

Workshop Concept Paper.

WORKSHOP, 7-8 December, 2007, Nafplion, Greece

WORKSHOP

«LIFTING THE BARRIERS OF SOCIAL PARTICIPATION: ROMA POPULATION BEFORE THE OMBUDSMAN»

Workshop Concept Paper

The main aim of this workshop is to built upon the experience of the European Ombudsman institutions in handling Roma cases and formulate the basis of a standing cooperation on Roma issues with the public administration, in particular structures of local administration, and civil society tackling the major factors of Romas' social marginalization. The workshop will also draw from the experience and field work of international institutions such as the Human Rights Commissioner of the Council of Europe and the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the OSCE. Particular attention will be drawn to the relevant case-law of the European Court of Human Rights.

The workshop agenda will be divided in 5 sections: one opening session, a session devoted to the normative and political developments in Europe regarding Roma populations, three thematic seminar sessions tackling the issues of problems of civic registration, education and housing and one workgroup session.

Opening session.

In this session, the whole concept of the seminar will be developed and comparative advantages of the Ombudsman as guarantor of Roma rights will be explored.

1. **Normative and political developments in Europe regarding Roma populations.** In this session, a judge from the European Court of Human Rights will present the relevant case-law of the Court and a senior administrator of the European Commission will present the initiatives of the EU combating Roma social exclusion. All participants are expected to put questions and join the round table discussion which will follow.

Thematic seminar sessions. International experts and academics, NGO officers, representatives of local and central administration, as well as Ombudsman personnel will deliver presentations that will address the core of the issue and the relevant argumentation. In the roundtables which follow, all the above are expected to depict their particular perception of the problem referring also to the experiences of their respective offices and possibly put forward legal and practical methods to surpass the problem.

- 2. Roma “invisibility” before the administration.** As many Roma live on the margin of the structured societies they confront obstacles that prevent them to acquire various documents, necessary for compliance with civic legality, (eg. Birth certificate, Identity card, registration with social security and taxation offices). This is mostly related with the fact that their functional analphabetism and social exclusion makes such procedures unintelligible.
- 3. Problems relating to the education of Roma children.** School education, as well as professional training, is considered an essential factor for surpassing social exclusion for the Roma population. The lack of it, so far, is also linked to the vicious circle of living conditions and the lack of proper documentation. In addition an important factor for educational exclusion is the negative attitudes of local societies and local administrators. As main speaker in this session we expect an expert/academic to address the core parameters of this issue and a field worker to present the actual difficulties and rewards which derive from the experience of working with Roma children.
- 4. Housing of Roma.** The living conditions are the major factor for prolonging the exclusion of Roma from various aspects of modern societal life. In all our countries the state is expected to offer humanly dignified living conditions to all its citizens. However, a large part of the Roma population is excluded and remain tent dwellers or live in polluted locations in appalling conditions and self improvised houses. Also, the fact that part of their population follows traditional occupations and lives in a lifestyle that requires much traveling around the year, generates the problem of finding proper temporary encampment grounds. The fact that there is little or no specifically designated areas for their temporary residence most frequently leads them to confrontation with local societies. Forced evictions from private or public lands is a common problem which brings much frustration to Roma populations. The speakers will try to present the current situation in their respective countries or areas of work, referring to good practices on the issue.
- 5. Workshop exercise.** Three real cases, preferably one from each of the abovementioned categories will be presented to the participants. The Ombudsman personnel will briefly explain their probable course of action. A discussion in the plenary will ensue for each case.