

AI Index: PRE01/565/2013
30 October 2013

Italy: Roma segregation camps – a blight on the City of Rome

Rome's municipal authorities have been running a discriminatory two-track assisted housing system that is denying thousands of Roma people access to adequate housing, said Amnesty International in a report published today.

“The municipality of Rome is keeping thousands of Roma people on the margins of society. Its assisted housing system is designed and implemented in such a way as to condemn thousands of Roma purely on ethnic grounds to live in segregated, substandard accommodation in camps far from services and residential neighbourhoods. This is a blight on the city of Rome,” said John Dalhuisen, Programme Director for Europe and Central Asia.

“This is being done with the tacit complicity of the Italian government which is failing to ensure equal access to adequate housing for all across the country. This is clearly a breach of its international obligation to eliminate discrimination, both under international and European Union law, and to uphold the right to adequate housing.”

Amnesty International's report *Double standards: Italy's housing policies discriminate against Roma*, exposes how more than 4,000 Roma living in authorized camps in Rome have been systematically discriminated against, including when applying for social housing.

Following forced evictions, they have been placed in pre-fabricated containers or mobile homes in segregated and overcrowded, fenced camps, built and managed by the municipal authorities. This hugely limits their opportunity to integrate into the wider community and find regular employment.

Despite their poor living conditions, for over a decade, prioritisation criteria have effectively prevented them from accessing social housing. Applicants have had to prove that they had been lawfully evicted from private rented accommodation -- an impossible task for Roma living in or forcibly evicted from camps.

At the end of 2012 new criteria for accessing social housing were introduced prioritizing people in gravely disadvantaged temporary housing provided by charities or the municipality itself. However, when Roma from authorized camps started to apply, the Rome municipality was quick to explicitly clarify that these criteria did not apply to them.

In 2008, the previous Mayor of Rome developed a “Nomad Plan” to close informal settlements and segregate their occupants in authorised Roma-only camps far from residential areas. The partially implemented plan has resulted in the forced eviction of hundreds of Roma. Many have been left without hope, condemned to a life of segregation, poverty and social exclusion.

“The ‘Nomad Plan’ has been an expensive shuffling exercise which has completely failed to address the housing needs of Roma and the wider question of their social integration. Even the national government has unequivocally acknowledged that large segregated camps have ruined the lives of generations of

Roma,” said John Dalhuisen.

In a meeting with Amnesty International on Monday, the new administration of Rome indicated a willingness to repeal the discriminatory instruction preventing Roma in camps from accessing social housing. This would be an important step in the right direction.

It also indicated that the Nomad Plan has been discontinued. This is also welcome. The municipality of Rome must follow this up with concrete plans to mitigate the segregation and poor living conditions of those in camps in the short term and develop longer term plans to end the parallel housing system condemning thousands of Roma to a life in camps.

“Amnesty International is not calling for Roma living in camps in the Italian capital to be given priority access to the limited stock of social housing in the capital. We are calling for them to have equal access regardless of their ethnicity,” said John Dalhuisen.

“Amnesty International defends the right to adequate housing for all – and urges the municipality of Rome, and, indeed, the government to do all they can to increase the supply of assisted housing to thousands of families in the capital with dire housing needs. “

Approximately half of the Roma in Italy are Italian citizens. Others are recognized refugees from former Yugoslavia, migrants mostly from Romania and the Balkans and recognized or de facto stateless people.

“Roma are an integral part of Italian society. Yet, they remain among the most severely affected by gravely inadequate housing conditions and widespread discrimination, in Rome and in many other Italian cities.”

Authorities, both at local and national level, are obliged to uphold the principle of non-discrimination. The segregation of Romani families in camps can be ended only when they are allowed equal access to other forms of housing, including social housing.

“There can be no excuse or justification for discriminatory housing policies. The Italian government must review housing legislation and practices and remove any obstacles that discriminate against Roma and keep them trapped in camps.”

“If Italian authorities do not take adequate action immediately and instead continue violating EU anti-discrimination legislation so blatantly, it becomes more urgent than ever that the EU Commission starts an infringement procedure against Italy.”

Testimonies

Miriana Halilovic, an Italian citizen, is married and a mother of four, including two twins born in mid-2013. Following their forced eviction from an informal settlement in 2010 they were placed in a tiny mobile home in the authorized camp of Salone. “When they moved us from Casilino 900 they told us it was for a short time. Now I’ve been here for three and a half years. Here we are isolated from the whole world. My little one keeps asking: ‘when do we go away from here? Why do we not have a house?’ What should I tell my son? That other people are better than us?” Miriana is waiting to know the outcome of her application for social housing.

Hanifa is 23 and has lived in the authorized camp of Castel Romano in Rome for three years with her husband and five children. “They took away the bus stop. It is like being in prison. If you have no car, you can even die for lack of food!”

Georgescu Vassile, a baker, arrived in Italy from Romania, with his wife, in 1999: “I applied for social housing in 2001, I got eight points on the old list, too few. We have three families in one container, including my two sons, their wives and three grandchildren. We thought about renting, but it is so difficult. For 11 people, we would need to pay €1,000. If you add expenses, it is €1,500. We cannot afford it. We only have two salaries.”