



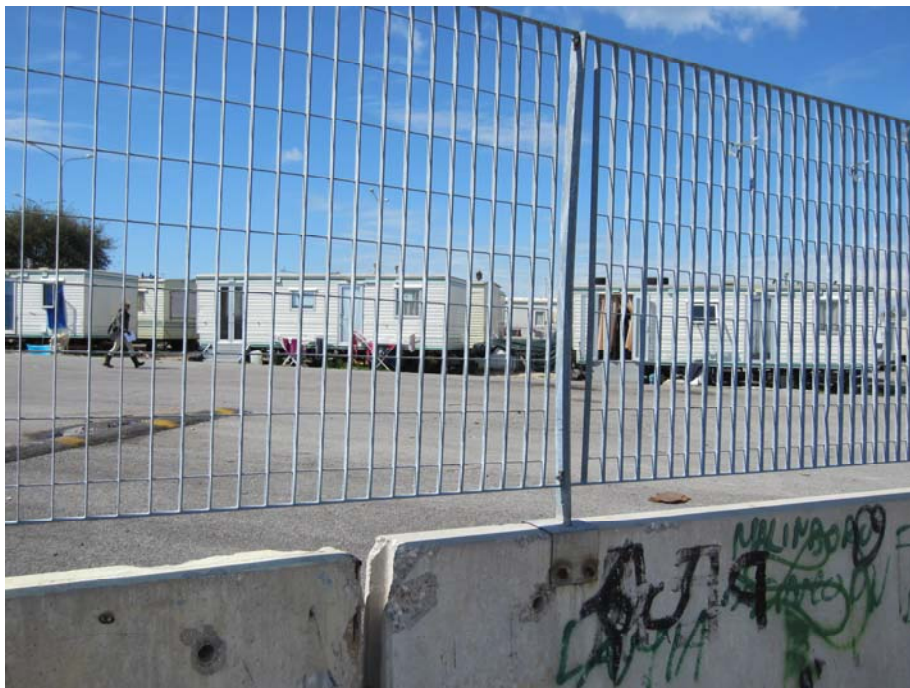
## DOUBLE STANDARDS: ITALY'S HOUSING POLICIES DISCRIMINATE AGAINST ROMA

**“My little one keeps asking: ‘when do we leave here? Why do we not have a house?’ I am an Italian citizen... We cannot live like this. What should I tell my son? That other people are better than us?”**

Miriana Halilovic, a resident of Salone authorized camp, Rome, June 2013

In Rome, Italy, people in need of housing, are being treated differently depending on their ethnicity. A two-track assisted housing system is condemning thousands of Roma to live in segregated, sub-standard accommodation on the outskirts of Rome.

Conveniently, but wrongly, labelling them "nomads", the municipality of Rome has for years been housing homeless Roma in overcrowded prefabricated containers and mobile homes in mono-ethnic camps far from public services and transport links. While non-Romani people can at least hope to access the very limited social housing on offer, Roma living in such camps have been sidelined by allocation criteria that are impossible for them to meet and from which they have recently been explicitly excluded.



Over 4,000 Roma live in the authorized camps of Rome. Most Romani families were moved to these structures after being forcibly evicted from other camps, without legal safeguards and without being genuinely consulted or offered any adequate housing alternative apart from a segregated camp. For over a decade, it has been impossible for these families to improve their living conditions as without a regular income from formal employment to count on, they cannot afford private market rents. Despite numerous

and repeated applications, to date only a handful of Romani families are recorded as living in some of the over 50,000 social housing properties of Rome. This is despite the fact that the state is obliged to provide affordable housing to everybody as part of its duty to realize the right to adequate housing without discrimination.

## SEGREGATION AND SUBSTANDARD HOUSING CONDITIONS IN CAMPS

*“Inside here there is no future, there is drug smuggling, drug addiction. Inside the camp there is no life. It is impossible to improve life inside the camp, because you would still be inside. Here.”*

Kinta, a resident of Castel Romano authorized camp, Rome, June 2013

In 2008, the previous mayor of Rome adopted a “Nomad Plan” with the aim of closing informal Roma settlements and re-housing occupants in authorised Roma-only camps. The partially implemented plan has resulted in the forced eviction of hundreds of Roma.

The living conditions in authorized camps have been and remain very poor, as international human rights bodies have repeatedly noted. Severe overcrowding robs individuals of any privacy, families of the space for intimacy and children of the possibility to play and concentrate on their homework. Poor, in many cases dire, living conditions – including inadequate access to water and electricity, blocked sewers, insufficient waste removal, damaged structures and insect infestations – threaten health and undermine the human dignity of residents. Residents can be expelled or evicted without legal safeguards. Gates guarded by wardens at the entrance of authorized camps and very poor public transport connections perpetuate the social exclusion of these families.

This segregated and sub-standard housing system has been used not only to provisionally shelter Roma rendered homeless by an eviction, but also in practice to house them for the long term. Many families have lived in authorized camps for over 15 years.

## THE EXCLUSION OF ROMA FROM SOCIAL HOUSING IN ROME

*“After 12 years, I do not know anymore what the problem is. I took all the steps, I sent all the applications.”*

Georgescu Vassile, a resident of Candoni authorized camp, Rome, June 2013

Social housing is regulated at the regional and municipal level in Italy, which results in significant differences particularly as to the criteria for prioritizing applicants. In Rome, the choice of the municipality to prioritize families in certain disadvantaged situations has had the effect of excluding Romani families living in camps from the social housing system for over a decade. In 2000, the Rome’s municipal authorities decided to prioritize families lawfully evicted through an administrative or civil law procedure. As this criterion could only extremely rarely apply to Romani families evicted from camps, this decision resulted in their indirect discrimination. Though many had been evicted several times and were living in appalling conditions in camps, they had virtually never been evicted through procedures ending with an administrative or court decision they could exhibit as evidence of their having lost a home.

Though the criteria for allocating social housing in Rome between 2000 and 2012 may not have been designed to exclude Roma living in camps, this was their effect. The *de facto* exclusion of Roma living in camps from social housing in this period therefore constituted indirect discrimination. At the end of 2012, the first criterion was changed to prioritize those living “... for at least one continuous year in centres, public dormitories or any other appropriate structures temporarily provided by public bodies ...” It appeared, initially, that Roma living in inadequate housing conditions in authorized camps would at last enjoy equal access to social housing according to their needs. The hope was short-lived. The municipality was quick to clarify, in a circular issued in January 2013, that the relevant revised criterion did not in fact apply to Roma living in camps at all, thereby transforming an indirectly discriminatory system into a deliberately and directly discriminatory one.

The vast majority of Roma that Amnesty International has spoken to in the last few years have had enough of life in camps and the discrimination that condemns them to it. They want proper homes.

## THE SHORTAGE OF SOCIAL HOUSING

The discriminatory exclusion of Roma from adequate housing must be seen in the wider context of the growing shortage of affordable housing across the country. Thousands of non-Romani families are also struggling to find adequate housing in Rome, as well as in other parts of the country.

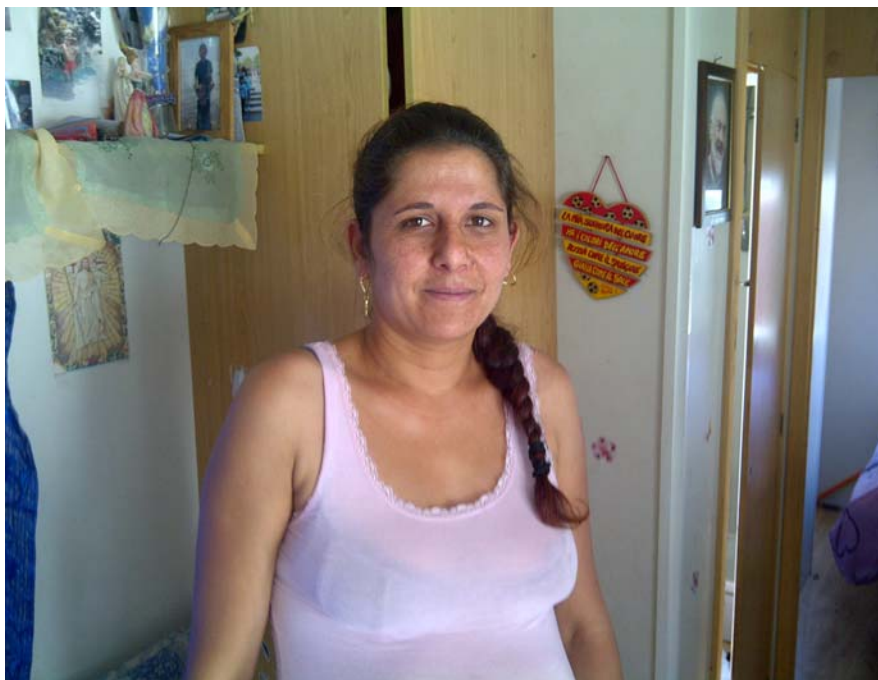
The ongoing economic crisis in Italy has left a growing number of families in poverty. For some three million

families, housing costs now exceed 40% of their income. Evictions have increased sharply, the vast majority caused by the failure to pay rent due to unemployment or other loss of income. Rent benefits have also been slashed in recent years.

The pressure on social housing is therefore growing. But for decades, the social housing sector has been shrinking. Italy's social housing stock has been progressively depleted, currently at about 5% of the total housing stock, compared with 17% in France, 18% in the UK and Sweden, 23% in Austria and 32% in the Netherlands. Social housing is not currently funded by a regular source and housing bodies are struggling to ensure ordinary maintenance and management of social housing properties.

## THE CASE OF MIRIANA

**Miriana Halilovic** lives in the camp of Salone, at the outskirts of Rome, after having been forcibly evicted from the settlement of Casilino 900, which was demolished in 2010. Her parents are from Bosnia, but she was born in Italy and has never been there. She has two three-month old twin girls and two sons, aged 11 and four and a half. The family lives in a mobile home with two tiny bedrooms and a central



kitchen/dining area in a mobile home. "I wanted to ask for social housing already when I was living in Casilino 900 but I did not have all the documents needed. Then they closed the lists for a long time. I kept going to ask, from one office to the next. I applied at the beginning of this year, when the new public offer was issued. Now I have the receipt and I must wait. The mobile house is tiny. Here we are isolated from the whole world. The air is bad and the sewers are always blocked. We had a Hepatitis A epidemic in 2012. I ran away to my mother's. There were lots of ambulances in the camp. More than 15 children got sick. I want my children to have a stable life, not like mine. I know that there are many empty social houses. It is not

right. My little one keeps asking: 'when do we go away from here? Why do we not have a house?' I am an Italian citizen. We cannot live like this. What should I tell my son? That other people are better than us?"

## WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE?

It is undeniably challenging to uphold the right to adequate housing for all. However, there can be no excuse for perpetuating segregation and maintaining a two-track social housing system based on ethnicity. Roma in Italy have endured discrimination and violations of their fundamental rights for long enough. They remain among the most severely affected by gravely inadequate housing conditions, in Rome and in many other Italian cities. In over a decade, Italy's treatment of Roma, and especially their lack of adequate housing, has been repeatedly and consistently criticized by United Nations, Council of Europe and European Union human rights bodies. The legitimate demands of the many non-Romani families in gravely disadvantaged housing conditions cannot be exploited as an excuse to perpetuate the discrimination of Roma and their exclusion from mainstream housing services.

The exclusion of Roma living in camps across Rome from social housing is discriminatory and has to end. The provision of inadequate housing in segregated camps breaches Italy's obligations under its own constitution and under international law. International treaties to which Italy is a party and EU legislation prohibit discrimination on the basis of race and ethnicity and require Italy to meet certain standards in relation to the right to adequate housing. These obligations bind all levels of the state, including regional and municipal authorities.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### To the Italian government:

- End discrimination in the provision of adequate housing, including by determining the essential levels of housing which should be provided to all, including Roma, throughout the national territory, in a manner fully consistent with Italy's obligations under international human rights law
- Review the current national housing plan and ensure it responds to housing needs, it prioritizes the most disadvantaged, and it is funded with the maximum of available resources to ensure the progressive realization of the right to adequate housing for all
- Review and amend national housing legislation, policies and practices to remove discriminatory obstacles for Roma and other marginalized groups to access social housing
- Ensure that forced evictions immediately cease throughout Italy, including by: enacting and enforcing a clear prohibition on forced evictions through legislation setting out essential safeguards based on international human rights law; issuing guidelines to relevant state officials and local authorities; and establishing an effective independent mechanism to monitor evictions and ensure that obligations are respected by local authorities and other actors
- Implement the National Strategy for Roma Inclusion without delay and with appropriate resources, including as regard to housing
- Adopt and disseminate without delay guidelines for state officials and local authorities aiming to ensure that policies and practices affecting Roma are in line with international human rights law and consistent with the National Strategy for Roma Inclusion

### To the Lazio region:

- Review access of Roma to social housing and eliminate any discriminatory obstacle
- Ensure that the maximum of available resources are devoted to social housing to guarantee the progressive realization of the right to adequate housing
- Include in regional legislation that eviction from a camp or settlement should be considered as eviction from a private dwelling for the purposes of the allocation of social housing

### To the Mayor of Rome:

- Publicly withdraw the "Nomad Plan" and prepare a new plan to address the housing situation of Roma, which will respect Italy's obligations under international law. The municipality should commit to prepare such plan as a matter of urgency with the participation of the Romani community and in consultation with civil society and start consultations without delay.
- Ensure effective access to social housing by all, including Roma, and ensure that the allocation of social housing is based on principles of non-discrimination, fairness, transparency, accountability and participation
- Take measures to increase the offer of social housing for the most disadvantaged
- Upgrade housing conditions in authorized camps immediately to ensure that they meet international law adequate housing standards and in consultation with residents. As long as they are in use, housing in camps should be of an adequate standard and more steps should be taken to mitigate against the segregation of their residents.
- Stop forced evictions and disseminate to all officials involved in evictions guidelines describing international standards for carrying out evictions

### To the European Commission:

- Start an infringement procedure against Italy for breach of Article 3(1)h of the Race equality directive

Page 1: The Castel Romano camp is located beside a busy motorway outside Rome with no transport links. It houses around 1,000 Roma, many of whom were transferred there after being forcibly evicted from other camps. © Amnesty International

Page 3: Miriana Halilovic in her mobile home in the camp of Salone, Rome, June 2013. She applied for social housing in early 2013. © Amnesty International.

Note: This document (Index: EUR 30/009/2013) is a summary of the report with the same title, Index: EUR 30/008/2013. The information contained in this document is further explained and sourced in the extended report.

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