

Submission by Society for Threatened Peoples

a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

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Bulgaria

Religious groups

An estimated 85% of the population is Orthodox Christian Muslims comprise the largest religious minority with 13%. There are approximately 150,000 evangelical Protestants, 30,000 Armenian Christians, and 3,000 Jews. Between 2008 and 2009 there were 110 cases of vandalism against mosques: On Jun 24, 2009, vandals broke a memorial slab in Bagoevgrad before its unveiling. The memorial was dedicated to Jews from Aegean Thrace who died in the Auschwitz concentration camp. On July 13, 2009, several Molotov cocktails were thrown at the former synagogue and the Jewish school in Burgas.

Overall situation of Roma

Bulgaria participates in the Decade of Roma inclusion, an international initiative to improve the overall status of Roma. According to the 2002 Council of Europe report, there were some 600,000 to 800,000 Roma in Bulgaria, constituting between 6 and 10% of the population. There is widespread societal discrimination against Roma and other minorities. In the 2005 Bulgarian parliamentary elections, three Roma parties participated.

Dismal socio-economic situation of Roma

In 2009, the European Committee of Social Rights found Bulgaria in violation of the European Social Charter by failing to meet its obligation to ensure that Roma have adequate access to the health care system and to social assistance.

The unemployment rate among Roma is 65% and reaches 80% in some regions. A generally unfavourable attitude towards Roma, in combination with a poor education level, leads to Roma being less able to find jobs. Lower bound estimates of annual productivity losses are 526 million Euros in Bulgaria, according to the World Bank. Employed Roma earn 31% less than the majority population in Bulgaria. Since the Roma population is younger with larger family sizes than the majority population, the economic costs of Roma exclusion will rise in Bulgaria. Since few of them are employed and those who are make less money than the average employee, working Roma pay less taxes and social security contributions. They are also more likely to receive minimum guaranteed income type programs. These numbers result in fiscal losses for the Bulgarian state of 370 million Euros.

Educational situation of Roma

Public education is compulsory until the age of 16, and free through 12th grade. Children are required to pay for books after the fourth grade, which is a problem especially for Roma families.

Roma children and teenagers often attend de-facto segregated "Roma schools" located in majority-Roma areas. The quality of education in such schools is low; many lack necessary tools such as computers. According to the World Bank only about 13% of Bulgaria's adult Roma population have graduated from high school. Over 90% of the other Bulgarian citizens have high school diplomas. 80% to 90% of Bulgaria's Roma children are enrolled in remedial schools. According to reports by the Bulgarian Helsinki Initiative, Roma constitute 50% of the number of pupils in schools for children with intellectual disabilities. Nearly 10% never attend school. What is needed is a larger investment by the state in

inclusive and quality education for Roma children, including early childhood education and lifelong learning opportunities for Roma adults.

Forced evictions of Roma

In September 2009 local authorities in the Gorno Ezerovo and Meden Rudnik settlements in the Black Sea city of Burgas demolished the houses of at least 200 Roma and forcibly evicted them.

84 Romani households had gotten eviction orders in 2007, based on a law that allows for the demolition of houses built without permission. There was no real consultation with people from the Gorno Ezerovo and Meden Rudnik settlements prior to the demolition and eviction. There was no legal aid offered by the authorities for the Roma people. The informal settlements had existed for more than 50 years before being demolished. The local administration had provided the households with public services such as water, electricity and sanitation. During the evictions the police reportedly kicked some people and dragged them away. The evicted have received no compensations. Many of them moved in with relatives who live in the same area.