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Betrayal of Romani families in Baia Mare places them at ongoing risk of housing insecurity and other human rights violations

About 120 Romani families who were forcibly evicted in May and June 2012 from the settlement of Craica in Baia Mare in northern Romania now face new uncertainty about their future.

In May and June the families, having been evicted from Craica without the necessary safeguards as required under international law, were moved to three blocks belonging to the former factory CUPROM. Two of the buildings were offices and one a former laboratory used for processing chemicals. None were adapted by the municipality for residential use prior to people being moved there.

Initially, a number of families were given contracts that complied with the original promises of the mayor that the families will be able to use the new “accommodation” for three years and without being obliged to pay for utilities such as electricity and water. This was supposedly based on a recognition by the municipality of the social disadvantage and poverty experienced by the families living in the Craica settlement.

However, only two months after the relocation, the municipality replaced these signed contracts with new ones that entitle the tenants to stay in the premises for only one year. Moreover, they are now obliged to pay rent and the failure to comply with this obligation may result in an eviction. In addition, the families interviewed by Amnesty International, based on the actions of the municipality to date, fear that it will also start charging them for utilities. Given their extremely low income it is clear that many of the Roma families will not be able to cover such costs.

“If they start charging us, I would not be able to pay. How could I afford it as a single mother relying only on the allowance that I receive for my three children? The municipality told us that we would not be paying. Now they have started charging us,” a single mother told Amnesty International.

The housing conditions in CUPROM buildings are inadequate and do not meet the standards required under either Romanian or international law. Whole families have been allocated either one or two rooms only, resulting in as many as six or more people often sharing one room leading to overcrowding. The rooms do not have heating facilities or adequate insulation. In violation of Romanian housing regulations, as well as international human rights standards, the buildings have very limited sanitation facilities. On most floors, the men and women have to share no more than four communal toilets. In some cases this results in up to 20 people sharing one toilet. The washing facilities are limited to a tap in communal bathrooms. There are no facilities for cooking and people prepare food in improvised conditions in their rooms.

According to interviews conducted with evictees by Amnesty International, prior to the relocation to CUPROM the families understood that if they did not accept this option, they would be

rendered homeless. Indeed, in the case of some individuals following the evictions and demolitions, this has been the case.

“Had we had the choice we would have stayed in Craica. We did not feel free to stay there,” another person told Amnesty International.

Amnesty International calls on the Mayor and municipality of Baia Mare to (a) honour the original contracts signed in good faith by the residents of Craica, (b) guarantee and ensure that all former residents of Craica have access to adequate housing that meets the requirements of international law and (c) not carry out any further forced evictions, which are prohibited under international law, and ensure that before any evictions are implemented those affected are protected by the legal safeguards including genuine consultation on a range of feasible alternatives.

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