

Press Release

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Stateless Roma: no documents – no rights

Strasbourg, 17.08.2010 – “Tens of thousands of Roma live in Europe without a nationality. Lacking birth certificates, identity cards, passports and other documents, they are often denied basic rights such as education, healthcare, social assistance and the right to vote” said the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, Thomas Hammarberg, publishing today his latest human rights [comment](#).

“This problem exists in many countries in Europe, but it is particularly acute in the Western Balkans where restrictive citizenship rules have been adopted. In Slovenia, thousands of people, a considerable number of them Roma, were erased from the registry of permanent residents in 1992, while in Serbia and Croatia, Roma who seek regularisation often face complicated administrative procedures and excessive fees.”

Furthermore, conflicts worsened the situation. “Many Roma from Kosovo* were forced to flee for their lives, and documents were lost, destroyed or displaced. With lower levels of education and a problem of missing papers it was all the more difficult for many of them to acquire the documents necessary for life and rights in hosting countries.”

States should also refrain from policies that worsen the situation. “Western European states should stop forcibly returning Roma to Kosovo. A recent UNICEF [report](#) indicates that 38% of the Roma returned from Germany are stateless. The situation is even worse for children: 42% of those who have lived, and often also were born, abroad during or after the war are not registered today.”

“The right to a nationality is a basic human right, enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It amounts to a ‘right to have rights’ and must be enforced – for everyone - with much more energy and determination than has been the case so far.”

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**All reference to Kosovo, whether to the territory, institutions or population, in this text shall be understood in full compliance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244 and without prejudice to the status of Kosovo.*