



Children from a Roma family in Serbia

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Improving the Quality of Childhood in the European Union: the Case of the Roma Children

by Ivan Ivanov

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introduction by Livia Járóka, MEP

SUMMARY

The Roma population in Europe is estimated to be between 10 and 15 million people. Numerous assessments of the situation of the Roma clearly illustrate that the members of the Roma communities continue to experience marked discrimination and social exclusion, and encounter difficulties in gaining unhindered and equal access to:

- education
- employment
- social security
- healthcare
- housing
- other public services
- justice.

The assessments also show that many Roma communities are uniquely exposed to the forces of social exclusion.

Ivan Ivanov and Bernard Rorke gave an overview of the situation of the Roma People in Europe and the severe discrimination and deprivation that they face. The speakers then gave an overview of the extensive policy and legal frameworks that have been built up over the past 15 years, at the European level.

Conclusion: the tools are in place, but far too little is happening on the ground. Bernard Rorke, paraphrasing UNICEF, stated that what is needed for the next five years of the Decade of Roma Inclusion (2005 – 2015) is nothing less than:

"a revolution that places children at the heart of human development – not only because this offers a strong return on our investment (although it does) nor because the vulnerability of childhood calls upon our compassion (although it should), but rather for a more fundamental reason: because it is their right."

Introduction by Livia Járóka, MEP

The two main things I wish to discuss are:

- The quality of education experienced by Roma children, and
- The threats faced by Roma children and young people, such as extreme socio-economic deprivation and lack of education. In addition, they often face threats from within their own communities.

The Quality of Education for Roma Children

Most Roma children are subject to low-quality education in the form of segregated education and gipsy-only classrooms. Roma children encounter major difficulties in accessing high quality education. The result of this is low performance at school. For example:

- Only 20 percent of Romany children receive preschool education,
- 20 percent of Roma children are not enrolled in school.
- 30 percent of Roma children in Europe drop out of school before completing compulsory education.
- Some 50 percent of the Roma in Europe are illiterate or semi-illiterate.
- Often Roma children live in segregated areas (or in communities on the periphery of urban areas) and this tends to lead to them attending segregated schools.
- Frequently Roma children are educated in separate classrooms, or are in schools specifically for gipsy children. This is not only an issue in the new member states of the European Union, but the same holds true in many older member states.
- Excluding Roma children from school, as well as segregating them from mainstream education deprives them of their fundamental right to education and makes it difficult for young people to move into higher education and into higher paying jobs.
- Children's parents often remove their children from school when there are Roma children at that school. This leads to segregated classrooms, especially in rural areas.
- The authorities in Slovakia, Hungary and other Eastern European countries very often place Roma children in special schools (i.e. for mentally disabled children). Very often learning difficulties or even disadvantaged social background are falsely portrayed by school officials as mental disability.

All forms of school segregation weaken the quality of national education systems as a whole. The continued marginalisation of Roma youth will cause society to lose a significant source of creativity and social contribution. On the other hand, investment in Roma education is a worthwhile investment: better educated Roma have better paid jobs and while they earn money and contribute to the national budget through taxes on both income and consumption they also contribute to diminishing prejudice. As the Roma become more productive and their poverty level decreases, they also become contributing

members of society instead of beneficiaries of public aid. The combination of increased tax contribution and decreased spending on welfare benefits adds up to a net gain for the national budget.

- The education of Roma women has a major impact on the educational performance of communities. The incomplete or poor standard of education of girls is likely not only to affect them individually, but may well transmit disadvantage to their children. Pre-school education is particularly important for children from socially disadvantaged families, in terms of it having a positive impact on the whole of the person's life. The benefits of pre-school education include: the promotion of social equality, increased individual productivity, reduced levels of poverty, and the elimination of discriminatory attitudes and social exclusion.
- Making progress depends on the children and young people having well-qualified teachers from Roma and non-Roma backgrounds. If we are to expect good results, teachers must be provided with exemplary training and expertise in progressive teaching methods for multicultural and diverse class groups. However, teachers who are going to teach Roma children are not at all prepared for the task. At the Teacher Training Colleges little or no attention is paid to this issue. Teacher trainees are taught about psychology, history, pedagogy and so on, but they are not informed that 60% of their students may be Roma children from extremely deprived families, where even getting enough to eat is a problem.

The Roma must be integrated into the workforce

Given the trend that many Eastern European countries will need more people in the workforce, due to demographic changes, by 2050 many of the working population will be Roma. The Roma population is growing rapidly. In Hungary the Roma constitute 6% to 8% of the population at present. Some researchers are saying that 40 to 50 percent of the active working population in Hungary will be of Roma origin by 2050. It is therefore vital to take into account that, on the one hand, the proportion of Roma within the active population is growing steadily, and on the other that there is huge potential to reintegrate unemployed Roma adults into the labour market. Today's children will be responsible for paying the pensions of an ageing Europe in the future. Therefore the member states cannot ignore this aspect of the Roma context.

Early Marriage

Equality between men and women is not a reality within most Roma families. Girls are often forced to leave school at an extremely young age to help care for younger siblings or to carry out other household responsibilities, and are often pressurized to marry young. Many Roma girls marry at a very young age and are thus denied the ordinary experiences that other young people are granted: schooling, good health and broad economic opportunities. Instead of being viewed as children with potential and with a range of opportunities at their disposal, girls are often viewed by their communities only as wives

and mothers. This exposes girls to responsibilities and risks that they are often not physically or mentally prepared to undertake, while at the same time disrupting their prospects for education and employment. In addition to having a negative impact on the girls themselves, the practice of early marriage also has negative consequences for children, families and for society as a whole. Research shows that providing economic opportunities and enhancing the education of women will result in fewer early marriages. When jobs are available to girls, and they can thus contribute to the household, both daughters and their parents become interested in delaying marriage. Financial incentives alone will, however, not eliminate the practice of child marriage. The views and attitudes of the community itself must be changed, with the help of educated Roma and committed community leaders.

Violation of Human Rights in Roma Communities: It is widespread and should be addressed

Human Rights are often violated in Roma communities. This is well-known and well documented. When people are forced to live in extreme poverty this is a violation of their Human Rights. I have, at first hand, seen the devastating impact that poverty has on families, on people whom I have known for decades. There is often miscommunication between the people providing services to Roma people and the Roma, because they do not know the language, the culture and so on. In most cases they are not of Roma origin. This is the case with medical doctors, police officers, social workers and other government officials.

In addition, mentoring should be provided to help people to get out of the situations of deprivation in which they live. Partners from both inside and outside the community are needed to help the Roma.

Basic facts about the Roma people in the European Union, with a particular focus on Roma children.

by Ivan Ivanov, Executive Director of the European Roma Information Office (ERIO)

What is the European Roma Information Office (ERIO)?

ERIO aims to combat racial discrimination against the Roma and to raise the level of public awareness of the problems faced by Roma communities. It lobbies for the rights of Roma people by designing and promoting policies which are oriented towards the improvement of the socio-economic situation and social inclusion of the Roma in Europe.

ERIO is currently focused on anti-discrimination policies in the fields of education, employment, healthcare and housing.

Demographic information and the levels of discrimination

In the European Union there are more than 10 million Roma. This is the largest minority group in Europe and it is widely accepted that the Roma are subjected to exclusion and segregation, and suffer from high levels of racism from the majority populations. Although

considerably more attention has been paid to the human rights violations experienced by the Roma in Central and Eastern Europe, it should not be forgotten that the Roma who live in Western Europe endure similar violations of their basic civil, political, economic and social rights. Across Europe Roma communities have experienced a long history of discrimination and persecution, including forced resettlement, female sterilization, and the removal of children from their families.

Despite the commitments made and the resources invested by governments, improvements in the lives of the Roma have been meagre. Recent research indicated that anti-Roma sentiments have risen in many countries. Recent reports provide further evidence of discrimination across Europe. For example, housing conditions for the Roma are often atrocious, with communities facing a perpetual risk of being evicted and/or experiencing police raids. The Roma have poor (or no) access to services such as water and electricity. The unemployment rate among the Roma is frequently very high, especially in Slovakia, Romania and Spain. The Roma also face limited eligibility for social assistance or they are not eligible for social assistance at all. Removal of their eligibility for social assistance has been known to happen in countries such as Slovakia, Romania and France. One of the main obstacles in accessing basic services is the lack of residence permits, birth certificates, and identity documents among individuals in the community.

Roma communities face exorbitantly high poverty rates

All of these factors contribute to the exorbitantly high poverty rates among Roma communities which impact directly on their children. But that is not the extent of the difficulties faced by these children – they are often excluded from school, have limited access to healthcare and low vaccination rates. But the most obvious violation of the Roma children's basic rights is segregation, both residential and educational.

Well-funded initiatives often fail to take into account the underlying systemic discrimination which is at the root of much of the economic, social and cultural poverty and exclusion experienced by the Roma. Focusing on improving housing, education or access to healthcare without addressing issues of segregation will, at best, bring about only short-term benefits.

The 2007 Euro barometer shows that on average 77% of Europeans think that it is a disadvantage to be a Roma in their society. The 2008 Euro barometer shows that between 28% and 45% of Europeans do not want to live next door to a Roma household, to work with individuals of Roma extraction or for their children to attend school with Roma children.

A recent survey by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights shows that the Roma are in the top three groups which are most discriminated against, based on the indicators used in the survey.

Three pillars of the legal framework: the Race Equality Directive, the Framework Directive and the Charter of Fundamental Rights

Respect and protection of minority rights was highlighted as a key value of the European Union when it became one of the political criteria for accession. When the Amsterdam treaty came into effect in 1999, the EU Council acquired the right to introduce legislation to fight discrimination on a range of different grounds, including discrimination on the basis of racial or ethnic origin. Shortly thereafter, the Commission developed a proposal which led to the adoption of the Directive 2000/43 – the Race Equality Directive and Directive 2000/78 – the Framework Directive. The EU commitment to equality was further reaffirmed in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union which was proclaimed in the year 2000.

Current EU Policy Actions

European institutions have produced the following documents and have founded the following working groups. This illustrates the commitment that exists to address the topics in question:

- The European Commission Communication 'Towards an EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child'
- Commissioners' Group on Fundamental Rights, Equality and Non-Discrimination, a high level group which backed the development of a European pact for children, helping Member States protect children through legislative and financial support or by the exchange of existing good practice.
- Inter-institutional and inter-service working group
- The European Parliament Children's Rights Alliance

The latest developments concerning the Roma:

- The European Commission Framework strategy for non-discrimination and equal opportunities for all (September 2005).
- The establishment of the Fundamental Rights Agency
- The three resolutions (mentioned above) concerning the Roma, which call on the European Commission to prepare a communication on ways of coordinating EU efforts to improve the situation for Roma communities (April 2005)
- The resolution concerning Roma women (May 2006)
- The resolution for the adoption of a Roma Policy (January 2007)
- The European Council decision of December 2008.
- The 10 Common Basic principles based on the decision of the Council
- The European Platform for Roma integration

The Roma context in the European Union:

A story of extreme discrimination and deprivation.

By Bernard Rorke

Director of International Advocacy and Research, Roma Initiatives, Open Society Foundations, Budapest, Hungary

When it comes to the rights and well-being of children we could do well to pause and remember the fates of three Romany children last year. In February 2009 five-year-old Robika Czorba and his father were shot dead as they fled from their fire-bombed house in Tatarszentgyorgy, Hungary. In April 2009, in the Czech town of Vitkov, two-year-old Natlka Sivkov sustained 80% burns when her home was attacked with Molotov cocktails. In the Hungarian town of Kisleta in August 2009, 13-year-old Ketrin Balogh suffered multiple gunshot wounds in an attack on her home that killed her mother Maria.

Beyond the tragic fates of these three children, lies a wider story of discrimination and neglect. When it comes to the rights and well-being of Romany children, the gap between rhetoric and reality is an affront that should, but somehow does not, inspire outrage and indignation among all right-minded citizens. Within and beyond the European Union, masses of Romany children subsist in conditions of marginalization, poverty and exclusion more akin to the developing world.

UNICEF's research into the plight of Roma children confirms what many of us have surmised from witnessing the conditions in many settlements over the last 10 years:

- The environment of the child is one of marginalization, poverty and exclusion. Poor housing and poor infrastructure are exacerbated by residential segregation. Residents of slums suffer legal insecurity, often lack property rights and cannot register their home as a permanent address. Because of this, many are unable to access basic services: they are in fact "invisible", living on the margins of societies that do not care about them.
- Low levels of education, early marriage, and the economic and social dependence of Roma women reinforce the discrimination of women, and limit women's abilities to make important decisions related to their own life and to that of their children.
- Extreme poverty causes malnutrition, ill health, inadequate parental care and psycho-social stimulation which can result in damage that cannot be repaired later in life, even if the individual's standard of living improves. Poverty has the most dire consequences in childhood, more than in any other phase of the life cycle.
- Poverty and social exclusion are passed on from generation to generation.

The children stranded on the lead-contaminated camps in Mitrovice, Kosovo bear terrible testament to the failure of national and international agencies. Thousands of others, displaced by conflict in Kosovo, lack basic registration documents and, as a consequence,

are denied the very basic right to have rights. One of the earliest forms of exclusion suffered by many Roma children is the lack of official registration of their birth. The 'invisibility' of non-registered children is of particular concern as the lack of an official identity can hinder them from receiving their rights to care and support from public authorities and services. In addition to the complications arising from the displacement by conflict in Kosovo of many thousands of people, obstacles such as costly and complicated procedures, a lack of trust in the authorities, the lack of a permanent address compounded by discriminatory treatment by relevant authorities leads to a truly unacceptable situation. The mere fact that children are not registered at birth is evidence of a severe deficiency in the system. It is the governments' responsibility to ensure that all children are registered. As Thomas Hammarberg, the Commissioner for Human Rights for the Council of Europe put it:

'It is not acceptable that European citizens are deprived of their right to a nationality – a basic human right. It is necessary to address this problem with much more energy than has been done so far'.

European host states should do their utmost to provide Roma children and their parents with a secure legal status

European host states where children of Roma migrants have been born and have lived for several years should do their utmost to provide a secure legal status for these children and for their parents. Both the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights stipulate that children shall have the right to acquire a nationality. In other words, the host country has an obligation to ensure that children have a nationality; the fact that their parents are stateless is no excuse. Recently, Thomas Hammarberg, criticizing EU states such as Germany for the forced returns of Roma to Kosovo, said:

To push Roma families between countries, as now happens, is inhumane. It victimizes children – many of whom were born and grew up in the host countries before they were deported.

Many Romany children have experienced the trauma of deportation and forced eviction, and, from a tender age, have acquired an intimate knowledge of what it is like to go hungry. Many Romany children across the continent have experienced the trauma of deportation and forced eviction, and from a tender age, too many Romany children have acquired an intimate knowledge of what it is like to go hungry. Research conducted by UNICEF and other agencies in the countries of the former Yugoslavia indicated that when it comes to Roma children, 47% were considered as 'food insecure with hunger', and many had never consumed milk or dairy products, nor had ever tasted fresh fruit and vegetables. The experience of hunger is debilitating and humiliating. A hungry child cannot concentrate at

school and a hungry child feels ashamed when seated alongside his/her well-nourished peers. For many Roma children acute material disadvantage is compounded by ethnic segregation at school. Research conducted by the Roma Education Fund (REF) has confirmed that "separate" remains profoundly unequal when it comes to schooling and succeeds only in amplifying disadvantage and reinforcing prejudice.

All talk of integration is futile as long as children across Central and Eastern Europe are denied equal access to quality education on the basis of their ethnicity. Integration will remain an elusive goal as long as Romany children continue to be disproportionately and inappropriately classified as mentally disabled and sent to special schools; as long as Romany children continue to be dispatched to so-called gipsy schools situated in Roma ghettos; or placed in 'gipsy classes'. The decision of the European Court of Human Rights in the case of *D.H. and Others vs. the Czech Republic* dramatically highlighted the persistence of such discriminatory practices. The court ruled that segregating Romany students into special schools is a form of unlawful discrimination. Evidence and research conducted by the Roma Education Fund confirms that despite the ruling, the practice of sending Romany children to special schools persists in many countries, including Hungary, Slovakia, Serbia, Bulgaria and Montenegro. The most recent study conducted by REF provides the first comprehensive picture of the over-representation of Roma children within special education in Slovakia. The report confirms that approximately 60 per cent of children in special schools are Roma and the report asserts that the vast majority of these children clearly do not belong in special education.

De facto segregation is more than an abuse of human rights. It amounts to a willful and malicious squandering of the Roma communities' most precious asset – the intellectual capacities of future generations. Substandard segregated education leaves young people unable to progress beyond elementary levels of schooling, and unable to compete in the labour market. From an early age, it isolates Romany children from the wider society in which they live. Segregation perpetuates and exacerbates existing divisions and inequalities in society.

Policies and Recommendations, Part I

By Bernard Rorke

The Decade of Roma Inclusion: closing the gap by 2015

We are at the mid-point of the Decade of Roma Inclusion (the Decade runs from 2005 to 2015, see www.romadecade.org). I am happy that the Czech Republic, which will assume the presidency of the Decade for one year from June 2010, has prioritized the rights and well-being of Roma children. Each of the Decade countries have drawn up National Action Plans in the priority areas of health, housing, education and employment with the declared objective of closing the gap between Roma and non-Roma peoples by 2015.

Within the context of the Decade, and drawing on UNICEF research, the following points need to be emphasized:

- Particularly vulnerable groups of children, including Romany children, are likely to suffer most from the lack of coherent child and family policies across central and south-eastern Europe.
- The National Action Plans have not given enough attention to childhood issues. Decade National Action Plans (NAPs) of countries participating in the Decade of Roma Inclusion were found wanting on a number of issues, according to the UNICEF report *Breaking the cycle of exclusion: Roma children in South East Europe. UNICEF 2007* http://www.unicef.org/ceecis/070305-Subregional_Study_Roma_Children.pdf One example is the issue of upgrading settlements. None of the NAPs account for children's needs in this area, such as outdoor safety, spaces for play, access to transport, and recreational and sports facilities. No role is foreseen for children and young people in helping to improve their own environment. According to UNICEF the NAPs do not reflect a holistic, multi-dimensional understanding of children's lives and well-being.
- Such an understanding is necessary to define what policies are needed to create conditions in families, communities, schools and healthcare to enable Romany children to develop to their full potential. In the education system this would, for example, mean not only focusing on enrolment and attendance rates but on the conditions for learning within schools: the quality of teaching, child participation and parental involvement, and tackling bullying and violence among students. Addressing the well-being of Romany children from a broader perspective requires comprehensive and coordinated strategies.
- As regards the sphere of education – affirmative and positive action is so important because schools play a crucial role in creating a wider sense of belonging in society. Integration and a sense of belonging should, always and everywhere, be a two-way process. The Roma cannot belong to a society that does not welcome them. Schools should prepare their pupils by cultivating such skills and virtues as sympathetic imagination, tolerance, openness to other ways of life and mutual respect. Schools must address issues of racism in playgrounds and classrooms, among children and teaching professionals. Schools must work to provide a welcoming and positive environment for Roma and all ethnic minority children.
- **Early childhood intervention from Year Zero: the provision of health care, development and education for children under compulsory school-age.** The material deprivation endured by so many Romany children in their early years, impedes their potential to progress from the very outset of their schooling. To ensure equality there is a clear need for a series of compensatory interventions at the earliest possible stage in a child's life. We need to think in broader terms than compulsory enrolment in pre-school. Readiness for school must include health and emotional well-being, cognitive and language development and take into account of the child's family and social environment.
- When we speak of Roma children we are not talking merely about a category of humankind. We are discussing the fate and dignity of millions of young individuals in all their diversity and uniqueness. We must refute those who would diagnose these children

in terms of what they lack, those who would categorize them as problematic. What is needed is a supportive, child-centered learning environment for these children to enable them to realize their potential and successfully adapt to mainstream schooling.

In a region characterised by aging populations and falling birth rates, the Roma population is the youngest and fastest growing demographic segment of the citizenry. Our societies cannot afford another lost generation of excluded and marginalised young Roma.

To paraphrase UNICEF, what is needed for the next five years of the Decade is nothing less than

"a revolution that places children at the heart of human development – not only because this offers a strong return on our investment (although it does) nor because the vulnerability of childhood calls upon our compassion (although it should), but rather for a more fundamental reason: because it is their right."

At the level of the European Union, the impact of the Decade is clear

The establishment of an integrated EU Roma Platform marks an unprecedented departure. The task of the Platform is to grapple with Roma issues at a European level. We now see signs of its commitment to engage fully in the Western Balkans. And we look forward to heightened political commitment and concrete recommendations from the 2nd EU Roma Summit in Cordoba in April 2010.

The Decade of Roma Inclusion provides a working template

To meet the challenges facing Roma communities in general and children in particular we need more than a Platform. We need a comprehensive EU strategy for Roma Inclusion that embraces member states and accession countries alike. The Decade of Roma Inclusion, its shortcomings notwithstanding, provides a working template. The Decade of Roma Inclusion is unique in bringing together such a wide array of partners with shared objectives and common goals and with a shared commitment to make a difference. The EU could harness these efforts and the experience garnered to date to best effect. I have been impressed by the concern and focus of many within the European Commission and the genuine desire to do the right thing. What is needed now is the courage and political will to move out of the comfort zone and for the Commission to devise a comprehensive strategy for Roma inclusion that is proportionate to the challenge.

One glaring deficit is the lack of ethnically disaggregated data. If there is no data there can be no progress. If we lack basic data we cannot devise effective, targeted policies. If we lack basic data we can neither make nor measure progress. The Open Society Institute has recently launched a report on the state of data collection across the Decade countries called No Data No Progress with clear recommendations on how best to move forward http://www.soros.org/initiatives/roma/articles_publications/publications/no-data-no-

progress-20100628. One thing is clear, early findings confirm our long held assertion that the lack of disaggregated data has proven to be a major barrier to progress; it weakens the impact of policies to promote equality and non-discrimination. Such failures may result in worsening the situation for the impoverished, the marginalized, and the disenfranchised.

Adopted in 2004, the European Common Basic Principles for Integration call for clearly defined objectives and highlight the need for evaluation and monitoring. Much more could be done by the EU to support and encourage governments to collect data disaggregated by ethnicity. Some states object to this, stating that the collection of ethnically disaggregated data is not permitted, that it cannot be done. The short answer is: 'yes it can'. There are adequate procedural safeguards in place to ensure that personal data is not put to improper use. In this area, the European Union could play a vital coordinating role in guiding and coordinating the efforts of national governments to collect the sort of data we need to move forward. And towards this end we need a comprehensive European strategy for Roma inclusion that prioritizes the rights and well-being of Romany children.

Policies and Recommendations, Part II

by Ivan Ivanov

I recommend the following actions:

- Adopt a framework strategy for the Roma.
- Improve the existing EU policy frameworks.
- Enhance legislation compliance and monitoring.
- The Open Method of Coordination should encourage a strategic, integrated approach and facilitate "mainstreaming" at the Member State level with regard to Roma integration as well as providing opportunities for networking and mutual learning.
- Positive measures need to be part of the EC strategy, in terms of its own initiatives and funding programmes and the guidance that it provides to the Member States.
- Establish a mechanism to monitor the Member States in order to tackle discrimination and racism directed towards the Roma.
- Focus on strengthening and expanding Roma civil society with particular focus on capacity and network building and core support for organisations at the European level.
- Greater support and encouragement for data gathering by the Member States.
- Promoting respect for Roma identities and culture should be an integral aspect of the EU approach.
- Identifying Roma target groups within current EU social inclusion, employment and life-long learning strategies should be a priority for the EU Council. This would inform the EU commitment to Roma integration and would greatly facilitate the bringing of Roma issues into the mainstream.

The actions indicate that Roma issues are quite well articulated at EU level. Some

Commissioners show a political will for change, but no clear and concrete commitments have been made. Perhaps I expect too much, but from my point of view this is something that should happen as soon as possible.

Reflections on how to make policy efforts more effective

Over the last five years there have been ongoing discussions with several organisations about why the high investment in Roma issues have not lead to a proportional outcome.

- One of the three problems that can be seen is that all these projects are not strategically focused. Usually they exist as parallel systems funded by different private or state run institutions and often they do not include ensured continuity or sustainability.
- Secondly, one of the obstacles to really making a difference is the issue of participation. In most cases institutions take a paternalistic approach. They tend to believe that they are better informed about the rights of the Roma than the Roma themselves. When the ethnic and cultural specificity of the Roma is not taken into account these projects usually fail. To take an example, in Bulgaria, my home country, a health care centre was built in the Roma ghetto, which lay some distance from the centre of the town. Regular check-ups for pregnant women were planned. The centre was staffed by two male gynecologists and two nurses, but over a period of six months not one single Roma woman came to the centre. What had not been taken into account is that Roma women will not consult male gynecologists. This aspect of the culture of Roma women had been overlooked and led to the failure of the project. Consultation and participation is, therefore, very important – the Roma should not be passive beneficiaries. They should be charged with responsibilities from the beginning to the end of each project.
- The third reason could be that often projects with the same goal and ideas are run in different regions or countries and these projects do not communicate with each other. Neither successes nor failures are communicated in an appropriate way, so that there seems to be no learning process.
- Policy initiatives of the European Union should always have a clear Roma aspect. The exchange of good practice should also be enforced. I am aware that not everything can and should be solved by "Brussels". There should be a shared responsibility between European and national levels and they should really be linked to each other.

Conclusion

by Lorne Walters

Lorne Walters presented a manifesto *"Putting Child Rights First – Say No to the Exploitation and Discrimination of Roma Children"*. (For the full text of the manifesto – please see Appendix 1.) The manifesto was written by Lorne Walters, Hvi Cazim and Nicolae Gheorghe and was endorsed in Brussels in March 2010. The document calls for the urgent implementation of a unified European stand by all stakeholders – Roma and non Roma – against the ever rising wave of ill-treatment, exploitation, discrimination and social

exclusion of Roma children and for the immediate protection and implementation of their fundamental rights. The document also lays out proposed methods and targets to improve the situation for the Roma children in Europe.

Lorne Walters also presented a letter from Hvzi Cazim to the meeting. Mr Cazim (who was unable to be present) is the President of the Brussels-based Roma NGO, ASBL Comité pour l'Union du Peuple Rhom. His letter (for the text see Appendix 2) calls upon other Roma leaders to immediately initiate a Roma child rights campaign.

We need a "Roma Marshall-Plan" to address this appalling situation

We have to break with what has been happening until now. We are getting into a situation where it is normal to have seminars and conferences about the fate of Roma and their children. But some kind of "Marshall-Plan" must be set in place to really make a difference – talks and resolutions do not help enough. The problem is: why are the existing agreements to change the situation of the Roma not being respected? How can it be that people who have the power to change the unbearable situation do not do anything? They are obviously aware of the situation as they have signed all the resolutions, but nothing is being done to change the situation. It is really time to start the work: the Roma people have to be out in front, but they have to know that others are there beside them.



I love you baby (Sárvár)

© Tamás Schild

Appendix 1:

'Putting Child Rights First – Say No to Exploitation and Discrimination of Roma Children'

Rationale for the urgent implementation of a unified European stand by all stakeholders – Roma and non Roma – against the ever rising wave of ill-treatment, exploitation, discrimination and social exclusion of Roma children and for the immediate protection and implementation of their indivisible fundamental rights¹

1. *Given the vulnerability of children in general – especially within the EU Roma community, itself a longstanding victim of discrimination, persecution and social exclusion – common sense would require the immediate mainstreaming for these children of a non-discriminatory effective protection against all forms of violence, neglect and exploitative activities, involving or not trafficking². Unfortunately just the opposite is true and the aggravating factor of today's all-for-profit global economy contributing to the exponential spread of social exclusion and violence against children in general is only making things worse, particularly for successive generations of Roma youth.*
2. *The illicit and persistent failing of EU society as a whole to provide adequate protection for Roma children and their fundamental rights curtails their individual potential for full positive human development thus gravely compromising their possibilities to grow up to be responsible empowered citizens in a strengthened socially inclusive Europe;*
3. *Indeed, given the continued absence of prioritized protection and the adoption by all stakeholders – Roma and non Roma, Member States, NGOs, concerned citizens everywhere – of an uncompromising and non-discriminatory child rights centred approach³ to deal effectively with the root causes of this worsening vicious cycle of successive lost generations of sacrificed Roma children, the legitimate on-going campaigns for full human rights by and for the Roma community as a whole cannot possibly succeed; as Nelson Mandela so wisely put it: "Children are the rock on which will be built the future of Humanity: Citizens of tomorrow, for the better or for the worse."*

¹ As set out notably in the UN's Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)

² Cf. the important update of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF): Guidelines for the protection of child victims of trafficking, September 2006, available at http://www.unicef.org/ceecis/0610-Unicef_Victims_Guidelines_en.pdf

³ Cf. the European Parliament Resolution of 16 January 2008 : Towards an EU strategy on the rights of the child, P6_TA(2008)0012 – (2007/2093(INI)), notably para.89: "{the Parliament} calls on the Member States to implement serious measures to ban all different forms of exploitation of children including exploitation for prostitution or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery or servitude, use of children associated with begging, illegal activities, sport and related activities, illicit adoption, forced marriage or any other forms of exploitation;"

4. It is therefore urgent for the above-mentioned stakeholders – Roma leaders at the forefront – to kick start together a highly public European Union backed campaign to raise awareness of the injustice and increasing dangers of the pursuit of the present unsustainable racist driven policy of “laissez-faire” and to propose and implement concrete measures to effectively stamp out all forms of abuse, exploitation and exclusion of Roma children.

Method and targets – a few initial open-ended propositions

1. In a nutshell, stakeholders and supporters of this campaign must come together without further delay to determine how to explicitly mainstream current general Roma fundamental rights demands by prioritizing those of their children, hence the present appeal “Putting Child Rights First”. Thus, without “reinventing the wheel”, this could be achieved by appropriately reformulating the legitimate fundamental rights demands of the Roma community as a whole into specific child rights terms and basically “putting these first” with the specific aim of eradicating on-going violations of the fundamental rights of Roma children and youth throughout the EU⁴;

2. This child rights prioritizing of current Roma fundamental rights demands could eventually take the form of an ad hoc “Charter”⁵ open to the signature of the widest possible range of concerned potential stakeholders;

3. To increase success, the campaign must benefit from a high-profile launch involving at the very least the EU Parliament and preferably all EU bodies as well as the active participation of relevant Roma, European child rights and antiracist NGOs;

4. The invitation to this highly publicized launch – preferably in a high venue building of the EU – should include significant field savvy key speakers⁶ to underscore the gravity and the urgency of the said campaign’s objectives;

5. Different concerted actions should involve at a minimum urgent verification and denunciation of existing breaches in present legally binding EU, UN and domestic Member States’ legislation imposing the non-discriminatory protection of all children – especially with regard to Roma – and result in their immediate correction;

⁴ All existing Roma and Roma related policy documents – resolutions, recommendations, communications, etc. – duly adopted by Member States and European institutions must presently be urgently matched by ad hoc Action Plans, conceived and implemented from the “Putting Child Rights First” point of view.

⁵ For example, by reformulating into a “Putting Child Rights First” perspective key elements of relevant existing documents such as the European Roma and Travellers Forum’s “Charter of Roma Rights” (February 2010) and the EU Council of Europe’s “EU Common Basic Principles for Roma Inclusion” (June 2009), etc.

⁶ These could include, for example, renowned experts on child trafficking, specialized researchers from international organizations such as Anti-Slavery International, Terre des Hommes, UNICEF, ILO/IPEC, UN.GIFT(Global Initiative to Fight Human Trafficking), etc., as well as specialized ad hoc investigative reporters and eventual screenings of extracts of some of their work, films, photography, etc., documenting the trans-European exploitation of Roma children and youth in prostitution, forced begging, forced crime, etc., which could serve as visual testimony to some less visible aspects of the problem, etc...

6. Other actions might also include the setting up of a specific “Roma child rights watchdog” body having official EU competency for scrutiny and binding denunciation of all reported violations; to do so this group would necessarily interact and cooperate closely with all existing EU bodies presently monitoring and combating child rights violations notably involving human trafficking;

7. Similarly the creation of a trans-European permanent helpline for potentially vulnerable Roma child victims and other concerned groups could add visibility and efficiency to the above; etc...⁷

Importantly, the proposed campaign must necessarily be perceived to be spearheaded by Roma MEPs and other recognized Roma leaders themselves, together with the above-mentioned stakeholders. This shared ownership is essential in order to ensure necessary credibility and widespread public support and to bring to an end current untenable implicit trivialization and condoning of the abuse, exploitation and discrimination of Roma children in the name of a most doubtful “cultural” political correctness. In truth this cynical form of pseudo-humanistic anti-Roma racism is actually fuelling and not combating increasing anti-Gipsy-ism, dangerous racist stereotypes and multiple anti-Roma discrimination whilst allowing Member State and European authorities at all levels to continue to wriggle off the hook of their legally binding obligations to effectively prevent and eliminate these problems.

Finally, “Putting Child Rights First” should, within the above-mentioned specific context of effectively protecting vulnerable Roma children, strike home the essential but often forgotten universal wisdom that as adult citizens, what we do to our children – be they Roma or not – they will one day do back to us!

Indeed, if as a society at large we continue to remain incapable of adequately protecting and respecting the fundamental rights of our own children, how can they possibly be expected as adults to do otherwise?

Surely, considering the consequences for all of us, “wait and see” is today no longer an option.

The present urgent appeal for active endorsement and ownership of the “Putting Child Rights First” campaign is especially directed to all participants at the 2nd Roma Summit, organized in Cordoba on the 8th and 9th of April 2010 by the Spanish 2010 Presidency of the EU, and in particular to the EU Commission, the EU Parliament, the EU Council, the EU Member States and states participating in the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015, the Council of Europe, the OSCE Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues, the Roma representatives and civil society

⁷ This brief list of propositions should not be seen as limited and/or definitive but rather as a series of suggestions of means to an end; indeed any proposition which would reinforce the main thrust of the campaign i.e. “Putting Child Rights First: Say No to Discrimination and Exploitation of Roma Children” would be most welcome.

organisations and notably to the EU Roma Policy Coalition⁸ with specific reference to its "Declaration on the Occasion of the European Roma Summit", Brussels, 16 September 2008.

Brussels, 10-11 March 2010

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⁸ The members of this coalition are Amnesty International, European Roma Rights Center, European Network Against Racism, Open Society Institute, Spolu International Foundation, Minority Rights Group International, European Roma Grassroots Organisation, Roma Education Fund, Fundacion Secretariado Gitano. This working blueprint text was originally drafted in November 2009 for the proposed campaign by the Brussels based independent consultant on child health and child rights issues, Lorne Walters and subsequently embellished together with Nicolae Gheorghe (Roumania) and Hvzi Cazim (Belgium).

Appendix 2:

Brussels, March 2, 2010

To:

The Alliance for Childhood European Network Group

Brussels, Belgium

The Working Group on the Quality of Childhood at the European Parliament

Subject: the 21st session "Improving the Quality of Childhood in the European Union: the case of Roma Children"

Dear MEPs, Dear Friends, Dear Fellow Roma,

As President of the Brussels based Roma NGO, ASBL Comité pour l'Union du Peuple Rhom, I wish to express to you all, and especially to Mr Michiel Matthes, Secretary General of the Alliance for Childhood European Network Group, our sincere thanks for his warm invitation to participate in the above-mentioned 21st session for the promotion of the well-being of Roma children.

Unfortunately, due to a compelling professional engagement, I am unable to attend this important working session. I do hope, however, that you may accept and find useful the following written remarks.

As some of you may know, since its creation in 2001, the C.U.P.R. has set out at the very top of its agenda the fight against human trafficking in general, and especially against all forms of child exploitation, abuse and neglect, notably associated with forced begging, early marriages, forced pregnancies, prostitution and other forced criminal activities of which Roma children, girls and boys alike, are increasingly the vulnerable victims of predators, from without and, most regrettably, from within our own community.

Whatever the circumstances, the exploitation and/or trafficking of vulnerable Roma citizens, especially children, can never be justified or tolerated, especially when perpetrated by other Roma including family members.

Neither can be the continuing incomprehensible failure by the EU authorities and Member States to effectively protect especially Roma children from all forms of violence, abuse and neglect, in clear breach of their legally binding obligations to do so. We also vigorously denounce growing cynical attempts, from without and from within the Roma community, to publicly condone or trivialize these practices as a "lesser evil", wrongly suggesting as

"legitimate" a sort of would-be special "Roma right" to exploit vulnerable others "out of necessity".

What we must urgently understand, however, is that the combined toxic effects of prolonged decades of often violent persecution, ever increasing poverty, social exclusion and endemic despair and desperation resulting in successive lost generations of sacrificed Roma children does not come without a price. Indeed, if not urgently remedied, the knock-on effects of these untreated wounds to the individual and collective Roma psyches, like gangrene, will inexorably continue to eat away at our moral and cultural vitality, thus compromising our potential to attain the economic, social and cultural goals we are so desperately trying to reach. Increasing drug abuse among our youth and its influence in rising crime rates is just an example of this. If we dare to continue to ignore the vital necessity of putting the best interests and well-being of our children at the very vanguard of our endeavours, we are effectively compromising any realistic hope for significant change for the better in the foreseeable future.

Moreover the above-mentioned practices, especially involving the use of infants and children as commercial commodities, inevitably contribute to the increasing vilification of the Roma in general, perceived as being "less than human" in the eyes of our European neighbours, thus directly reinforcing the vicious circle of rising fear and rejection of our community whilst consolidating the racist stereotypes and discrimination which are seriously hindering the human rights based social inclusion we all so ardently aspire to.

At the eve of the 2nd Roma Summit in Spain next month, it is therefore high time for all Roma leaders, not just some of us, to urgently break with our present uncomfortable and unsustainable "silence" and to speak out unambiguously with one voice against this growing threat to the future of our community. Indeed, if we, the so called Roma leaders remain incapable of standing up publicly and proudly taking full ownership for the protection of our own women and children as a prerequisite for the sustainable implementation of the fundamental rights of our community, why then should we expect others to do it for us?

Immediate and resolute action on the ground to effectively protect and guarantee without discrimination basic child rights to all Roma children and youth, as set out notably in the legally binding dispositions of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), must therefore become the top priority for all European stakeholders, Roma and non Roma alike.

Successful implementation of other key child rights such as the all-important access to quality education must necessarily be directly associated with the immediate provision to all needy Roma families of adequate housing, employment and unfettered access to health care.

In conclusion, in the name of the C.U.P.R., I wish to you all a most successful working session

today and encourage you to adopt decisive measures in favour of urgently prioritizing the full protection of Roma children and their basic human rights against all forms of discrimination, ill-treatment and exploitation in order to guarantee that the present generation of Roma children may still indeed have a chance to be able to grow up to become responsible, empowered citizens in a strengthened, socially inclusive Europe, thus ensuring the aims we have all been fighting for.

To that effect, I look forward personally to actively participating in your on-going efforts.

Thank you.

*Hvzi CAZIM, President
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Ivan Ivanov

is the Executive Director of the European Roma Information Office (ERIO). Previously an attorney for the Budapest-based European Roma Rights Centre, Ivan Ivanov was involved for five years in researching and building the legal strategy of ground-breaking civil rights cases filed with the European Court of Human Rights and the domestic courts of several countries in Central and Eastern Europe. From 1996 to 1998 he served as a legal adviser for the Human Rights Project, a national human rights and legal defense organisation based in Sofia, Bulgaria. In this period Ivan Ivanov spearheaded the development of a number of strategic litigation cases and key advocacy initiatives.

Ivan Ivanov holds degrees in medicine and law. From 1999 to 2000 he was a visiting scholar at the Law School of Columbia University in New York, where he specialized in international human rights and anti-discrimination law. He has written a number of publications focusing on issues related to discrimination and access to education and health care.

Livia Járóka

is a social anthropologist and Member of the European Parliament. She is a board member of the European Roma Information Office and the Roma Education Fund. Livia Járóka won the award of "Member of the European Parliament of the Year" in 2006 in the category of Justice and Fundamental Rights and was nominated to be a member of the Forum of Young Global Leaders by the World Economic Forum. Currently she is the Vice-Chairwoman of the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality, rapporteur of "The EU strategy on the social inclusion of Roma" appointed by the Committee on Civil Liberties Justice and Home Affairs, and Chairwoman of the Working Group on Roma Inclusion of the European People's Party.

Bernard Rorke

is the director of International Advocacy and Research, Roma Initiatives, Open Society Foundations, Budapest, Hungary. Formerly director of the Roma Participation Program, he has worked with the Open Society Institute since 1998. Currently he teaches the "Roma Rights" course at Central European University in Budapest. He has a PhD from the Centre for the Study of Democracy, University of Westminster, and an MSc in politics and sociology from the University of London. He has written on Roma issues, national identity and nationalism. Publications include *Between the Living and the Dead: the Politics of Irish History* (1999) and *Beyond Friends and Enemies: the Politics of Irish Nationalism in the 20th Century* (2010). His blog post for commentary on Roma issues can be found on <http://blog.soros.org/?s=rorke>

Lorne Walters

is a Brussels based independent researcher and consultant on child health and child rights issues. He has been actively involved with the elaboration of the EU Parliament resolution of 16 January 2008. *Towards an EU strategy on the rights of the child*, notably concerning the need for Member States to ban in law all forms of exploitation of children. Similarly, he is the author of a proposal to explicitly ban the "use" of children associated with begging, which, mutatis mutandis, could serve as a model for much needed harmonization and clarification of present EU Member States' domestic legislation on this particular issue. Since 2005 he has been the coordinator for a citizen's appeal promoting such legal clarification and the reinforcing of a preventive child rights centred approach with regard to the identification and referral of presumed victims of exploitation, whether or not involving trafficking, the text of which can be found on the website: www.stop-mendicite-enfance.org. He is also currently active as an independent advisor to European Roma NGOs and individuals working on child protection issues.