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## **Slovenia urged to provide housing and water for its Roma**

Amnesty International is calling on Slovenia's authorities to protect Romani communities from discrimination, following the release today of its report showing they are being denied proper access to adequate housing, water and sanitation.

Some Romani families in the country have less water available to them than the minimum deemed necessary for people suffering a humanitarian emergency, Amnesty International reports in its publication, *Parallel lives: Roma denied rights to housing and water in Slovenia*.

Many are living in poorly built, overcrowded shacks in isolated and segregated rural settlements, far away from health-care services, schools, employment and shops, it says.

"Continuing discrimination against the Romani people condemns many of them to live in housing without basic public services. Their whole existence - from their health to the education of their children and their chances of finding work - is affected," said Nicola Duckworth, Europe and Central Asia Programme Director at Amnesty International.

"Some municipalities refuse to provide public services to Roma because their settlements are 'irregular' - despite the fact that families have been living there for decades - while the government has ignored the problem."

"The Slovenian government must act to end the discrimination Roma suffer and ensure their human rights are upheld and their basic needs are met."

Slovenia is a highly developed country and enjoys a GDP per capita above the average in the European Union.

Almost 100 per cent of the population have access to safe drinking water, while many Romani communities struggle to collect even small amounts of water to drink, cook, and bathe themselves and their families.

The average water use per person per day is 150 litres rising up to 300 litres per day in urban centres. But between 20 and 30 per cent of Romani settlements in the south-east of the country have no access to water, according to a survey conducted last year.

Amnesty International found Romani families who were only able to collect between 10 – 20 litres for each member to use for drinking, bathing and cooking, and which had been collected from distant sources and sometimes even polluted streams.

Romani people often find living in settlements is their only option due to discrimination they face when trying to buy or rent housing.

But, despite the state and municipalities being responsible for adequately housing Romani communities, many families find it difficult, if not impossible, to get social housing or permission to improve their current housing.

They also live in fear of forced evictions and are rarely consulted or informed about what choices are available to them.

Amnesty International is calling on the Slovenian authorities to:

- Improve the inadequate housing conditions in Romani settlements, allow for regularization where possible and make alternative housing options available.
- Ensure security of tenure to all residents of informal settlements and offer alternative housing options, in consultation with the affected Romani communities, which do not lead to further segregation.
- Immediately ensure a minimum essential level of safe water in all Romani settlements.

“The Slovenian government must also provide the Romani people with effective legal remedies to counter the discrimination they suffer,” Nicola Duckworth said.

Amnesty International launches its global campaign for Roma in Slovenia as part of World Water Day on 22 March 2011.

### **Testimonies**

Danilo Hudorovic and his family live in a two-room house in the informal Romani settlement of Gorica vas with around 70 inhabitants. The settlement has no water supply, no electricity, no toilets, sewerage or drainage. He told Amnesty International:

My four-year-old son has to take antibiotics very often because he gets sick a lot. Those antibiotics have to be kept in the refrigerator. We don't have electricity. I have to drive three times a day, even in the middle of the night to get his medicine from my mother-in-law. Our baby is only a few months old. She is sick all the time. I don't know how we will survive the winter. I tried to apply for non-profit rental housing but received an answer that the Ribnica municipality doesn't have any empty apartments and no open public call for applications.

A Romani woman from Žabjak in Novo mesto told Amnesty International:

In the winter I have to wake up very early in the morning to set up a fire outside the shack to heat the water for children to wash themselves a bit before going to school. In the winter it is also dark very early and there is no light. A candle once almost set the house on fire.

Ruža Brajdic, a 12-year-old girl living in the informal Romani settlement of Žabjak in Novo mesto, without water, electricity or sanitation facilities told Amnesty International:

I don't go to school because I'm dirty and I smell. Other children make fun of me and call me names.

### **Background Information**

Roma have been living on the land that makes up the Slovenia of today since the 14th century. Their number is now estimated to be between 7,000 and 12,000, which represent around 0.5 per cent of the whole population.

Most of the Roma are concentrated in south-east and in north-eastern Slovenia. Roma also live in urban centres, including in the capital, Ljubljana. Unemployment among Roma is above 90 per cent in some areas.