, leads a group of parliament members who submitted an amendment to the bill on the prevention of delinquency. This amendment aims at enabling the prefect to evict by force the “gens du voyage” 24 hours after having ordered them to leave a place, without asking for a court decision as it is already the case. As a MP, Mr. Hérisson is free of the amendments proposed, but coming from the president of the consultative commission of the “gens du voyage”, this amendment is a blatant aberration and a danger for the future of this consultative body. Indeed, the Romani members of the commission have never been consulted for such an amendment and being members of the commission, they might lose the credibility of the Romani population, who would see them as traitors.

“La voix des Roms” calls upon the French government:

1. to modify the legislation on the “gens du voyage” inscription to the voting lists
2. to reform the mechanism of participation of the Roms (of both French and foreign citizenship), by an efficient and equal dialogue with the Rromani organisations.