

A Call for Justice and Dignity for Roma People

12 Recommendations to Churches, Church-Related Agencies and Christians in Europe

“And then you will be citizens of the household of God” (Ephesians 2: 19). This was the theme of a meeting in Frankfurt, Germany in November 2013, jointly organized by the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Europe Desk and the Churches’ Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME), focusing on migration and equal citizenship of Roma in Europe. The consultation concluded with the following recommendations:

- 1) **Enhance knowledge about Roma culture and history** in the church and in society, for example through exhibitions, leaflets and educational materials. Let International Holocaust Remembrance Day (January 27) and International Roma Day (April 8) be used as opportunities for making Roma history and culture visible and known.
- 2) **Create meeting places between Roma and non-Roma people** with face-to-face interaction, sharing of life stories, sharing music and art, and worshipping together. Support congregations to become open and welcoming communities, and provide for closer cooperation with and more representation of Roma in European church consultations.
- 3) **Ground the work in inclusive and justice-oriented theology**, making use of Biblical stories and parables that open up space for reflection and challenge us to move out of our comfort zones towards a stronger belief in a shared humanity. Create spaces where fears of each other and difficulties in cultural encounters can also be expressed and struggled with.
- 4) **Strengthen capacity within the churches**. Offer trainings on Roma culture for church workers, so as to make knowledgeable and effective outreach to Roma communities possible. Offer training on spiritual and diaconal service to church workers from the Roma community to strengthen their role in the churches. Collect and share best practices.
- 5) **Reduce tensions between Roma people and the majority society**, for example through training intercultural community mediators. Work together with the Roma leadership to build mutual trust and understanding. Support bridge-building initiatives, especially involving children and youth.
- 6) **Reclaim Roma culture**. Value and cherish the cultural contributions from the Roma community and learn about its diversity and commonality. At the same time, avoid freezing the concept of what Roma culture is or should be, affirming that every living culture is involved in processes of change.
- 7) **Don’t victimize Roma people**. Affirm Roma people as agents of change and strengthen their voice in society. Always work together with Roma people on Roma people's concerns. Facilitate the creation of platforms where different minority groups and their different organizations can strengthen and stand up for each other and walk together.

8) **Encourage and empower Roma people to pursue basic and higher education.** Work against any hindrance against Roma children's (both girls and boys) school attendance. Provide support for Roma adults (both women and men) for further education and training, also for church service.

9) **Support the development of sustainable livelihoods and poverty reduction among Roma people,** for example through education, business training, income generating projects and assistance in developing small and medium scale enterprises, as well as access to employment, also in the churches. Work with long-term, inclusive and strategic measures.

10) **Acknowledge that "one intolerance seldom comes alone".** Build strategies that take into account the interconnectedness between, for example, anti-ziganism, anti-Semitism and racism. At the same time, acknowledge the need to specifically focus on anti-ziganism as one of the most neglected among these.

11) **Speak out against "anti-ziganism" in the society and media.** Making use of the 8th Commandment, react whenever false and generalized accusations are made against Roma people. Challenge any hateful rhetoric, making people aware that history teaches that intolerant rhetoric can lead to genocide.

12) **Strengthen cooperation on Roma migration,** on European ecumenical levels as well as between churches, diaconal agencies and the wider civil society. Enhance both spiritual and diaconal approaches to Roma migration and its challenges, both from sending and receiving countries' contexts, and work also with Roma belonging to other faith communities.

And in all this:

Work together with and involve Roma people in both analysis and action!