

It is my great honor to be present at this hearing today. I am grateful to you for your interest in Roma in Russia and the opportunity for me personally to be chosen as the representative to inform you about the current situation of Roma in my region of Russia.

I am Alexandr Torokhov, director and founder of the NGO Roma Ural which was established in 1997. Roma Ural is the only Roma NGO in the Sverdlovsk region where we are based, and one of a very small number of registered Roma organizations in the whole of Russia. Sverdlovsk region represents a relatively rich and economically and politically stable region of Russia.

There are approximately 8,000 Roma in our region out of a total population of approximately 180,000 Roma in Russia. For detailed information about population statistics on Roma in Russia generally please refer to the Council of Europe report which Roma Ural wrote and has been distributed to you.

Roma Ural:

The main aim of Roma Ural is the integration of Roma into modern society and the protection and promotion of their rights. Since 2002 Roma Ural has undertaken research into the situation of Roma concerning media coverage of Roma, the education levels and attitudes of Roma, human rights of Roma and statistics on Roma victims of the Holocaust in the Ural region.

As a result of this research we worked out three main directions for our activities:

- Education of Roma children and adults who have no secondary education
- Protecting the rights and interests of Roma in the Ural region (including monitoring of human rights of Roma)
- Media – monitoring of regional coverage, appearances in the media about Roma issues, press conferences etc.

In addition, we have cooperated with various governmental structures, and representatives of other ethnic minorities and developed methods of working with the Roma community.

I will present now the results of our work in the following five areas: education, Holocaust, media, economic situation, and human rights.

1. Education:

In 2003 Roma Ural with the NGO research institute Socium with the financial support of the Council of Europe carried out research into the situation of education of Roma children in Ekaterinburg. 253 families were interviewed, including 453 children, teachers and directors of several schools in the city, civil servants in local education departments. The findings of the research confirmed that fifty five percent of children aged between 11-17 do not attend school, and 15% of them had never been to school. Roma Ural imagines that if such research was conducted into the attendance levels of other Russian minorities, and including ethnic Russians,

the figure would be much lower, indicating that for Roma education is a serious problem. Our research also indicated that of those parents interviewed approximately 70% had not completed secondary education and there was little difference between the genders.

The research revealed both internal and external causes for this trend. Concerning internal factors it can be said that children repeat the educational patterns of their parents, that is, that they do not finish secondary education and do not value formal school education. The parent's lack of education means that they cannot help their children in the education process because of their lack of experience and familiarity with the requirements of schooling. In addition, Roma children are unprepared for starting school because there is no tradition within Roma families to send Roma children to kindergartens. This means that Roma are often illiterate when starting school.

The external factors include:

1. Stereotypes towards Roma pupils from other classmates and teachers results in Roma children leaving school or not doing well in their schooling.
2. The education system is unprepared for supporting Roma children through schooling due to lack of knowledge of Roma culture and traditions. Also there is no component in the school curriculum about Roma history and culture.
3. There are no specialists within the Roma community to become teachers

Roma Ural recommends:

1. to initiate programmes on pre-school education for Roma children
2. to support those Roma children who left school to be re-motivated again to study
3. to support Roma who wish to go on to higher education
4. to work with parents to value education, to motivate them to send their children to school, to be familiar with the school process
5. to work on cooperation between parents and schools so that the education system is prepared to support Roma through schooling

2. Holocaust

In 2001 Roma Ural with other Roma NGOs in Russia took part in the data collection of the victims of the Holocaust residing in the Ural region

600 families were interviewed, approximately of which 200 families arrived in the Urals during the Second World War from the European part of Russia, after fleeing from Nazi persecution.

160 respondents suffered from Nazi violence. The majority of them were children and several had become orphans or lost a parent during the war.

We prepared applications for financial compensation for 160 Roma victims. Out of this number approximately one third received financial compensation, one third were disqualified for technical reasons and one third of applicants died before the decisions about compensation were made. In Russia approximately 2000 Roma made claims for financial compensation.

3. Media:

Roma Ural carried out monitoring of the TV and printed regional media including the internet in a 6 month period in 2002-2003. The results showed that more than 90 broadcasts and articles were concerned about Roma. This reflects a high interest in reporting about Roma in the regional media. The majority of the reports were negative about Roma. Those neutral and positive media reports which was ten times less frequent than negative reports, were in fact initiated by Roma Ural.

In a one month period 12 reports were monitored. All reports without exception represented Roma as enemies of society and criminals.

To illustrate this negative trend in the media there was a TV trailer which was broadcast several times a day for one week in the run-up to a one hour documentary about the Romani drug trade in Ekaterinburg

“A large and terrible invasion of drugdealers mainly Gypsies to Ekaterinburg from all over Russia. In those places where they were forbidden to sell drugs, they gave up their places of residence to invade the capital of the Ural to sell death, kill us and our children. ... Drug money very quickly was turned into luxury palaces. ...Gypsies were leading a beautiful and very contented life on the blood and bones of citizens”.

It is necessary to note that such reports were broadcast only on two regional channels from 10 regional channels, channel 10 and Regional TV which are the most widely viewed channels in the region. The main purpose of these reports was to provide information about the NGO City without Drugs which has existed in Ekaterinburg for about 5 years. The organisation's director was running for candidate in the elections and became a Federal Parliament deputy in 2004.

One candidate for mayor of Ekaterinburg included in his manifesto the proposal to demolish the Roma village in the city. He suggested to build instead a new microregion. In one weekly regional free newspaper an article was published which stated that Roma were criminals. The journalist quoted the famous writer Prosper Merme ‘The Gypsies despise the people amongst whom they live’ to justify the mayoral candidate's proposal about the demolition of the Roma village. The candidate did not become mayor.

Roma Ural made many complaints to the regional authorities responsible for the observance of rules of parliamentary elections. However, these authorities took no measures against such

coverage as it was decided that these cases did not incite racial hatred according to Russian legislation.

Federal TV channels broadcast less often negative reports about Roma, as they generally use information from the regional media.

The results of the monitoring confirmed the trend that media create and develop negative stereotypes about the life of the Roma community. Furthermore, journalists do not have objective information about Roma, preferring to use stereotypical terms.

Roma Ural recommends:

1. training programmes for mainstream journalists for improving their knowledge and professional skills when reporting on Roma and ethnic minority issues
2. continued monitoring and analysis of the coverage of Roma
3. continued making of complaints in cases of discriminatory coverage
4. to initiate public information campaigns on tolerance
5. to initiate dialogue between mainstream journalists, editors and managers of media with representatives of ethnic minorities
6. to develop Roma media – TV/radio programmes and newspapers

4. Socio-Economic Situation:

In Ekaterinburg more than 50% of Roma are unemployed which represents about 4,000 people. Roma work mainly in markets in Ekaterinburg, trading in clothes. Before some Roma worked as musicians and artists, farmers and handicraft workers. Due to the economic changes in Russia such traditional spheres are no longer in demand and this has caused Roma to give up this type of work. Similarly, not only competition resulted in Roma losing their jobs in the markets but also negative attitudes towards Roma as traders meant that they had to give up.

The lack of education and professional skills of Roma means that Roma face redundancy given fierce competition as employers prefer skilled labour.

Many Roma want to start up their own businesses or to work as managers. However, they do not have skills necessary for modern business and do not have the financial means to establish their businesses. There are already some successful examples of Roma business in the region. However, these Roma businesses do not recruit Roma into their activities.

Roma Ural recommends:

1. to support the creation of Roma enterprises in modern forms of business
2. to increase the skills of Roma in business management including computers

5. Human Rights:

Roma Ural started up a legal consultation service for Roma in Ekaterinburg in 2002. We have recorded many examples of violation of rights of Roma citizens. We took one court case involving custody rights.

For more detailed information about the types of human rights problems Roma face and their attitudes towards solving such issues please refer to the Council of Europe report. As a result of our monitoring of the human rights situation of Roma we discovered that Roma do not know their rights and how to protect them. When their rights are violated they do not apply to law enforcement agencies because of a lack of confidence in such bodies to resolve these issues. Furthermore, well-established human rights organisations do not have any contacts with the Roma community so therefore are not used as a source for protecting rights of Roma. Few lawyers work with Roma but generally lawyers do not choose to work with Roma clients.

Roma Ural recommends:

1. to support programmes which aim at improving the knowledge of Roma about their rights and methods for redress of violations of their rights
2. to continue, and expand, the monitoring of human rights violations of Roma
3. to support human rights organisations to prepare court cases involving the violations of the rights of Roma
4. to provide training on anti-discrimination and tolerance for lawyers
5. to support lawyers who already work with Roma for preparation of cases and representations in court