

The situation of Roma in Europe

ENAR special Shadow Report 2007

The European Network Against Racism (ENAR) has issued a comparative European Shadow Report on the experiences of Europe's largest minority, the Roma. Roma, Sinti and Travellers represent a particular group that have consistently experienced discrimination and prejudice in Europe over centuries and have been identified by ENAR as being the most vulnerable minority group in essentially all areas of life.

This special shadow report consolidates available data and information on the basis of findings related to Roma, Sinti and Travellers from the 2007 national shadow reports on racism in Ireland, Hungary, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Romania, Bulgaria, Poland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia and the United Kingdom. Despite the lack of data, it reveals an alarming picture and urges for renewed focus and a collaborative approach to combat anti-Gypsism and Romaphobia and to secure real change.

Manifestations of Romaphobia and anti-Gypsism

Employment

- Entrenched stereotypes make access to employment particularly difficult - e.g. a survey in Lithuania found that 82,4 % of the surveyed Roma identified prejudice and negative attitude of employers as one of the main reasons for their unemployment, and that 47 % of surveyed employers believed that a Roma would probably not be offered a job in their company.
- Low qualifications or lack of qualifications hinders members of the Roma community in access to and progression in the labour market.
- Roma experience high unemployment rates across Europe - e.g. in the Czech Republic 70% of Roma are unemployed while the national average is 6%.
- Roma minority women and Roma who live in segregated settlements have extreme difficulties in finding employment and are particularly vulnerable to multiple discrimination.
- Despite the positive results that the transposition of the Race Equality Directive into national law has yielded, cases and complaints on the grounds of racial discrimination in the area of employment are still missing or are exceptional.

Housing

- The majority of Roma, Sinti and Travellers live in substandard and inappropriate housing conditions across Europe, mostly in segregated rural settlements or urban "ghettos".
- This substandard housing generally lacks running water, electricity and gas, adequate sewerage, and is cut off from main roads, making access to health services and schools difficult.
- Roma also face forced and sometimes illegal evictions, in particular in Italy, the Czech Republic and Slovakia.
- In the private rental sector, lack of protection against discriminatory practices and the negative attitudes towards Roma make them particularly vulnerable - e.g. in Hungary it is not uncommon to find rental notices stating that "Black, Arabs and Gypsies should not call for information".

Education

- Segregation is a major and persistent problem across Europe that limits access to education, both as a result of spatial segregation in housing and of institutional segregation within the education system.
- Segregation of Roma children in "special classes" is documented in Latvia, Bulgaria, Slovakia and Romania.
- Roma, Sinti and Travellers have the poorest educational outcomes across Europe. Factors leading to poorer educational outcomes include lower expectations by teachers and peers, the lack of role models and parental involvement, and the requirement to speak only the national language.



Health

- Roma, Sinti and Travellers have considerably poorer health status than the majority of the European population: they have a lower life expectancy and a higher infant mortality rate than majority populations in all countries examined.
- Access to healthcare is an important area of concern, not only linked to the fact that the Roma are at highest risk of experiencing poverty, but also in some cases because some countries require identification documents and proof of employment, e.g. in Hungary, Lithuania and Bulgaria.
- Roma women experience particular issues, in particular when it comes to addressing previous coercive sterilisations: e.g. in the Czech Republic a number of cases of illegal coercive sterilisations have not resulted in full prosecutions.

Racial profiling and racist violence

- Roma, Sinti and Travellers are targets of racial profiling in a number of countries, in particular in Italy, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia and Romania. This racial profiling is based on police stereotypes which associate the Roma with criminality and drug abuse.
- Key problem areas relate to police harassment and ill-treatment of Roma and insufficiently independent supervision of prosecutions of police officers accused of hate crimes.
- There is a very worrying trend towards the rise of right-wing extremism and an increase of racist violence across Europe, often targeted at Roma - e.g. the Hungarian guard, an extremist paramilitary organisation, has staged regular demonstrations against "Gypsy crime".

Access to goods and services

- In the private sector, Roma have difficulties in particular in accessing financial services, the hospitality sector and public transport. For instance, in Poland Roma on public transport are often treated as potential beggars. In Estonia, shop assistants often consider Roma as being thieves and criminals.
- The fact that Roma mostly live in segregated settlements, at the outskirts of urban and rural areas, makes it more difficult for them to access basic public services.

Media

- There is worrying evidence of the media fuelling anti-Gypsism and Romaphobia. A rise in extremism in the media is reported and Roma are frequently portrayed as criminals, thieves, beggars and drug users.
- Problem areas include distribution of anonymous, violent, anti-Roma racist messages via SMS and the internet, and real-time encouragement of television viewers or internet users to participate in racist exchanges.

Recommendations

ENAR members call for a common comprehensive European approach that secures real change in the lives of the ten million Roma in Europe by:

- Empowering Roma communities and recognising the contribution made by NGOs;
- Providing basic rights for quality education, adequate and affordable housing, effective health and social services;
- Challenging extremist groups and inaccurate reporting by the media.

To read the full report, visit www.enar-eu.org/Page_Generale.asp?DocID=15294&langue=EN

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