Strasbourg, 17 March 2000 MG-S-ROM (2000) 3

Memorandum prepared by the Secretariat on problems facing Roma/Gypsies in the field of housing

- 1. At its 8th meeting, the Group of Specialists asked the Secretariat to prepare a summary of Mr Macura's report (MG-S-ROM (99)1) and the comments on it by members of the Group.
- 2. The present document should enable guidelines to be drawn up on the issues involved in Roma/Gypsy housing for the attention of member states of the Council of Europe: it should also assist these countries in preparing strategies for improving the situation in this area.
- 3. The document is therefore submitted to the Group of Specialists in the first instance, which will then send it to the European Committee on Migration for submission to the Committee of Ministers.
- 4. The Group also considered the housing question in its report on the situation of Roma/Gypsy families in Valdemingómez, Madrid (MG-S-ROM 97(8)). This report has been taken into consideration in preparing the current document. In addition, consideration has been given to various experiments in the housing sector that have come to the Group's notice, particularly the joint co-operation programme between the Council of Europe and the Council of Europe's Development Bank, which aims to identify and develop integrated projects for the purpose of improving the living conditions of disadvantaged groups, including Roma/Gypsies.

Introduction:

- 5. Frequently, and in the majority of European countries, the Roma live in deplorable housing conditions, and this is an important factor in their general socio-economic deprivation and the socially excluded position in which they find themselves.
- 6. Whether they are sedentary or have an itinerant or semi-itinerant lifestyle, Roma/Gypsies are faced with numerous problems, the roots of which lie in the general phenomena of exclusion, discrimination and marginalisation affecting this group. Furthermore, these problems must be viewed in their overall context, since they are closely related to other issues such as employment or education, on which they have a considerable impact. Thus, the disadvantages experienced by Roma/Gypsies in these diverse areas serve to intensify each other.
- 7. The main issues that should be taken into account when introducing policies or measures aimed at improving housing conditions for Roma/Gypsies are as follows:
- · The general phenomenon of discrimination against Roma/Gypsies is also apparent in the housing sector, particularly as regards access to adequate shelter.
- · The income levels that would facilitate access to adequate shelter are often absent and, in the case of social housing, there are frequent cases of indebtedness, which prevents families from paying rents and related charges, due to the very high unemployment rate affecting these population groups.
- · The issue of social housing is in some countries not adequately regulated with regard to the legal framework, the strategies and programs. In some Central and Eastern European countries, it is also sometimes regulated on the basis of remains of old provisions dating back from the socialist period. In both cases, the Roma/Gypsy population found itself in a difficult position because of its vulnerability.
- · In many countries, Roma/Gypsies live in ghettos/a state of physical segregation, both on the fringes of cities and in rural environments. Such ghettos frequently take the form of shantytowns. These separate districts are

sometimes the outcome of historical circumstances (especially in the Balkans, where Roma have traditionally lived in "mahala", separated from other ethnic groups), but also result from former or more recent policies which have deliberately brought about the physical separation of Roma/Gypsies. In many European cities, the Roma/Gypsy population has been and continues to be relocated from town-centres to the outskirts in conjunction with city-centre renewal or property development programmes. Clearly, this phenomenon also affects other population groups, but it has a particular impact on Roma/Gypsy groups, which have few financial resources and means of opposing it.

- · As regards travellers or groups with a semi-itinerant lifestyle (mainly in Western European countries), there is a shortage of camping sites, and they are frequently under-equipped and over-populated. In addition, these sites are too frequently built in insalubrious or ecologically dangerous areas (edges of motorways, near waste disposal sites, industrial zones, etc) and at a distance from city centres.
- · The laws governing travellers' or itinerants' movements and camping arrangements often make it difficult to gain access to adequate shelter. In addition, some authorities apply the description "nomadic" to certain groups of Roma/Gypsies (even if these groups only travel because they practise a travelling trade), in order to block access to adequate shelter.
- · In other instances, the housing offered to those who wish to become sedentary is often inappropriate or of poor quality. Indeed, social housing built in recent decades and used for re-housing Roma/Gypsies from shantytowns or who wish to become sedentary is frequently unsuitable for these groups' lifestyles and culture. They subsequently find it difficult to adapt, often amongst other disadvantaged population groups, and this occasionally leads to conflicts between neighbours.
- · In some Eastern European countries, particularly in the Balkan region¹, there are no provisions on camping sites for travelling or semi-itinerant groups (such as seasonal ambulant traders). The problem facing these groups is therefore double: on the one hand, the majority population often tries to expel them from villages and towns and, on the other hand, local authorities usually do not grant them with temporary residence permits. Obtaining a temporary residence permit is often more a matter of goodwill of the local authorities rather than the result of proper regulations on camping sites.
- · In certain Central and Eastern European countries, where a process of privatising land and access to private ownership has been embarked on, Roma have frequently found themselves without warning in an illegal situation. It is often difficult for them to obtain private ownership of land (notably on account of a process of direct or indirect discrimination).
- · In most cases, poor Roma are not illegal builders. The very fact that they belong to a powerless class and do not have any force indicates that for the most part they are not in a position to break the law on construction either. When their housing has to be illegal because they have no other options, it is most often on abandoned land in fringe zones, often in places that few are interested in, land that has been neglected owing to its unhealthy characteristics. The other extreme consists of living environments² that the authorities, using different legal procedures, have artificially declared illegal or temporary, places that should be torn down and the inhabitants relocated, places where life is supposedly unsafe.
- · Instances have also been recorded of travellers who have received land but cannot occupy it, for reasons connected with use of a semi-mobile home (such as a caravan), land-registration or town planning.
- · The physical segregation of Roma exacerbates the phenomenon of exclusion in other fields and prevents access to basic social services, the labour market, education and health services It has generally resulted in children from these districts being educated in separate or special classes/schools, which clearly has adverse implications for

their future.

- The fact that many of the districts or shantytowns populated by Roma/Gypsies are in areas that are unhealthy or unsuitable for construction places these populations in a particularly vulnerable position in the event of natural or ecological disasters (flooding, land slides, industrial pollution, high levels of underground water, etc...). The floods which affected Central Europe in 1998 and destroyed Roma districts and villages illustrate this point.
- · In many areas inhabited by Roma/Gypsies, facilities such as drinking water, electricity, waste collection and social or health services are lacking. This frequently results in deplorable sanitary and medical conditions that bear little resemblance to the general situation in Europe in this respect.
- · Finance for building or improving Roma/Gypsy housing is often very limited, either because of a lack of political will at local level or because of a fear on the part of local authorities of kindling antagonism from the majority population by making resources available to improve the Roma's housing conditions.
- · Finally, whether the issue is establishing camping sites or building houses, the populations concerned are still too rarely consulted or invited to take part in building or renovating their environment. This results in housing that is inappropriate for their needs and in conflicts with the authorities and, occasionally, with the majority population.
- 8. In order to address these different problems, the Specialists Group recommends that the following principles be observed during the preparation and implementation of housing programmes or policies for Roma/Gypsies.

I. Housing policies: major principles to be applied $\frac{3}{2}$:

- 9. If they wish to be able to improve the general position of Roma/Gypsies in the longer term, the member states should consider the improvement of Roma/Gypsy housing conditions as a priority action area. Access to decent housing is a right for any citizen. Consequently, financial measures should be agreed at both national and local level, and this issue should be given its rightful place in national and local budgets.
- 10. Housing and town-planning policies and programmes should be an integral part of any policies for Roma/Gypsies, since the housing problem is closely related to other important aspects of their exclusion, such as education, employment and health. The most appropriate way of simultaneously solving the housing, employment, training and other problems facing Roma/Gypsies seems to be, in the light of various experiences, the development of integrated or comprehensive projects (see Paragraph VI).
- 11. Housing and town-planning policies affecting Roma/Gypsies should establish a framework and impose obligations on local authorities, which are the main players in managing housing questions.
- 12. Housing policies that affect Roma/Gypsies should also be integrated into the more general framework of housing policies for society as a whole. Equally, the rules and standards applicable to the general population should be applied to Roma/Gypsies. In other words, the standards and norms applied to Roma/Gypsy housing should be no lower than those generally applicable.
- 13. At the same time, it is essential to ensure that Roma/Gypsy housing is located in areas that are fit for habitation or suitable for construction under current legislation and in ecologically acceptable surroundings. In addition, the states should introduce measures that will enable them to confront unexpected events, such as natural disasters or epidemics, that often disproportionately affect vulnerable groups living in precarious settlements.
- 14. Minimum standards of public services (water, electricity, street cleaning, sewerage system, waste collection,

- etc) should be adhered to in districts where Roma/Gypsies form the majority populations and are disadvantaged in comparison with the rest of the population. This entails an obligation on national and local authorities to take action on behalf of all a country's citizens.
- 15. The authorities should also provide minimal social services (health-care provision, access to education, police services, etc) in these marginalised areas.
- 16. Finally, the Roma/Gypsies' living environment should be taken into account when seeking solutions to their housing problems.

II. The fight against discrimination

- 17. The authorities should take measures to end the discrimination (direct or indirect) faced by Roma/Gypsies and to promote equal opportunities in access to housing, by enacting anti-discrimination legislation where it does not exist or by enforcing such legislation more effectively. In addition, organisations that provide legal assistance to persons who have suffered discrimination in this area should be supported.
- 18. Roma/Gypsies should be given better information about their rights and obligations with regard to housing, especially by local authorities and the departments responsible for housing. Associations, which work to assist, disadvantaged groups, particularly Roma/Gypsies, in housing procedures matters should also be encouraged and supported.
- 19. In general, tackling discrimination against Roma/Gypsies also implies the need to work with the majority population, and in particular at local level, with the municipal officers responsible for housing issues. It should be made clear that access to adequate shelter, for Roma/Gypsies as for other groups of the population, is a basic human right, acknowledged as such in the Revised European Social Charter.

III. Towards desegregating the Roma/Gypsy environment

- 20. National or local policies aimed at settling Roma/Gypsies on the fringes of towns or villages or relocating them to such areas should be stopped, since they have led to the creation of ghettos across Europe, often with deplorable living conditions and building types (shantytowns), to an almost total separation from the majority population and to the introduction of separate or "special" education structures. Furthermore, such measures or policies fly in the face of policies intended to improve the position of Roma/Gypsies.
- 21. Local authorities should also ensure that they do not exclude certain groups living on the fringes of towns and villages, frequently at the borders of territorial units, from their responsibility. In practice, municipalities have frequently refused to give consideration to local Roma/Gypsy groups, under the pretext that they were living on the territorial boundary of the municipality in question. In addition, certain practices whereby municipalities which wish to be rid of their Roma/Gypsy populations evict them from the territory should be brought to an end.
- 22. The description "nomadic" should not be used by local authorities to restrict groups to vulnerable and marginalised housing areas, especially when the persons concerned are only nomadic in the sense that they exercise a profession such as that of itinerant traders.
- 23. The member States should establish policies for a gradual desegregation, in co-ordination with housing renovation or rebuilding programmes. Residents of shantytowns should be prepared for and supported in the transfer to "permanent" housing, so as to minimise the difficulties linked to adjustment and rejection by the neighbouring majority populations. This is particularly valuable for groups that have never previously lived in

"permanent" housing.

- 24. However, desegregating the Roma/Gypsy environment should not be used as an excuse to destroy Roma/Gypsy living environments, which have been established on land that increased its financial value over time. In fact, lots of old Roma/Gypsy settlements developed at the outskirts of cities in the past, but due to growth of the size of cities, they now form part of the city. Local authorities and Roma/Gypsy communities should then find fair arrangements in case of destruction, when the latter is really necessary.
- 25. Programmes for urban renewal or for rehabilitating deteriorating districts with predominantly Roma/Gypsy populations should include the following aspects: consultation of and participation by the populations concerned, housing that is adapted to the specific needs of the groups concerned (lifestyles, trades, etc) and closest possible proximity to town centres or economically active areas (so as to avoid physical isolation).
- 26. In some cases, the authorities should consider protecting and maintaining old Roma/Gypsy settlements which were set up a long time ago and which occupy a stable position in urban or rural communities. This might apply to Roma/Gypsy settlements which are not ghettos, but are representative of a traditional way of living, some specific values and cultural features.

IV. Legalisation

- 27. In finding solutions to the problem of illegal housing areas, the first step should be to identify the reasons why these living environments have been declared illegal for each specific case, and to examine each case to see whether legalisation is possible.
- 28. The authorities should legalise settlements wherever it is possible to do so, since this status increases people's ability to improve their housing.
- 29. Urban development plans can sometimes include the planned destruction of Roma/Gypsy settlements. The timeframe needed to complete the works is often unknown and, in such situations, it is necessary to find fair and decent solutions, including temporary legalisation, in order to avoid leaving these groups of people in a complete uncertainty as regards their future. They should also be given possibilities of upgrading their living conditions in a way which would not jeopardize town development plans.
- 30. In cases where legalisation is not possible, the authorities should find, through dialogue with the Roma/Gypsy communities concerned, solutions which are acceptable for all the parties. The absence of possibilities of legalisation should not be used as an excuse to leave these groups unattended and out of any scheme of public support and care, to which they are entitled as citizens of the state where they live.

V. Travelling or semi-itinerant groups

- 31. In countries or regions where Roma/Gypsies lead an itinerant or semi-itinerant lifestyle, the member states should seek to ensure that the legislation in force provides for equal opportunities as regards access to fundamental rights, and that those who wish to settle down can do so in good conditions.
- 32. Issues concerning camping are usually managed at local level. Nonetheless, the central authorities should ensure that local authorities meet their obligations with regard to sites for travellers, and should make resources available to help them with this task.
- 33. Camping sites should correspond to the needs of the groups that use them. It is therefore essential to consult these groups when building camping sites. In addition, they should be designed in such a way as to ensure decent

sanitary and health conditions.

34. Families that wish to settle down should have access to suitable decent housing, so as to facilitate their integration into non-travelling society. Legislation and urban planning regulations should also enable those who wish to settle down in a mobile home (caravan), to do so, particularly when they have obtained a plot of ground. Generally speaking, mobile housing (whether for travelling or sedentary groups) should be granted the same status as housing for sedentary persons.

VI. Towards integrated and participative projects

- 35. Projects or programmes for renovating or building housing for relocated Roma/Gypsy populations should give priority to participation by the families concerned in the planning, construction or renovation and management processes, so as to ensure the sustainability of such projects. In practice, the problems of indebtedness or insolvency faced by many Roma/Gypsy families living in social housing could be minimised by generating income for these families during building or renovation work.
- 36. Rebuilding and renovation of disadvantaged districts creates employment opportunities for the people living in these areas, particularly as regards the communal management of buildings, the upkeep of public areas and the creation of community services. It is therefore important that projects intended to improve Roma/Gypsy housing include components aimed at job creation, income generating and revitalisation of community life, so as to ensure their long-term sustainability.
- 37. With regard to social housing, the implementation of a system for postponed access to ownership may also help to ensure that buildings are maintained in good condition and provide a long-term solution to the economic problems of Roma/Gypsy families.
- 38. Co-operation between the local Roma/Gypsy community and the majority social group is generally the key to success.
- 39. An individualised approach to solving Roma/Gypsy housing problems is needed and possible since, in most cases, the Roma/Gypsy living environments are relatively small.
- 40. A management group should be set up for every project, involving representatives of the Romani community, of the local authorities and NGOs concerned and of the relevant national authorities. In addition, the legality of the rehabilitation or improvement processes should be monitored in order to ensure that the interests of all participants in the project are safeguarded.
- 41. All steps in the process of solving Roma/Gypsy housing problems, and the process as a whole, should be conceived in such a way that their ethnic and cultural identity is preserved.

VII. Financing

- 42. Financing of housing projects should stem from various sources. Considering that the cost of the projects is often a restrictive factor in their implementation, it should be borne in mind that while the borderline cost is a question of the national economy's strength, the distribution of this cost is a question of social policy and market mechanisms, and ultimately a question of the relations between the partners in the housing process.
- 43. Given that the period of carrying out a housing project is relatively long, accurate plans of work and financing should be elaborated in order not create false expectations in the communities concerned.

- 44. The financial systems put in place by the member states for the purpose of building or renovating Roma/Gypsy districts should take account of the diversity of housing conditions throughout Europe, and especially of the distribution of urban and rural Roma/Gypsies, which varies according to the country concerned. They should also support the efforts being made in this area at local level, particularly through increased financial support or incentives for improving Roma/Gypsy housing.
- 45. In meeting the financial implications of Roma/Gypsy housing projects, the member states should make use of international financial institutions such as the Council of Europe's Development Bank or the World Bank. Indeed, these institutions take a particular interest in the situation of Roma/Gypsies in Europe and will undoubtedly contribute to developing better living conditions for Roma/Gypsies in the near future.

APPENDIX

A PROPOSAL TO IMPROVE HOUSING

(Extract of the report of Mr Macura on: Housing, urban planning and poverty: problems faced by Roma/Gypsy communities with particular reference to Central and Eastern Europe [MG-S-ROM (99) 1])

This part of the paper proposes a set of principles that might be the basis for a strategy to more successfully solve Roma housing problems. My proposal is based in the first place on research and conclusions made in my own country, as well as on ideas and approaches which have been developed by people gathered in the Society for the Improvement of Local Roma Communities. Although the ideas and conclusions mentioned here arose within a specific social and environmental context, in Yugoslavia, I strongly believe that with certain adaptations they could be used in some other European areas and regions where the Roma live in poor conditions. I say this because I have found views very similar to mine in a number of texts written by experts from different countries in order to solve various Roma problems. Different outlooks can be used in assessing the Roma's housing today and formulating a proposal for future improvement. My own personal views are basically founded on several simple affirmations which are presented below:

1. Roma housing should be part of the housing system of society as a whole

This housing system should regulate the matter of relations in the spheres of the market resolution of housing, social policy and practice, and the government's involvement, most probably in urgent cases. The system's solution should be equal for all citizens and all families, and for the Roma and their families. The housing market should be based on the same rules and principles that apply to the majority. Social housing regulations should be the same for those who are not Roma and have a difficult housing situation. The authorities should have instruments available that can be used in cases of sudden difficulties, catastrophes, epidemics, etc., in order to rescue some housing situation or return it to its former state.

2. Advocating an integral, comprehensive solution is advocating a better apartment

Roma housing problems should be considered and resolved within the context of other aspects of their life in general. Concurrent with solving the Roma's housing problem, other matters should be resolved as well, such as: employment through the improvement of their economy, education through improving the existing qualification structure and the better schooling of children. The recommendation to solve the problems of employment (economic issue), schooling (educational issue) and housing (environmental issue) concurrently has more of a methodological-procedural nature than the actual content of every specific project. Specific action requires proper research into the specific deprivation that is part of the poverty of a specific community. Sometimes along with material shortages there might be a poor health situation, or illegal building, or conflicts with neighbours about the land, or pressures from developers to relocate, or very unacceptable natural conditions of the location. Different communities have different problems and in practical work they should see that theirs are the problems that are

actually being solved. Working on only one set of problems does not lead to results. Concentrating activities only on housing is possible but it might happen that the problem is not solved and after a time the poor community is in an even worse housing situation than when they started. Concentrating only on employment not infrequently puts the Roma in the very worst jobs, and insisting only on schooling can easily end up with them quitting school. An integral, comprehensive approach is the key to successfully answering the Roma's housing problem.

3. Solving the housing problem should be in line with other solutions

The need to resolve the Roma's housing problem not only in the housing sector but within an integral project does not mean that all parts of the project - for example retraining, employment, solving the question of sanitation - must be taken up immediately, all at once. If the goal is clear then it is possible, with a good choice of priorities, distribution of activities and elaboration of a longer plan of action, that in terms of time housing appears at some later stage, although it might have been the immediate reason for launching the programme. The integral concept does not mean uncritically "attacking" all problems at the same time, does not mean "packing" activities, rather solving problem by problem or a group of problems. This creates a supporting and facilitating atmosphere for every subsequent solution that helps carry projects out. If it is assumed that in addition to a community's other problems it has people with illegal residence, then the resolution of this problem will create people's necessary security. The feeling of security that they will stay, removing the fear of expulsion, in this case would be a good support for all other activities. In this case solving the housing problem should find its place within the scheme of other activities.

4. Legalizing illegal Roma living environments should be a priority

In most cases, poor Roma are not illegal builders. The very fact that they belong to a powerless class and do not have any force indicates that for the most part they cannot be breaking the law on construction, either. When their housing has to be illegal since there is no other possibility, it is most often on abandoned land in fringe zones, often in places that few are interested in, land that has been neglected owing to its unhealthy characteristics. The other extreme consists of living environments that the authorities, using different legal procedures, have artificially declared illegal, temporary, places that should be torn down and the inhabitants relocated, places where life is unsafe. This status of Roma living environments is unsustainable. The reasons why these living environments have been declared illegal must be found for each specific case. Each case must be examined to see whether legalization is possible. The authorities should legalize settlements wherever possible since this status increases people's ability to improve their housing.

5. When solving the Roma's housing problem, the type of living environment should be kept in mind

When developing a programme to solve some housing matter, the morphological nature of the living environment should be kept in mind. It is not possible to have one single remedy for all types of settlements, districts, blocks, or collective buildings in which the Roma live. It is not possible to have one type of programme that is equally valid for the poorest slums in city centres and for large housing communities on the periphery. Programmes and projects are needed that are based on specific situations, on concrete street networks and plots, on houses and accompanying facilities, on the quality of the natural conditions and ecosystem where the living environment is located. Advocating that local conditions be respected and advocating solutions that suit each place does not mean advocating great diversity in the approach. There must still be a uniform strategy, a uniform framework for action for the Roma's different types of living environments. The existence of a minimum framework should help prevent arbitrary interpretations of the forms and functions, systems and structures of Roma settlements, should contribute towards a more or less recognizable orientation in treating the physical structures used by the Roma.

6. Cooperation between the local Roma community and the dominant society is the basis of success

It is a fact that the Roma are constantly working to improve their living environment and apartments to the extent provided not only by their financial resources but also by the often difficult legislative framework, the fact that they do not own the land and their hostile surroundings. On the other hand, it is also a fact that individual towns and municipalities are trying to solve the Roma housing problem as much as their monetary situation, the

availability of other resources and their readiness to get involved in Roma problems allow. There is one more factor: in spite of this work neither one nor the other has achieved very visible success. The situation in most Roma living environments clearly indicates this. Poor Roma cannot find their way in the systemic and structural finesses of the more affluent dominant society. The dominant society does not quite understand the aspirations and needs of minorities, often offering solutions that have nothing to do with them. The idea that people could live decently in army containers is as misconstrued as the assumption that closing them in the world of the impoverished Roma mahala could achieve something more than marginalization and ill will. The failures of both sides are evident. The situation can change under the assumption that the two sides join together. The Roma and non-Roma can voluntarily put together what they sovereignly and naturally possess: one side its traditional convictions, the other modern beliefs; one side skills that have sustained them for centuries, the other knowledge that has made them energetic, etc. Cooperation between the Roma and non-Roma can bear fruit for both sides' benefit, and joy.

7. An individualized approach to solving Roma housing is needed and possible

In most cases, the Roma living environments are relatively small. This seems to be the case regardless of the type of population, regardless of whether it is pure Roma or a mixed population. Large mahalas such as those found in Macedonia and Bulgaria are more an exception than the rule. If community development projects are undertaken, which can have several different orientations, it seems possible to form distinct teams of technical experts that can work with the Roma on a highly individualized basis. There is no substitute for direct human contact that develops special two-way learning: experts learn from the Roma, the Roma learn from the experts. The process of two-way learning at one moment leads to the homogenization of knowledge, approaches and ideas so that the rest of the work can be done like a well coordinated team. The idea behind the individualized approach is for the community to activate its best potentials and those potentials that are hidden.

8. Full participation of the Roma in the improvement process is required

The question of participation is the question of rights, democratic relations, and of money. It is wrong to assume that you can make a good apartment if you don't talk to the people it is intended for. It will not be built well or used well. The participation of the Roma in developing housing projects, just as the participation of any other population, means a simple rule: the more vital the question, the broader the dialogue. Great participation is always expected when the agenda has questions regarding town planning, devising employment programmes, analyzing and solving inter-neighbour relations and similar decisions; at the other extreme are technical questions in which there is greater participation of professionals and the opinion of the local community or its leaders is not sought. Participation in preparing projects to improve housing is one thing, another is to implement the project. Those with experience with the local population as a workforce will often emphasize that even in the poorest environments they found people who had enough talent to be "barefoot architects". These people were also able to mobilize other members of the local community to take part in construction work. Here is an observation: it seems that there is no readiness among professional enterprises - either from the dominant society or the Roma's, to take their workforce, even skilled artisans, from the local environment to work in that environment. Cooperation between professional building organizations and individuals is very difficult since their work interests are quite different. Self-help building and professional building should complement each other, not collide.

9. A management group must exist for every project

Complex projects such as self-help building projects, community development projects and similar projects must have a managing group that directs them in a professional manner. The group should consist of representatives from the local Roma community, best organized as a CBO, municipal representatives, representatives from appropriate state bodies, and representatives of NGOs. The managing group should have the role of decision maker above all, while regarding technical matters it should rely on internal help from the local Roma community itself, or the external help of either the public sector or any private agency. The management group is not part of the local Roma community's self-management but provides it with support.

10. The identity of the Roma should be preserved in housing to the extent they so wish

All steps in the process of solving the Roma's housing situation, and the process as a whole, should be conceived so that the Roma's ethnic and cultural identity are not jeopardized. The housing solution process, which includes the Roma themselves, should be based on their needs, viewpoints, opinions, understandings, desires, and even fears, and thereupon seek appropriate solutions in planning and designing, administration and financing, and later in using and maintaining the housing fund. This process, as well as housing in general, can help bring about the gradual loss of those elements of the Roma's identity that come from the culture of poverty, and make room for elements that are the product of indigenous cultural values. Housing should help the Roma become better integrated in the dominant society, should help the development of a multiethnic and multicultural society, and prevent the process of forced assimilation. In this regard, it should be emphasized once more that the atmosphere of mass housing in apartment blocks in high-rise settlements and dormitory communities on the outskirts of towns was completely unsuitable for the thousands of Roma families that lived in them, or still live in them today. These mass dormitories were nothing more than one of the means to forcibly change cultural patterns, value systems, and in some cases cause assimilation. Technical and design solutions should and can be such that they take into consideration the tradition of family life to the extent desired by the Roma community itself. The housing process should allow the Roma an unrestricted attitude towards individual elements of their own identity, and towards identity as a whole.

11. Housing standards that apply to others should apply to the Roma

The Roma housing environment should have the same treatment as the housing areas, settlements and towns of the majority. The standards used in supplying settlements and building apartments should be identical. *Identical* standards should apply to structural safety, earthquake resistance, fire prevention measures, thermal protection, waterproofing, protecting parts of the structure from freezing, and should allow micro climatic comfort to be achieved, i.e. temperature and humidity within the rooms, using sound material, etc. There is no question of creating "parallel standards", "double standards" or any regulations that would discriminate against any part of the population. Standards must be applied identically to the apartments of all members of society, thus to the apartments to be inhabited by Roma, too. The quality of the material that is built-in and the permanently visible parts of the apartment such as joinery, wall and floor coatings, installations, sanitary fixtures, technical equipment, etc., is directly dependent on the economic possibilities of the tenants, community funds, and ultimately the economic strength of society as a whole. The above requires that minimum standards be found within a country that will guarantee a healthy life, balanced family relations, better conditions for children, and good neighbourly contacts. The apartment surface area should correspond to the number of tenants, while bearing in mind normal human adjustment to the spatial framework. Since families are dynamic - increasing number of members, economic possibilities and cultural needs, changes in vital needs and the development of aspirations - the design and legal solutions must make it possible to follow these dynamics through easy adaptations, adding on, and improving the interior properties of the apartment. The rule should be introduced: if apartments are built below the average surface area - such as "minimum apartments", "mini-space", "one-room flat", an apartment with an "initial core", etc. - they must be designed in advance for expansion and enhancing. If a non-increased layout is used then concepts of minimization cannot be used. Standards regarding the adaptability of the structure and surface size should be introduced that will open up the technical possibilities of poor families starting with a modest, even overcrowded apartment that they can expand and valorize.

12. The legality of the improvement process must be controlled

The process of improving the housing of the poor is a complex and difficult job, especially if it is within a larger project. The large number of participants who do not know each other well, who have little work experience in common, different and sometimes unrecognizable interests, and the facility with which such projects can get stuck on a sidetrack and fail, requires a high level of control. In addition to controlling financial and technical accuracy, one important area is to control the accuracy of the process. Such controls should guarantee fair play for all participants. This control should protect all participants from any possible abuse, from the improvement process being conducted in a completely selfish way that is not suitable to the community, and finally should remove all

doubt that the project has to do with something that will harm the neighbours, or damage the broader community. Controlling the legality of the housing improvement process is the best way to protect the project from possible malicious rumours.

13. Housing improvement should be financed from several sources

There is a high level of agreement among different participants that solving the housing problem of the poor cannot rely on only one source. The cost of building new apartments, repairing rundown housing or buying used housing, regardless of how inexpensive, always requires more funds than the poor have. This is why all those involved in this matter should join forces, including the state, the municipality or town, non-government organizations, and the poor Roma families themselves. The idea behind this joining forces is for each party to bring the resources naturally available to him to the housing process. This does not have to be ready money or money alone. Municipalities and towns as a rule, regardless of the system of ownership of city construction land, always have plots available that can be given to solve the Roma's housing problem. Often the municipality has stocks or is whole owner of city infrastructure systems. On the other hand, the state has funds to purchase apartments for the vulnerable poor. The Roma families themselves have insignificant sums of money, but can bring their workforce to the process, and sometimes pay for part of the transport or construction material. Nongovernment organizations can also bear part of the expenses. Both domestic and foreign funds can be used. But what should probably be developed, and some projects in developing countries have managed to do so, is a banking system adapted to the poor. All aggravating circumstances should be removed - initial deposits, many years of saving as a prerequisite to receiving credit, proof of regular income, proof of permanent residence, etc. In some countries in which the Roma cannot reach banks, they still raise credit on the shadow banking market. This is a completely irregular supply, with exorbitant interest rates that these people must accept since there is no other possibility. Opening up such possibilities would strengthen the Roma's position in the process of solving their housing problems.

14. Housing projects should be affordable

The cost of the project is very often a restrictive factor to its implementation. Depending on their economic strength and other factors, countries can determine the borderline of costs that their national economy can bear, or simply put, how many annual incomes or revenues are needed for one apartment. And while the borderline cost is a question of the national economy's strength, the distribution of this cost is a question of social policy and market mechanisms, and ultimately a question of the relations between partners in the housing process. Housing costs can be reduced in different ways, ranging from building less expensive apartments, which is an architectural solution, to forming an atmosphere suitable for self-help housing. On the other hand, the process of paying the full cost can be drawn out by building houses in phases or building on credit. Finding ways to decrease apartment costs is a world problem and Roma programs have much to learn from the practice of countries in South America, Asia or Africa.

15. The period of carrying out a housing project is relatively long

The period of carrying out a housing project is relatively long. Numerous examples indicate that such projects, even when carried out in ideal circumstances and unburdened by unnecessary standstills or intrigues, take several years; the more complex the project, the more participants or money it requires, the longer its completion date. An accurate network plan must be elaborated that leads a critical path along the money line. It is not good to awaken false hopes and for anyone from the non-Roma world to promise that some project can be completed in several months. The local Roma community sometimes experiences a project as charity, as something given to them from some other world through the charity of some higher power. This often brings with it wrong assumptions that this "charity" does not require them to respect any rules or customary procedures, any laws. But they must be respected in reality. Otherwise it requires time and poor communities sometimes do not understand this. They think that everything is easier, faster and granted to the more affluent, which is actually not true. A realistic calculation of the time needed to carry out a project is a good prerequisite for making people aware of time and creating trust in the next project.

Note ¹. Even if most of the itinerant or semi-itinerant Roma/Gypsy groups live in Western European countries (like France, Ireland, the UK, etc), communities maintaining an itinerant way of life, as result of tradition or of economic activities, can be found in some Eastern and South-Eastern European countries.

²- "Living environment" means here Roma/Gypsy settlements and mahala, ghettos and shantytowns, part of cities or villages in which they live, illegally or legally, in healthy or unhealthy areas.

Note ³ For more details, consult the 15 principles put forward by Mr Macura in his report MG-S-ROM (99)1 and reproduced in Appendix to the present document.