



Romani CRISS

Roma Center for Social Intervention and Studies

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Bucharest, May 6, 2011

To: EUROSTAT
To the attention of: Deputy Director General, Marie Bohatá

To: EUROSTAT
To the attention of: Director, Social and Information Society Statistics, Inna Šteinbuka

Ref: **Addressing the undercounting of Roma in the official census to be held in Romania in October 2011 as well as in other member states**

DEAR MADAMS,

Romani CRISS – Roma Center for Social Intervention and Studies is a non-governmental organization, which defends and promotes the rights of Roma in Romania by providing legal assistance in cases of abuse and works to combat and prevent racial discrimination against Roma in all areas of public life, including the fields of education, employment, housing, and health.

The population census is scheduled in Romania for October this year. This is a highly significant event, for the Roma population as well, since it represents an opportunity for collecting accurate data regarding the real and certain number of Roma in Romania. Although the census is a sole method to acquire demographic indicators, nobody knows the real number of Romanian citizens of Roma ethnicity, taking into account that the data collected during the census are inexact. Having information as accurate as possible on the number of Roma is essential for the decisions at European level as well. Apart from being citizens of the EU Member States, the Roma community is often subject of decision-making at the level of the European Union. This is even more relevant as the European Commission and the European Parliament are currently articulating a new Framework for the National Strategies for the Inclusion of the Roma. Indeed, an accurate picture of the Roma communities in the European Union might prove to be the very difference between failure and success in the European-wide effort for the inclusion of Roma.

In 2002, in Romania, 535 520 people affirmed their Roma ethnicity. However, in 2003 the European Commission estimated some 1.8 to 2.5 million Roma live in Romania.¹ This puts forward a major discrepancy that shows that in Romania there live more than 4-5 times Roma than the ones who are officially registered. This situation is not only common to Romania, but is also present in most European countries. Nor is this situation new in any way, as Roma are being undercounted in censuses for decades at least. Yet, the problem remains, Roma are being systematically undercounted, for decades, in most if not all European countries.

Our experience in working with Roma communities taught us the peculiarity of this state of things is fueled by discrimination and prejudice. This is confirmed by the preliminary results of the focus-groups on the declaration of the ethnic appurtenance of the Roma, which is part of a research Romani CRISS is currently conducting.

The process is twofold. On the one hand, a major cause is the fact that Roma people are reluctant to declare their real ethnicity. This is due to the process of assimilation along the history and especially because Roma fear stigmatization in the societies in which they live. Deportation during WWII is another important element which determined Roma people not to declare their ethnicity, especially amongst elderly Roma. The lack of trust in local authorities and certain difficulties in the use of terms such as ethnicity, nationality, citizenship also plays an important part.

On the other hand, certain administrative procedures prove to be an obstacle. The field operators conducting the census in the Roma communities were largely non-Roma people, which led to reluctance to disclose the ethnic origin, because of the widespread discrimination existing in the society. The manner in which the questions are posed in the questionnaire is also very relevant.

Hence, a certain peculiarity stems from the above mentioned state of things. Failure to treat this particular situation with a particular, tailored solution resulted in the continuous undercounting of the Roma in official censuses. Thus, we feel that absent a tailored approach by the relevant state agencies, with the support of civil society, the problem will remain unsolved.

Dear Madams,

We kindly bring to your attention the fact that Romani CRISS is currently conducting a twofold approach in an effort to solve the issue.

With regard to the tailoring of the administrative procedures, we already started lobbying the relevant public institutions, in order to have the methodology for the census modified. One of the proposals for the modification of the census methodology made by Romani CRISS was ***monitoring the interactions between field operators and interviewed persons, realized by observers, representing the civil society.***

The observers should monitor the process of data collection and identifying possible malfunctions. The observations would be sent to the National Institute for Statistics and will allow the improvement of the accuracy of the next census.

¹ See European Commission, 2003 Regular Report on Romania's Progress towards Accession , at 30, available at http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/archives/pdf/key_documents/2003/rr_ro_final_en.pdf.

Another proposal was the ***participation of the non-governmental organizations' representatives to the training sessions of the field operators, where the questionnaires used within the census will be presented.***

We also mention that one of the priorities for 2011 of Romani CRISS – Roma Center for Social Intervention and Studies is to contribute to a favorable environment for Roma to declare their ethnic appurtenance. Thus, we are currently conducting a nation-wide awareness-raising campaign which includes the producing and broadcasting of one video-add, one radio-add, 8 community meetings in four different regions in Romania. We are also conducting a field research that will result in a report on the Roma and the 2011 census.

Taking into consideration the EUROSTAT mission which is to provide the European Union with a high-quality statistical information service, as well as and your wealth of expertise, ***we kindly ask the EUROSTAT considers a set of specific measures designed to address the issue of the undercounting of the Roma in official censuses in the European Union.***

Also, we kindly ask you ***to elaborate a working paper*** regarding the issues mentioned above. ***The Romanian National Institute for Statistics, as well as the similar institutions in other EU member states, should receive methodological recommendations from the EUROSTAT,*** in order to ensure more accurate information on the Roma.

As previously mentioned, Romani CRISS has already started to lobby the national institutions, including the Romanian National Institute for Statistics, but we feel the involvement of the EUROSTAT would be highly effective.

Please consider our kind request an invitation to start working in detail on the matter described above.

Should you have any further queries, please do let us know.

Best regards,
Margareta Matache

Executive Director
Romani CRISS