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ERTF Update

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Political Developments

European Roma and Travellers Forum

ERTF alerts at misuse of FRA report in campaign against Roma

Strasbourg, 11 July 2007 - The European Roma and Travellers Forum has reacted to Italian media reports according to which there are currently 50,000 child beggars in Italy, most of them Roma. ANSA which first brought up the issue further stated that child begging is a very lucrative business, and quoted as a reference the issue of a new report by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA). The news agency also said that the Fundamental Rights Agency was just launching a European campaign against the exploitation of child beggars.

The European Roma and Travellers Forum enquired with the Fundamental Rights Agency and was told that FRA never issued such a report. The Agency made its own investigations into the issue and found out that the source of the media campaign was a report issued by an Italian MEP Roberta Angelilli from Alleanza Nazionale presented a few days earlier in Rome.

The far-right politician who is also the coordinator of the National Office for the Problems of Minors of the Alleanza Nazionale has indeed used statistical material provided by the Fundamental Rights Agency in order to point out at the alarming situation of Romani women and children which makes them the natural victims of criminal networks. The report which is peppered with pictures of begging women and children is part of a campaign against street begging which is ultimately targeting Roma.

Italy has been again at the centre of a racist campaign against Roma. Not even two months ago Rome followed by other cities announced plans to resettle Roma out of town in so-called solidarity villages guarded by police. Two weeks ago, the mayor of Rome, Walter Veltroni, travelled to Bucharest in order to sign a readmission agreement for illegal aliens with the Romanian authorities. As part of this agreement the first Romanian police officers have just

arrived in Rome and will support their Italian colleagues on issues such as minors, prostitution and Roma camps (see report down below).

“We are very much concerned about the ongoing media campaign against Roma in Italy, the President of the European Roma and Travellers Forum,” Rudko Kawczynski said in a letter to Beate Winkler, the acting director of the Fundamental Rights Agency, pointing out at the link between the media campaign and the recent initiatives against Roma. He asked Ms. Winkler to use her right to correction in order to avoid that the misuse of the Fundamental Rights Agency’s prestige would lead to further damages to the Roma communities in Italy.

ERTF

50,000 child beggars in Italy (Ansa, 6.07.07)

http://www.ansa.it/site/notizie/awnplus/english/news/2007-07-06_10694392.html

Infanzia negata: Futuro zero

<http://www.angelilli.it/doc/Dossier%20Convegno%204%20maggio.pdf>

Italy tells Romania: We don’t want your Roma

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/italy/story/0,,2111620,00.html>

International Organisations

OSCE

Parliamentary Assembly condemns racism against Roma

On the last day of its 16th Annual Session which took place in Kyiv from 5 to 9 July 2007 to the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly adopted a declaration condemning all forms of racism and intolerance including anti-Gypsyism.

The Parliamentarians took positive note of the efforts by some states to study the enslavement of Roma, and commemorate the Holocaust and urged “implementation of the Resolution on Roma Education unanimously adopted at the OSCE PA 2002 Berlin Annual Session to “eradicate practices that segregate Roma in schooling” and provide equal access to education that includes intercultural education.”

They also invited the elected members of other bodies to “ publicly speak out against discrimination, violence and other manifestations of intolerance against Roma, Sinti, Jews, and other ethnic or religious groups.

The full text of the Kyiv declaration is available at:

<http://www.oscepa.org/admin/getbinary.asp?fileid=1736>

Reports/Publications

NGOs

Roma Rights 1-2/2007: Social Assistance

This issue of Roma Rights takes a critical look at the current efforts to retool the nature of the welfare state across Europe, and how these efforts affect Europe’s Romani population. The

welfare state attempts to enact social justice for citizens by mitigating unfairness created by market economies through proactive social assistance schemes. In the past, these have consisted of unemployment benefits, public health care, and other social services. Recent labour market reforms have also introduced "market-friendly" activation policies, which aim to reduce public costs for social assistance by re-integrating the excluded into the labour market.

While these policies seem promising in some respects, their real effects on the most vulnerable groups have been mixed, and in some cases harmful. For Roma, who as a group, are most in need of the assistance and the re-integration promised by the welfare state, these new social assistance schemes may pose a serious danger. Due to the interplay of multiple exclusionary factors as well as open discrimination, Roma are often unable to access and benefit from these measures. When these measures fail to lead to jobs, as they often do, Roma are left with no work and no social assistance, victims of more "efficient," but less just, welfare policy.

Source: ERRC

Social Rights is available online at: <http://www.errc.org/cikk.php?cikk=2840>

News digest

Countries

Austria

Bettler: Ferk sucht Verbündete in EU

8. Juli 2007

Bei Besuch in Brüssel lotete SP-Vizebürgermeister Walter Ferk mögliche Netzwerke aus.

Das Problem der Bettler durch ein Verbot zu lösen, sei nicht menschengerecht. Die soziale Frage der Roma und Sinti müsse auf breiter Ebene und vor allem durch Unterstützung in den betreffenden Staaten angegangen werden, meint der Grazer SPÖ-Chef Vizebürgermeister Walter Ferk. Deshalb besuchte er kürzlich mit Caritas-Präsident Franz Küberl, Staatssekretärin Heidrun Silhavy und Finanzstadtrat Wolfgang Riedler Vertreter der EU-Kommission und des -Parlaments in Brüssel.

"Wir wollten in direkten Gesprächen mit Vertretern der EU ausloten, welche Netzwerke möglich sind, um die soziale Frage der Roma und Sinti auf europäischer Ebene einer menschengerechten Behandlung zuzuführen", berichtet Ferk von Kontakten in Brüssel. So habe der Südtiroler EU-Abgeordnete Sepp Kusstatscher (Grüne) seine Unterstützung beim Aufbau einer Partnerschaft zwischen Graz und Bozen, wo es ähnliche Probleme gibt, zugesagt.

Der Grazer Sozialreferent will jetzt gemeinsam mit dem "Personenkomitee Grazer Initiative" und anderen österreichischen Städten - so haben etwa Linz und St. Pölten schon ihr Interesse bekundet - Projekte entwickeln, mit denen Minderheiten geholfen werden kann. "Die nun beginnende Förderperiode der EU sieht auch Schwerpunkte zur Lösung solcher Probleme vor. Es könnte also Geld von der EU für solche Projekte geben", hofft Walter Ferk.

Hans Andrej

Quelle : Kleine Zeitung

<http://www.kleinezeitung.at/regionen/steiermark/graz/492153/index.do>

Czech Romanies want senator to leave post over her statements

11 July 2007

Prague- Most regional Romany coordinators demand that Senator Liana Janackova (for Independents) leave her post of deputy chairwoman of the Senate human rights committee over her statements about Romanies, central Bohemian coordinator for Romany issues and foreigner integration Cyril Koky says in a letter sent to committee chairman Karel Bartak.

The letter is published on the Romany www.romea.cz server.

Janackova, mayor of Ostrava's Marianske Hory and Hulvaky neighbourhood, allegedly said last August: "Unfortunately, I am a racist, I disagree with the integration of Gypsies so that they would live across the area. Unfortunately, we have chosen the Bedriska (colony) and so they will stay there, with a high fence and with electricity."

The words appeared on the recording of a local housing committee meeting. Janackova told CTK today that she saw no reason why she should yield to the pressure from Romany groups.

"I should naturally have not reacted in such a way, it is careless and it is silly. If I insulted or harmed any Romany from Marianske Hory I will personally apologise to him," she said.

Previously, Janackova questioned the authenticity of the recording and said that it was a political attack on her.

Later, she said on the Aktualne.cz server that another woman with the voice similar to hers pronounced the words.

Janackova conceded, however, that she did say that she had no place to move Romanies so she would rather take dynamite and blow them away.

Koky said that most Romany coordinators have been indignant at Janackova's statements.

"To hear such awful words from a legislator is absolutely unacceptable to us," Koky said.

He described Janackova's remaining in the post of the deputy chairwoman of the Senate committee that also deals with human rights issues as a "ridicule of the entire work of the committee."

The Romany coordinators have called on Bartak to investigate the matter thoroughly. Bartak said Janackova should apologise to Romanies.

The SNK senators' group of which Janackova is a member is to discuss the matter next Tuesday.

Romany activists, representatives of Romany organisations and human rights activists recently demanded the resignation of Deputy Prime Minister Jiri Cunek (Christian Democrats, KDU-CSL) over his statements about Romanies.

Cunek described Romanies as sun-tanned people who set up fires and make messes on the squares.

Cunek also said that Romanies were unwilling to work.

Source: ČTK/Ceske Noviny

http://www.ceskenoviny.cz/news/index_view.php?id=261631

Removal of Czech Romanies leads to appearance of ghettos

11 July 2007

Prague/Ostrava- A large part of more than 300 Romany ghettos in the Czech Republic appeared only recently and expediently, as a result of the removal of Romanies from their original places of residence, according to an analysis on excluded Romany localities that has been drafted for the Labour and Social Affairs Ministry.

Both Romany rent defaulters and Romanies whose flats their town halls or other house owners wanted to use for their own purposes were moved to these localities, the analysis says.

Liana Janackova, mayor of Ostrava's Marianske Hory and Hulvaky neighbourhood and senator for the Independents, also allegedly commented on the choice of place for Romanies.

"Unfortunately, I am a racist, I disagree with the integration of Gypsies so that they would live across the area. Unfortunately, we have chosen the Bedriska (colony) and so they will stay there, with a high fence and with electricity."

The words appeared on the recording of a local housing committee meeting, whose authenticity Janackova has questioned. Later she said on the Aktualne.cz server that a woman with a similar voice pronounced the words.

According to the analysis, there are 10 large ghettos in Ostrava, mostly populated by Romanies. Up to 6600 people may live there. Although some Romany families have lived in the localities for years, a large majority of them were expediently moved there in the past years.

"Massive resettlement occurred after 1989 in connection with the collapse of heavy industry," the authors of the analysis said about one of the localities.

In another case, the town hall started to move exclusively Romany families to the locality 15 years ago, and in yet another locality community flats have been given exclusively to Romanies in the locality over the past 15 years. In addition, rent defaulters from other parts of Ostrava and nearby villages have been moved there.

In another case, Romanies were moved from their flats that the town hall intended to use in a different way.

Experts and non-profit organisations have long pointed out that in many cases local authorities were responsible for the emergence of ghettos. According to their opinion, local authorities have thus created a problem for themselves that they will have to deal with in the future.

Most adult Romanies in the ten Ostrava ghettos are jobless and in some ghettos all their residents are unemployed. Families there are dependent on social security payments. Most Romanies in these localities have only basic education. There is widespread usury and drug-trafficking in many Romany ghettos and in many cases the authors of the analysis registered prostitution, drug addiction, alcoholism and gambling.

Some Romany families left for Britain and Canada in the past.

Ten years ago, Janackova came up with a proposal to pay allowances to Romanies for the departure abroad and the return of their flat licences to the town.

Last year, the authorities of the north Moravian town of Vsetin and its then mayor Jiri Cunek (Christian Democrats, KDU-CSL), currently deputy prime minister, moved many Romanies families outside the town for which they were widely criticised.

A large number of Romanies have been also removed from the town of Mlada Boleslav, central Bohemia, and Prostejov, south Moravia.

It is estimated that some 200,000 Romanies live in the ten million Czech Republic.

Source: ČTK

http://www.ceskenoviny.cz/tisk_clanku_view.php?id=261643&BACK=/news/index_view.php?id=261643

Czech School for Romany Children to be abolished

3 July 2007

The Krnov town hall will abolish its special elementary school where some 95 percent of children are Romanies, not Czechs, town hall spokeswoman Dita Cirova told CTK today. The town hall wants to integrate Romanies into other school in the town to avoid later problems with their joining the class collectives, Cirova said.

The economic aspect was also of major importance when the decision was made as the school's costs per one pupil were several times higher than the average of other schools in Krnov, Cirova said. "We do not want to separate Romanies, although they themselves had chosen the school," deputy mayor Alena Krusinova said. "However, we want to offer them the same chances and conditions for education as to the rest of the Krnov children," Krusinova said.

The school educates children from the first to fifth grades and it is very popular with Romanies as it takes into account their problems. Teachers pay attention to Romany traditions and relationships, the school offers preparatory courses and free activities for leisure time and there are Romany assistants. There are also singing and dancing groups.

However, problems arise for the children when they advance to the sixth grade of the elementary school. "They enter the classes with established collectives. Due to their different complexion and character, it is sometimes difficult for the Romanies to be integrated," Krusinova said. When the children join the school collective as early as the first grade, they will stand a bigger chance to achieve higher education and to be integrated with the rest of the children, she added.

The integration will start in September. However, the town hall wants all schools to have Romany assistants.

Source: Prague Daily Monitor

<http://www.praguemonitor.com/>

Hungary

Demszky: I will be Jewish, Roma or gay if I must

The mayor on the weekends violence

12 July 2007

Budapest rejects the aggressive Arpad Flag-toting extremists who call ever more openly for hate against the widest possible range of groups. "In this situation, if I must, I too will be Jewish, Roma or gay," said Gabor Demszky in a statement on Monday. His Free Democrat party is calling for a five-party statement, while Fidesz and the Christian Democrats condemn the government. Meanwhile, the Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF) are rejecting "Arpad Flag hooliganism".

Demszky, who is mayor of Budapest, said physical attacks on people expressing their sexual identity, could not be allowed to pass without comment.

He said it was saddening that troublemakers bearing Arpad Flags claimed to be acting in the names of "normality."

"The truth is that what they are doing is far from what is regarded as normal in the world's democratic countries," said Gabor Demszky.

The mayor said: "It was the people who defied the threats and stood up for their rights at the weekend who showed true bravery." He thought it was "difficult to imagine behaviour more cowardly than wearing a mask and hiding away inside a crowd, while throwing stones and eggs at people you are sure will not rise to the provocation."

"As mayor, it is my duty in the name of every citizen to stand up for those who are persecuted in Budapest for their faith, ethnic origin or sexual orientation. Budapest says no to aggressive, Arpad Flag-toting extremists, who are calling ever more openly for hate against the widest possible range of groups. In this situation, if I must, I too will be a Jew, a Roma or gay. Budapest is our city. We cannot allow a situation where people feel fear because they belong to a minority," says the mayor in his statement.

The Free Democrats called for a joint statement to be signed by all five parliamentary parties, protesting against intolerance and homophobia in the wake of several people being beaten on Saturday evening during the Gay Pride parade.

Peter Gusztos, the party's spokesman, said he had written to members of the parliamentary human rights committee's members of all parties suggesting they issue a joint declaration against violence, intolerance and homophobia.

Fidesz has criticised the government and the police, but has issued no other statement. Zoltan Pokorni, Fidesz's deputy chairman, said at a press conference that the issue was not homosexuality but about whether the Hungarian government and the police were capable of guaranteeing the right to free assembly.

"What we have today in Hungary is a situation where the government is either unwilling or unable to guarantee the right of Hungarian citizens - be they bisexual or homosexual - to free assembly," he said. He added that the police had shown brutality on 23 October last year, whereas now, the police had allowed similar violence to occur. Both cases needed to be condemned, he said.

He added that homosexuality was a private matter, whereas the police's inability or unwillingness to uphold the right to free assembly was not a private matter.

Zoltan Balog, the the Fidesz president of the parliamentary committee on human rights and minority, civil and religious affairs, said it was the duty of the police to uphold the universal right to free assembly and free expression, as well as to keep order in public places. "This is not an instance where we need political declarations or open letters. It's about the constitutional duties of the police," he said.

The European People's Party, which represents Fidesz, the MDF and the Christian Democrats in Brussels, also criticised police failures to guarantee the right to free assembly. Andras Pettko, an MDF MP, said the Free Democrats had an inaccurate interpretation of the weekend's events.

He said: "The problem that every part has to act upon is the continuous street violence of a violent, Arpad Flag and national symbol-toting hooligan minority. As Hungarian Democrats, we will sign a declaration if it is to protest against this violent minority, because that minority respects neither the law on free assembly, nor a national celebration, nor the freedom of speech."

He added that Hungarian society had become increasingly tolerant of difference in recent years.

Source: HVG

http://hvg.hu/english/20070712_demszky_pride_parade_rection.aspx

Italy

Cantatore aurait tenu des propos racistes

11 juillet 2007

L'Italien Vincenzo Cantatore, champion d'Europe des poids lourds-légers, a été déféré devant les organes disciplinaires de la Fédération italienne de boxe (FPI) pour avoir tenu des propos racistes à l'égard de la communauté tzigane, a annoncé mercredi la FPI.

Il est reproché à Cantatore, sacré champion d'Europe le 23 juin à Rome face à l'Ukrainien Alexander Gurov, d'avoir récemment déclaré à un hebdomadaire en visant les dirigeants de la FPI: «Ils mettent sur le ring des ex-criminels et des tziganes».

«Si par le passé quelques plaisanteries malheureuses ont été pardonnées à Cantatore, a expliqué le vice-président de la FPI Antonio del Greco, cette fois-ci, la Fédération, injustement attaquée, ne peut tolérer et supporter une telle affirmation, honteuse, infâmante et outrageante pour la communauté rom».

«La FPI est fière de compter parmi ses athlètes et ses champions beaucoup de roms qui ont choisi la boxe, non pas pour une question de +rachat social+, mais pour les valeurs de courage et de loyauté que le noble art transmet et représente: et ils le démontrent sur le ring et dans la vie de tous les jours!», continue le dirigeant.

Une partie de la communauté rom installée dans la Péninsule depuis longtemps compte de nombreux membres nés en Italie.

«Cantatore s'est arrogé le droit d'associer les roms, en utilisant de manière dépréciative le terme +tziganes+, aux criminels!, a insisté M. Del Greco. Tout cela est inacceptable! C'est du racisme pur et injustifié! Et c'est encore plus inadmissible du fait que de telles déclarations émanent d'une personne publique: c'est un comportement inqualifiable, qui relève du code

pénal, et que la loi poursuit et punit justement avec la réclusion!».

«Aussi, conclut Antonio Del Greco, je souhaite et j'attends que les organes compétents prennent une mesure opportune et efficace, et aussi exemplaire que sa conduite a été exécrationnelle».

Cantatore, 36 ans, compte 33 victoires, dont 27 avant la limite, 1 nul et 4 défaites).

Source : cyberpresse.ca

<http://www.cyberpresse.ca/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20070711/CPSPORTS09/70711091/5026/CPDMINUTE&template=printart&print=1>

100 rom sgomberati da casa colonica a Bologna

12 luglio 2007

Un centinaio di rom sono stati sgomberati questa mattina verso le 8.30 a Bologna, dalla casa colonica abbandonata di via Malvezza, vicino all'ex clinica Villa Salus. Tra gli stranieri sgomberati, tutti regolari e occupati, ci sono anche una trentina di bambini.

L'operazione è stata condotta dagli uomini della Questura felsinea che hanno allontanato i cittadini romeni, li hanno identificati e invitati a trovare una residenza alternativa.

Fonte: Modena 2000

<http://www.modena2000.it/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=58125>

Lo ha annunciato il sindaco dopo l'incontro in Campidoglio con il vice ministro alla sicurezza Andreescu

Nomadi, arrivano gli esperti romeni

10 luglio 2007

Lavoreranno sui problemi dei minori e della prostituzione

I funzionari collaboreranno per tre mesi con la polizia municipale e con la polizia e, se funzionerà, il periodo potrà essere prorogato

Minori, prostituzione e campi rom: sono questi gli ambiti in cui lavoreranno i cinque funzionari della polizia romana arrivati ieri a Roma per dare un contributo fattivo alla polizia e all'assessorato capitolino delle Politiche sociali. I funzionari avranno una postazione negli uffici della vecchia Fiera di Roma e inizieranno i primi interventi sul campo. Lo ha annunciato il sindaco Walter Veltroni al termine dell'incontro con il vice ministro alla Sicurezza romeno, Anghel Andreescu, sull'emergenza rom nella Capitale.

«I funzionari lavoreranno per tre mesi assieme alla polizia municipale e alla polizia di Stato - ha aggiunto il sindaco - e se funzionerà, il periodo potrà essere prorogato. Al vice ministro romeno ho spiegato che sui fenomeni di criminalità ci deve essere un lavoro congiunto». Veltroni ha poi aggiunto che «questi funzionari lavoreranno su minori, progetto Roxanne e campi rom».

«Conoscono le lingue rom - ha concluso - e aiuteranno nelle operazioni di identificazione».

Il lavoro sarà svolto sul campo: soprattutto per quanto riguarda i campi Rom che saranno passati al setaccio per individuare quante persone sono dediti al borseggio e al furto. Anche la piaga del lavoro minorile verrà affrontata: ci sarà anzitutto un monitoraggio sull'accattonaggio infantile nelle strade della città. Ma non sarà escluso nemmeno l'accattonaggio fatto dalle donne con dei minori al seguito, talvolta bambini appena nati. I cinque funzionari romeni lavoreranno insieme agli intermediari culturali dell'assessorato alle Politiche sociali, in modo da avere un immediato riscontro sui problemi che verranno affrontati di volta in volta.

E poi c'è il problema delle tratta delle schiave, le romene costrette alla prostituzione, un problema molto sentito dal Campidoglio. Dal 1999, con il programma Roxanne, medici, psicologi, assistenti sociali e mediatori culturali sono entrati in contatto con cinquemila prostitute ogni anno, informandole sui rischi sanitari, sui problemi legati alla tutela della salute, distribuendo preservativi. Di queste, trecentocinquanta sono riuscite ad uscire dal mondo della prostituzione, denunciando i loro protettori e iniziando una nuova vita con un permesso di soggiorno regolare. Le ragazze hanno poi seguito corsi professionali, trovato un lavoro dignitoso, vivendo in strutture protette (a Roma ce ne sono quattro) o in appartamenti del Comune.

Per Veltroni «l'incontro di ieri è la prosecuzione della visita in Romania. E proprio oggi - ha concluso - è stata rimpatriata una persona che viveva in condizioni disastrose». Veltroni ha intrapreso il viaggio in Romania il mese scorso per chiedere il rimpatrio di un migliaio di romeni e per indurre gli imprenditori italiani che lavorano in Romania di assumere i romeni residenti in Italia dopo che questi abbiano svolto un corso di specializzazione professionale.

Anna Maria Liguori

Fonte: Espresso

<http://espresso.repubblica.it/dettaglio-local/Nomadi-arrivano-gli-esperti-romeni/1679155/6>

Romania

Rumänien: Ministerpräsident vor Antidiskriminierungsrat zitiert

10. Juli 2007

Wegen Ankündigung Tariceanus, "Maßnahmen gegen Roma, die in Italien Verbrechen begehen", treffen zu wollen

Berlin - Wegen diskriminierender Erklärungen gegenüber der Roma-Minderheit soll der rumänische Ministerpräsident Calin Popescu Tariceanu am heutigen Dienstag vor dem Nationalen Antidiskriminierungsrat auftreten. Tariceanu hatte vorige Woche angekündigt, Maßnahmen gegen die "Roma, die in Italien Verbrechen begehen", zu treffen und den Angehörigen dieser Minderheit vorgeworfen, sich "aller möglicher Verbrechen" schuldig zu machen.

Daraufhin schaltete die Nichtregierungsorganisation "Romani Criss", die die Belange der Roma-Minderheit vertritt, den Antidiskriminierungsrat ein. Allerdings wird sich der Ministerpräsident dabei von einem Berater vertreten lassen.

Laut Presseberichten hatte Ministerpräsident Tariceanu, Bezug nehmend auf den Skandal um rumänische Staatsangehörige, die in Italien zahlreiche Verbrechen verüben, vorige Woche bekannt gegeben, rumänische Polizeibeamte nach Italien zu schicken, die den italienischen Behörden "bei der Festnahme und Rückführung der Roma, die in Rom Verbrechen begehen",

behilflich sein sollen. Weiterhin beklagte der Ministerpräsident, "diese Roma machen sich aller möglicher Verbrechen schuldig, von Diebstahl und Prostitution bis hin zu organisierten Raubüberfällen und Drogenhandel".

Diese Äußerungen wurden von "Romani Criss" als diskriminierend empfunden. Auf Veranlassung der Organisation lud der Nationale Antidiskriminierungsrat beide Seiten für den heutigen Dienstag zur Anhörungen ein. Da sich der Ministerpräsident auf Arbeitsbesuch in der Provinz befinde, werde er dabei von seinem Rechtsberater vertreten, wurde heute in Bukarest bekannt gegeben. Ende Mai hatte der Antidiskriminierungsrat eine Rüge gegen den rumänischen Staatschef Traian Basescu wegen eines ähnlichen Vergehens ausgesprochen. Basescu hatte damals eine Journalistin als "stinkende Zigeunerin" beschimpft. (APA)

Quelle: Der Standard

<http://derstandard.at/?url=/?id=2953701>

The First Romani Mayor

4 July 2007

A small town near Bucharest makes history as it elects the country's first Rom to do a hugely difficult job.

BARBULESTI, Romania | The only paved road in Barbulesti, a town of about 6,000 some 50 kilometers north of Bucharest, cuts the mostly Romani village in two.

Alongside it sits the pink town hall. Nearby, shoddy houses sit behind tumbledown fences. Beside the houses is a cluster of 59 temporary homes, each about the size of a railway carriage. Installed by the Romanian government after the floods in the fall of 2005, the homes have no sewer and water facilities. Water comes from a single well, and there is one crude toilet, with a piece of hanging cloth for a door, to serve every 10 of the temporary shelters.

"When the wind blows a bit harder, the tin on our roofs flies off," said Dumitru Dragnea, the community's unofficial spokesman. "We run after it at night to put it back on the next day. ... We are 400 souls drinking from one well."

This forlorn place made a bit of history last year. In a country of 21 million, of whom an estimated 2 million are Roma, it elected Romania's first Romani mayor. Ion Cutitaru has set goals for Barbulesti that might seem modest anywhere else - ensuring its residents receive the proper state benefits, as well as building a police station and post office - but here they are lofty.

Plans and ambitions

One of Cutitaru's first actions in office was to get Barbulesti's residents the social aid they are entitled to legally. Early this year, the town hall had some 700 applications pending for the minimum social aid, up from 580 before Cutitaru's election.

"I want to fully ensure social aid for my people throughout my term. A kid can go to school if he has a bit of bread to eat," said Cutitaru, who at 55 stands about 168 centimeters tall and sports a gray pate.

He recently welcomed visitors into his paper-filled office, where there are

Romanian, European Union, and international blue-and-green Roma flags on his desk. Clearly tired after a long day of work, Cutitaru spoke calmly of his ambitious plans.

He wants to build a police station, a clinic, a veterinary clinic, a post office, and a cultural center for the Roma. "Now, we have nothing," he said.

Cutitaru also plans to pave the village's roads and to dam the nearby Ialomita river, which flooded the village in 2005 and destroyed more than 200 houses, leaving 300 people to take shelter in the village school.

"Very shortly, the village will get back to normal," Cutitaru said. "We'll receive funds from the county government. There are European funds for the Roma. As far as I understand, there will be 10 to 12 million euros for the Roma."

Nine months after his election, the mayor is still waiting for the county government, which disburses most public money, to pump cash into his village. Meanwhile, he said, his emphasis on getting aid for people has improved the town's tax collection rate, although he would not say by how much.

"You first give something to somebody and then you ask them for something," he said. "So we first offer people the minimum aid, guaranteed by the law, and then they pay their taxes to the state. We try through our local councilors to explain to people that they have rights and obligations."

But one critic says the taxes-for-aid approach is misguided.

"I don't really agree with people relying only on social aid. As long as they rely on 40 or 50 euros a month, that's a problem," said Leonida Mandache, president of the Ialomita County branch of the Roma Party Pro Europe. He said that in a typical family of seven or eight people receiving about 100 euros a month in benefits, at least three are people able to work for a proper salary and therefore to lead a normal life.

Jobs, jobs, jobs

Most agree that jobs are key for further development, but securing them is another issue. It is difficult to know what Barbulesti's real unemployment rate is, as most of the villagers have never worked legally and are therefore not entitled to the unemployment benefits received by someone who, for instance, worked legally in a company that went bust. Many leave temporarily to find work, or to beg, elsewhere.

In 2005 and 2006, the country's national employment agency experimented with a job exchange for Roma, funded jointly by the European Union and Romanian government. It was a failure, according to a source at the agency who asked not to be named. "The employment conditions were too tough," he said. "The lack of interest from employers and social actors, [such as schools, hospitals, and NGOs] combined with the lack of information about the exchange among Roma contributed to its failure."

The source said potential employers imposed absurd conditions. For example, a street-cleaning company required 10 years of education. Another company, the same source said, asked Roma applying for a window washer job to speak English.

"The jobs exchange was bollocks," Mandache said.

"We want to work, but we have no jobs," Dragnea, 55, added. "To work as guards, companies ask us for at least eight years of education. We live from the [aid to] children and social aid."

We have nothing else. Out of 400 people, only two or three work [in the village]. If we all had an education, it would be a different situation.”

Until 2 years of age, a poor child can receive state aid of 65 euros per month. After that, the figure is cut to 12 euros per month.

Even farming is not much of an option. Agriculture was practiced cooperatively under communism, but it declined after land reform gave people back their land without the money or resources to farm it. Long neglected now, the land has only become more difficult to work.

“Agriculture hasn’t been lucrative lately,” Cutitaru said. “It’s hard here in Barbulesti to work the land. We have no equipment, and the fields don’t cooperate.”

The village has some 100 hectares of agricultural land.

Today, many of Barbulesti’s Roma work as itinerate traders, mostly in textiles and clothing. “If you go to some fairs in the country ... you’ll find Roma from our village,” Cutitaru said.

The national employment agency’s Ialomita County branch plans to hire 150 Roma for three months later this summer to work for the community. They will receive a minimum salary from the agency, Mandache said.

But that is just a drop in the ocean. Cutitaru has promised to lobby the companies that will do modernization works in the village to hire Roma.

Climbing the ladder

Cutitaru was elected mayor in October 2006, three months after Barbulesti gained autonomy from a neighboring village and, therefore, the right to choose its own leader.

In a field of seven candidates, he took 55 percent of the vote in the first round.

Cutitaru also wins the title of village intellectual, locals say. He attended school for eight years, then took an apprenticeship to learn upholstery. He worked recently as a school mediator, aiming to get all of the village’s Romani children in school.

“I had a very difficult task,” Cutitaru said. “If children missed classes for three consecutive days, I went to their homes and talked to their parents to convince them to send them to school. The next day, I went to classes with them. I brought them pastries and milk. It was especially hard with the young children because they didn’t know Romanian at all. I had to teach them. Now, they’re in the second grade. I want to see where these kids go.”

Cutitaru is proud to have 12 high-school graduates, his own five children among them, in the village, especially considering that the nearest high school is some 20 kilometers away. “If [people] have an education, their mentality changes. It’s a long-term battle. It’s changing, in decades, not overnight. If you have 10 to 12 years of school, you find your way easier,” he said.

There are 1,100 children, mostly Roma, studying in Barbulesti’s school, a significant number in a town its size. Some villagers attribute the rate at least in part to Cutitaru’s efforts.

But not everyone has been impressed by Cutitaru. Dragnea said that the mayor has achieved little. “They distribute the social aid when they want,” Dragnea said of the government. “He hasn’t done anything so far.”

A member of the Roma Party Pro Europa, Cutitaru has been in politics for 16 years. Until

recently, he sat on the council for the town of Armasesti, of which Barbulesti was a part until last year. He was known there as the unofficial mayor of the Roma.

“I conducted my campaign by visiting everybody. I talked to everybody to get to know them,” Cutitaru said. “I thought before doing this. I calculated what problems I would encounter. ... If I can’t do what I planned, I won’t run for a new mandate. If I do what I planned, I’ll run for another mandate.”

He does not have much time. Cutitaru was elected in a special poll between two regular elections. Only a year and a half remains in his current term.

Daniel Ganga/Petru Zoltan

Source: Transition online

<http://www.tol.cz/look/TOL/article.tpl?IdLanguage=1&IdPublication=4&NrIssue=225&NrSection=3&NrArticle=18818>

Legacy of Shame

Health workers say too little is done to help the Romani community cope with an HIV infection rate that may be far higher than statistics suggest.

BUCHAREST, Romania | A small van edges onto a deserted street in northeast Bucharest. On the side of the vehicle, a glossy red ribbon - the international symbol of the struggle against AIDS - is almost unnoticeable in the darkness.

Here in this working-class neighborhood on the outskirts of town, no strings of blue lights hang from lampposts to celebrate Romania’s entry into the European Union like those you see in the downtown and shopping districts of the city.

In the front seat, Adrian Caraboi sighs and pushes his hand through his spiky blond hair. He normally moves at a breakneck pace, speeding around the city in this converted ambulance. Suddenly, he shifts to just above slow motion. If he’s going to have any success tonight, he must be patient. He takes another deep breath before jumping out.

Inside the van, there is a mobile HIV unit with three chairs, a large box of condoms, pamphlets, films and videos about prevention and a stack of rapid HIV antibody tests. Caraboi opens the back doors and a flood of light spills onto the street.

Faces start to peek out from cracks in the row of dilapidated buildings - the remnants of former dictator Nicolae Ceausescu’s housing policies that moved people from small family homes into flats. Some people call Adrian over to give him a high-five before they step out into the light.

Others are more confrontational. An older man yells with accusation and surprise, “You came back again, *gadjo!*” Caraboi just smiles and shakes the man’s hand. *Gadjo* is the word for outsider in the Romani language.

The few dozen people who make their way to the van four nights a week are some of the 5,000 Roma whom Caraboi visits each month. As part of his job as a project coordinator for the Romanian Association Against AIDS, or ARAS, Caraboi tries to convince Roma at risk for HIV to take antibody tests. It can take months or even years to persuade them because, as an outsider, he first has to earn the community’s trust. Since 2004, ARAS, which has eight offices

in the country, has tested 2,074 Roma out of a national population estimated at up to 2 million.

None of the health workers who deal with HIV in Romani communities knows how many Roma are infected with the virus, but they believe the numbers are much higher than the government health agencies or the Roma themselves will admit. Many Romani children lived in orphanages or received medical care in the late 1980s and early '90s, when as many as 11,000 children were accidentally infected with HIV at state institutions during the tail end of Ceausescu's reign.

The government started an official program offering free antiretroviral treatments for HIV in 2002, but few Roma have come forward to receive state aid. Discrimination, mistrust of state institutions, and reservations among many Roma to learn about and be tested for HIV could result in another generation of HIV-positive children.

The Health Ministry reports that there are only five cases of Roma with HIV or AIDS in the entire country, where the United Nations has recorded a cumulative 14,000 cases of HIV or AIDS. However, volunteer health workers on the ground say that close to 10 percent of the HIV patients they help are Roma.

At that rate, there may have been as many as 1,000 Roma who were infected in the original group of children, many of whom could have transmitted the disease without knowing it, and a large number of whom might have died without ever receiving treatment. Many Roma families still live in a climate of secrecy and mistrust making it hard to identify those infected.

It has largely been up to a small army of non-governmental associations to identify those Roma living with the virus and teach prevention methods. This is the complicated situation that Caraboi and other health workers are facing in their fight to have HIV recognized as even a potential problem among the country's Roma. It's a task that often requires more time and attention because of cultural traditions including adolescent marriage, home birthing, and a mistrust of birth control.

"The biggest problem," Caraboi says, "is getting [Roma] to stop thinking, 'No, no, no, I don't need the test. AIDS is not for me, not for us, it isn't here.' "

Medical misconceptions are difficult to overcome. Until recently condom use was rare among the Roma. "The worst thing anyone said is that I want them to take the condoms as a trick because I want them to have less babies and then there will be less Roma," Caraboi says. Some of the free condoms he convinces people to take are sold outside of the community for pocket money, he says.

Recipe for disaster

In a community as historically insular as the Roma, it is difficult to trace how a virus like HIV could be introduced. In 1990, when the accidental HIV infections first began to be reported, the groundwork had been laid under the Ceausescu regime. One of his first orders of business, after taking office in 1967, was increasing the population and workforce by outlawing family planning and abortions.

Then, over the course of two decades, Ceausescu drove the country into debt by building elaborate palaces and construction projects to "modernize" Romania. In the early 1980s he began imposing food and energy rations, he cut the budgets at social institutions, and began exporting fuel, food, timber, and anything else he could sell to reduce the national deficit.

The results were a high level of poverty and an increase in unwanted children. Romani

families, which were already traditionally large, also increased in size at this time because even though birth control had never been widely accepted, abortions were common among the Roma. Children of all ethnicities were now being dropped off at railway stations and churches, causing the population in orphanages to swell to an unmanageable number.

State institutions were forced to deal with slashed budgets. Hospitals resorted to reusing needles and other materials that could be rinsed or quickly sterilized. Blood, however, was in large supply because donors were paid a small fee. So, when the orphanage pantries were down to just powdered milk, it seemed like a good idea to give the smallest and weakest children whole blood transfusions under the theory that new blood would have more nutrients for their bodies to use.

It was the catalyst for a health crisis.

In 1988, only 20 percent of the blood being donated was tested for disease. For that year, the Romanian government reported three cases of HIV infection to the World Health Organization. For the next year, the number swelled to nearly 1,200. Nearly 96 percent of those cases were children under 4 years old, 65 percent of the children lived in orphanages, and all of them had a history of multiple transfusions. The children's epidemic was born.

After the 1989 revolution, the worst orphanages were closed. Several administrators who were interviewed by non-governmental organizations at that time said that up to 80 percent of the children in their care were Roma. But, because of a lack of record keeping, getting an accurate estimate of the number of Roma children in orphanages in the 1980s is nearly impossible. However, anecdotal evidence of a high number of Roma children in orphanages would suggest that the current government significantly underestimates the number of cases of HIV infection among Roma.

The Black Sea coastal city of Constanta is ground zero for Romania's HIV epidemic, the place where the first cases were found and the place where the most Roma cases of HIV have been reported to NGOs.

Courageous health worker

In the living room of an AIDS hospice for 10 teenagers in Mihail Kogalniceanu, about 30 minutes north of Constanta, Dr. Rodica Matusa places a plate of fried and sugared dough on the table. Her grandmotherly smile, tiny glasses and round red cheeks are deceptive.

This is the face of a medical revolution in Romania. She was the first doctor to diagnose HIV in the children who had transfusions, and the first to come forward with her findings. Matusa pulls her purple shawl tight around her shoulders. It's hard to picture her as a rebel, but at a time when police informers lurked everywhere, going against the government's wishes was deemed revolutionary defiance.

When young children started to get sick in 1988 and 1989, they were all sent to Matusa. Over a period of five days, nearly 200 children piled into Constanta Hospital. They were in the advanced stages of AIDS. Without treatment, the average life expectancy for an infant infected with HIV is about three years. As the age of infection rises, so does the life expectancy as long as the child receives proper nutrition and isn't exposed to illness.

These children who had been infected on average for less than three years were dying at the rate of 10 per day. There was no day clinic at the time to house all of them, no beds, no food because of budget cuts, no medicine because it had never been a problem before.

When Matusa informed the Health Ministry that children had died of AIDS complications, she

recalls, she was threatened and told to change the cause of death to pneumonia or diarrhea. The Health Ministry felt the number of AIDS cases Matusa was talking about would have made Romania look bad.

The Securitate, Ceausescu's secret police, began keeping files on Matusa, she says. HIV workers all over the country recount her stories almost like legends. All of them finish by describing how Matusa kept her own secret files of all the children with AIDS symptoms, hidden in a false compartment in her desk. She listed the cause of death as "SIDA" in red ink, she recalls, using the Romanian acronym for AIDS.

"I still have them in my office. They were under lock and key, but I have files for everyone so that we could track the disease," she says. "The worst part was telling their parents. We would just quickly say it because there was nothing else we could tell them."

Because blood wasn't being tested and transfusions were common in regular hospitals as well. "Anyone who went to the hospital with a small child was susceptible," Matusa says.

"This is not a disease of the Roma," she says, pronouncing each word carefully for emphasis. "Of course there are a few cases, but they are not the majority. We do not want people to think AIDS is a Roma disease."

The discrimination against HIV-positive people in Romania was profound. All of the children in the hospice were abandoned by their parents, who became frightened when they found out their sons and daughters were infected.

Matusa says the situation is starting to improve, at least for infected teens. The Health Ministry has started several public information campaigns to help spread public awareness, but many of the infected teens continue to keep their medical history a secret. Matusa is worried that the historic discrimination against the Roma will stunt the progress NGOs have had in gaining funding for programs and fighting public HIV discrimination.

Prejudice persists

While many Romanians still harbor prejudice against the Roma, those infected with the AIDS virus have an even harder time. HIV-positive Roma have to hide the fact that they were even tested for fear of being ostracized. A Romani teen in a small village 40 miles from Constanta said that if her village knew she was HIV positive, they would ask her and her family to stop using the community water well, reflecting widespread ignorance about how the virus can be spread.

The number of patients hiding their real identities in Constanta started to make an impression on Crina Gutui, an HIV/AIDS worker who is Romani. Gutui would record people's addresses on medical paperwork - addresses that were inside of Roma enclaves - but when she would write "Roma" under the space for ethnicity, people would correct her. "They would claim to be Turkish or Muslim, but I know their names, they are Roma last names," she says.

Gutui says she believes that is one reason why the official number of Roma with HIV is so low. Over time, a large number of Roma started identifying themselves as something else whenever they could.

However, Gutui says more importantly many Roma are unwilling to come forward. "They have more problems in the Roma community with HIV, but they hide it. It's shame about sexual disease. Even children infected don't know it's HIV, because their parents are ashamed they passed this disease to their children," she says. "I see so many people who just don't care enough. You really have to scare them, to tell them that this disease will make them die."

Gutui left ARAS after two years with the program to go back to the community where she was born in rural Braila County, in southeastern Romania. Working there is an uphill battle, she says.

“To get them tested, maybe it is one or two years, but you have to work for 10 years here before you will change the way of thinking,” Gutui says.

Technical difficulties

Back in Bucharest, Colentina Hospital is enormous, with more than a dozen wards and specialty units housed in a drab building. The hospital is guarded by armed security in the traditional navy blue jumpsuits and black berets of the government police services.

At the entrance on the east side of the hospital, a line of people stretches halfway down the block. Almost everyone in line is young. No one is laughing or talking, except to guess aloud when the iron gates will close. The remaining people will then be sent home. They are all dressed in layers of dark clothing with hoods, hats and scarves covering their hair and most of their faces to hide their identity.

Dr. Mariana Madarescu hurries through one of the hospital’s winding white stairwells, her arms crossed. As the head of Romania’s pediatric AIDS program, she is in charge of keeping all of the country’s HIV statistics. She rattles off statistics at the beginning of a tour of the hospital’s HIV/AIDS ward. There are 6,700 patients receiving treatment. Nearly 11,000 people have been infected, and the rest are being monitored until treatment with antiretroviral drugs becomes necessary.

Then she says, “There are five,” referring to the number of Roma infected. “It is not discrimination when there are only five cases of Roma diagnosed with HIV.”

The rooms are small and cramped with three beds and some dresser drawers in each. She hurries through introductions to some of the interim patients, starting with a three-day-old baby abandoned by her HIV-positive mother, who apparently was a prostitute. Health workers think the baby may be Romani. Madarescu says HIV tests show the baby is “100 percent” negative.

She waves hello to a 16-year-old mother, a runaway, who is one of the few people the doctor will admit might have gotten HIV through sexual intercourse. There are children with advanced AIDS who cannot leave their beds. They stare at the floor or the ceiling, alone in their rooms.

“Abandoned,” Madarescu says. They are all small for their age, 16 or 17, too skinny and fragile looking, as though their necks are having a hard time just supporting their heads. No one comes to visit them and for the ones who are in the last stage of the disease, no one will watch as their caskets leave the hospital.

The government started providing antiretroviral treatment to children in 1995, but the drugs were not widely available until a national AIDS action plan began in 2002. It did not include any specifics about how the drug program would continue to be funded, so until recently, foreign aid was the only way the program could keep going. It also did not include any programs to specifically address the Romani population.

“It is not a problem in the Roma community, and none of our programs are aimed at them specifically,” says Dr. Adrian Streinu, head of the infectious disease unit at Colentina Hospital. “Our first priority was treating HIV, and making treatment available to everyone.”

But critics say some Roma can't get treatment if they suspect infection or already are infected with the virus that can lead to AIDS. And there is another problem: access to medical care. Getting health coverage in Romania requires proof of citizenship, usually a birth certificate. This is not easily done for many Roma. In rural communities, Romani mothers have their babies at home and parents tend to not get birth certificates. Filling out paperwork for health insurance also can be an involved process. ARAS workers offer to accompany families to help them apply, Caraboi says.

"Doctors will refuse to see Roma if they do not have identification paper or insurance card," he says. When Roma test positive for HIV or other sexually-transmitted diseases, a representative of ARAS will accompany them to get treatments the first few times, in order to make sure they know where to go and what to do.

"Sometimes it doesn't matter, sometimes it is just discrimination. Some doctors will say they are unclean, or smell and refuse to treat them for those reasons," Caraboi says. "I have a special deal with a doctor I found. I pay him some money at the beginning of the year, and when I bring in Roma, he doesn't ask for ID cards. I mean, this is the way most of Romania works. Everyone pays a little extra to make sure doctors take good care of them."

Government defends policies

Vlad Iliescu, an official in the Health Ministry, defends the government's health policies as open to all Romanians.

"When you talk about HIV, there is no special access for a certain category of people. Anyone is eligible for the free ARV [antiretroviral] treatments or any of the programs we offer. We don't tailor them for any particular group," he says. "We do have programs that address Romani healthcare needs. Out of roughly 8,900 community nurses there are 300 dedicated solely to the Romani communities."

But voluntary associations and non-governmental organizations remain at the vanguard of helping the Romani community. A priest in Craiova, two hours west of Bucharest, talks to Romani teens about condoms, abstinence, and the effects of HIV. A doctor at Colentina Hospital makes sure to set aside a box of pamphlets that detail how new mothers can transmit HIV to their children through natural birth and breastfeeding. It will go to social services programs that work with the Romani community.

There are missions and churches that focus solely on taking Romani teen prostitutes off the street and getting them into group homes or schools. One group donates crates of condoms to ARAS.

Caraboi returns to the ARAS office. Tonight he is going to a new neighborhood, a little farther away. He stacks two boxes of condoms, counts out 100 HIV tests, and makes sure to bring extra paper pamphlets to hand out.

He takes a deep breath and prepares to begin again.

"I will get them to take the tests, and in one year," Caraboi says opening the van doors, "when I return to test them a second time and they still don't have [HIV] then I am successful. Then I will be happy."

Claudia Lauer

Source: Transition online
<http://www.tol.cz/look/TOL/article.tpl?IdLanguage=1&IdPublication=4&NrIssue=225&NrSection=3&NrArticle=18814>

Serbia/Kosovo

Serbian Returnees Left to Fend for Themselves in Sandzak

11 July 2007

Former Bosniak and Roma refugees, deported from Western Europe, are being dumped in Serbia's most isolated and remote region.

Djijan Osmanovic, a nine-year-old Roma knows barely a word of his Roma mother tongue. Nor does he know much Serbian, the language of the country his family comes from and in which he now lives.

Playing among the ruined houses with his friends in the Novi Pazar settlement of Savci, he prefers to chatter away in the German he learned while living abroad.

Born to refugee parents in Germany, Djijan's family moved later to Denmark. But in 2004, when he was seven, his family was deported back to Novi Pazar, the largest town in Serbia's isolated and mainly Muslim Sandzak region.

In the settlement of Savci, where his family now lives among 37 repatriated families, many prefer speaking German to Serbian or Roma.

This is certainly the case among most of the 80 or so children attending Savci's primary school.

"I had to learn German to speak with my mates," little Djijan says in fluent German. "Now I'm trying to learn Serbian in school but it's a big problem because I don't know the language and everything is different here."

His father, Saban, says Djijan and his other children did not resume schooling immediately on their return to Serbia mainly because the children did not know the language.

In Sandzak, a region lying at the junction of three state borders, Serbian, Montenegrin and Bosnian, about 50,000 people have returned since 2000.

Most left this part of Serbia in the Nineties on account of the wars in the region, the Belgrade government's discrimination against non-Serb minorities and a pervasive feeling of social insecurity.

Most have returned to Novi Pazar, followed by neighbouring Sjenica, where according to the statistics every fourth citizen is a repatriate.

The biggest number by far returned from Germany - as much as 70 per cent. The next largest numbers came from Holland, Sweden, Denmark and Luxembourg. The highest rate of return was recorded in 2003 and 2004, when an average of 900 to 1,000 people arrived back each month.

Reintegration, a local organization in Sandzak dealing with these people, says every third repatriate was deported, which means they did not return voluntarily.

Kadrija Mehmedovic, president of Reintegration, told Balkan Insight that while ignorance of the national language was the children's biggest problem it was not the only obstacle repatriates

face when trying to readjust. "On average, these Sandzak families stayed abroad for around 12 years," Mehmedovic notes.

"As many as 80 per cent of the child repatriates aged 12 or under was born abroad, more than half speak no Serbian and more 30 per cent did not resume their education," he adds.

Mehmedovic says that on return to Serbia, the repatriates faced both poverty and unemployment, and he especially laments the government's failure to put in place special programmes to help child repatriates resume education.

The criticisms appear well founded. Serbia has no real repatriation strategy for the returnees and has opened no reception centres to help them. Many left their personal documents in the countries from which they returned. A lot of things have changed in Serbia in the meantime.

Safet Osmanovic says that when he returned to Savci he found his house ruined and overgrown with bushes. He and his wife are unemployed, like the majority of repatriates.

"Only 2 per cent of repatriates have got permanent jobs and none has returned to the job they had before leaving," Mehmedovic explains.

Hajrija Redzovic left for Germany in 1999, settling in the town of Wilhelmhaven at a centre for asylum-seekers.

In Germany, she immediately obtained refugee rights to welfare assistance and gave birth to a daughter. But on the basis of an agreement that Serbia signed with 17 host countries in western Europe last July, Redzovic was deported back to Serbia along with her daughter Emma and her husband.

"Four policemen came to my apartment at 6am and said we had an hour to pack," she recalls. "The luggage could not exceed 36 kilograms, which is what we carried to the plane. I came back with hardly anything."

On return to her homeland, Redzovic faced numerous problems. She had no personal documents and her daughter had no certificate of registration and was not admitted into the Serbian birth registry.

Numerous Roma and Bosniak returnees have also been re-settled in Sandzak even though they are not from the region, but from Kosovo. Sandzak is close to Kosovo and repatriation to Kosovo itself is out of the question on account of Albanian hostility.

Hamid Pepic is one of them. After his house in Kosovo was destroyed during the 1999 war, he sought asylum for several years in the Netherlands. But now he has been sent back to Serbia to live in Sandzak with his six-member family. With no ties to the area, he has no source of income, either.

Under the Geneva Convention, people from former Yugoslavia who left for countries in Western Europe were entitled to claim refugee status because their minority and basic human rights had either been violated or were clearly in danger. But after the conditions were created for those rights to be restored, Serbia was obliged to accept back those citizens, on the basis of which Belgrade signed readmission agreements with 17 Western host countries.

Georg Einwaller, of the German embassy in Serbia, says more bilateral work is needed to help returnee families in Sandzak who have spent years outside Serbia and forgotten its language and culture.

“We have to work together with our colleagues in Serbia on their reintegration and on the improvement of their position,” he said. “By solving the problem of documentation, we can also help them exercise their rights to social and health insurance and education.”

But Kadrija Mehmedovic emphasizes that besides international institutions, local authorities and the non-government sector, Serbia’s own government needs to assist the process as well.

Marija Vojinovic, assistant director of the Serbian Service for Human and Minority Rights, the only state organization indirectly dealing with the repatriates, agrees. She estimates that as many as 150,000 people may return to Serbia over this year and next year, half of whom will be Bosniaks from Sandzak.

Vojinovic claims the Service for Human and Minority Rights devised a strategy and an action plan; the problem was that it was not being implemented.

Hannelore Valier, head of the OSCE mission in Serbia’s democratisation department, says if the issue the returning refugees is not handled with greater sensitivity, there will be trouble down the line. It could be “a danger for the region’s stability”, she warns.

Zoran Maksimovic

Source: Balkan Investigative Reporting Network

<http://www.birn.eu.com/en/92/10/3562/>

Gypsies in Belgrade slums without basic needs

5 July 2007

BELGRADE, Serbia - Piles of garbage, dirt and mud are everywhere. There is no running water, no electricity. Yet, Mica Tulipovic and his family have no other home.

"Rats here are as big as cats!" the 37-year-old man tells a visitor. "This is no life."

The Tulipovics, Mica, his wife, Biljana, and their six children, aged 2-13, are among tens of thousands of Gypsies, or Roma, living in the Belgrade slums, or "the cardboard settlements," as they are called here.

The Gypsies, one of Europe's most segregated and neglected ethnic groups, are the sole residents of these makeshift enclaves, perched alongside fancy hotels or first-class residential complexes in the Serbian capital. The Belgraders mostly turn their heads from these settlements, regarding them as "tumors" in the body of their city.

What's worse, the enclaves are targeted by skinheads and other extremists who often come in the middle of the night to attack the slums' beleaguered residents.

The Gypsies have occasionally organized their own guards and nightwatch to defend themselves since there has been no systematic response from the state to protect the slums, despite pledges by the police to hunt down the attackers.

"This is true hardship," Tulipovic says. "I just wish it would end sometime."

The deplorable situation of the Belgrade Gypsies has come into focus recently as Serbia strives to reconnect with mainstream Europe following years of wars and international isolation.

There are no exact figures for the number of Gypsies living in Serbia. The numbers vary from 100,000 to 500,000, as the Gypsies often stay out of the system, failing to register themselves or their children.

As part of pro-Western reform, the Serbian government approved a national strategy in 2005 to integrate its Gypsies into the society and provide for their basic needs, such as health and social services. Earlier this year, a Roma representative was elected in the Serbian parliament, in what is considered a significant step in the community's efforts at better positions in the society.

Tulipovic says all this means little to those most in need. "We don't have money for anything, we pick food from garbage containers, we fight the rats during the night," he goes on. "This is no life."

One look at Tulipovic's "house" says it all. It consists of pieces of tin, old carpets, cardboard or anything that can be put up to serve as a wall or a ceiling.

On the floor, directly on the sticky black mud, are more old carpets, a stove, stinky mattresses that serve as beds for the kids and the rest of the family. Nearby, naked children play in the dirt amid a swirl of flies hovering above piles of garbage.

Dogs and cats roam around. A man is making a pitiful attempt to clean around his "home" with an old broom. A child comes running, holding a ragtag toy. "Who are you?" the black-eyed girl asks, unaccustomed to visitors. "Would you like to sit down with us?"

Her name is Serijana, and she is 10. Like many Gypsy children, Serijana does not go to school, does not know how to write or read. Together with her parents, Serijana picks up leftovers from garbage containers to survive, or sells old paper. "We are waiting," her father, Ilija Jovanovic, 40, says. "You all know we are here, why don't you help us?"

The Belgrade city authorities in the past have tried to move the Gypsies from some of the slums to other residential areas, but have faced strong protest from local residents rejecting the Gypsy company in their neighborhoods.

The conflict triggered criticism from human rights organizations, amid warnings by the Roma groups that such segregated lives deprived their people of basic rights, such as those to health service or education.

Dr. Oliver Petrovic, from the UNICEF mission in Belgrade, agreed that the position of the Gypsies in the slums, particularly the children, was alarming. Petrovic said that a UNICEF study, conducted in 2005-2006 on about 10,000 women and children from the settlements, showed that most of the Gypsy children suffered from "chronic malnutrition," which leads to bad health and "three times higher mortality rate than the national average."

About 80 percent of the Gypsy children enrol in the obligatory primary schools, but only 20 percent actually graduate, Petrovic said, adding that the Gypsy children "slip out" along the way, a trend that must be halted.

"We must stop that vicious circle," he said. "It is all tied to their lack of education, their ignorance."

Back in the slum, Mica Tulipovic says he does not have the money to buy books and proper clothes for his children to go to school. And he fears his children will face rejection by other children and teachers, who often treat the Gypsies as outcasts.

"There is nothing I want more than to live normally and have my children go to school so they can become clever," his wife adds. But with a ramshackle shelter and not so much as a good meal in their bellies, what hope is there for a better life?

Source: Associated Press

<http://www.serbianna.com/news/2007/01951.shtml>

Serbia Sidelines Roma Rights Campaign

'Decade of Roma Inclusion' inspires much talk but little action.

In a Roma settlement on the outskirts of Belgrade, yards from the luxurious Hyatt Hotel, a cardboard shack of about 10 square metres, housing three beds and a stove, is home to a Roma family of four.

One-year-old Zorica Azemovic sleeps in an improvised hammock that stretches across the flea-infested room.

Her father, Miroslav, has barely slept for months, fearing a repetition of the drama when a rat almost bit off his daughter's ear.

"It was about 10.30pm and Zorica started crying," he said. "I jumped out of my bed and saw her bloodied ear. She was in hospital for a week and I've been awake ever since."

Rat attacks on children are a routine ordeal for the 200 or so families living in the settlement, close to Belgrade's main motorway.

Most of the Roma living there have moved to Belgrade from the impoverished southern town of Leskovac and other areas in the south.

"A day's work in Leskovac is enough to buy you a sack of potatoes or beans, while you can earn up to 2,000 dinars [25 euro] in Belgrade by collecting and selling scrap cardboard; that's quite an income," Miroslav said.

The grim living conditions that the Azemovic family puts up with are the norm for many Roma families in Serbia.

Two years ago, Serbia's Prime Minister, Vojislav Kostunica, signed Serbia up to a regional programme aimed at improving the position of Roma throughout Central and South-east Europe.

The other countries involved in the programme are the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Macedonia, Croatia and Montenegro.

However, governments have taken only token steps so far to live up to the words contained in the declaration, "A Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015."

Most Roma in Serbia have never heard of the document and know nothing about how they might benefit from it.

"I don't know what my rights are nor who to talk to," Azemovic said.

Poor living conditions, a lack of health care and no education are the main problems the declaration is supposed to tackle.

In 2006, the Serbian government duly passed action plans aimed at improving Roma education, health care, housing and employment, allocating special funds for their implementation. The Health Ministry allocated 60 million dinars or 750,000 euros, to Roma health care, for example.

Ljuan Koka, head of the government's secretariat for implementing the Roma Strategy plan within the Department for Human and Minority Rights, said they had made most progress over education, while efforts to lower unemployment within the community had fallen well short of the target.

"We have been able to set up working groups in various ministries and what we want to do now is to get a clear picture of who's spending the money and how," Koka said.

"We don't have a political agenda, as our project is mainly financed by the OSCE mission in Serbia, while the government has given us the premises to work in," Koka went on.

Koka admitted the position of Serbia's Roma community remained far worse than that of the general population. Child mortality among Roma was four times higher the rate among the majority population.

Average life expectancy is only 47, compared to an average of 75 in Serbia as a whole.

Very few Serbs grow up totally illiterate, while among Roma, Koka said, "More than 75 per cent are essentially illiterate; a meagre 0.3 per cent have degrees of any kind".

These disadvantages impact on their project prospects. Only around 27 per cent of adult Roma are economically active as opposed to almost 70 per cent of the mainstream population.

Apart from illiteracy, lack of documents is a major problem, as this prevents Roma from gaining access to local services.

Many Roma are not even registered as legal residents and have no identification cards, health records and passports.

It also means no one has a clear idea of the size of their community. While the Roma population in Serbia officially stands at 108,000 it is widely believed the real number ranges from 450,000 to 800,000.

In spite of their size, politically, they remain a marginal force. It was only at this January's elections that candidates representing Serbia's biggest ethnic minority won two seats in parliament for the first time. These were Rajko Djuric, head of Serbia's Roma Union, and Srdjan Sajn, leader of the Roma Party.

Djuric said the prevalent anti-Roma sentiment in Serbia reflected the general climate of racism in the country. He blamed the community's plight on a lack of political will for and said the government still treated Roma problems as a second-class issue.

"The future is bleak for all of us unless Serbia becomes a more democratic society and takes a decisive step to curb right-wing extremism," Djuric said.

Sajn maintains that if progress is to be made towards meeting goals by the 2015 target date, an effort needs to be made in setting up an institutional framework for the campaign, assembling competent staff and building a non-government sector capable of addressing the problem

"The current funds are being misspent as many people have joined the Roma integration

project for their own personal benefit,” Sajn complained.

During the run-up to the January elections, Sajn’s Roma Party promised to provide 500 apartments for the neediest families, find jobs for 10,000 people and allocate 50 million dinars from the state budget to aid Roma students and teachers.

“We have to see concrete results this year and we will only support the government if it clearly defines the measures it intends to take in that direction,” Sajn said.

Koka said the election of two Roma deputies was a step forward but would not resolve their problems alone. “One or two deputies can’t change anything, while they can easily cancel each other out if they end up supporting rival camps in parliament,” he pointed out.

Bozidar Jaksic, a sociologist, said the position of the Roma community was made more difficult by the fact that, like other ethnic groups in Serbia, they tended to rally only behind narrowly defined “ethnic” issues.

“Their diverse culture is their greatest wealth and not a handicap,” Jaksic said.

Jaksic said he saw the integration formula as a cliché, bearing in mind that Roma had lived in the region for centuries; what they needed was not “integration” but emancipation.

“The sole purpose of the integration story is to turn the Roma into something they are not,” he went on.

As the legal successor of the former Serbia-Montenegro state union, Serbia has inherited the old state’s international human rights commitments, which include its obligations to the Roma community.

Serbia is also a member of the European Human Rights and Civil Liberties Convention on protecting national minorities and the European Charter on minority and regional languages.

While in theory these commitments and Serbia’s constitution guarantee Roma rights, in practice, according to Roma journalist Dragoljub Ackovic, discrimination is alive and well and even getting worse.

In some ways, he went on, the position of Roma had markedly deteriorated.

“We even had our own newspaper until 1935 while now we no longer have our own media outlet,” he noted.

The Serbian broadcasting agency had recently banned the Roma Amaro Dom television and Krlo e Romego radio stations, he went on.

Although Roma groups protested to the justice minister, the broadcasting agency insisted the stations did not fulfill basic technical and staffing criteria for the renewal of their licenses.

“All our effort to get air time on Belgrade state television have also been fruitless,” Ackovic continued.

Now the community’s hopes are increasingly pinned on the EU, which Serbia hopes eventually to join.

Countries aspiring to join the European club have to incorporate an anti-discrimination law into their constitutions.

Late last year, a draft bill was presented to the Serbian parliament though it still has not been passed.

Daliborka Mucibanic

Source: Balkan Investigative Reporting Network

<http://www.birn.eu.com/en/91/10/3478/>

Romani return to the Mitrovica Mahalla marred with problems

A number of Roma, Ashkalia and Egyptian (RAE) families who were displaced in Serbia and a small part of the those who were in 2006 relocated to Osterode camp, started to return to South Mitrovica where a joint UN/non-governmental organisation project is placing camp residents in newly constructed homes, according to a press release by the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) of 30 March 2007. Since 1999, approximately 700 RAE originally from Roma mahala in South Mitrovica who fled to North Mitrovica to escape violence have been living in IDP camps subject to lead poisoning and dire living conditions.

According to UNMIK, the move is part of a multi-pronged effort by the provisional government of Kosovo, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the UN Development Program (UNDP), and UNMIK, with funding from the Norwegian Foreign Ministry, the Swedish International Development Agency and the European Agency for Reconstruction, amongst others. The programme was launched in response to scandals surrounding lead poisoning in several camps for IDPs in and around Mitrovica.

The programme aims to resettle 102 families, or more than 500 RAE, in the new homes by the end of the summer 2007. At the time of the UNMIK press release, 24 flats and 54 houses were completed, and another 24 flats under construction. The Scandinavian organisations Norwegian Church Aid and Danish Refugee Council undertook the construction of the new homes. However, according to a report in the Pristina newspaper Koha Ditore of 5 March, 36 houses for 57 families had been completed.

On 24 April, the ERRC travelled to Mitrovica to examine progress in the return of Roma, Ashkalia and Egyptians from the IDP camps to the new homes, constructed on the territory of the former Roma mahala. Discussions with local RAE representatives, camp residents and an examination of the new homes revealed a different situation and indicated serious concerns with the "Return to the Roma Mahala" project.

Residents of the Osterode IDP camp complained to the ERRC that since December 2006, humanitarian food aid had been cut for residents of that camp. In addition, doctors who had regularly checked the health status of children in the camp had also stopped coming since January 2007. At the same time as services are being cut in the camps, Mr Skender Gusani, a representative of the residents of the former Romani mahala and himself a resident of one of the IDP camps implicated in the lead poisoning scandal, informed ERRC staff members that the process of moving camp residents to the newly built houses was extremely problematic. Mr Gusani's primary concern related to the fact that while 57 families had moved into the new flats and houses, only 13 of those families had been living in the IDP camps in Northern Mitrovica. The majority of the families given housing in the new buildings were reportedly Romani, Ashkalia and Egyptian returnees from Serbia, Montenegro, Croatia, other parts of Kosovo, and elsewhere.

Indeed, the first house in the reconstruction area the ERRC approached was inhabited by a family who had returned from Montenegro, to live in their new home. Under such circumstances, the success of the response of the international community involved in the "Return to the Roma Mahalla" project, intended to move Roma, Ashkalia and Egyptians away from the hazardous living conditions in the camps, is questionable. Mr Gusani informed the ERRC that the reason for this absurd situation stemmed from the fact that the Steering Group established to make decisions related to the allocation of the new flats and houses was comprised entirely of UNMIK, UNHRC, OSCE and Mitrovica Municipality representatives, with not a single member of the RAE community. According to Mr Gusani, he had requested to sit on the Steering Group but was told that he could participate as an observer only. One day before the ERRC visit, on behalf of his organisation, Association for Protecting Roma Rights, Mr. Gusani sent an open letter to all relevant actors, describing the problems and highlighting mistakes in the assignment of housing and lack of response from UNMIK authorities.

New housing in the Mitrovice Romani Mahalla, built by Norwegian Church Aid and Danish Refugee Council with international funding. The quality of the houses built and civil planning of the area leave much to be desired. Photo credit: Tara Bedard/ERRC

Mr Gusani also voiced discontent to the ERRC on behalf of the Roma, Ashkalia and Egyptian community with the fact that ownership of the new houses was not being passed to the occupants. Property rights were given to the occupants in the form of 99-year leases. Mr Gusani expressed great frustration with this given that houses were intended for those Roma, Ashkalia and Egyptians who had legally owned their houses in the mahala before the war.

In addition to the obvious problems in the return process, the ERRC noted that the condition of the houses built under the supervision of Danish Refugee Council (DRC) were of very poor quality. The houses built with large red bricks, were, though families had already moved in, not finished on the outside, leaving the houses in an apparent condition on non-completion. The red bricks were themselves both the outer and inner walls, with no form of insulation included in the construction; the interior walls had merely been painted white. At the same time, there was no heating system installed in the houses. The houses were heated by electric heaters purchased by the occupants. Almost all of the homes were constructed on multiple levels, and one house visited by the ERRC had stairs on the outside of the structure which the occupants had to use to move between their sleeping area and their living, eating and sanitary area. Given the winter weather in Kosovo, such conditions are highly inadequate.

Planning of the area was done in a haphazard manner. Some houses had been built within one metre of each other, while others were without any neighbouring structure for around 100 metres. Rubble and dust had not been covered with grass or stone and in the windy weather on the day of the ERRC visit, dust and dirt filled the air making it impossible to be outside in the area. Further information on the situation of Roma, Ashkalia and Egyptians in Kosovo is available at: <http://www.errc.org/cikk.php?cikk=2511>.

Source: ERRC: Roma Rights 1-2/2007

<http://www.errc.org/cikk.php?cikk=2827>

Slovakia

Polizei-Homepage in der Slowakei mit rassistischen "Witzen"

12. Juli 2007

Computerexperten vergaßen Diskriminierungen aus Arbeitsversion zu löschen
Auf einer offiziellen Polizei-Homepage in der Slowakei waren tagelang vulgäre und rassistische Witze über Homosexuelle, Blondinen und Angehörige der Roma-Minderheit zu lesen. Erst als der

Fernsehsender TA3 das Innenministerium auf die anstößigen Inhalte aufmerksam machte, wurden sie gelöscht.

Eine Polizeisprecherin kündigte am Donnerstag disziplinaire Konsequenzen gegen die schuldigen Computerexperten der Polizei an. Sie hätten die diskriminierenden Äußerungen "zum Spaß" in die Arbeitsversion der Homepage eingebaut und vor deren offizieller Inbetriebnahme für die Öffentlichkeit zu löschen vergessen. (APA/dpa)

Quelle: Der Standard

<http://derstandard.at/?url=/?id=2956756>

Spain

Treinta años viviendo en una chabola

12 de Julio 2007

Manuel llegó con unos diez añitos y allí sigue, a pesar de que tiene más de 40. Eso sí, su casa no ha sido siempre la misma. Primero estaba muy próxima a Torreblanca, en el término de Sevilla, pero el alcalde de la capital en 1992, Alejandro Rojas Marcos, pensó que el asentamiento no cuadraba con la imagen de modernidad de la ciudad de la Expo y le dio solución: obligar a los chabolistas a desplazarse unos metros y ubicarse en término de Alcalá de Guadaíra. ¿Problema resuelto?, para Sevilla, porque allí siguen desde entonces. Ayer el Ayuntamiento alcalaño derribó seis chabolas en un intento de regularizar la zona o, al menos, evitar que el asentamiento siga creciendo. No es la primera vez que el Consistorio de Alcalá procede a derribos de este tipo. Cada vez que le indican que algunas han quedado vacías las derriba para evitar que el poblado siga creciendo

Manuel ha crecido en este asentamiento situado junto a Torreblanca, entre el camino de Peromingo y la carretera que va desde la A-92 a Mairena del Alcor, y en cuyos márgenes se reparten naveas industriales. Allí llegó con su padre, que fue durante mucho tiempo el patriarca del asentamiento. Ahora, ha heredado el título y es quien pone algo de orden en el poblado. Allí viven unos 40 matrimonios con sus correspondientes hijos, según el propio patriarca, que no sabría precisar el número de niños. El Ayuntamiento de Alcalá estima que son algunas familias más y que puede haber unos 70 niños en edad escolar. Lo que aquí no siempre es sinónimo de que vayan al colegio. En cualquier caso, el número es variable y depende de los trabajos que les vayan saliendo a las familias, normalmente en ferias y fiestas de los pueblos. Ahora en verano, el asentamiento está en temporada baja.

El propio Manuel y las familias que llevan más tiempo en el poblado dictan las reglas en el mismo. Son ellos quienes señalan al Ayuntamiento las chabolas que puede derribar. Ayer fueron seis, que cayeron sin que hubiera ningún tipo de protesta. Al revés, una señora mayor reclamaba que echaran abajo algunas más. Se trata de chabolas abandonadas o cuyos ocupantes se han marchado a trabajar a otro lugar temporalmente. El problema es que al estar vacías se convierten en refugio de drogadictos y de personas ajenas al asentamiento que pueden traerles problemas y cambiar los modos de convivencia. Los rumanos son particularmente temidos.

En el poblado de Torreblanca casi todos son gitanos, los hay de Sevilla, los primeros que llegaron; portugueses y procedentes de Valencia. La convivencia es, en líneas generales, buena, hasta el punto de que se dan matrimonios entre ellos. Aunque hay quien la distorsiona. El hermano de Manuel causa problemas, según él mismo reconoce. Su adicción a las drogas provoca que en ocasiones aparezca por allí y robe a diestro y siniestro.

Es un mundo con sus propias reglas, medios de vida y leyes. Tan es así, que el Ayuntamiento alcalaño ha optado por la fórmula de la colaboración a la hora de paliar carencias. Por su parte, Manuel anuncia su firme decisión de no permitir la construcción de nuevas chabolas, todo lo más autorizará a colocar algún toldo para que familias de paso entren una feria y otra pasen algún tiempo, «no más de cuatro o cinco días», afirma. Su autoridad en el asentamiento es incuestionable. Hace poco, él y su mujer obligaron a diez personas a marcharse de allí. No pudo ser por las buenas, como demuestran las cicatrices de los cortes que luce en la cara. También intentó derribar varias chabolas atando los palos que las sostienen a su furgoneta. Pero las construcciones son más sólidas de lo que parecen y le resultó imposible.

Ayer la máquina del Ayuntamiento tenía que emplearse a fondo, ya que las construcciones contaban incluso son solería. El resto de materiales de estas edificaciones son muy diversos, pero la experiencia indica a estas personas como darles solidez. Hay desde chapas, hasta muestrarios de azulejos, pasando por un amplio repertorio de paneles de madera, restos de uralita o trozos de gomas. Las lavadoras suelen estar fuera y dentro es normal que haya televisores. Hay chabolas que tienen una especie de merendero en el exterior y algunas cuentan con corral, donde se crían gallos de pelea. Otra tiene una piscina hinchable y muchas cuentan con un porche en el que tomar el fresco por la noche. Estos días, cuando el calor aprieta, es normal que se saquen los colchones fuera, puesto que el calor se hace asfixiante en su interior.

Urbanismo particular

La zona cuenta con su propio urbanismo. El camino pecuario a cuyos lados están las chabolas fue arreglado por el Ayuntamiento y funciona como calle mayor. Los pocos árboles que hay los han sembrado ellos mismos ya que los mayores recuerdan que aquello estaba «todo pelao» cuando llegaron. La luz la toman de los cables que pasan por lo alto y el agua de la tubería general, donde los técnicos les abrieron una llave de paso.

Estas mínimas infraestructuras en poco palían unas condiciones de vida impensables para la mayoría. El calor es insoportable. En invierno buena parte se inunda y en verano proliferan charcos en una zona casi pantanosa, como demuestran los juncos que crecen. Los mosquitos e insectos son, por lo tanto, bandadas afectadas de superpoblación. Las culebras recorren las malas hierbas y entran en las casas. Y respecto a las ratas, los habitantes hablan de prodigios zoológicos: «cuando van corriendo las ratas se confunden con conejos de grandes que son» afirma uno; «entran en las casas por más que se tapen los huecos», dice otro; «yo he visto a una saltar por encima de la cama», explica una mujer.

Pero aquello es su hogar. Afirman que para irse les tienen que dar una casa o el dinero para comprar una. Ahora están a la espera de una reunión con los responsables de servicios sociales del Ayuntamiento y aguardan a ver si les proponen alguna solución. Pero después de treinta años no tienen mucha esperanza. A la llegada de las máquinas que iban a derribar las chabolas no reclamaban una solución definitiva sino algo que aliviara en algo su situación. Uno de los vecinos le decía a la policía «a ver si me podéis quitar con la máquina las hierbas de delante de mi puerta». No parece que tenga mucha intención de abandonar el «barrio» en el que ha vivido durante treinta años.

El Ayuntamiento de Alcalá derribó ayer seis construcciones en el asentamiento junto a Torreblanca.
Alberto Mallado

Fuente: ABC de Sevilla

http://sevilla.abc.es/20070712/sevilla-sevilla/treinta-anos-viviendo-habola_200707120317.html

Sweden

Housing market sees rise in ethnic discrimination

8 July 2007

The Ombudsman against Ethnic Discrimination (Diskrimineringsombudsman - DO) has begun an investigation into the housing market as the number of complaints continues to increase.

Over the last five years DO has received a total of 314 reports of landlords discriminating against people with non-Swedish ethnic backgrounds. The first half of this year has already seen 43 complaints, compared to 60 for all of last year.

According to DO, groups most likely to be discriminated against are Africans, Roma, Muslims and people from Middle Eastern countries.

"We have come across terrible situations whereby people have become trapped in ghetto-like areas. They have often applied for hundreds of apartments in an attempt to get out of the areas in which they have been placed. It is a situation that breeds despair," John Stauffe, DO's lawyer and project manager, told Svenska Dagbladet.

None of the cases reported to DO have resulted in a single court decision. The ombudsman's office has however instigated proceedings on five occasions, most recently in the case of a Roma woman evicted from her apartment in Sundsvall.

Legal proceedings are underway in a further three cases. In the fifth case, an out of court settlement has been reached, with the tenant receiving 20,000 kronor (\$2,900) in compensation from the landlord.

Source: The Local

www.thelocal.se/7825/

United Kingdom

Report focuses on needs of travellers

8 July 2007

A report has been published highlighting the needs of the gipsy and traveller communities across Cheshire.

Local authorities have been carrying out research to assess the needs of travellers and make recommendations for their future accommodation requirements.

The details published in the report will allow local authorities to agree more robust working arrangements to deal with unlawful encampments.

Clr David Topping, from Congleton Borough Council, said: "We have had an established gipsy and traveller population within the borough for as long as anyone can remember and it is important that we continue to include their housing needs just as we plan for the needs of all residents."

Gipsy presence has been a controversial subject for some people in Middlewich for years as they make up the biggest ethnic minority group in Cheshire and only last weekend a group of travellers set up camp on the cemetery extension field much to the dismay of nearby residents.

As the gipsy population remains strong across the county, Middlewich High School has attempted to broaden the links and understanding between the travelling and non-travelling community by holding a cultural diversity day aimed to encourage acceptance between the two communities.

As reported in the Guardian last week the day was hailed a success and pupils came away from the day with a deeper knowledge and respect for the minority group.

However comments left on our website have been less supportive towards the travelling community.

One reader called Crusader said: "Promoting tolerance and understanding goes both ways. "Ask yourself why Cheshire has so many Gypsies. It is because we are tolerant but all they seem to do is cause trouble."

What do you think about the gipsy and traveller presence in Middlewich? Click on comment or the link to the forum, below.

Hayley Collins

Source: This is Cheshire

http://www.thisischeshire.co.uk/mostpopular.var.1519403.mostviewed.report_focuses_on_needs_of_travellers.php

Vacancies

Project Assistant

The European Roma and Travellers Forum is looking for a Project Assistant for its new subsidiary in Brussels.

Job Description

- assist the Project Manager in his/her daily duties and in particular in the contacts with the EU institutions in Brussels and the members of the Forum's network;
- compile information on the situation of Roma in Europe and on the work of the EU in this field;
- perform administrative duties and logistic support to the preparation of meetings.

Requirements

- University degree in Social Sciences or Law or commensurate professional experience,
- professional fluency in English and good knowledge of Romani compulsory,
- additional language in particular of French and Dutch will be considered as an asset,
- flexibility and adaptability.

Candidates must be nationals of a Council of Europe member State.

The position is initially limited until 15 December 2007 with possibility of extension.

Applications

Interested persons should send their application together with a cover letter and CV outlining their interest and experience in English, French or Romani to:

European Roma and Travellers Forum
c/o Council of Europe
rue Toreau
F - 67075 Strasbourg

E-mail: ertf@ertf.org

Letters of recommendation from Roma or Traveller NGOs as well as of recommendation from a former employer will be appreciated.

Established in 2004, the European Roma and Travellers Forum is the European Romani interest representation which gathers Romani organisations from all over Europe. Its aim is to promote the effective exercise by Roma and Travellers of all human rights and fundamental freedoms as protected by the legal instruments of the Council of Europe and other international legal instruments. A partnership agreement with the Council of Europe gives the Forum a unique status and makes it a prime interlocutor for the Council of Europe and national governments on issues affecting Roma communities.

ERTF Update is an information bulletin on Roma issues. The views represented in the articles and comments do not necessarily represent the view of the European Roma and Travellers Forum. For reactions and comments please write to ertf@ertf.org.