

Advocacy Quilt Helps Roma Families to Find a Secure Home in France

Strasbourg, France: Eight vulnerable Roma women and their families have been offered permanent housing and the chance to make handicrafts by the city of Strasbourg, after they produced a [powerful advocacy quilt](#) denouncing discrimination against the Roma in Europe.

The initiative was brokered by the Council of Europe, which commissioned the quilt in the spring of 2011 with support from The Advocacy Project (AP). It suggests that quilting can not only help marginalized communities to tell their story, but also change lives.

[The quilters](#) are originally from Romania and were living in caravans on the outskirts of Strasbourg when they volunteered for quilting in the spring of 2011. Like many Roma in Europe, they were in a parlous state. Several had returned to France after being expelled during the much-publicized crack-down against Roma, but were still fearful of the police. Most relied on begging to support their families, and some married as young as 14.



The Strasbourg Quilt: Dosta is Romany for enough, and refers to the Council of Europe program

But they seized on an invitation from the Council of Europe to embroider panels for a quilt with help from AP Peace Fellow [Kerry McBroom](#), a local artist Veronique Boyer, and a Romanian cultural mediator. After being approached by the Council, the Strasbourg city government offered housing and training to the 8 women and their families.

AP's interest in advocacy quilting was sparked by survivors of the 1995 Srebrenica massacre in Eastern Bosnia, who have used [memorial quilts](#) to keep the memory of the massacre alive. Building on their example, AP has helped [community groups](#) in 11 countries to make advocacy quilts and profiled over 150 quilters on the AP site.

Until Strasbourg, it was not clear if this model would catch on among Roma women in Europe, who have little experience of organizing or outreach. In addition, none of the 8 Strasbourg quilters had prior experience of needlework. But they drew inspiration from each other and received constant encouragement from the Council of Europe, which arranged for their quilt to be exhibited at the prestigious [Biennale in Venice](#).

Introducing the quilt in Venice, Maud de Boer Buquicchio, the Council's Deputy Secretary General said of the artists: "The quilt expresses in vivid colours the injustice to which they are condemned - evictions, expulsions, unemployment, discrimination and the constant struggle for survival."

Following Strasbourg, AP sent Fellows to support three more Roma quilting projects in Kosovo and the Czech Republic. Thirty-one Czech Roma have been murdered since the fall of Communism and the Czech quilt, which was made by a group of friends from the village of Mimon, offers a bleak portrait of fire-bombings, beatings and Neo-Nazis. Quilters from [Iniciativa 6](#), a Roma NGO in Prizren, also sent a strong political message with [their designs](#).

The third group of quilters, from [Gracanica](#) in Kosovo, showed picturesque scenes of country life. But their panels also depict the life of drudgery that faces many Roma women. One artist, [Mamudja](#), shows a mother bathing her baby and then re-using the water for cooking - a reminder that water is in short supply in many rural Roma households.



Mamudja and her panel

In October, AP took the four Roma quilts to the World Congress of Roma Women, in Granada, Spain. [Emilie Horackova](#), one of the Czech quilters, attended the conference and introduced her quilt to other advocates. It was her first trip to an international conference and she enthused about the experience in [a new video](#). AP hopes to support more Roma quilting projects in 2012, and help the artists earn an income by selling greeting cards made from their designs. Building on the Strasbourg example, AP will also encourage Roma NGOs to show their quilts at local festivals and work with local authorities to improve their conditions of life.

- Click [here](#) for the Dosta! (Strasbourg) quilt and artists
- Click [here](#) for the Czech quilt and artists
- Click [here](#) for the Gracanica quilt and artists
- Click [here](#) for the Prizren quilt and artists
- Click [here](#) to see the Roma quilts exhibited in Spain
- Click [here](#) for the comments of Maud de Boer Buquicchio, the Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe, on the Strasbourg quilt.
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