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France: Record number of evictions of Roma

The French government has failed to end the vicious circle of repeated forced evictions of Roma which have now reached record numbers, Amnesty International said in a report published today. The organization is calling for a ban on all forced evictions..

More than 10,000 Roma were evicted from informal settlements during the first half of 2013.

“France makes no provisions for effective protection against forced evictions. In most cases they take place in a climate of hostility with no alternative housing proposed. Roma people are condemned to a life of constant insecurity, and forced to wander from one of makeshift camp to another. Forced evictions should be banned in law,” said John Dalhuisen, Europe and Central Asia Programme Director at Amnesty International.

There are some 20,000 Roma migrants living in France mostly from Romania, Bulgaria and former Yugoslavia. Almost all of them are fleeing the chronic poverty and discrimination they face in their home countries.

When President Francois Hollande came to power last year, he promised a change in tone and policy regarding Roma but there has been little change on the ground.

In August 2012, the government issued guidelines on steps to be taken prior to and during evictions. It also set up an inter-ministerial commission to coordinate policies.

“The new measures are not intended to stop forced evictions and fall short of international human rights standards. The guidelines are discretionary and inconsistently applied. The inter-ministerial commission has no teeth or political weight. Despite good intentions, its efforts are continually undermined by the overall drive to evict no matter what,” said John Dalhuisen.

Forced evictions continue at an alarming rate in France. A quarter of the Roma population lives in the Lille and Lyon regions. Amnesty International’s report: Told to move on: Forced evictions of Roma in France, assesses recent developments one year after the publication of an inter-ministerial guidelines.

At the beginning of the summer, an Amnesty International delegation visited the largest informal Roma camp in Lille. There were about 800 people living there.

By the 18 September 2013 everyone had been evicted. The local authorities have promised alternative accommodation for less than a dozen families and only three have received it to date. The vast majority of the evicted Roma have resettled in informal settlements in neighbouring municipalities.

Adela, a 26-year-old, a mother of four has lived through 15 forced evictions in the 10 years she has lived in France.

“If there is no alternative housing, if they cannot do anything to help us, then why don’t they let us stay here? We have nowhere to go, we cannot sleep on the street like homeless people,” she told Amnesty International delegates.

Amnesty International is calling for the inter-ministerial guidance to be amended to ensure that no one is left homeless after an eviction.. Roma communities should be provided with alternative accommodation, receive adequate information about evictions in reasonable time and proper consultation should takes place. . All forced evictions to be banned by law.

"Roma continue to be driven out of their homes, without being appropriately consulted and informed. Often, they are left with no choice but to seek shelter in informal settlements elsewhere," said John Dalhuisen.

“The French government must respect its international commitments and implement effective protection measures against the practice of forced evictions.”