
Council of Europe: “criminalising begging is not a solution”. Anti-Roma sentiment on the rise

The phenomenon of begging among Roma children in Europe is again on the rise. And anti-Roma and anti-Traveller discourse and sentiment in several EU countries is also on the rise. But “criminalising begging is not a solution”. This is according to a report published by the Council of Europe’s Committee of Experts on Roma and Traveller Issues. The experts believe that “social and economic measures aimed at addressing the root causes of begging and improving the living conditions of Roma communities are preferable to measures aimed at criminalising begging”. Research shows that “there is no criminal intent behind begging”, since the latter is often the result of extreme poverty: Roma children may be forced to beg by their families or third parties to help pay family debts. The COVID-19 pandemic has aggravated the conditions of Roma communities in Europe. According to the report, begging is allowed in nine Council of Europe Member States, but 29 States have some criminal sanctions in place for it. In 11 States, begging is prohibited locally. The report recommends “harmonizing” legislation with EU human rights standards to combat poverty. The report recommends measures to support Roma families: school mediation and monthly allowances to ensure children attend school; child protection and legal assistance. “The removal of a child from their family should be “a last resort”, the report concludes.

Redazione