

AI Index: PRE01/156/2013
04 April 2013

Wake-up call for a giant: The EU must end discrimination against Roma

The European Union (EU) is not doing enough to end discrimination against Roma across its member-states, Amnesty International said on the eve of International Roma Day marked on 8 April.

“The EU must implement immediately the considerable measures at its disposal to sanction governments that are failing to tackle discrimination and violence against Roma,” said John Dalhuisen, Europe and Central Asia Programme Director.

“Such practices run counter to EU law and the principles of liberty, democracy and respect for human rights it was founded on.”

The estimated six million Roma living in EU countries fall far below the national average on almost all human development indicators -- eight out of ten Roma are at risk of poverty; only one out of seven young Roma adults have completed upper-secondary education.

Forced evictions of Roma continue to be the norm rather than the exception in a range of European countries such as Romania, Italy, and France.

And education is segregated in the Czech Republic, Greece and Slovakia. This is at odds with national and EU laws prohibiting racial discrimination.

More than 120 serious violent attacks against Roma and their property occurred in Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Bulgaria between January 2008 and July 2012, including shootings, stabbings and arson attacks. State authorities, including the police, have in many instances failed to prevent or thoroughly investigate these attacks.

In 2000, the EU adopted the Race Equality Directive that prohibits discrimination based on race or ethnicity in the workplace, education, access to goods and services, housing and health care. The EU’s Charter of Fundamental Rights, which entered in force in 2009, also prohibits discrimination and enshrines the rights to education, social and housing assistance and work.

As EU’s executive body, the European Commission is empowered to act against EU member states when they fail to comply with EU law and the Charter.

However, so far this has never happened with regard to policies and practices discriminating against the Roma or any other ethnic minority.

“The European Commission has the powers to make a lasting impact on the lives of marginalized and discriminated communities in Europe, including the Roma. Regrettably, it has so far been hesitant to act against states which have violated the human rights of Roma,” said Dalhuisen.

“What we see is the Commission sanctioning countries on technical issues in areas of transport and taxation, for example, but failing to grapple with issues which are of vital importance to millions of people such as forced evictions, segregation and hate-motivated attacks.

“The Nobel Peace Prize winning EU has the power to end discriminatory practices that are rife in many of its member States. It must use these now.”

Amnesty International’s briefing *Human rights here. Roma rights now. A wake-up call for the European Union* is a call to the EU to take decisive action and play a central role in ending the discrimination against Roma in Europe.