

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

18 March 2019 EUR 30/0064/2019

THE ONGOING SCANDAL OF ROMA HOUSING IN ITALY: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL FILES COMPLAINT BEFORE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF SOCIAL RIGHTS

In response to the ongoing scandal of the housing situation of Roma in Italy, Amnesty International filed a complaint on 18 March 2019 with the European Committee of Social Rights.

The complaint is the first ever to be filed by Amnesty International under the Committee's collective complaints procedure. Drawing on years of research by the organisation, especially in the cities of Rome, Milan and Naples, the complaint presents comprehensive evidence alleging how the housing situation of Romani communities in Italy amounts to a series of breaches of the European Social Charter, which is binding upon Italy. These include widespread forced evictions; the continued use of segregated camps featuring substandard housing and lack of equal access to social housing.

"It's a scandal that in the 21st century, in one of Europe's biggest economies, some of the most marginalized individuals and families continue to experience such appalling living conditions and endemic discrimination," said Lucy Claridge, Director of Strategic Litigation at Amnesty International. "Amnesty International has documented numerous cases of forced evictions of Romani people, despite these being absolutely prohibited under international law, as well as instances of Romani families living in the most awful circumstances, segregated from the rest of the population. After Italy's Minister of Interior supported the forced eviction of Roma at Camping River in July 2018, which left scores homeless, we are concerned about this government's continued determination to dismantle Roma camps without providing any adequate, alternative housing options."

The inadequate living conditions faced by thousands of Roma include lack of basic infrastructure and services such as access to water and sanitation, washing facilities, electricity and heating. Lacking basic security of tenure, including in authorized camps, they remain vulnerable to forced evictions, which are frequently carried out by the authorities.

Local authorities continue to fail to end segregation by relocating Roma to camps, often offering them as the only housing solution for Romani families who are unable to provide for themselves. The community's situation is further compounded by de facto exclusion from access to social housing in many cities.

The complaint brings together years of documenting systemic and widespread violations of the Charter and other international and regional treaties which are binding on Italy. It demonstrates that despite initiatives such as the national integration strategy adopted in 2012, the reality for the Roma remains one of discrimination and social exclusion. "The evidence we are presenting to the Committee shows that sadly this is not just a longstanding issue, but one that the authorities refuse to address, despite their obligations under international law," said Lucy Claridge.

The Committee has twice found Italy to be in breach of its obligations under the Charter following similar allegations, including in 2010, at the time of the so-called "nomad emergency" declared by then Prime Minister Berlusconi.

"As this complaint demonstrates, Roma have been consistently let down by successive administrations, and the future looks bleak for these families under the current government. UN experts have recently criticised Italy for fuelling intolerance, racism and xenophobia. International pressure remains essential to highlight the plight of marginalized individuals and families. We hope that the Committee will deliver a robust condemnation of Italy's failure to address the needs of the Romani community. In the complaint, we have recommended measures that Italy should take such as prohibiting forced evictions in law and practice, offering adequate alternatives to people segregated in camps, reviewing the social housing system to remove any discriminatory provisions, and increasing the offer of social housing available, in line with current needs." concluded Lucy Claridge.

NOTES

According to recent studies, about 26,000 Romani people live in camps and settlements in Italy, either informal or built by the authorities, and in segregated centres, where they are at continued risk of forced evictions. The persistent lack of

data regarding the composition and needs of the Romani population in Italy has been repeatedly criticized by international human rights bodies, most recently in 2017 by the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

Amnesty International has been documenting the housing situation of the Roma since 2008 and issued numerous reports which provide the evidence for the allegations detailed in the complaint. See:

Italy: Double Standards: Italy's Housing Policies Discriminate against Roma, 30 October 2013, Index number: EUR 30/008/2013, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/EUR30/008/2013/en/>

See also, more recently, regarding the forced eviction of the Gianturco settlement in Naples and Camping River in Rome:

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur30/5937/2017/en/>

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2017/04/italy-forced-eviction-international-roma-day/>

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/07/italy-authorities-defy-european-courts-ruling-and-render-dozens-of-roma-homeless/>

The UN expert statement regarding the climate of hatred, racism and xenophobia in Italy can be found at:

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=23908&LangID=E>

Amnesty International is registered to bring complaints under the European Social Charter's collective complaints system alleging failures to implement certain provisions of the Charter. Decisions of the European Committee of Social Rights must be respected by the States concerned with national authorities being required to take measures to give them effect under domestic law: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/european-social-charter/collective-complaints-procedure1>