Human rights abuses and discrimination against Roma

October – December 2013
This publication includes snapshots that are illustrations of human rights abuses and discrimination against Roma in EU member states and candidate countries. The period covered is October-December 2013.

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Neo-Nazis again march against Roma in Ostrava

On 19 October, a group of neo-Nazis again marched against Roma in the town of Ostrava, following a similar march in August that resulted in street battles between neo-Nazi demonstrators and police. During the most recent march, more than 300 people participated, with firecrackers and glass bottles thrown during the march. The neo-Nazis attempted to march on the Roma neighbourhood of Přívoz, however they were closely monitored by police throughout the day and ultimately dispersed, with 15 demonstrators detained.

On 28 October, yet another neo-Nazi demonstration of against Roma in Ostrava took place, with the group of approximately 200-300 people once again marching on the neighbourhood of Přívoz. Police barricade a street in order to prevent the neo-Nazis coming into contact with an anti-racism demonstration, however the neo-Nazi demonstrators reportedly repeatedly attempted to assault Roma during the afternoon, chasing some Roma residents. Roma in Ostrava vowed to continue their own peaceful demonstrations against neo-Nazis and racism.

Sources:
http://praguemonitor.com/2013/10/21/anti-roma-rally-held-ostrava

France

Roma girl escorted off school bus by police to be deported

The manner in which the recent deportation of Leonarda Dibrani was carried out suggests the presence of discriminatory attitudes towards Roma migrants and asylum seekers in France. On 9 October, the Dibrani family was deported from France to Kosovo after their application for asylum was denied. The family was detained by police at their house, however Leonarda was on a school trip. Police called the school and insisted that the bus be stopped, despite the objections of one of Leonarda’s teachers. Leonarda was then escorted off the bus and detained by police in full view of her school friends, and was deported with her family later that night.

It has been reported that the family’s application was rejected on the grounds of ‘insufficient prospect of social and economic integration’, despite Leonarda having learnt fluent French after having lived in France for almost five years. The deportation of the Dibrani family was carried out legally, however the manner in which Leonarda was detained suggest the presence of
discriminatory attitudes that justified police stopping a school bus and detaining a 15 year old school girl.

Further, on 1 November French journalist Natacha Polony tweeted a picture of a woman who appeared to be begging at the entrance to a Metro station and who was wearing clothing with a designer brand name printed on it. Accompanying this picture was the comment ‘Leonarda back in France for fashionweek (sic)’. Polony quickly deleted the tweet and dismissed it as a ‘bad joke’, however accusations of xenophobia and finding humour in human misery have been levelled at the journalist.

Sources:

http://uk.reuters.com/article/2013/10/17/uk-france-migration-idUKBRE99G0BD20131017


http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/11/01/natacha-polony-backlash-twitter-leonarda-photo_n_4193720.html

Roma forcibly evicted from a squat in Lyon

On 2 December 2013, police violently evicted around 73 Roma among which 24 children from a squatted house in Lyon (ERRC, LDH, 2014). Despite of the presence of children the police used tear gas, batons and sticks to violently expel the Roma from their shelter. From September to December alone 5,528 foreign Roma have been forcibly evicted from squatted spaces and slums by the French authorities, the number of Roma migrants evicted in 2013 amounts to approximately 21,537 persons (ERRC, LDH, 2014). Although in summer, the numbers of evictions were even higher, evictions continued in the winter months despite of the weather. In the case of the evictions on 2 December in Lyon, the order for eviction has been in place since mid-August—the fact that the authorities have waited with the evictions until winter can be considered inhumane. In many cases of eviction in France, Roma have not been offered alternative housing, nor have they received social support. This policy of rejection and exclusion shows that there is no attempt to integrate Roma. It, moreover, opens up channels for extremism and racism against Roma. After the change in government, evictions became even more violent, although president Hollande condemned the eviction and expulsion policy under the Sarkozy government before the elections. The eviction actions by French authorities disregard international and European treaties, as well as a bylaw passed on 26 August 2012 demanding a social assessment of the residents before evicting them.

Sources:
French politicians continue spreading anti-Roma discourse

In December Jean-Marie le Pen, former leader of the extreme right-wing party Front National has repeatedly made racist comments on Sinti and Roma. He claimed that Roma were naturally inclined to steal, by saying that Roma “like birds”, “steal [/fly] naturally” (“comme les oiseaux”, “volent naturellement”). The French word “voler” can mean both “fly” and “steal”. After le Pen had uttered this for the first time, on 19 December 2013, he was fined 5000€ by a Parisian court for publicly insulting a group based on their ethnicity. Le Pen, nevertheless, repeated his statement on 27 December 2013. He added: “this means that Roma people fly over [national] borders, they pass over borders to come to us,” and “I think they will depart on January 1, we are waiting for them. Sie kommen [(they are coming in German)]. They are coming.” With this he made a reference to the right for the European freedom of movement for Romanians and Bulgarians, entering into power on 1 January 2014. With his statement le Pen makes essentialist claims, assuming that it would be “natural” or genetically determined for Roma to steal. Before, in 2012, le Pen was convicted for Holocaust denial, in July he stated that Roma were “smelly” and “rash inducing”.

Negative, discriminatory anti-Roma discourse has been widespread in French media and political discourse throughout the last months. Racist and discriminatory comments came not only from right-wing politicians, but also from politicians from other camps. In September, for instance, the socialist Interior Minister Manuel Valls had made stigmatizing comments about Roma.

Sources:

http://www.liberation.fr/societe/2013/12/19/jean-marie-le-pen-condamne-pour-des-propos-sur-les-roms_967754
Greece

Roma girl removed from her family due to her hair colour and complexion

During a police raid on a Roma settlement near the Greek town of Farsala on 16 October, a young girl (estimated to be four years old) was removed by police and taken into the care of a charity. The justification offered for this child removal was that the girl had blonde hair and green eyes, while her ‘parents’ had darker complexions. The Greek Roma couple involved claimed that Maria’s biological parents willingly left the child with them and that they informally adopted her, however they were both arrested and charged with child abduction.

After the case was reported in the media, allegations of child trafficking, forced begging, and child prostitution were levelled against the Greek couple, with no valid evidence offered to support such claims. Headlines included ‘Little Maria made to dance for cash’ and ‘Maria mystery: Police investigate whether child traffickers planned to sell girl’. The director of the charity caring for Maria, Smile of the Child, stated that Maria was ‘either sold at maternity, or later abducted ... they use these children for begging, or later for prostitution, or, even worse, for selling for other purposes’. Maria was widely referred to in the media as ‘the blonde angel’.

DNA tests subsequently proved that the Greek couple were not the biological parents of Maria, with the media and authorities speculating that on the basis of her ‘characteristics’ Maria was from northern or eastern Europe. Further investigations revealed that Maria was the child of a Roma couple from Bulgaria who willingly gave her to the Greek couple as they could not afford to take her home to Bulgaria. Maria remains in the care of a Greek charity.

Throughout this case it is clear that the appearance of Maria and the contrasting stereotypical appearance of Roma (dark skinned, dark hair, brown eyes) played a key role in shaping official actions and public opinion, including the removal of a child from her family. Further, following the discovery of Maria’s biological parents in Bulgaria, seven of their other children have now been removed from their care.

Sources:
Two Roma children removed from their parents due to their fair complexions

Following the removal of Maria (‘the blonde angel’) by Greek police, two Roma children – a seven year old girl and a two year old boy – in Ireland were removed from the care of their families after being reported to police. It has been alleged that these ‘reports’ began with an anonymous Facebook post. In both cases, the children were reported for having fairer complexions than their parents, with the removals carried out despite the family of the seven year old girl providing her birth certificate and passport. Subsequent DNA tests revealed that in both cases the children were the biological offspring of their Roma parents, and the children were returned to their families. Police claimed the removals were carried out in the interests of protecting vulnerable children, despite there being no claims or evidence of child abuse. The Irish government has promised to carry out a review, however the Justice Minister has also publicly stated that he believed the police acted in good faith.

Sources:


Roma denigrated and assaulted

Three different incidents in which Roma were denigrated or assaulted were reported in Naples during October. On 3 October, a Roma man had stones thrown at him by a group of non-Roma, reportedly after the Roma man ran in the same direction as two local children. The group of non-Roma heard the children scream and assumed the Roma man was attempting to harm or abduct the children. It was only after the man was assaulted that the issue was clarified.

On 12 October an article was published quoting a social worker employed in a local pro-Roma organisation, with the social worker quoted as stating that ‘For Romanian Romani men, prostitution is normal; if it’s Slavs instead, the situation becomes alarming because this takes place within the context of paedophilia. And the fact that their mothers favor this is even worse’. Further, the social worker is reported to have alleged that Roma children are ‘lent’ to people outside of the family for sexual services in return for money, after first being sexually assaulted in their own home by relatives. Additionally, it was alleged that Roma families encourage wives and sisters to prostitute themselves.

Finally, on 15 October a Roma woman and child had acid ‘accidentally’ spilled on them from a balcony. It has been alleged that the Roma woman and child had previously been targeted by the same individual, with items thrown at them from the same balcony. It has also been reported that the acid was deliberately poured on the mother and child, however the alleged perpetrator claims that it was accidental.

Source:

Forced evictions, poor living conditions and segregation of Roma in Italy

On 25 November 2013, Milanese authorities forcefully evicted 700 Roma from an informal camp in the area of Milan (Montefeltro/Brunetti). The evictions, the largest by the municipality of Milan since 2011, took place disregarding the individual conditions of inhabitants and the presence of over 200 children, as well as elderly people and women. Following the evictions, Milanese authorities did not offer sufficient alternative housing opportunities so that those evicted are forced to live on the streets or find other informal housing opportunities. The evictions, moreover, limit the right to education for those children who had been enrolled in local schools.

Moreover, the municipality of Citanova Marche in the Milan area passed a law against free camping in December. The law, which has been referred to as the “anti-Roma law” by the
media, provides local police with the permission to forcefully evict Roma camps disregarding their circumstances and perspectives for finding alternative housing.

Forced evictions of Roma settlements have taken place in Italy on a regular basis. While many of the Roma living in Italy are not nomads, they are forced to move because of evictions and they are labelled as such by the Italian authorities. If Roma are offered alternative housing, it is often in so called “authorized” or “formal camps” which are often poorly equipped, overcrowded, far outside the city, with limited access to public transport and services and damaged structures. If Roma with limited economic resources try to access social housing, they are often denied it. Non-Roma, in the meantime, are offered mainly alternative housing in dormitories or temporary housing centers rather than in camps and have easier access to social housing.

In many parts of Italy there is, thus, a two track housing system in which Roma are discriminated against on the basis of their ethnicity. Instead of supporting the integration of Roma, these policies lead to severe social and physical segregation of Roma from the mainstream society and prevent them from improving their living conditions as well as the perspectives for their children. The policies contradict international treaties and Italy’s own strategy on Roma inclusion.

Sources:


http://www.errc.org/article/italys-formal-camps-dont-work-%E2%80%93-new-video-from-errc/4233


Serbia

Skinheads attempt to abduct fair skinned Roma child

On 19 October a group of skinheads in the Serbian town of Novi Sad attempted to abduct a two year old Roma child. It is alleged that this attempted abduction was motivated by a suspicion that the child had been ‘stolen’ by the Roma family as his skin tone was fairer than his parents. It was reported that the family was walking, with the father carrying the child, when a man...
shouted ‘How did you get that white child, you must have stolen it!’ A group of men watching then allegedly yelled that the Roma family had stolen the child and that they should be put in prison. After attempting to explain that the child was theirs and refusing to hand over their child, the group offered the father 100 EUR for the boy. The father of the child reports that the group ran away once he threatened to call police.

Following this incident, the father further reports that a man masquerading as a police officer offered to deal with the child, however when police were called the individual ran away. It has also been alleged that the group have been seen painting swastikas on buildings located nearby. The family claim that they are now too scared to leave the house or sleep in case someone attempts to take their child.

Source:

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<th>United Kingdom</th>
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**Discriminatory media reporting about Roma immigration continuing**

A number of media outlets have continued to publish stigmatising and discriminatory reports about Roma, particularly with relation to immigration. These headlines often link Roma to criminality and begging, and additionally often use language suggesting that Roma immigrants pose a ‘threat’ to the United Kingdom, or will arrive in some sort of ‘invasion’. Such headlines include:

- ‘The Roma invasion of Paris... next stop Britain’ (Telegraph 6 October);
- ‘Cashpoint con trick and how UK authorities’ hands are tied’ (Telegraph 6 October);
- ‘In January, the only thing left will be the goat’: Romanian father-of-seven’s boast as mayor says half the population of his villages are on their way to Britain for the higher salaries and generous benefits’ (Daily Mail 10 November);
- ‘Influx of Roma migrants could spark city riots, warns David Blunkett’ (Daily Mail 12 November);
- ‘Peril from this flood’ (in support of the ‘warning’ from David Blunkett) (Daily Star 13 November).

The same language has been repeated in an article reporting on a group of Roma parking their caravans in a hospital car park:
‘Hospital’s car park is invaded by French Roma’ (The Times 22 October).

These headlines and/or the articles following them all refer explicitly to Roma migrants coming to the United Kingdom.

Sources:


http://www.dailystar.co.uk/star-says/350517/Peril-from-this-flood


http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/health/news/article3900621.ece