



« Harassment and stigmatisation: Policies and public statements are helping to make the conditions of those living in slums worse»

2012-2013 report summary

This new report by the National Human Rights Action Group Romeurope provides an analysis of the public statements - in a historic context - that relate to people who are living in very difficult conditions in slums and squats in France. The predominant kind of rhetoric coming from politicians and the media confines these people to a specific and stigmatised « Roma » identity.

This report attempts, by way of some straightforward recommendations, to offer another view of these people in an effort to establish with each of them a solution that is designed to meet their choices and needs.

Despite a change in government now for almost two years and inconsistent with the stance taken by its members when they were in opposition, it has to be noted with dismay that the situation of those who are living in slums continues to deteriorate.

1. The stance taken by the National Human Rights Action Group Romeurope

In the Republic of France there can be no place for talk, actions, and policies that target specifically a population recognised throughout the world and given an identity, that is Roma or otherwise. On the other hand, it is essential that the Republic of France makes an attempt to combat any discrimination resulting from such a stance and to be aware of those who suffer from it.

It is essential for the National Human Rights Action Group Romeurope to refer to « slums » when the living areas of these vulnerable people are talked about and not to « camps », a term chosen by governments. The reference to slums is necessary so as to increase awareness of the current situation and to remind the government and local authorities of their responsibilities towards their residents.

2. Being evacuated from the slums and being expelled from the country: the failure of a security-based policy

The process of being evacuated from slums with no possible alternatives is proceeding at an ever increasing pace, making those families which are forced to become vagrants even more vulnerable and so putting their lives at risk; this is a far cry from the promises made in the presidential campaign. The number of foreigners expelled from the country continues to be the benchmark used by the Minister of the Interior when assessing the effectiveness of his policy. The Romanians and the

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Bulgarians, European citizens, make up the nationalities that are the most excluded in the country and are the target of abusive practices when repatriation arrangements are issued (OQTF=*notice to leave French territory*).

3. Stigmatising by the State

The prevailing policy still includes an approach which is security-based but which is completely ineffective. What is the real aim of this government policy? To make these people scapegoats, the source of all the ills of our society. They are used as a perfect cover aimed at hiding any embarrassment or criticism at times of economic crisis. Whether as a result of the prevailing rhetoric coming from the politicians or from the media, you become on the one hand aware of language which leads to legitimising the different treatment of a part of the population which creates discrimination and on the other hand of the verbal abuse and physical violence against it.

4. The recommendations of the Human Rights Action Group Romeurope

*They do not relate specifically to one population group. On the other hand, they do accord with the **application** of the same principle to all, which is the principle of **GENERAL LAW**. The close support which these people have to receive is the same as that of all people who are experiencing poverty and social exclusion.*

The prerequisites:

- Any public initiative has to be based on the principle of equality of rights,
- Any measure to provide support is based on the circumstances surrounding the person's individual situation and the situation of the family of this person,
- Any solution has to be created with the people affected,
- Creating solutions requires a set period of time essential to the intervention and the preparation work by those people/organisations involved,
- Preference has to be given to dialogue with all those involved, including dialogue with the support organisations,
- It is important to pursue a comprehensive and consistent policy nationwide which encourages mutual support among communities.

Priority measures recommended by the National Human Rights Action Group Romeurope:

- Changing the language and practices of most of the policy makers and some elements of the media and real commitment in the fight against discrimination,
- Stopping group issues of notices to leave French territory (OQTF) without a prior individual examination of the circumstances,
- Stopping the evacuation of people without any proposals for accommodating or housing them which are designed to meet each individual set of circumstances,
- To ensure the transitional arrangements applying to the whole territory come to an end, in particular those relating to full access to the services of the Pôle Emploi (the newly created agency that merges employment services and unemployment insurance),
- Effective access to schooling in the case of children living in slums and squats by activating all the necessary mechanisms in the national Education system,

- Systematic care and treatment from the Child Protection Services of minors who are at risk, within the context of the existing provisions under common law,
- Action by the CCAS (the French National Union of Social Action Community Centres) to settle people in a home throughout the territory, ,
- Access to a Social Welfare system for all.

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