



The Roma Minority in Europe: A nomad path to exclusion

Policy paper as adopted during the General Assembly 2009, Maastricht.

We, the Young European Greens, gathered in our General Assembly in Maastricht, want to address the problems and possible solutions to the degrading situation of the Roma people residing in Europe and EU citizenship.

It is firstly important to note, that the situation of the Roma minority differs from one European country to another. In some cases the Roma people and their specific problems are completely ignored. There also is, in certain countries, an immediate need for a change of attitude towards the Roma people.

We have identified several areas in which the Roma minority is particularly vulnerable. These areas and our proposed solutions are outlined below.

Human rights

With the discussions about the fingerprinting policy of Roma people in Italy, it became clear that the guarantee for basic human rights for the Roma minority is severely questionable. Fingerprinting represents the criminalisation of this minority and this should not be accepted by any human rights standard. We are particularly worried with the Italian authorities' lack of response to the civil society protesting against this policy. Furthermore, we are concerned with the media's role, which is propagating negative stereotypes of the Roma. Discrimination on ethnic grounds is very visible among the Roma, thus their segregation in schools and local communities and their difficulties in finding decent jobs, and housing, in accessing the health care system and securing their children's education.

We believe in the freedom of movement of all people and above all in equality of all people. We consider policies such as the fingerprinting policy an inadmissible violation of human rights. We are aware of the particular problems that the Roma people face regarding self-organisation in NGO's or other association forms, such as the fact that many of the Roma people are not officially registered, due to being unable to afford the costs inferred by the registration or due to not being aware of registration procedures. We urge governmental authorities to support by all means the self-organisation and empowerment of the Roma people

Education

A big problem with education regarding the Roma minority is the segregation of Roma children in classes, and their difficulties to integrate because of the strong negative stereotypes held both by peers and teachers. In many cases, Roma children that cannot integrate in mainstream schools are considered to be the problem for this situation and are thus sent to schools for mentally challenged, or to specially allocated schools. This proves the lack of methodology to accommodate the diversity of learning patterns, as well as the lack of preparation of school personnel to integrate culturally diverse groups.



A considerable problem is also represented by the precarious situation of Roma families that often sacrifice the education of their children to the need of extra work hands. The fact that school materials are in many countries not free and that sometimes there even are school fees amplifies this problem.

We believe that all these problems can be addressed if there is governmental will to do so. First and foremost, education should be universally free, at all stages. Secondly, schools curricula should include minority cultures, as an optional course. Thirdly, intercultural learning needs to start already with the pre-school system, when children are receptive to interact freely and are less subjected to external influences that propagate certain negative stereotypes. Fourthly, we believe in affirmative action measures, such as guaranteed places in university programs without taxes or examination, in order to give the possibility to Roma people to reach higher positions in the academic system. Fifthly, we support the creation of materials and school and university departments in Romani language. Last, but not least, we believe that policies should also be directed towards the mainstream population of countries where large Roma minorities live. Racism should be sanctioned by law, and cultural understanding classes should be given both in the academic environment, as well as at the work place.

Health

In many countries, the life expectancy of Roma people is lower than that of the majority population, as they are not prevention-conscious. This happens for various reasons, but a major one is that they are forced to live in remote, segregated, unclean areas, because of a precarious economic situation. For the Roma people that are not legally registered in their country or for those that are unemployed, no health insurance is issued, thus medical treatment becomes very expensive. Furthermore, there is an observable segregation of Roma people in hospitals, who are not treated at the same standards as the other patients. Because of the extreme poverty situation of some Roma people, they even accept insignificant amounts of money to have medicines tested on them.

We believe in free and equal health care systems for all. Furthermore, we strongly suggest that social monitors should be employed by the Health Ministries, who would go to various Roma communities and record the health status of people. This would prevent diseases from spreading, as well as insure better health care of the Roma people residing in those communities. Facilitating the registration process at the city hall would also help, not only with the health care, but also with education and the guarantee of basic rights, such as the right to vote.

Housing

The ghetto-isation phenomenon is becoming more and more visible with the Roma minority. Due to scarcity of housing in big cities, the Roma generally have to wait much longer than the majority population to be assigned a house. And when the assigning is done, it is usually in isolated areas and poor districts. Furthermore, many Roma houses are being demolished, on account of not being legally built in the first place or not complying with safety regulations. The demolishing phenomenon is not matched by a phenomenon of giving the Roma people subsidies to build decent houses for themselves. This leads to increasing numbers of homeless people among the Roma.

Everyone should have a right to decent housing. Therefore, a greater concern should be paid and more thorough measures should be taken regarding the building of flats for Roma people. Any new building initiative should be undertaken with the participation in the decision making process of the local Roma community. Governmental subsidies should be allocated for those whose houses had been demolished.



Employment

The Roma minority is plagued everywhere in Europe by high unemployment rates. This has a dual cause: on the one hand, the discrimination based on racial considerations by many managers (be them corporate or state employed), and on the other hand a lack of formal qualification of many representatives of the minority.

Inside companies, attention should be paid to diversity management. As an affirmative action, fiscal incentives should be given to companies employing Roma. National and local governments should follow a policy to employ Roma people on all levels of administration. Furthermore, governments should look into ways of fostering Roma entrepreneurship, by granting various subsidies for Roma people to run their own business and to employ others.

In conclusion, there is an urgent need for beneficial state monitoring of the developments inside the Roma communities and of research of the housing, unemployment, education and health care situation of these communities, in order to set the basis for future increases of the live quality of the Roma people in Europe. Affirmative action in education and employment is essential and European governments should be preoccupied with this.

We strongly urge the European Union institutions to develop a strategy for a veritable integration of Roma people in the European societies and to also create a Roma Unit within the Directorate General for Social Affairs. In this respect, we support the Roma Policy Coalition in their requests to the European Commission. Furthermore, the Council of Europe should create a fund for ethnic minorities with specific resources for the Roma people. We request all states to encourage and support the creation of a strong Roma civil society that can counteract the negative stereotyping of the minority and the afferent ethnical discrimination.