

ACTION UPDATE: ERRC MEETS ROMANIAN ROMA REPATRIATED FROM FRANCE

On 20 August 2010, the European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC) met the third group of Roma returned to Romania by French authorities since President Sarkozy's eviction and expulsion plan was announced on 28 July.



There were around 15 Romanian police officers present at the airport, plus many photo and other journalists. The atmosphere was tense and it was not possible to speak with returnees at the airport. Two buses waited to transport the repatriated Roma from Timisoara's airport to the train station. Working with the Romanian Romani organisation **Association Parudimos**, the ERRC accompanied the returnees from the airport to the train station. During that time, the ERRC spoke with numerous returned Roma.

The returnees with whom the ERRC met reported that they had been living in caravans in informal settlements around Paris for between one month and four years. Many earned a living while in France by collecting scrap metal because they were not able to get a job. (Indeed, France, as some other EU Member States, severely limits the ability of nationals from Romania and Bulgaria to work in France.) One returnee, Mr V., had previously lived in Spain where he was employed as a seasonal agricultural worker.

The Roma interviewed by the ERRC stated that they were not among those evicted in recent weeks by French authorities, though they all reported having been evicted by French authorities on numerous occasions in the past. The Romani individuals and families interviewed by the ERRC were provided a plane ticket and a cash payment of 300 EUR for adults and 100 EUR per child.¹ At the time they took the



return assistance, the returnees stated that they were requested to provide their identity documents to French officials who took them and returned the documents after some time: they believed that the authorities copied their documents though they did not actually see this.

Between the time of their request for return assistance and their actual return on 20 August, the people with whom the ERRC spoke continued to live in their caravan. They reported that French police visited them from time to time – some families reported that the police were threatening while other families said they were not.

The returnees noted that there were many police and journalists present at the airport in France; far more than in Timisoara. The returned Roma informed the ERRC that as they boarded the plane, a woman from the French Office of Immigration and Integration (OFII) stood



¹ See: http://www.ofii.fr/article.php3?id_article=958.

at the stairwell and made them sign a document which they could not read and which was not explained to them. It was written in French and they were not given a copy of it.



At the airport in Timisoara, journalists assailed the returned Roma until they left by bus for the train station. Police cars followed the buses to the train station and police remained at the station until the returned families made their individual travel plans to return to their home towns. Some of the returned families were from around Timis County; others came from Cluj-Napoca, Piatra Neamt and Bucharest on the other side of the country. French authorities reportedly told them that there was no plane to Bucharest.

Based on the reports coming out of France, the ERRC will continue to monitor developments in the country as well as returns to Romania and Bulgaria.

All photos courtesy of Radkin Photography.