

# Press Release

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Estonia  
Finland  
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Georgia  
Germany  
Greece  
Hungary  
Iceland  
Ireland  
Italy  
Latvia  
Liechtenstein  
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## Do not stigmatise Roma

Strasbourg, 15.09.2010 - Repatriation of Roma EU citizens is now common in several European countries, said the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, Thomas Hammarberg, publishing today his latest human rights [comment](#).

France's crackdown on crime has specifically targeted Roma from Romania and Bulgaria. And France is not alone. Italy, for instance, has arrested and deported a considerable number of Romanian Roma in the last few years. Recently, Roma have also been sent back to their home countries by Denmark and Sweden.

Pushing Roma families between EU member states offers no solutions to any problems. It has to be recognised that there are reasons why members of the Roma minority seek a future in other countries and that these concrete problems must be addressed. The majority of the Roma in Europe live in abject poverty; they are deeply disadvantaged in employment, housing standards and access to health care.

Roma school children are in some countries routinely assumed to lack learning capacity and put in special classes. Many children have also suffered bullying in the school environment and the drop out rate among them is high. Tens of thousands of Roma in Europe are stateless which creates further obstacles for them in terms of access to social services.

Discrimination against Roma communities in Europe has a long and bitter history. The repression came to a climax in the 1930-40s when they were targeted by fascist regimes in both Romania and Italy. In areas controlled by the German Nazis several hundred thousand Roma were rounded up and brought to concentration camps or executed directly. This genocide was not even an issue at the Nuremberg trial and the little compensation to the survivors or to the victims' family members came late, if at all.

**Anti-Gypsyism has continued until this day and is now exploited by extremist groups in several European countries.**

Mob violence against Roma individuals has been reported in, for instance, the Czech Republic and Hungary. It might be sobering to learn that the Canadian authorities have in fact granted asylum to Roma refugees from these countries.

The persistent refrain in the speech against Roma is that they are committing crimes – this has also been one theme of the French campaign. Of course, there are some Roma who are guilty of thefts and some have also been badly exploited by traffickers. It is a well known fact that socially marginalised and destitute people tend to be somewhat over-represented in criminal statistics – for obvious reasons.

These problems should be taken seriously and preventive steps should be taken. However, they offer no excuse for stigmatising all Roma; the overwhelming majority of them are not in conflict with the law. It is a crucial, ethical principle that you do not blame a whole group for what some of its members might have done.

**European states and their leaders must come to terms with their responsibility for the current situation of Roma.**

The stigmatising rhetoric has to stop. Serious steps must be taken to counter discrimination of Roma, not least in their home countries. Indeed, proactive measures are necessary to undo injustices which have turned Roma into a European underclass. A first step is to give children a chance to be educated and adults to find a job.

Meaningful reforms to protect their human rights will only be possible through dialogue with Roma representatives. Some of the changes will have to be initiated by Roma themselves within their own communities. However, there will be little space for such efforts as long as they are targeted by hate speech from politicians and others.

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