



# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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## **Romani community is fighting against forced evictions and housing segregation in Romania**

Today, Romani communities, activists and their partners from Cluj and beyond commemorate a long history of violations of housing rights and racial exclusion in the city. Dozens of people will participate in a series of events, including a march for equality to mark December 17 as one of the saddest days in the life of the former Coastei Street community and one of the most emblematic forced evictions of a Romani community in Romania.

Five years ago, in the middle of a harsh winter with temperatures reaching  $-20\text{ C}$ , with just one day's notice, 76 families (approximately 350 people), the most of them Roma, were forcibly evicted from the centre of Cluj (Romania) by local authorities. Most of them were relocated to the margins of the city, in the industrial area of Pata Rât, close to a garbage dump and a former chemical waste dump, cut from their jobs, schools, and the life they once had in the city. 40 of the families were given one small room each, in overcrowded and inadequate social housing units, sharing communal bathrooms with only cold running water, and no heating. The other evictees were left homeless and were told by the municipality just to "build something" on the nearby plots of land. To this day the housing they improvised remains without legal status or security of tenure and therefore at constant risk of eviction.

Cluj embodies a wide range of violations of housing rights and exclusion and segregation faced by Roma across Romania. The Pata Rât area, where the former Coastei Street community was relocated in 2010, represents the largest segregated concentration of Romani communities around a landfill in Europe. The Romani communities living in Pata Rât share a history of abuse and neglect by the local authorities: Dallas is a community established forty years ago, but still deemed an informal settlement, precluding its inhabitants from obtaining identity documents and connecting their homes to electricity. The settlement on Cantonului Street has been created largely as a result of forced evictions of Romani families from the city over the past 20 years by local authorities. Other Romani communities in Cluj, such as on Stephenson Street, are also under threat of eviction. Efforts to secure access to social housing for Roma or legalise their tenure have been largely met with indifference by the Cluj authorities, who in turn are looking for ways to make the families leave their homes or move them to surrounding villages further entrenching housing segregation.

The European Roma Rights Centre and Amnesty International join the Romani communities in Cluj in calling on the local authorities to secure equal housing rights for Roma, in line with Romania's

international human rights obligations. They should provide security of tenure to people living in informal housing and often targeted with forced evictions by municipalities, ensure non-discriminatory access to social housing and safeguard against the removal of Romani families from the city. The organisations have long supported Romani communities in Cluj and elsewhere in Romania in their fight for housing justice.

“Forced evictions and housing segregation of Roma are prohibited by international human rights law. Moreover, such state-sanctioned exclusion fuels anti-Roma discrimination within society, seriously jeopardising any progress for Roma in Romania and across Europe” said Gauri van Gulik, Deputy Director for Europe and Central Asia Programme at Amnesty International.

András Ujlaky, the ERRC’s executive director said: “Segregation is a scourge affecting Roma throughout Europe in many areas from education to housing. This doesn’t make the consistent indifference of the Romanian authorities to the plight of Roma in Pata Rât, and elsewhere, any less shameful. We will continue fighting to dismantle the structures that prevent Roma from enjoying full equality and we will not rest until we secure justice for human rights violations and equality.”

Romanian authorities have long been urged to address the exclusion of Roma in the field of housing, including forced evictions, in compliance with the country’s international human rights law obligations, most recently by the UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty who highlighted the “[official state of denial](#)” regarding anti-Roma discrimination following his visit to the country in November. A worrying pattern of housing rights violations against Roma persists across Romania. In recent years local authorities have threatened or carried out forced evictions against Romani communities in Cluj-Napoca, Piatra Neamț, Baia Mare, Miercurea Ciuc, Tulcea, Eforie Sud and Caracal.

The ERRC and Amnesty International urge Romania’s new government, unencumbered by political loyalties to local authorities responsible for uprooting Romani communities from their homes, to give full effect to anti-discrimination policies and urgently adopt robust safeguards against forced evictions.

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