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"Spain should build on its good practices to improve the integration of Roma people"

Strasbourg, 01/06/2011 – "Over recent years, Spain has adopted constructive programmes to foster Roma integration. They should be consolidated and further developed, in particular as concerns access to employment, housing and education" said the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, Thomas Hammarberg, releasing today a [letter](#) addressed to the Minister of Health, Social Policy and Equality of Spain, Leire Pajín. The letter follows up to the Commissioner's visit to Spain from 4 to 6 April 2011.

Ensuring access to employment is necessary for the improvement of living conditions for the Roma. "During the last decade, Roma employment rates have increased in particular through the ACCEDER programme which has been facilitating Roma access to the labour market. More than 58 000 Roma have taken part in this programme, leading to almost 40 000 employment contracts for Roma. However, the current economic downturn affecting Spain may endanger these improvements. The Spanish government should maintain its political and financial support to existing programmes and ensure that the economic situation will not disproportionately affect vulnerable groups of people, including the Roma."

Despite concrete results in ameliorating access to adequate housing, Roma still live in disproportionate numbers in segregated and substandard dwellings. Migrant Roma encounter even harsher living conditions, as the Commissioner observed in the "El Gallinero" district in Madrid. "Insufficient availability of publicly-subsidised housing and discriminatory attitudes among property owners constitute major obstacles for Roma in obtaining adequate housing. Cases of collective evictions of foreign Roma from their settlements without being offered an adequate alternative were also reported. National and regional authorities should develop effective programmes to offer adequate accommodation to all Roma people."

Commissioner Hammarberg is also very concerned by the growing gap between the Roma and majority population in terms of life expectancy and infant mortality. "Roma live at least 8 years less than the national average and mortality at birth is 1.4 times higher. The Spanish authorities should adopt more resolute measures to improve the health conditions of Roma, including by promoting awareness - raising campaigns, intercultural mediation and peer education".

Considerable progress has been made towards achieving the full education of Roma children at primary level. However, concerns remain as regards secondary schooling. "The higher dropout rate among Roma in comparison with the majority population indicates that they do not benefit from the same opportunities. Efforts should be strengthened to ensure that more Roma children complete compulsory education and go on to attend university".

Finally, the Commissioner observes that further efforts are necessary to eliminate deep-seated prejudices towards the Roma and recommends that measures to promote diversity and fight discrimination, including in the media and the police, be taken. "Good practices in this field exist. They should be disseminated more widely at local and national level to offer useful guidance to law enforcement authorities, public officials and civil servants." The promotion of Roma culture and history among the majority population should also be reinforced.

Read the [reply](#) of the Minister of Health, Social Policy and Equality of Spain.

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Elected by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the present Commissioner, Mr Thomas Hammarberg, took up his function on 1 April 2006