



European Roma and Travellers Forum
c/o Council of Europe
F - 67 075 Strasbourg
Tel.: + 33 3 90 21 53 50
Fax: + 33 3 90 21 44 34
e-mail: ertf@ertf.org
www.ertf.org

ERTF Update

05/2007

15.03.07

Political Developments

European Roma and Travellers Forum

Stop Ignoring the Rights of Kosovo Roma

Strasbourg, 12 March 2007: The president of the European Roma and Travellers Forum, Rudko Kawczynski, has today warned the international community to stop ignoring the rights of Kosovo Roma. On the occasion of the vote by the Foreign Affairs Committee of the European Parliament of a report by the Dutch MEP Joost Lagendijk on the future of Kosovo he reminded that Roma, once the third largest group of population in Kosovo, have been ethnically cleansed from this territory in the aftermath of war, and continue to be victims of discrimination and acts of reprisal.

“The international community has long time closed its eyes on the fate of Kosovo Roma,” the leader of the European Romani interest representation said. “Ignorance and misconceptions have prevented it from realizing the truth.”, Kawczynski said. He criticised that the Parliament’s report largely and unilaterally endorses the interests of the Kosovo Albanian majority and ignored Kosovo’s smaller communities including the Roma.

“Ongoing discrimination and human rights violations are minimised by this report which merely refers to ‘tensions’ between the two major groups,” Kawczynski said, pointing out that the rapporteur does not even mention the ethnic cleansing which took place after the withdrawal of the Yugoslav troops in summer 1999, and of which almost 200,000 Roma became victim. Kawczynski added that he was also missing any reference to the necessity of bringing the

perpetrators of these deeds to justice as a precondition for a peaceful settlement of the status issue.

“The international community including the EU are coresponsible for the ethnic cleansing of Roma from Kosovo in that it failed to protect them,” the president of the European Roma and Travellers Forum said. “If it is condoning the status quo it will become guilty a second time,” Kawczynski said pointing out at the pending decision in the UN Security Council.

In a statement distributed to the MEPs before the vote his organisation which represents 15 million Roma in Europe urged the European Parliament to speak out for the rights and the interests of Kosovo Roma and reiterated its demand to be consulted on any issues regarding Kosovo Roma including the status settlement.

Source: ERTF Press Release

Reports

International Organisations

European Parliament

Foreign Affairs Committee adopts report on Kosovo

The Foreign Affairs Committee of the European Parliament adopted on Monday, 12 March 2007, a report by Dutch Green MEP Joost Lagendijk on the future of Kosovo and the role of the EU. While the draft report did not contain any reference to the situation of Roma, several MEPs proposed amendments in this regard. The final draft which is set to be adopted by the European Parliament in its plenary session on 28 March calls for security safeguards, specific attention to the situation of Roma refugees and IDPs and for the right of education in Romani language as part of the regular school curriculum.

Draft report (22.01.07):

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2004_2009/documents/pr/647/647824/647824en.pdf

News digest

Countries

Czech Republic

La direction d'un hôpital vient de présenter ses excuses à une jeune femme rom stérilisée

L'hôpital de Vitkovice, dans le nord de la Moravie, a présenté ses excuses à Helena Ferencikova, une femme rom de 24 ans qui avait porté plainte contre l'hôpital pour une stérilisation non consentie.

Justice a enfin été rendue à Helena Ferencikova, deux mois après avoir gagné son procès contre l'hôpital de Vitkovice où elle avait subi, il y a 5 ans, une stérilisation non consentie après la naissance de son deuxième enfant. En janvier dernier, la Cour supérieure d'Olomouc

avait ordonné à l'hôpital de présenter ses excuses à cette femme, pour avoir agi illégalement et être intervenu dans sa santé et dans sa vie privée. Selon le juge Jaroslav Hykl, la stérilisation doit être précédée d'une demande de la patiente et d'une décision de la commission ad hoc, ce qui n'était pas le cas de Helena Ferencikova à laquelle les médecins ont proposé cette intervention pendant l'accouchement.

Pour Helena Ferencikova, qui réclamait une réparation d'un million de couronnes pour avoir été stérilisée sans son consentement à l'âge de 19 ans, la justice n'a toutefois été rendue qu'à moitié, car la Cour a rejeté sa demande d'indemnisation d'un million de couronnes. Satisfaite et déçue à la fois, Helena Ferencikova a réagi en déclarant qu'aucune somme d'argent ne saurait compenser la perte de la possibilité d'avoir des enfants.

Le problème des stérilisations n'est apparu au grand jour qu'en 2004, après la publication du soupçon par le Centre européen pour les droits des Roms. La même année, plus de 80 femmes ont adressé une plainte au médiateur de la République qui a réalisé une étude avec le résultat suivant : entre 50 et 60 femmes auraient été victimes d'une stérilisation entre 1973 et 1991. Un arrêté alors en vigueur permettait de payer une somme relativement importante pour l'époque, 10 000 couronnes, si la femme consentait à se laisser stériliser. D'après le rapport de l'ombudsman, les travailleurs sociaux incitaient ainsi les Roms à avoir moins d'enfants. Dans certains cas, les stérilisations étaient réalisées sous la menace d'une suppression des allocations familiales. Le bureau du médiateur s'est prononcé en faveur de l'adoption d'une loi pour favoriser l'indemnisation des victimes des stérilisations.

L'hôpital de Vitkovice est le premier à être sanctionné pour la stérilisation non consentie, et Helena Ferencikova est la première à avoir porté plainte et gagner son procès. Or, l'avocate de 25 femmes roms, Michaela Tomisova, prévoit que deux ou trois plaintes contre les hôpitaux seront portées dans les plus brefs délais.

Source: Radio Praha
<http://www.radio.cz/fr/edition/89280>

Sterilised Roma accuse Czechs

13 March 2007

"I was sterilised when I was 21", says Elena Gorolova, an ethnic Roma (Gypsy) woman living in Ostrava in the east of the Czech Republic.

She is one of 80 Roma women in this pretty and quiet Czech town who claim they were coerced into sterilisation in the Czech health system.

Elegant and articulate, 37-year-old Elena describes how her stay in the maternity ward 16 years ago left her emotionally and physically scarred for life.

She had just delivered a boy and joked to the doctor: "I won't bother to take the baby home, because I wanted a girl".

The doctor's answer still reverberates in her ears: "You'd better take it, because you will not have any more children. We have sterilised you."

Silence broken

For years these women stayed silent, and some were even ashamed to tell their own husbands. Only a few years ago did the shocking details start to emerge. There are allegations that coercive sterilisation was used to curb the traditionally high fertility rate among the Roma.

Many were offered money, though that was not official policy. Similar cases have been reported in neighbouring Slovakia.

The practice officially ended in 1990 after the collapse of communist Czechoslovakia, but a number of doctors are said to have continued the operations on their own initiative.

The complaints sparked an official inquiry. The Czech ombudsman - Public Defender of Rights Otakar Motejl - investigated the cases and issued a report in December 2005.

"The problem of sexual sterilisation carried out in the Czech Republic, either with improper motivation or illegally, exists," he said, recommending state compensation for women affected between 1973 and 1991.

During that period social services had offered some Roma women financial incentives to undergo sterilisation "even though the state issued no instruction," he concluded.

The communist authorities had practised an assimilation policy towards Roma which "included efforts by social services to control the birth rate in the Romani community," he said.

Pressure for action

But human rights groups say the last recorded case happened as late as 2003. "Sterilisation was used as a means of birth control," says Kumar Vishwanathan, head of Life Together, an Ostrava-based NGO for Roma rights.

Like many other Roma women, Elena Gorolova signed a consent form without realising what the operation entailed.

Some women say they had been administered drugs, others simply did not understand what the word "sterilisation" meant.

Czech doctors disagree. "Sterilisation is conducted on purely medical grounds," says Richard Spousta, head of the gynaecological unit at an Ostrava hospital. "We don't keep any statistics on Roma and non-Roma sterilised women. I don't know why you are making such claims."

An investigation by a Czech health ministry advisory committee concluded that procedural mistakes had been made in a number of cases.

But the Czech embassy in London told the BBC that "sterilisation is in no way a national policy targeted on a specific ethnic or any other group in the Czech Republic".

"We've suggested to the government that it issue an apology to the victims," says Ceslaw Walek, director of the Roma Community Affairs Council, which advises the government on Roma-related policies. "But I cannot see this happening."

Earlier this year the Czech high court did uphold a lower court's decision obliging an Ostrava hospital to apologise to one of the victims, Helena Ferencikova, sterilised in 2001.

"This is the first decision of its kind in Central and Eastern Europe," says Lucie Fremlova from the Life Together NGO.

The hospital has not yet complied with the court's decision. Helena Ferencikova is still waiting.

Marina Denysenko

Source: BBC
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/6409699.stm>

State may be unable to buy Lety pig farm 8 March 2007

More than 1,000 Roma were detained at the Lety camp during World War II. Of those, more than 300 perished in the camp and another 500 were sent to Auschwitz.

Prague, March 7 (CTK) - The Czech state will probably not be able to buy out the pig farm in Lety, south Bohemia, built on the premises of the wartime internment camp for Czech Romanies, since it is overpriced multiple times, but a foundation might finance the purchase, Minister Dzamila Stehlikova (Greens), in charge of minorities and human rights, told CTK today.

Stehlikova added that the government cannot spend tax-payers' money on the farm since its price is exorbitant. But she at the same time added that the farm's owner had the right to set a high price on his property.

Stehlikova stressed that a mistake had been made in this case in 1992 already when the originally state pig farm had been privatised.

The state negotiated with the AGPI company, owning the pig farm complex, in the past, most recently in 2005, but in vain.

According to estimates, the price demanded for the premises could amount to one billion crowns, which is inadequately high, but no concrete sum has been released yet.

According to historical documents, some 1,308 Romanies were deported to Lety during WW2, while 326 people perished there and more than 500 of its inmates ended up in the extermination camp in Auschwitz.

Romany activists have in the long run demanded that the pig farm in Lety be removed. They point out that it defames the victims' memory. At the end of January, the activists asked the U.N. for support in this case.

The EP called on the Czech Republic to remove the pig farm two years ago.

Stehlikova said that the case must be first discussed in a working group including representatives of particular ministries and its proposal would be submitted to the Government Council for Romany Issues. The council will then present its stance to the cabinet.

Source: CTK Czech News Agency/The Prague Daily Monitor and Monitor CE
http://launch.praguemonitor.com/en/39/czech_national_news/2657/

Entrée en vigueur de la Charte des langues régionales ou minoritaires 6 March 2007

Le 1er mars, la Charte européenne des langues régionales ou minoritaires, qui doit assurer la protection des langues des minorités ethniques, est entrée en vigueur en République tchèque. Le document profitera notamment aux minorités polonaise et slovaque.

Les minorités concernées pourront désormais, sous certaines conditions, s'adresser dans leur langue aux fonctionnaires de l'administration publique et aux tribunaux, et pourront également rédiger des documents administratifs. D'après le secrétaire de la Commission gouvernementale pour les minorités, Milan Pospisil, cité par l'agence de presse tchèque CTK, cette mesure concerne notamment la langue polonaise dans les localités de Moravie du Nord et de Silésie où la minorité polonaise représente plus de 10 % de la population, mais aussi la langue slovaque sur l'ensemble du territoire tchèque. Néanmoins, Milan Pospisil constate que l'adoption de la Charte ne change pas beaucoup de choses, car le document n'a été ratifié qu'après l'entrée en vigueur de la nouvelle loi sur les écoles et du nouveau code d'administration, qui stipulent déjà la protection des langues minoritaires.

Les noms des rues et les enseignes des magasins en deux langues sont, d'ores et déjà, une chose assez courante dans certaines communes de la région des villes de Karvina et de Frydek-Mistek situées à proximité de la frontière dans le nord-est du pays. Cette année encore, 5 millions de couronnes, quelque 180 000 euros, seront mis à disposition des communes concernées en Moravie du Nord et en Silésie pour qu'elles puissent se doter de ces doubles inscriptions, mais aussi pour payer les interprètes et les traductions des documents officiels. Et il existe aussi une possibilité théorique que les doubles inscriptions apparaissent le long de la frontière tchéco-slovaque, dans les endroits où les Slovaques dépassent en nombre 10 % de la population locale.

Cependant, selon Milan Pospisil, aucune revendication de ce genre n'a été entendue pour l'instant. Les membres de ces minorités doivent avoir également la possibilité d'envoyer leurs enfants dans des écoles polonaises et slovaques, et on devrait leur réserver une station de radio, une chaîne de télévision et la possibilité de publier leurs articles dans les journaux. La majorité de ces avantages ne concernent cependant pas la minorité rom.

Bien qu'on estime qu'il y a en Tchéquie quelque 250 000 Roms, seules 11 000 personnes ont déclaré appartenir à cette minorité lors du dernier recensement. Officiellement, donc, la population rom en Tchéquie n'est pas suffisamment dense pour jouir des mêmes avantages que les minorités polonaise et slovaque.

Vaclav Richter

Source: Radio Praha
<http://www.radio.cz/fr/edition/89034>

Čunek has plan for Roma integration

9 March 2007

Regional Development Minister Jiří Čunek is preparing a plan to help integrate the Roma minority into Czech society. According to Čunek, a new law concerning social subsidies should include a clause that barring those with longtime unemployment who have not made an effort to find work from receiving monetary state support. Instead, such individuals would receive food vouchers. Čunek also wants all Roma children to be required to master the Czech language before starting elementary school.

Čunek, who is currently being investigated over bribery allegations, gained renown for his radical resolution of a local Roma issue in Vsetín, the town where he served as mayor until last month. Last October, Čunek moved several Romany families out of decrepit housing in Vsetín's downtown into metal container housing on the city's outskirts. Some applauded his bold move, while others accused him of racism.

Source: Prague Daily Monitor

Serbia/Kosovo

Haradinaj trial: Witness describes plight

11 March 2007

The Hague -- At the trial of Ramush Haradinaj, Idriz Balaj and Lahi Brahimaj, the prosecution started with the crime base evidence.

The prosecution began with the first two counts in the indictment, referring to the events of May 1998 in the village of Junik near Decani.

At the trial on Friday, a witness gave evidence with her identity, image and voice protected because she had received death threats before coming to The Hague.

She described how the KLA members expelled her and her family from Junik. She said that all non-Albanians were expelled from Junik then, along with her Roma family.

They joined the refugee column and at one point, KLA soldiers singled out her and her family and took them to a mill in Gacifer, a nearby hamlet. There, a KLA member she knew from Junik grabbed her father by his moustache and tore some skin off.

He ordered her to strip naked. Then he beat and humiliated them, and tied them up with barbed wire. The abuse stopped when a jeep with two uniformed men arrived. She heard the others call one of them "commander", and she was able to identify him as Ramush Haradinaj when she saw him on TV a few months later.

The abuse continued after the two men in the jeep left, the witness said. They were then taken to the village of Jasic where they spent two days under guard in open air. She was allowed to dress only two days later when she started to shake with fever.

On the third day of their captivity, they were taken to a cliff near Albanian border, the witness said. She described what followed in closed session. The questions asked by the defense counsel later and the allegations in the indictment indicate that the witness and her family were lined up for execution but somehow managed to escape down the mountain slopes. They ran to the village of Batusa where they were taken in and assisted by the Yugoslav Army troops.

In her cross-examination, Ramush Haradinaj's defense counsel pointed to some discrepancies in the statement the witness had given to the Serbian Interior Ministry in 1998 and 2002, the statement taken by the OTP in 2005, the proofing sessions before her testimony and the evidence she gave in her examination in-chief.

The defense counsel did not contest the fact that the witness and her family were expelled from Junik and abused by the KLA. He focused on contesting the claim that "the man from the jeep" was really his client.

Although she claimed that she had recognized Haradinaj a few months after the events in Junik, the witness never mentioned his name in the statements to the Serbian Interior Ministry in 1998 and 2002.

Contrary to that, in the statement taken by the OTP in 2005 she said that the KLA soldier that was abusing them near the mill said to the man from the jeep, "Commander Ramush Haradinaj,

the people we captured are at your disposal". This statement is listed in the pretrial brief filed by the prosecution.

The witness denied saying this and when British attorney Ben Emmerson asked her if "the investigators had made this up" she replied that it was maybe a "translation error". She apologized, stressing that her statement was taken while she was "ill and traumatized" with "high levels of blood sugar, lipids and blood pressure".

When the witness said that she had spent three days naked in the rain, Idriz Balaj's defense counsel said that the meteorological reports he had obtained showed no rain in Kosovo on 28th, 29th and 30th. He did not tender the reports into evidence, indicating he would do that later.

Source: B 92/SENSE

http://www.b92.net/eng/news/society-article.php?yyyy=2007&mm=03&dd=11&nav_category=113&nav_id=40067

Slovakia

Integration or Isolation? Roma housing in Slovakia

8 March 2007

The mayor of Letanovce, Slovakia, Peter Karvinský, proposed a new solution to the housing problem of Roma residents. With nearly 60 million Slovak crowns (1.76 million Euro) from the European Fund, and in cooperation with the State Fund for Housing Development, the project plans to provide housing for 650 Roma who are legally living in the municipality. The settlement, however, is planned to be built 2 kilometers away from Letanovce, where access to stores, doctors, and proper infrastructure is limited.

Mayor Karvinský's plan is to build an improved settlement on at a different site. The settlement, new and better than the previous one at Letanovce Myln, will have cold water and electricity. Every Roma family who will live in the housing project will help to build the settlement. They will work for 20% of the cost of a flat in the settlement. At the moment, the structure of four buildings with sixteen flats has been erected.

The new settlement has brought tension to the area. The mayors of the surrounding villages of Hrabusice and Spissky Stvrtok at the end of February sent an open letter to the Prime Minister Robert Fico stating that "the building of a new Roma settlement just moves this difficult social problem to other villages" according to SME Daily.

A further complication in the matter concerns the new settlement's proximity to the Slovak National Park. In the past Roma have been accused of stealing wood from the National Park and many believe the new housing location will exacerbate this problem. Accordingly, the mayor has begun a new plan to allow Roma to plant trees for harvesting over a three-year period.

Persistent problem

For more than one hundred years a Romany camp has existed at the site of Letanovce Myln. Václav Havel visited in 1990 (at this time still Czechoslovakia), stating that these living conditions are shameful for the whole republic. Despite of this, previous mayors of Letanovce stated that residents of Letanovce Myln are not residents of the village but rather residents of a local area of another village.

Karvinský is the first mayor of Letanovce to address and to solve the Romany housing problem. These policies have put him into a precarious political position. Many of his non-Roma

constituents do not see settlement as something positive, rather, only as the government spending money on Roma.

The land purchased for the new settlement was bought from a private owner. Owners of land near Letanovce did not want to sell.

Because of this project for new houses for Roma, Karvinský has received anonymous threats in the mail. According to MF Dnes, one such letter in the summer of 2006, adorned with a skull, stated that if "the building of settlement doesn't stop, you will end like this [skull]. This is the last warning." The author also wrote that there are two grenades around the building site. They have not been found by pyro-technicians.

Using funds intended to help integrate Roma into Slovak society, the Mayor's placing of the settlement away from the city brings into question intentions of the housing project.

"This is a common trend that we can see in Slovakia: money for integration going for further social isolation of the Roma community," says Ivan Vesely of Dzeno Association. "Many times these settlements can be even further away from the village or city than the previous."

Source: Dzeno
http://www.dzeno.cz/?c_id=13229

United Kingdom

Travellers go to court over eviction to make way for Olympic village

12 March 2007

*Legal challenge to use Human Rights Act
Residents may launch own action over new location*

The first major contests of the 2012 Olympics are taking place not in one of the new stadiums but in the Royal Courts of Justice. Lawyers for two groups of Travellers are using human rights legislation to challenge plans to move them from their sites to make way for the Olympic Village.

At the centre of the legal battle are two existing sites for Travellers in the east London boroughs of Newham and Hackney. The London Development Agency is seeking to move the Travellers to new sites so that construction work can begin.

The LDA wants the Travellers in Newham to be relocated from their site in Clay's Lane, where they have been for 36 years, to a nearby park, which is currently used by locals for games and a children's playground, and is surrounded by four busy roads.

The Travellers and residents near the park are unhappy at the plans. Tracie Giles, whose family has lived on the site for more than three decades, said the new site would make them "like animals in a zoo". However, Newham council has this month given planning permission to the site.

The Travellers will next month take their case to court under article eight of the 1998 Human Rights Act which states that "everyone has the right to respect for his private and family life, his home and his correspondence."

The act stipulates that a public authority cannot interfere with this right except in the interests of "national security, public safety, the economic wellbeing of the country, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others."

Chris Johnson, the Birmingham-based solicitor who has represented Travellers in a number of precedent-setting cases, will challenge the decision to compulsorily purchase the two sites in an action against the trade and industry secretary next month. He said the European court had been more receptive to such actions than its British counterparts.

"The domestic courts in this country have sucked some of the lifeblood out of the Human Rights Act," said Mr Johnson. "The European court has been more far-sighted in the way it is applied."

In 2004, the European court had ruled against the eviction of a Lancashire-based Traveller, James Connors, and his family. In its judgment, that there had been a violation of article eight of the act, the European court said "there was a positive obligation on the United Kingdom to facilitate the Gypsy way of life."

The European court has set the bar high for any authority seeking to move a Traveller family without their agreement. As the judgment stated, "the serious interference with the applicant's rights under article eight required, in the court's opinion, particularly weighty reasons of public interest by way of justification."

The judgment also highlighted the differences in the interpretation of the Human Rights Act between British courts and those elsewhere in Europe: "It would rather appear that the situation in England, as it had developed, for which the authorities had to take some responsibility, placed considerable obstacles in the way of Gypsies pursuing an actively nomadic lifestyle."

The Travellers have already lost one judicial review in court. Now, however, the residents living near the proposed new site in Major Road Park, Newham, will decide this week whether they, too, will seek a judicial review to challenge Newham council's agreement to turn the park into a Travellers' site.

Duncan Campell

Source: The Guardian

http://www.guardian.co.uk/olympics2012/story/0,,2031602,00.html#article_continue

Travellers enduring third-world hardship, campaigners say

9 March 2007

Many Traveller families are living in third-world conditions because of a shortage of sites set aside for them, according to campaigners.

Rodney Bickerstaff, the president of the charity War on Want, and Andrew Ryder, of the Irish Traveller Movement, are visiting Traveller families living on unauthorised encampments in Sussex today to hear their concerns and try to draw attention on their plight.

Council proposals for two new sites in Crawley for the Travellers were abandoned last year in the face of vocal public opposition, and Mr Ryder said that such decisions are typical of what is happening around the country.

He said around a further 5,000 site pitches were needed in the UK to accommodate the Traveller population.

"If the people of Crawley hadn't opposed the plans, maybe we would be in a position where two sites were up and running and these families could be on proper sites, which would be good for them and for the settled community," he said.

"We're trying to challenge the huge body of prejudice against Travellers. There's obviously a lot of misunderstanding, and people need to realise the consequences of that hostility.

"The Travellers are very anxious, moving around the way they are, never knowing where they will be following week. With more sites, they could have a more planned and structured nomadic existence."

Mr Bickerstaff added: "What opponents of sites in places like Crawley need to realise is that a lack of sites means that some Traveller families are living in third-world conditions.

"I visit families in the third world who are living in appalling conditions who do not have access to decent services and sanitation, yet in our own country - one of the richest in the world - Gypsies and Travellers are living in the same conditions."

John Ives

Source: The Guardian

<http://society.guardian.co.uk/socialexclusion/story/0,,2029538,00.html>

Young gypsy travellers speak out

8 March 2007

When Tommy was younger the other school children wouldn't let him play basketball with them because they were scared they would "get germs". They called him names and left him feeling alone, hurt and angry, just because he was a gypsy traveller.

Now Tommy, 14, is one of a group of young Scots gypsy travellers who have decided to speak out against the discrimination and exclusion they so often face.

Working with charity Save the Children they have compiled a website, packed with information about their culture, which they hope will help break down the hurtful stereotypes.

Called Time Travellers, the site was part funded by Heritage Lottery money and was launched at Edinburgh's Dynamic Earth by the Princess Royal, Save the Children's president.

Donna Lawrie, youth development worker for the charity, explained: "We're hopeful that this initiative will go some way to promoting a positive self-image for young gypsy travellers.

"The young people have worked so hard putting this resource together to promote the history and cultural traditions of an ethnic group who have been discriminated against for centuries."

Their long history dates back to the 12th Century. Some believe they can trace their roots to pre-Celtic populations, others to the Roman slaves brought to Britain as armourers.

Today the Scottish Executive estimates there are between 1,628 and 2,077 people but this excludes the thousands who live in houses for all or part of the year. Others do not want to identify their ethnic origin because they fear discrimination.

Culture and history

Consequently gypsy travellers themselves estimate their community to include about 15,000 people.

The site - developed as part of an ongoing youth project - explores gypsy traveller life both past and present.

One section looks at gypsy traveller homes, from the bow tents and ornate wagons of the 19th Century to the modern caravans and permanent trailers in council-run sites where some travellers live today.

Traditional culture is also explored, from the origins of fortune telling and traditional fairs to gypsy traveller superstitions, such as the belief that it's unlucky to cut your hair or your nails on a Sunday. Otherwise "there will be blood shed on Monday," goes the saying.

Some of the boys in the group have investigated traveller boxing traditions, and have uploaded footage of recent matches.

There is an explanation of the Cant language, which many travellers use mixed with English, and a look at traditional occupations through the centuries including berry and daffodil picking, hawking, pearl fishing and collecting scrap metal and tin.

The young people have also confronted racism, still a reality of all too many of them.

Tommy, who lives in a trailer in the summer and a house in winter, was inspired to "make a difference" to his own community by Rachel Hilton, a Scottish campaigner for gypsy traveller rights who died last May.

"There's a lot of misunderstanding about gypsy travellers," he said. "In Iraq there might be some people who want to bomb the country, but that doesn't mean they are all bad. "That's how it is with the gypsies too. One does a bad thing and then it seems like all of us get blamed for it."

It was not just in playground basketball games that Tommy felt discriminated against. "The minute you tell people you're a gypsy their attitude completely changes," he said. "They start being really cheeky and don't want to touch you or even go near you."

As a result Tommy left secondary school, attends a gypsy traveller education project three days a week and goes out hawking with his dad on the other days.

Chantelle, 20, also faced racism at school. "That's why the site is important," she explained. "We don't want people to judge us. There's some bad travellers out there, and when people hear about things that they've done, they blame every other traveller. We get accused of stealing. They just think, well, you're a traveller so you must steal."

She left secondary school after just six months, and though she too went to a gypsy traveller education project she does feel she was disadvantaged. "I did miss out on a lot of things the kids at the high school do," she admits. "I didn't get my standard grades so I'm hoping to go back to college and get qualifications."

Brother and sister George, 14, and Justine, 16, who live on a council site in the Highlands, are happy with their schooling arrangements - one-to-one tuition at the local secondary school to help them catch up on what they missed when they were travelling. But they would still like people to see past the differences and accept them more readily.

Lack of knowledge

"My culture is important to me and it makes me different in some ways," says Justine, who wants to be a journalist when she is older. "But in others I'm just like everyone else."

George, who speaks Cant and has a theory that it used to be widely spoken across Scotland, agrees. "Most bad opinions of travellers are based on fears or a lack of knowledge. But if people know more than maybe they will change their opinion."

The site is also an attempt to give other young Scots the information about gypsy traveller culture that will help them make up their own minds. There are some aspects of gypsy traveller life that all the young people find hard - the lack of decent site facilities and chilly winter caravans feature amongst complaints.

But most feel lucky to have been born into such a rich tradition which is still passed down the generations. As Tommy says: "Living in a trailer is good because you get to travel about a lot, you're not tied down. In fact, I think if people knew more about the gypsy traveller lifestyle they might even be a little bit jealous."

Karin Goodwin

Source: BBC Scotland

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/scotland/6427391.stm

Vacancies

Project Manager and Project Assistant

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

Job Description (Project Manager)

- in cooperation with the Secretariat of the Forum, set up and maintain a functional office in Brussels,
- establish and maintain good working relations with the European Commission, Parliament and other EU institutions and national government representations,
- liaise with the national member organizations and the Secretariat in Strasbourg and keep them informed about relevant developments affecting Roma at EU level,
- in cooperation with the ERTF Secretariat, draft regular reports on specific policy areas,
- in cooperation with the Secretariat and the network members issue policy recommendations to the EU institutions on specific policy areas and policies affecting Roma,
- establish and maintain good working relations with civil society organizations working in Brussels, in particular with the Commission sponsored networks.

Requirements

- University degree in Social Sciences or Law,
- minimum of three years of experience in a similar position with a national NGO or public administration,

- knowledge and understanding of the situation of Roma in Europe,
- knowledge and understanding of EU politics, in particular on areas which particularly affect Roma,
- good communication and writing skills,
- professional fluency in English and good knowledge of Romani compulsory,
- additional language skills in particular of French will be considered as an asset.

Job Description (Project Assistant)

- assist the project manager in his/her daily duties,
- perform administrative tasks including book-keeping.

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 and must be aged under 55 on the closing date of the vacancy notice.

Both positions are initially limited until 15 December 2007.

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 Tureau
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.

Part-time assistants on Social Cohesion and Culture

The European Roma and Travellers Forum is looking for part-time assistants to support the work of its directorates for Social Cohesion (Romania) and Culture (Poland).

Under the direction of the directors of the directorates the assistants will be in charge of following up on any important developments in their field and assure a smooth communication flow between the directorates, the Forum's delegates and the Forum's central offices. They will also support the directors in administrative tasks and provide logistic support to the organisation of meetings.

Minimum requirements:

- Undergraduate studies in a relevant field such as social sciences, law or economics
- Good knowledge and experience on Roma issues

- Experience in drafting and writing of reports
- Administrative and logistic skills
- Good knowledge of English and Romani compulsory

The positions are on a consultancy basis (300 Euros per month) and do not constitute a full-time employment.

Interested persons should send their application (letter of motivation plus CV) to the

ERTF Secretariat at: ertf@ertf.org

For further information:
European Roma and Travellers Forum
Tel.: + 33 3 90 21 53 50

Awards

The EU Journalist Award 2007: EU wide competition on discrimination and diversity open for print and online journalists

The “For Diversity. Against Discrimination.” Journalist Award 2007 is granted by the European Union to honour journalists who contribute with their work to a better public understanding of the benefits of diversity and the fight against discrimination in society. Print and online journalists in the 27 EU Member States are requested to submit articles on issues of discrimination or diversity on the grounds of racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, age, gender, disability and sexual orientation.

Journalists are particularly encouraged to raise awareness of diversity in employment and discrimination on multiple grounds.

Media professionals and anti-discrimination experts will select 27 national award winners. An EU jury will then choose the three winners of the EU-wide award. Entries will be judged according to their news value, relevance, complexity of research and preparation, originality, creativity as well as their significance for the general public.

For more information see: <http://journalistaward.stop-discrimination.info/>

Established in 2004, the European Roma and Travellers Forum is the European-level Roma interest representation which gathers Roma 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 any 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.