



EUROPEAN WOMEN'S
LOBBY
EUROPEEN DES FEMMES

STATEMENT

Brussels, 12 October 2010

The European Women's Lobby condemns the expulsion of Roma from France and calls for more European and national actions to ensure that the fundamental rights of Romani women, men and children living in Europe are fully respected

The European Women's Lobby (EWL) – a European network representing more than 2500 women's organisations, including Romani women's organisations – expresses its concern at the recent abusive measures taken by the French authorities and by those of other Member States (such as Denmark, Italy and Germany) targeting Roma for expulsion; the EWL calls on the appropriate authorities to ensure access for Roma to residence rights, on an equal standing with other European citizens. We welcome in this regard the Resolution adopted by the European Parliament on 9 September condemning the expulsion of Roma from France as well as the action by the European Commission (EC) requesting France to fully transpose the Directive on free movement, but regret the EC decision not to pursue France with legal proceedings for discriminating against Roma.

We urge these authorities to suspend immediately all expulsions of Roma and ensure the respect of the fundamental rights of all Travellers and Romani women, men and children in line with the EU treaties and the European social charter. In France, the forced evictions of the Roma and of the French Traveller (Gens du voyage) populations, first and foremost have gravely violated the fundamental rights of Romani and Traveller women, men and children as French nationals and European citizens. While the situation in most of the holding sites had already led France to be condemned by the European Committee of Social Rights (ECSR) on 19 October 2009¹ for its failure to fulfill its obligations in the framework of the European Social Charter, these evictions have resulted in an unacceptable upheaval to home and family life, a disruption in the education of children as well in access to services such as health-care, family planning and natal care, all essential services for women that have had an impact of both Traveller and migrant Roma communities.

The EWL also condemns the increasing stigmatising discourse held by some authorities and urges them to act at the national level to fight discrimination and ensure the inclusion of both Travellers and Roma. It is unacceptable that women's rights issues are manipulated by the political discourse and used to stigmatise a specific group as has been the case in France. While sexual exploitation and trafficking in women and children are very serious issues that should be addressed by national authorities, the focus of policies should rather be on ensuring the protection of all women and children victims of trafficking and sexual exploitation, independent of their legal status and their ethnic group, as well as tackling the demand for prostitution.

Urgent action is needed throughout Europe to tackle the marginalisation and discrimination faced by Romani women, men and children and Travellers. Particular attention should notably be paid to the various forms of discrimination that have been widely documented and range from access to education/health services (i.e. staff prejudices or segregation in school/health units, maternity clinics, etc.) to access to the labour market and job opportunities (due to prejudices on the part of employers, co-workers and, often, representatives of local institutions) to cases of sterilisation. Serious deficiencies have been found in several countries, such as France, the United Kingdom, Italy, Denmark, as well as some Eastern European states, regarding a violation of the rights of Roma and Traveller populations, in particular in relation to police actions, institutional discrimination and inequalities in access to social services and education.

¹ European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC) v. France, Complaint No. 51/2008, <http://www.errc.org/cms/upload/file/france-ecsr-51-2008-decision-19oct2009.pdf>



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Therefore, the European Women's Lobby calls on:

National authorities:

- To suspend all expulsions of Roma;
- To fulfill their obligations in relation to the European Social Charter and provide basic access to gender-sensitive services (housing, health, education, work) to the Romani migrant minority and to the French Traveller (Gens du voyage) community in order to ensure better socio-economic integration and well-being;
- To eliminate discrimination and prejudice in all sectors and at all levels by putting into force the appropriate and effective structures;
- To promote Roma inclusion, with specific measures for Romani women, through the use of the available EU structural funds;

The European institutions:

- To act to ensure that the fundamental rights of Romani and Traveller women and men living in Europe are respected, notably by verifying the consistency of Member States' actions with EU primary law and EU legislation;
- To develop a strong European strategy for Roma inclusion that pays particular attention to the situations and needs of Romani women in cooperation with Romani women's organisations;
- To consult with Romani women's organisations;
- To work towards the implementation of the recommendations of the Resolution on Romani women in the EU, adopted by the European Parliament in 2006.