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Albania: Temporary solutions are no solutions for evicted Roma families in Tirana

The Albanian authorities must immediately provide adequate housing for around 35 Roma families who face imminent forced eviction or have already been forcibly evicted, Amnesty International said today.

“Dozens of Romani people, including the elderly and small children, are facing winter on the streets – without a roof over their heads, without any certainty about their future security or adequate assistance from the authorities. Adults will find it difficult to support their families, the infirm – to access healthcare, children will not be able to go to school,” said Jezerca, Tigani, Europe and Central Asia Deputy Programme Director.

“This is the result of decades of failure by the authorities to provide adequate housing to Roma, and other vulnerable groups in Albania, despite their national and international obligations.”

Sixteen families face an imminent forced eviction from a site near an artificial lake where they took refuge after they fled a site near Tirana railway station, together with a dozen other families, after being attacked by outsiders a year ago.

The authorities did not offer protection from the attacks or adequate housing but instead offered the Roma families alternative tented accommodation at a riverside site at Babrru, on the outskirts of Tirana.

The majority of the families refused to go to Babrru which they considered to be dangerous for children, lacking necessary facilities, and offering inadequate protection from bad weather. Instead they built sheds near an artificial lake in Tirana, alongside seven Roma families who had already settled there several years ago.

On 21 January 2012, officials from Tirana Municipality reportedly visited the site and told them to leave, without offering any alternative accommodation. The Roma families pulled down their sheds to save the building materials from the bulldozers and left on 24 January. On 27 January 16 of these families, unable to find another site, returned to the artificial lake and rebuilt their sheds and now face another forced eviction.

10 families from the Tirana railway station side did move to the Babrru tented site but have since been forced to leave due to a dispute over unpaid rent between the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, and the landowner.

On 1 February, these families sought shelter and assistance from the People’s Advocate (Ombudsperson) who had found living conditions at the site to be very poor, lacking water, electricity, heating and medical supplies for children many of whom had suffered from ill health and malnutrition during a period of sub-zero temperatures.

They set up their tents in the courtyard of the Ombudsperson's office and on 2 February, it was reported they would be temporarily re-housed in a school gymnasium.

None of these families was consulted or provided with adequate or formal notice of eviction.

"The Albanian authorities are violating international law when they force people out of their homes without legal protection or alternative accommodation," said Jezerca Tigani.

"Thirty-five families are in urgent need of adequate homes. A school gymnasium is not adequate housing and nor does this address the issue of compensation for the destruction of homes, possessions and loss of income which the authorities have a duty to provide."

Under international law, evictions may be carried out only as a last resort, once other alternatives have been explored in consultation with the affected communities. The authorities should then provide them with adequate and formal notice of eviction. The authorities must ensure that no families are made homeless or vulnerable to the violation of other human rights as a consequence of eviction.

For editors

This work is part of Amnesty International's Demand Dignity campaign which aims to end the human rights violations that drive and deepen global poverty. The campaign will mobilise people all over the world to demand that governments, corporations and others who have power listen to the voices of those living in poverty and recognise and protect their rights. This work is also part of the Fight Discrimination in Europe campaign.