



Alternative Report  
on the Implementation  
of the Framework Convention  
for the Protection of National Minorities  
by the Russian Federation

The 4<sup>th</sup> Monitoring Cycle

October 2017

*Discrimination of Roma in Russia*



## **I. Discrimination against the Roma population**

### **Lack of state strategy to overcome discrimination against Roma people**

The strategy of the Russian Federation's national policy for the period up until 2025 and its practical expression – the Federal Targeted Program “Strengthening Russian National Unity and the Ethnocultural Development of the Peoples of Russia (2014–2020)” has the goal of forming a so-called “civic nation”: a shift in the self-identification of Russian residents from ethnic to civic (“Russian citizenship”). Much of the financing from the Federal Targeted Program is directed towards achieving this goal. Much less money has been allocated to supporting the culture of ethnic minorities, and the Program devotes no attention whatsoever to resolving systemic problems like structural discrimination against Roma people. There is reason to fear that government efforts to create a “united nation” will end in the infringement of the rights of ethnic minorities.

Russia still lacks a well-articulated state policy on overcoming structural discrimination against the Roma population. The pilot plan “Comprehensive Action Plan for the Socioeconomic and Ethnocultural Development of Roma in the Russian Federation for 2013–2014,” which was cause for fair criticism, has not been continued.

Structural discrimination against the Roma population in the Russian Federation does exist: most children are excluded from the process of receiving a quality education, and no more than one percent earn a high school diploma, even though school is mandatory for all children in the country up through eleventh grade; illiterate and poorly-educated people are not able to follow complicated bureaucratic procedures, which means that some of the requirements for registering housing and paying for access to water, gas, and electricity are violated; dense Roma settlements are notable for their poverty and low standards of living in comparison to surrounding villages, while the large-scale demolition of Roma homes and the loss of their only housing leads to homelessness and loss of personal documents and registration for place of abode; without registration, people lose all their social rights, and ethnic profiling during police operations makes them particularly vulnerable, which is accompanied by conflicts with the law, the stigmatization of the entire people, and racial prejudice

### **Displays of xenophobia against the Roma population: ethnic profiling by law enforcement authorities**

ADC “Memorial”<sup>1</sup> has conducted studies in dense Roma settlements for many years. During field missions, our specialists have found that existing laws, programs, and Russian government policies in several RF regions have not been able to ensure the elimination of racial discrimination against Roma people. The most recent study was conducted in 2016–2017; it found a growth in discriminatory activities against this group by the authorities in several regions.

We discovered signs of ethnic profiling during a field mission on 6 May 2017 in Belgorod Oblast, where Roma from the settlement of Shishino had to deal with groundless arrests and rude behavior directed at them by officers from law enforcement agencies throughout 2016. The arrests started approximately one year ago and have affected the entire population of the tabor (dense Roma settlement).

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<sup>1</sup> The central focus of all the activities of ADC “Memorial” is the defense of the rights of minorities and vulnerable groups, opposition to racism, sexism, homophobia and all other forms of xenophobia in countries which formerly were part of Soviet Union. ADC “Memorial” pays considerable attention to the protection of the rights of Roma people, who continue to suffer from various forms of systemic discrimination. More about ADC “Memorial”: [www.adcmemorial.org](http://www.adcmemorial.org)

*“At first our women were arrested for fortune-telling at the market. They think this is fraud. We prohibited them from fortune-telling a year ago, and they don’t do this anymore. We have already appealed to head of the village administration Igolkin, and we have spoken with the police officers. We explained that we’re not stealing, we’re not killing. But they continue to arrest us, they treat us as if we were enemies of the people.”<sup>2</sup>*

According to Roma people, some of them were arrested several times over the course of a year by officers from the same police departments, who put them through the same identification procedures each time they were arrested. For example, approximately 10 people complained that police officers fingerprinted them every time they were arrested, even though they had previously been fingerprinted many times.

Women are detained with particular frequency on their way to stores or the market, or near the polyclinic: *“My friends and I have been detained three times over the past six months. They fingerprinted us three times. Just like that, for no reason. We asked why we were being picked up, what we had done, but we were just told: ‘that’s the way it has to be.’ The police officers just came up to us, asked for our documents, and put us in the car. Some behaved brazenly, they just grabbed us and took us to the precinct. Others even apologized and said that those officers should be reprimanded according to the rules. After we finished at the precinct, they even took us back to the place where they had picked us up. The last time we were placed in a UAZ, and the person who detained us asked over the radio: ‘Do you need gypsies?’ Apparently, they said they did, and we were taken to the precinct on Gagarin Street. They held us for about an hour, then fingerprinted us and copied out our information from our passports. They wrote in the report that we were drinking alcohol in public.”<sup>3</sup>*

Several men complained that their passports were taken from them during their detention and that they were held at the police precinct for several hours without any explanation. After an extended time, they were released without being told the cause for their detention.

*“I was last detained in March, when I was on my way into the city. I was just walking along the street. Officers in uniform came up to me. They asked me to show them their documents. I gave them my passport, they took it and led me to the car. I didn’t understand anything. I asked what was going on and why I was being detained. They said that I looked suspicious and that they had to establish my identity. They took me to the precinct on Bogdan Khmelnskiy Street. I was there for three hours. Then they just returned my passport and released me, without even apologizing.”<sup>4</sup>*

As these incidents show, police actions against the Roma population in Belgorod are connected not just with biases that Roma are involved in various aspects of criminal activity, drug dealing, theft, fraud, etc., which is typically the reason for aggression and abuse of power by officials, but also because the police are convinced of the complete legal vulnerability of the Roma population and the fact that illegal actions taken against these people will go unpunished. Detentions and fingerprinting are performed without any formal legal grounds, and, even though these procedures do not involve violence, they are degrading and raise the level of intolerance among other citizens who regularly observe how Roma people are detained on the streets of Russian cities.

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2 From an interview with S., a resident of the village of Shishino, Belgorod Oblast.

3 Interview with R., a resident of Shishino Village in Belgorod Oblast.

4 Interview with R., a resident of Shishino Village in Belgorod Oblast.

## Racist statements by officials

The public statements and actions of Alexander Tygin, head of Zelenodolsk District of the Republic of Tatarstan, are clear evidence of a display of discrimination against Roma people. Over the past few years, Tygin has not concealed his dislike of the Roma people.

*“When Alexander Tygin assumed his duties as head of Zelenodolsk District in 2013, the attitude to local Roma changed completely, especially at the official level. In his public statements, he has repeatedly blamed members of this people for existing problems.”<sup>5</sup>*

In 2013, Tygin stated the following at a visiting joint session of the Council of the Assembly of the Peoples of Tatarstan and an interagency task force of matters of interethnic and interdenominational relations in the Republic of Tatarstan:

*“In the public consciousness, people have the image of a woman in long skirts, surrounded by many small children panhandling. Zelenodolsk is no exception in this regard. We face these exact problems every day.”<sup>6</sup>*

At a business meeting in November 2015, Tygin made a direct connection between Roma and fraudulent actions. *“‘And fraud, what is that?’ said the mayor of Zelenodolsk. ‘I have a hard time understanding what ‘street fraud’ is. The only thing that comes to mind is gypsies <...> I will be pleasantly surprised if you can show me one gypsy who earned his money. We’ll put it in a museum.’”*

Later, in 2016, Tygin stated that *“the religious traditions of the Roma population do not involve toilets, and all the physiological processes of life are traditionally performed outside. This causes a negative reaction from neighbors and introduces the danger of spreading infectious diseases.”<sup>7</sup>*

In January 2017, local human rights defenders filed a request with the RF Office of the Procurator General to check Tygin’s statements for compliance with Article 282 of the RF Criminal Code *“Incitement of hatred or enmity, debasement of human dignity,”* but the Office did not find any violations in Tygin’s statements about Roma people.<sup>8</sup>

In August 2015, there was a large-scale outbreak of acute viral hepatitis A in Zelenodolsk District, with clusters in NizhniyeVyazovye and Aysha. In both cases, managers at the Zelenodolsk office of Rospotrebnadzor (Federal Service for Supervision of Consumer Rights Protection and Human Welfare) rushed to accuse the Roma of everything by stating that the centers of the outbreak were dense Roma settlements: tabors in the villages of Aysha and NizhniyeVyazovye. According to Roma people, however, the epidemic started before cases were discovered in the tabors. Even so, local authorities upheld the opinion that the Roma tabors were the epicenters of the virus. These statements spread quickly through the local media and were the

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5 From the website idelreal.org, article by V. Meshcheriakov “Aleksandra Tyginaprosiatotvetit’ zatsygan.” of 18 February 2017. Available here: <http://www.idelreal.org/a/28309474.html>

6 From the website of the Tatar-inform news agency of 13 November 2013. Transcript of a speech made by head of Zelenodolsk District A. Tygin at a meeting of the Council of the Assembly of the Peoples of Tatarstan. Available here: <http://www.tatar-inform.ru/news/2013/11/13/382786/>

7 From the website idelreal.org, article by V. Meshcheriakov “Zatsyganotvetil.”. Available here: <http://www.idelreal.org/a/28320141.html>

8 Online business newspaper *Biznes online* of 29 March 2017, article about the results of the Procurator General’s check of A. Tygin’s statements about Roma people. <https://www.business-gazeta.ru/news/341369>

cause of the blatant persecution of all Roma people manifested in denial of access to local hairdressers, stores, and other public places, including schools.

*“First several people in Sviyazhka fell ill, but they weren’t from the tabor. They said in the newspapers and on TV that the epicenters of the hepatitis were the Roma settlements in Aysha and Nizhniye Vyazovye. It was shocking! Several cases of tuberculosis were discovered in the oblast late last year. Roma were also accused of being the main spreaders. In fact, only several Roma people fell ill, and they were infected after the start of the epidemic.”<sup>9</sup>*

Many Roma connect these events with the start of their harassment by the district administration, which was first expressed in an attempt to deprive several dozen Roma of their parental rights in early 2016 and then, several months later, in an attempt to evict them from their homes and tear down the houses that a court found to be illegal structures.

*“Since 1986, when we arrived in Kazan, we haven’t had any problems. But everything changed with the arrival of Tygin. The start of all this coincided with the start of his work, but his threats became serious two years ago, when there was a hepatitis epidemic in the region. Since then, we have seen open persecution. People came from the Sanitary and Epidemiological Service. They checked the entire tabor; they forced us to have tests several times a year after that. At the same time, only five children—two 17-year-olds and three younger children—actually had hepatitis. They said in the newspapers and on TV that the epicenters were the Roma tabors in Aysha and Nizhniye Vyazovye. Quarantine was introduced in the tabor. We weren’t allowed to go to the store, to the hairdresser, or to any other public places. And the children weren’t allowed to attend school, of course. Several cases of tuberculosis were discovered late last year. Roma were also accused of being the main spreaders. After this, Tygin stated that he would not allow Roma people to live on his land and that we should leave for Mariy El. Late last year, there were attempts to deprive many people of their parental rights, but they weren’t successful. Now they have apparently decided to deprive us of our residences.”<sup>10</sup>*

### **Discriminatory treatment of Roma families, violation of parental rights**

In January 2017, the media published the minutes of a staff meeting at Zelenodolsk City Hall signed by Alexander Tygin. The meeting was held on 12 December 2016. Among other things, the minutes read: *“Organize efforts with the Department of Child Welfare to remove minor children living in residences whose utility bills are in arrears, report on this weekly.”<sup>11</sup>*

A year prior to this, V., a woman from Aysha, came to ADC “Memorial” for help because a case had been opened to deprive her of her parental rights. The complaint was initiated against her by teachers from the local school, who stated that her children come to school disheveled and unprepared for classes. As a result, the administration of Zelenodolsk District initiated checks of fire safety, sanitary and epidemiological safety, and so forth. After these checks, child welfare authorities filed several suits in court to deprive several Roma in Aysha and Nizhniye Vyazovye of their parental rights. Later, during the trials, these Roma started to be charged with failing to pay their utility bills, which, in the opinion of Tygin, is a ground for depriving parents of their rights to children.

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<sup>9</sup>ADC “Memorial” interview with V., a resident of Aysha, 22 February 2017.

<sup>10</sup> Interview with A., a resident of Aysha.

<sup>11</sup> The broadsheet newspaper *Vecherniaia Kazan’* of 12 January 2017, article by N. Vasil’yeva “V Tatarstane iz semeidolkhnikovza “kommunalku” izymaiut detei.” Available here: <http://www.evening-kazan.ru/articles/v-tatarstane-iz-semey-dolzchnikov-za-kommunalku-izymayut-detey.html>

*“In court, representatives from child welfare were asked what complaints they had. They said that the respondents had not paid for electricity and gas, that their homes did not meet fire safety requirements, but the judge noted that no one can be deprived of parental rights for failing to pay for utilities.”<sup>12</sup>*

*“They harped on the fact that the children weren’t being raised properly because they were skipping school. The fire safety authority gave an opinion that the heating stove in the house was not safe – there should have been a metal plate near it, but there wasn’t, even though the mother asserted the opposite. No photographs were submitted to the court. The absence of a metal plate near a heating stove is not a ground for removing children from their family and depriving them of a mother. The Zelenodolsk City Court took the mother’s side and denied the claim.”<sup>13</sup>*

Before the checks, the female population of the tabors was subjected to unfounded persecution by police officers. This persecution was expressed in widespread, repeated detentions and document checks. The official reason for the detentions was suspicion of fraud, but the first thing the officers did upon detention was check the place in passports where number of children is listed and copy information out of there. The women who were detained believe that this was done mainly to find families with minor children.

*“My friends who were with me and I were detained several times right on the train platform, when we got off the commuter train. The official reason was a document check, but the same officers detained us multiple times. They copied the pages of our passports where number of children is listed. They asked if we work, where are husbands were. Anyone who didn’t have documents was detained and taken into the precinct to establish identity. I myself asked why they were detaining women, what we had done that was so bad that we could be endlessly tortured. One officer told me that their supervisors had given an order to check Roma women.”<sup>14</sup>*

*“We can’t even walk to the market normally. My wife was detained several times with other women when they were going to buy groceries. The police see a Roma woman and start right in: ‘Your documents? Where do you live? What do you do? Do you have children?’ Even if you have documents, they still force you to go to the precinct. They hold you there three to four hours and then release you. They ask the same questions a hundred times. When you ask why they have these questions and why you are being detained, they respond that that’s the way it has to be.”<sup>15</sup>*

These incidents fall under the concept of racial and ethnic profiling in the work of law enforcement authorities, which is banned in accordance with the norms of international law and is incompatible with its provisions, such as the right to live a life free from racial discrimination, the right to equality before the law, the right to freedom and personal inviolability, and the right to the presumption of innocence.<sup>16</sup>

Since early 2016, courts in Zelenodolsk District of the Republic of Tatarstan have

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12 Interview with V., a resident of Aysha.

13 Interview with attorney RushanaKamalova for the Idel.Real project. Available here: <http://www.idelreal.org/a/28251832.html>

14 Interview with T., a resident of NizhniyeVyazovye.

15 Interview with B., a resident of NizhniyeVyazovye.

16 Articles 2, 4, 5, 7 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.

considered approximately 15 cases related to the deprivation of parental rights of Roma parents. About ten of these cases were brought against residents of Aysha and five against residents of NizhniyeVyazovye. The claimants lost all these cases because of their failure to prove the circumstances of the case. Representatives of the child welfare agency attempted to appeal these decisions with higher courts, but their appeals were also denied.

In parallel with this, local residents and human rights defenders say that in late 2016 the administration initiated a case to tear down illegal structures in both tabors. See below for more on the problem of forced evictions.

### **Forced evictions and the destruction of Roma settlements**

During a January 2017 visit to a dense Roma settlement, an ADC “Memorial” expert uncovered cases where houses were demolished in Plekhanovo, Tula Oblast—one of the largest Roma settlements in Russia with approximately 300 families. In many dense Roma settlements, thousands of people live in hundreds of homes. The population of these so-called “tabors” grows rapidly, new housing becomes increasingly compact, and the authorities do nothing to make it possible to legalize new housing or register residents.

The absence of any documents that could confirm the Roma people’s right to the ownership of the houses they have built themselves is the direct result of a state policy from Soviet times (government order in 1956) that forced the Roma population to settle in certain places. These places, however, were generally not specified in writing. In fact, it was rare that the right to use the land was ever confirmed by written acts. To this day, the acts which do exist serve as the only documents providing evidence of the Roma’s right to use the land, but they are not enough to start the registration procedure.

Over the ensuing half century, the tabors grew rapidly, but they were never allocated any additional land. Meanwhile, the introduction of private ownership of land made the inhabitants of these haphazard settlements “illegals” in their own homes.

Thus, there have been two stages of discrimination against Roma in the RF—first during Soviet times in the form of violating the traditional way of life of nomadic peoples, which was criminalized in the 1956 order, and later in contemporary Russia, where Roma have not been able to legalize their residence in their own homes.

A typical example is the conflict between the administration of Tula city and the settlement’s Roma population: city authorities started to threaten to demolish structures four years ago, and later a conflict arose about use of a gas pipe by the settlement’s residents.<sup>17</sup> On 15 March 2016, workers from the gas utility shut off the gas supply to the entire settlement. This resulted in indignation on the part of the local population and a response from the administration expressed in its decision to demolish about 120 Roma residences, each of which was home to large families of five to eight people. After the demolition, which took place between March and May of 2016, several hundred tabor residents, including the elderly and children, were left without a roof over their heads.

*“When they cut off the gas in the tabor in March, everyone started to panic. Women came out on the streets. People from the administration came and started talking about demolition. We asked them to help us register our houses, but they refused and said would allow the land to be registered only after they took down the homes. I was personally rejected three times. The first conflicts with the administration started in*

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<sup>17</sup> The Roma had to cut into the gas pipe because of the banal inability to do anything legally: deeds to Roma homes in this settlement, which had stood for almost 50 years, were never properly drawn up. The homeowners do not have the appropriate documents. Without these documents, it is impossible to connect to the gas line.

*March, and by summer, by June, they started demolition. They tore down my house on Sverdlov Street on July 6. The demolition continued until August. They tore down over 120 homes during that time. It was a nightmare. Adults and children were left without a roof over their heads.”<sup>18</sup>*

According to local residents, the police officers and OMON troops, who provided armed support during the demolition, acted extremely harshly and applied force against the local population. Several video reports published in the media serve to confirm their words.

*“They came early in the morning, when everyone was still sleeping, and gave residents one hour to pack. Then they threw everyone out of the house, cordoned the house off with a living wall, started up their equipment, and began the demolition. The atmosphere in the tabor was terrible on those days. The women were screaming, the children were crying. They wouldn’t even allow us to go back to the demolished houses, to take whatever was still intact. They loaded everything into dump trucks and drove away. They didn’t allow us to take anything—not planks, not bricks, nothing. They hauled it all away.”<sup>19</sup>*

The families whose homes were demolished were not given any compensation or suitable temporary housing. They all had to move in with neighbors and relatives. People who couldn’t find a place in a home just built sheds from whatever materials they could find on the spots where their old homes stood. Some people still live in these sheds.

*“Fifteen people lived in our house for several months after the demolition, because they had nowhere to go. There wasn’t enough space for everyone, so some people lived right on the street and slept by a fire. Anyone who could went to relatives in other cities. At that time, they said on television that everyone whose home had been demolished had been placed in temporary housing, that our children were being given food and water. Journalists from the main national TV stations came here, filmed the houses that were still standing, and then said on television that we were all fine. But they didn’t show the crowd of hungry, homeless children who had nowhere to go from the rain.”<sup>20</sup>*

*“Hundreds of people were left without homes. Our guard, who’s also Romani, said that they were given another option of moving into a hotel, but for money. But no one agreed to that either. Instead, they built sheds made of fiberboard and other improvised materials; they now live in these sheds.”<sup>21</sup>*

As the cold set in, people felt the absence of gas heating more strongly. Every shed built by the Roma on the spots of their demolished homes has makeshift heating stoves, but it is very hard to keep the sheds warm because of the thin walls and uninsulated cracks.

These makeshift stoves have caused several of these sheds to burn down. There was not enough material to build proper stoves, so the chimneys on some of them led out of windows instead of the roof. This meant that sparks flew right into the structures, which then caught fire. Five of these structures have burned down since October 2016, when the cold season started.

The local school also lost its gas supply at this time. According to teachers, the local administration did not consider their request to provide separate gas heating for the school building and bought several electric steam boilers instead. The substation that feeds that

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18 Interview with Z., a resident of Plekhanovo, January 2017.

19Ibid.

20 Interview with P., a resident of Plekhanovo, January 2017.

21 Interview with a teacher from a tabor school. January, 2017.

settlement cannot withstand the high electricity usage of these boilers, so failures happen several times a day and the entire settlement loses electricity. Thus, the installation of these boilers failed to solve the heating problem and affected the supply of electricity to the school and the entire settlement.

Roma people lived relatively peacefully in the settlement of Kosaya Gora, Tula Oblast from the 1980s until 2016. However, immediately following the demolition of the homes in Plekhanovo in the fall of 2016, the Tula forestry administration filed a suit in court concerning this tabor.

*“Everything started in July. Forest rangers came and said that our homes here are illegal and that they would do what they could to have them demolished. After this, police and OMON officers came to the settlement several times. They came in the mornings, broke into the houses, and demanded documents from the residents. We gave them what we had. They copied everything down and left. Then we learned that they had opened cases on six homes. A court decision to demolish these six homes came in December, and we’re waiting for them to come tear them down in the spring.”<sup>22</sup>*

Around the same time, demolitions took place in a Roma settlement in neighboring Orel Oblast. Of the 16 homes located in the Northern District of Orel, eight were torn down between July and August 2016. They all housed large families.

Part of the settlement was bought by a Belgorod construction company to build a multistory residential complex.

*“Our homes were located on opposite sides of the street. As it happened, the homes on one side were registered, and the homes on the other weren’t. In the spring, the city administration filed a suit regarding these homes, and the court found that they were illegal structures. People came from the administration and threatened that we would have to pay for the excavators and garbage removal after the demolitions. They just wanted to leave us with nothing. But then a construction company bought this land and promised to compensate us for the demolition. In the summer, an engineer came with OMON troops. They threw us out of our homes with our children and started tearing down the houses. At first, they demolished four houses. The company paid them 500,000 rubles and offered them one one-room apartment. Then, in August, they took another four houses down. I lived in one of them. But the company didn’t pay anything. They initially asked us to wait until they sold the apartments in their new building, but that happened several months ago, and we haven’t received anything.”<sup>23</sup>*

Right now, four of these families are living with relatives or in rented apartments, since they do not have the ability to start the process of registering and building their own homes.

The situation surrounding Roma settlements in the Republic of Tatarstan also appears unsettled. Roma settlements in Aysha and NizhniyeVyazovye (Zelenodolsk District) are also under threat of demolition, while the local administration has organized a persistent campaign of harassment against the Roma population. Local human rights defenders link this to the 2012 appointment of Alexander Tygin as head of the district.

The city court received a claim from the local executive committee, which stated that 17 of the 20 Roma homes violated city planning laws and that the government wanted to evict the residents and demolish the buildings.

In July-August, 2017, 5 homes were demolished in Aysha Roma settlement (Zelenodolsk District, Tatarstan), also under the supervision of the special police troops. Before, the inhabitants of Aysha and neighboring NizhniyeVyazovye settlements were targeted by the local

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22 Interview with Baron of the Kosaya Gora settlement V. Rakovich, 31 January 2017.

23 Interview with R., a resident of the Orel settlement.

administration who has organized a persistent campaign of harassment against the Roma population. The city court received a claim from the local executive committee, which stated that 17 of the 20 Roma homes violated city planning laws and that the government wanted to evict the residents and demolish the buildings. One reason the administration decided on demolition was the “regular signs of outrage from Aysha residents, who are angry that the Roma people are violating not just the laws of Russia, but also of good neighborly relations.”<sup>24</sup>

The Roma asked if they could buy the land next to Aysha, but their request was denied; they connect this with discrimination:

*“First, they tried to take our children away from us because we supposedly weren’t able to create conditions for their lives and development, and now they want to take away our homes. Where’s the protection of the rights of the child that the child welfare cited when they tried to deprive us of our parental rights? And why isn’t this agency now protecting their rights when they will soon end up on the street?”*<sup>25</sup>

A similar problem exists at the NizhniyeVyazovye settlement on the other side of the Volga River. In late summer 2016, representatives of the local and district administrations came to the tabor and informed the local population that they would file a claim with the court regarding four homes if the residents did not agree to dismantle these homes themselves. The Roma complied. However, in the fall, the village mayor FoatNazmieovichShamsiev pronounced an ultimatum: tabor residents had until August 2017 to register their unregistered homes or the administration would file a lawsuit to have the houses demolished and their residents evicted from the tabor.

Residents of NizhniyeVyazovye also made several attempts to obtain permission to build houses and asked for land to be allocated to them for this purpose, but the district administration never even tried to meet them halfway.

*“We said: fine, we bought 1200 square meters in Safronovo, which is right next to Aysha, and drew up the deed, but Tygin won’t give us permission to build there. He says, go wherever you want, but you’re not going to live there. We even promised to have an area for dumpsters, to bring in electricity and water at our own expense. I personally drew up the deed through the registration chamber, but they never gave permission. I have personally tried to set up appointments with him several times to find out the reason for the rejection, but he has never received me once.”*<sup>26</sup>

Tabor residents believe that it is very possible that the administration will adopt a decision on demolition in the future. They say that Roma settlements in Perm also currently face the threat of demolition, even though 22 out of 44 residential structures there were demolished in 2014. That demolition took place at night. According to local residents, OMON officers arrived at the tabor after midnight, woke the residents up, and threw them out of their homes and onto the street. The demolition continued until lunchtime the following day. Tatyana Margolina, the human rights ombudsman for Perm Krai, attempted to dispute the legality of the administration’s actions at the prosecutor’s office, but she was not successful. The demolition of Roma homes in the neighboring microdistrict of Chapayevsky started in 2016. This process may be continued in 2017.<sup>27</sup>

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24 From the website idelreal.org of 20 February 2017, article by V. Meshcheriakov “Zatsyganotvetil.” Available here: <http://www.idelreal.org/a/28320141.html>

25 Interview with V., a resident of the Aysha settlement.

26 Interview with D., a resident of NizhniyeVyazovye. 2017.

27 Report from the news channel Ural-Inform Perm. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xvBIY4\\_uBUk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xvBIY4_uBUk)

In the 2000s, a wave of demolitions of Roma settlements swept across the country, leaving thousands homeless. ADC Memorial described this problem in a special report entitled “Forced Evictions and the Right of Roma to Housing in Russia” (2008),<sup>28</sup> in the update to this report, which was submitted to the CDESCR (48th session, 2011),<sup>29</sup> and in reports to UN CERD (2014). At the time, legal work and advocacy campaigns helped to suspend the demolitions and save residents of several settlements from eviction.

However, the practice of demolishing Roma settlements has unfortunately returned in recent years, even though international institutions have found this to be a violation of human rights. On 11 October 2016, the European Court for Human Rights issued a judgement in the case “Bagdonavicius and Others v. Russia (case No. 19841/06)”<sup>30</sup> in favor of 33 Roma residents of the Dorozhnoye settlement in the Guryevsk district of Kaliningrad Oblast who were victims of forced eviction and demolition of their homes in 2006, finding this a violation of Article 8 (right to respect for private and family life) of the European Convention. The court noted that the Roma homes in Dorozhnoye were built during Soviet times, and that their recognition by a Russian court as being illegal buildings was based only on the fact that they lacked a current title to these houses, which was not a substantial ground for claiming that the land had been occupied illegally. National courts had not taken into account the long-term residence of Roma dwellers in these houses and the fact that the government did not give them the opportunity to legalize their construction, nor did it offer any options for resettlement. The Court ruled that Russia must pay the applicants compensation of material losses and emotional damages.

### **Discrimination and segregation of Roma children in Russian schools**

Contrary to assertions by the RF government that no cases of the segregation of Roma children have been recorded, separate instruction for children in so-called “Roma classes” and even “Roma schools” remains a widespread practice in dozens of schools through the country and in cities and rural localities. ADC Memorial addressed this problem in a thematic report (2009)<sup>31</sup> and submitted an updated report for the 48<sup>th</sup> session of the UN CDESCR in 2011.<sup>32</sup> The situation has not changed in recent years – efforts to overcome segregation and introduce an integrative approach have only been seen in isolated schools, while the majority of schools attended by large numbers of Roma children continue to instruct these children separately from others. When homes are demolished and families evicted, children are deprived of their access to education – child services and education agencies have no interest in where evicted children will attend school, and the right of children to education is never considered by courts issuing a decision on demolition or eviction.

Evidence of segregation has also been confirmed by the results of checks conducted by state authorities. Moreover, officials responsible for protecting children from education discrimination did not find anything illegal in the segregation of Roma children. For example, parents of students at School No. 28 in Tula complained of violations committed by the school’s principal, including the application of “double standards” in the education of Roma children: not all the subjects envisaged in the program were taught, there was no work outside of class, and

<sup>28</sup><http://adcmemorial.org/wp-content/uploads/Romrussie501russe2008.pdf>

<sup>29</sup><http://adcmemorial.org/www/publications/forced-evictions-and-the-right-to-housing-of-roma-in-russia-2011?lang=en>

<sup>30</sup><http://adcmemorial.org/www/12199.html?lang=en>

<sup>31</sup> <http://adcmemorial.org/www/publications/problem-of-discrimination-and-violation-of-the-rights-of-roma-children-at-russian-schools-2009?lang=en>

<sup>32</sup> <http://adcmemorial.org/www/publications/problem-of-discrimination-and-violation-of-the-rights-of-roma-children-at-russian-schools-2011?lang=en>

separate “Roma classes” were created during the afternoon session. The Tula Oblast Ministry of Education conducted a check and commented on the results in the following manner: “No violations in the activities of the principal of School No. 28 were uncovered... Children of the Roma nationality aged six-and-a-half to 10 attend class with other elementary school students, while separate classes have been arranged for Roma children aged 10-13.”<sup>33</sup> The absence of any Roma students over the age of 13 in school (in other words, children drop out of school at this age) was also not found to be a violation.

Segregation in Russian schools takes on many forms: for example, a disproportionate number of Roma children are placed in special remedial classes for children with limited intellectual and other capacities. This is done on the basis of tests that are mainly taken by Roma people. However, all the children are given the same diagnoses, which are generally “social deprivation” and “bilingualism” (with all the absurdity of classifying bilingualism as a defect in a child’s development). They are also frequently subjected to segregation outside classrooms. For example, they are not allowed to use common play yards or cafeterias, and they are not allowed to participate in school holidays. Also, there have been cases where children were transferred to distance learning. Finally, statements made by teachers in the segregated education system make it patently clear that these teachers expect less success from Roma students or don’t believe that they can learn at all. Therefore, they have low requirements for these children.

Out of the ten schools in Tula, Penza, Kazan, Orel, and Volgograd visited by ADC “Memorial” experts in the first half of 2017, only two have Roma children studying in mixed classes. Of the remaining schools, one was an entirely Roma elementary school on the territory of the tabor in Plekhanovo, while the other seven all had separate “Roma classes.”

The Plekhanovo elementary school, which was created specifically for instructing Roma children, is located directly on the territory of the tabor. It currently has 160 students from grades 1 to 4. Children of other nationalities do not attend this school, which means that children later have trouble moving to middle school, where they are faced with an unfamiliar and seemingly hostile environment. After completing grade 4, children must move to school No. 17 for further study. This school is located several kilometers from the tabor. However, many children simply stop their studies and stay home because they fear being among unknown children on the one hand and facing the open disdain of the teachers on the other.

*“After finishing fourth grade, children move to another school—School No. 17—for grades 5 and up. But they’re isolated as soon as they get there and only attend the afternoon session. They don’t perform very well there, unfortunately. Parents say that they won’t allow their children to go there because they are treated so badly. Many children don’t want to go there, and they come running back to us, begging us to take them back. Sometimes, out of the kindness of our hearts, we let them sit in on classes. They dread going to the other school because they can sense the ill will. There have been incidents where they were thrown out for some offense that they may not have even committed. If something happens there, the Roma are always to blame.”<sup>34</sup>*

One student at School No. 17 said that their classes start after lunch and last until four or five in the afternoon. Three or four teachers work with them, and one of the teachers is the homeroom teacher. This student said that Roma children rarely see Russian children and do not even know them, since they attend class separately. When he was asked why he wasn’t in school, he said that he didn’t want to go there because he was afraid that he would be beaten up.

School No. 17 currently has several dozen children in grades 5 to 7. Most of them do not want to continue their studies because they feel excluded after the tabor school, and also because

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<sup>33</sup>The letter from parents and comments from the Tula Oblast Ministry of Education were published in the media on 9 June 2017 <https://www.tula.kp.ru/daily/26690.7/3713594/>

<sup>34</sup> Interview with a teacher at the tabor school.

of tradition, in accordance with which they must start working at quite a young age and have certain responsibilities that deprive them of the opportunity to attend school.

An egregious example of segregation was found at a school in the village of Aysha, Zelenodolsk District, Republic of Tatarstan, where a special first grade class known as “ts,” which is only for Roma children, has existed for several years. It currently has eight students. Another few children attend grades 2, 3, and 4.

*“This year we registered eight people for first grade. All the children are the same age—seven. In grades 2 and 3, the children generally disappear and don’t attend school, and I can’t say exactly how many of them are students now. There are five children in grade 4. In grade 5, we transfer all of them to homeschooling. We give them assignments, they study them and then come to take exams. Right now, we have seven remote students in grade 5, three in grade 6, and two each in grades 7 and 8. No one continues beyond this. Not one Roma student has completed nine grades over the entire course of my time here.”<sup>35</sup>*

Local residents say that teachers make decisions to separate students or put them in distance learning in conjunction with parents. At the start of every school year, the school holds a meeting with tabor residents where they decide what form of study their children will have. Parents generally always agree for their children to attend classes separately from the other students and say that they basically do not care where and with whom their children attend school. However, surveys have shown that they are very concerned about the level of knowledge their children attain in the local school. They believe that it is extremely low: even after several years of schooling, many children are illiterate and have no command over the very basic skills that children acquire in elementary school.

*“Students in Plekhanovo seem to be taught well, but that’s not the case here. Here they teach just so that the children are registered. Half of our students are still illiterate. I mean, they even had a New Year’s tree separately from all the other children. The school gave the others presents, but didn’t give our children any. We collected money ourselves, bought candy, toys, so that they could have a normal holiday like all the other children.”<sup>36</sup>*

In March 2016, the prosecutor’s office issued a recommendation to the head of the executive committee of Zelenodolsk District in connection with the existence of class “ts” at the middle school in Aysha. The actions of the school principal were found illegal, and an order was given to dissolve class “ts.” However, the prosecutor was not interested in evidence of discrimination due to the existence of a separate “Roma class,” but in the fact that this class only had five students. This is a violation of the federal law “On Education in the RF” and SanPiN 2.4.2.2821-10 “Sanitary and Epidemiological Requirements for the Conditions and Organization of Instruction in General Education Schools,” under which classes in village schools must have at least 14 students.

The anti-Roma campaign that was promoted by the local government after epidemics of hepatitis and tuberculosis in the village of Aysha also affected the tabor in NizhniyeVyazovye. The local school did not show any signs of segregation. However, because the tabor faced scrutiny from the sanitary and epidemiological service in the new academic year, many children were not allowed to attend class because they did not have the required vaccinations.

*“Our school is very good, the children like to study there. But this year, many children did not start first grade, since they hadn’t received certain shots. After the hepatitis started several years ago, our children always have to get vaccinations to*

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35 Interview with M.P. Nikishina, a teacher at a school in Aysha.

36 Interview with the grandmother of one of the students.

*attend school.*"<sup>37</sup>

The school in NizhniyeVyazovye is only one of two schools where we noted that administrators and teachers are making efforts to overcome segregation and implement an integrative approach. At the second school (Middle School No. 9 in Penza), children from the neighboring tabor have been integrated with the other children for many years. There are currently 150 Roma students in grades 1 to 11 at this school. Over the past 10 years, the school has graduated nine to 13 Roma students annually. This school is also known for the Russian-Roma football team it created, which has had success at annual district competitions.

The experience of this integrated school in Penza (an oblast center in central Russia) shows that it does not take much effort to ensure the successful instruction of Roma children with other children, provided that administrators and teachers have a non-discriminatory attitude.

The situation is completely different at the S.E. Kuznetsov school, which is located in the village of Chemodanovka, Bessonovskiy District, Penza Oblast. Fifty-three children from a tabor of Wallachian Roma attend this school. The parents of children who attend this school very much want their children to be placed in classes with everyone else, but instead they are placed in separate "Roma classes" because of their low level of preparation. Nominally, this relates to grades 1 and 2, but these classes also include children whose parents enrolled their children after they turned eight, i.e. children who missed the deadline for enrolling in first grade. Thus, children who are nine, 10, and 11 are in these classes as well.

A similar situation has developed in Volgograd schools, for example in the village named after Maksim Gorky. Only 40 students attend School No. 140, which is the closest school to the Roma tabor. Roma children started attending this school relatively recently—they started enrolling in first grade just three years ago. Now there are three grades with Roma children. Sixteen to 17 children are in grades 1 and 2, while five are in grade 3. All these children are taught separately from the others. During a conversation with the school's principal E.L. Gordiyash, we were able to clarify that the school administration forms these "Roma classes" illegally and without approval from anyone. After a regular class has a certain number of Roma students, these students are removed from the class and taught separately.

*"Naturally, our records show that they are in general classes, because that's the way it's supposed to be, but if a class gets at least 15 Roma, then we put them in a separate class where they learn together."*<sup>38</sup>

Aside from "Roma classes," school administrators also arranged for a special "Roma table" in the school's cafeteria, where Roma children use tableware intended only for them.

*"Our school is very young, we have new classrooms, a large separate gym. The building's in good repair. As disadvantaged children, all our Roma children receive free meals. We even have a separate table and separate tableware for the Roma children."*<sup>39</sup>

The school's principal does not conceal her disdain for Roma students:

*"You can't do anything with Roma children. They're very poor students. They're not interested, and, indeed, what's the point of attending school if they're going to leave after grade 6 anyway? In March, our children from nine classes took a practice test that they will have to take at the end of the year. Over 50 percent got twos [on a scale of 1 to 5 with 5 being the highest – Trans.] And these aren't Roma children. They're the children who have been here the whole time, who we have cultivated since first grade, to whom we have given several years of our lives. And what will happen with the Roma children?"*

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37 Interview with M., a resident of NizhniyeVyazovye.

38 Interview with E.L. Gordiyash, principal of School No. 140.

39 Ibid.

*They'll never pass this exam in their lives.*"<sup>40</sup>

Some of the children from this village go to a different school (No. 15), which has 59 Roma children who are all in "remedial" classes. They are placed in these classes after being processed by a special medical-pedagogical commission, which "diagnoses" all Roma children with delays in psychological development. There are eight of these classes in grades 3 through 8. Eight people are listed as students in grade 8, but only three students actually attend class. As in School No. 140, children here eat separately from Russian children in the cafeteria and, on top of this, they are scheduled to eat at a different time.

Roma at Ovsyannikovo Secondary School in Orel are also taught separately. There are currently two "Roma classes" in the school—in grade 2, which has 16 children, and grade 3, which has 12 children. According to school principal Maya Alekseevna Frolova, they were not able to enroll enough students for a first-grade class, and no one has made it to fourth grade. There will be one first-grade class this year, which will have 16 Roma students. It is obvious that teachers in this school treat Roma students with bias:

*"All the Roma children at our school study separately from the others, because their level is, how should I put it, lower than the level of other children. Not one Roma child has completed even nine grades for the entire time I've worked at this school. The highest grade they've reached is sixth grade. But that's extremely rare. They mainly complete four grades and then their parents marry them off or move to another city."*<sup>41</sup>

### **Exclusion of Romani language from public space and school education**

As a rule, Roma in Russia are highly competent in speaking their native language; Roma children, especially those living in dense communities, get acquainted with Russian language only at primary school while speaking primarily Romanes at home.

Romanes remains just a "home language"; it is not included in the public sphere outside the Roma community and neither books are published nor TV or radio are broadcasted in this language. Monitoring by ADC Memorial shows that Romani language is not present in public space, or state institutions, or schools even in places where inhabitants of dense Roma settlements make up an essential part of the local population.

Romanes is not used as a language of instruction in Russian schools. There are no academic programs on Romani language and culture at universities, nor exists such specialization for teachers. There is no additional special training for teachers working with children from dense Roma communities. Academic institutions like the Laboratory of Romani Language (at the Federal Institute of Development of Education) or Russian Center for Research of Romani Culture (Russian Institute of Culturology (under the Ministry of Culture)), where specialists could elaborate methodology of adaptation of Roma children to school have been closed. The only pilot manual for teachers published with the state support <sup>42</sup> has not been used at schools.

Real attempts to include Romani language into school curriculum were only made by NGOs. ADC Memorial published a number of methodological guides and manuals suitable for primary and secondary school, with the participation of linguists and ethnographers, teachers and Roma activists and native speakers. In the framework of its educational projects, ADC Memorial created a network of interested teachers and school directors, working with children from dense

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40 Ibid.

41 From an interview with M.A. Frolova, principal of Ovsyannikovo Secondary School.

42 Сеславинская М.В., Цветков Г.Н. Межкультурная русско-цыганская коммуникация. Пособие для учителей общеобразовательных учреждений. Москва, 2009.

Roma settlements in different regions throughout the country. Round tables, workshops and conferences were organized in order to promote integration within the education of Roma children and to raise the value of Roma culture in- and outside of the communities. Teachers were inspired to create their own publications on practical issues of teaching Roma children/ Teachers, school directors and Roma leaders participated in joint study tours and familiarized with foreign experience on education of national minorities.

Thus, the following educational materials were issued and disseminated at schools and Roma communities: large coloured posters depicting the Romani alphabet based on Cyrillic; picture books with Romani fairytales in two dialects, with didactic tasks for children; a manual of the Kelderari dialect; the book “History and Culture of Roma” for extra-school activities; a language method for electronic schoolboards; a book of fairytales of a native Romanes speaker-writer in Romani/Russian; teachers from Volgograd created a manual adopted for bilingual Romani primary schoolchildren.<sup>43</sup> These publications were very well accepted by teachers and Roma themselves, they were used at schools and by motivated parents at home.

Unfortunately, these initiatives were not welcomed and even prohibited by some educational authorities. Thus, teachers in Volgograd and Novosibirsk were prohibited from using the manuals created by themselves in everyday practice. There are documented cases (in Novosibirsk, Leningrad Oblast) of dismissal of teachers who creatively and successfully work with Roma children

The only Russian NGO who professionally worked on the problem of Roma rights in Russia, ADC Memorial was recognized as “a foreign agent” and politically repressed. This led to the disruption of the cooperation of Human Rights defenders, academicians and teachers and paralyzed the very well developed activities on integration of Roma children into school education because any contacts of school teachers and director with so called “foreign agents” became de facto forbidden by the Russian authorities.

As a result of this negative development, Roma schoolchildren who are badly adapted to the school environment because of language difficulties, do not receive the needed support. Neglect towards Romani language in education, in combination with the widely practiced segregation of Roma children at schools and other excluding forms of education often proposed to them (as so called “distant” or “home” education), leads to low levels of knowledge. Finally, Ultimately, this has led to a situation in which Roma children tend to complete only primary school, if they manage to do so at all.

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<sup>43</sup>These publications are available at the website of ADC Memorial:  
[https://adcmemorial.org/www/publication\\_type/other](https://adcmemorial.org/www/publication_type/other)

## II. Recommendations

With respect to discrimination-related legislation, **develop comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation** to ban all form of discrimination and introduce a clear definition of racial discrimination adequate to international standards.

For the purpose of better protection of social and economic rights of Roma, **ratify the Optional Protocol (1998) to the European Social Charter** on collective complaints to the European Committee on Social Rights.

**A state program of comprehensive support for Russia's Roma population** aimed at overcoming structural discrimination that includes positive measures on documentation and the exercise of rights to housing, a high-quality education, employment, and access to medical and social assistance must be adopted and implemented.

**Homes and land in existing dense Roma settlements must be legalized** and plots must be allocated to needy families with many children in accordance with current laws. Roma settlements must be safely and legally provided with resources. It must be possible for Roma to register at their place of residence, even in cases when their homes are not registered, to give them the opportunity to take advantage of economic, social, and cultural rights, including access to education, healthcare, and employment.

**Police operations to disconnect Roma settlements from gas and other resources must be ended.** The media must stop stoking hatred of Roma people.

There must be an **immediate end to the practice of forced evictions**. If resettlement is unavoidable, alternate housing equipped with modern conveniences must be provided as quickly as possible and compensation must be made for losses and emotional damages.

**The practice of segregating Roma children in schools must be ended.** Opportunities for the preschool preparation of Roma children must be created, and additional Russian language classes must be organized.

**The Roma language must be included** to at least some degree in the school program; and opportunities for adults who did not receive an education on time must be created. Academic courses on Romani language and culture should be created at universities, academic researches and practical work on preparing methodological materials for teachers who work with Roma children should be supported.

In order to guarantee the right of Roma to use, learn and develop Romani language, **ratify the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages**.

**We also call the Russian Government:**

**Bring to an end**, by all appropriate means, including legislation as required by circumstances, **racial discrimination by any persons, groups or organizations by public officials**. Adopt state policies that would prevent racial discrimination by state authorities. In particular:

- ;
- Put an end to harassment, persecution and prosecution of NGOs working on protection of the rights of ethnic minorities, indigenous peoples, non-citizens and other vulnerable discriminated groups.

Adopt immediate and effective measures, particularly in the fields of teaching, education, culture and information, with a view to **combating prejudices** which lead to racial discrimination and to promoting understanding, tolerance and friendship among nations and racial or ethnical groups. In particular:

- Encourage initiatives that foster extra-curriculum inter-community activities among

children of different ethnic origins, including establishment of platform to share cultural experiences and organise sports events.

- Monitor and take measures to prevent incitement to, or acts of, discrimination in schools, promote inclusion in society through a curriculum which ensures the principles and moral values of equality within the scope of social equity.
- Training of school personnel in needs of specific groups, effective working practices and cultural understanding;