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END FORCED EVICTIONS OF ROMA IN EUROPE



**HOUSING IS A
HUMAN RIGHT**

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



European governments forcibly evict thousands of people from their homes. They ignore their obligations under international law and commit human rights violations.

Forced evictions are cruel, humiliating and in breach of international law. In Europe, they happen all too often and affect those who are least able to resist. Most of those who are forcibly evicted are people who live in poverty or on the margins of society. Romani people are one such easy target; they are often poor, socially excluded, and treated with hostility by the public. Roma are the largest and one of the most disadvantaged minorities in Europe. Between 10 and 12 million in the region, around 6 million in the European Union. Many live in fear of being forced from their homes. They are discriminated against and are sometimes treated like criminals. This is why governments are able to forcibly evict them and show little regard for their human rights.

The effects of forced evictions are catastrophic. People lose their personal possessions, social networks, and access to work and services such as schools and health care. People may become homeless or find themselves living in worse situations than before.

Amnesty International, together with other organizations, has documented cases of forced evictions of Romani communities in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, France, Greece, Italy, Macedonia, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia and Slovenia.

Across the region, Romani communities are often denied equal access to adequate housing, education, health, water and sanitation. Discrimination in the labour market often makes it difficult for them to get jobs that will enable them to pay rent at market rates. Being effectively excluded from access to social housing schemes leaves them no choice but to find accommodation wherever they can – often in informal settlements. Without security of tenure, they are vulnerable to forced evictions and other human rights violations.

In most cases of forced evictions, the authorities make no attempt to offer Roma residents adequate alternative housing and many families continue to live in temporary and makeshift accommodation for years after they are evicted. Many are also likely to be forcibly evicted again and again. With even less chance of finding permanent employment and forming stable support networks, they are at risk of becoming poorer and more marginalized.

In the rare instances where Roma are provided with alternative housing, it is often segregated from the rest of the city, next to landfill sites, or industrial and toxic waste areas.

Romani communities are trying to claim their rights. Governments in Europe have acted and continue to act in violation of regional and international human rights standards, including the European Convention on Human Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. It is time to end this injustice.





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WHAT ARE FORCED EVICTIONS?

A forced eviction is the removal of people against their will from the homes or land they occupy, without legal protections and other safeguards.

Evictions should not be carried out until all feasible alternatives have been explored, genuine consultation has taken place with the affected communities and appropriate procedural protections are in place. In particular, there should be adequate and reasonable notice for affected people before any eviction, and no one should be rendered homeless or vulnerable to other human rights violations as a consequence of eviction. Where those affected are unable to provide for themselves, the government must ensure that adequate alternative housing, resettlement or access to productive land is available.

Not every eviction that is carried out by force constitutes a forced eviction. If appropriate safeguards are followed, a lawful eviction that involves the use of force as long as it is necessary, proportionate and reasonable, does not violate the prohibition on forced evictions.

above: Romani residents watch the forced eviction of their settlement in Belgrade, Serbia, known as “Block 72”, March 2012.

cover: A boy watches an excavator destroy homes during the Casilino 900 forced eviction, Italy, 2009. © Christian Minelli



FRANCE

Roma camp near the Boulevard du Mont d'Est in Noisy-le-Grand, Paris, June 2012.



© Amnesty International

NO ALTERNATIVE TO LIVING ON THE STREET

“If the police come, we will have to take our mattresses and sleep on the street.”

Tedor, a Romanian Roma man, lived with about 200 others in an informal settlement in Noisy-le-Grand, in the suburbs of Paris. Like other Roma living in informal settlements in the Ile-de-France region, Tedor had faced repeated forced evictions from other camps without being offered alternative accommodation.

On 13 June 2012, the courts declared that the camp was liable to be evicted after a period of three months. In September 2012, camp residents said police in plain clothes came several times, telling them to leave, but without providing any formal notice, without consulting them properly or providing emergency accommodation. Given their past experiences of evictions, including incidents involving police interventions with tear gas, and their uncertainty about the exact date of the eviction, residents had been unable to sleep for days.

On 15 October at 8am, the informal settlement at Noisy-le-Grand was evicted. About 10 police vans circled the camp and gave inhabitants an hour to gather their belongings. The 150 Roma still living in the camp, including 60 children, were rendered homeless. They camped outside the Town Hall all day, but the Mayor did not receive them. After spending the night there they were reportedly pushed by the police to the next commune, Champs-sur-Marne. The group eventually split, and by the end of October some had been sheltered by private individuals or NGOs, and others had found new places to settle.

GREECE

The forced eviction of Romani residents in Votanikos, Athens, 1 June 2007.

FORCED TO MOVE FROM PLACE TO PLACE

In the past decade, local authorities in Greece have forcibly evicted a large number of Romani families and continue to ignore the country's obligations under international law to provide adequate housing for all residents. Among those evicted were many Romani families who lived in appalling conditions in Votanikos, an area near the centre of Athens.

In June 2007, more than 100 Romani families were forcibly evicted from the land where they had been living for 10 years, in Aghiou Polykarpou Street in Votanikos, Athens. With no alternative accommodation offered by the authorities, several families moved into a nearby abandoned factory. The police forcibly evicted them a few days later. Again, the authorities made no attempt to provide them with adequate alternative accommodation. A few months later, they were forcibly evicted for the third time after they moved to land owned by a private company in Aegaleo, Athens. In January 2008, they were moved again.

On 14 August 2012, a fire broke out and destroyed a large part of the Roma settlement situated on Salaminias Street in Votanikos. On 17 August 2012, the police cleared the debris and forcibly evicted those who remained in the settlement. According to the NGO Greek Helsinki Monitor, no Roma who had lost their home, either because of the fire or the eviction, was offered suitable alternative accommodation by the authorities.

KNOW

YOU

You have a right to protection from forced evictions whether you rent, own, occupy or lease the home or the land on which it is built.

Your government, like many others around the world, committed itself to protecting your right to adequate housing, your right to privacy and other human rights. This means that it is obliged not to forcibly evict you from your home.

Your government should not evict you before it has completed a number of steps, including:

- Give you prior adequate notice, in writing, of the date of eviction.
- Give you information on the proposed evictions and the purpose for which the land or housing is to be used if you are evicted.
- Offer you a chance to appeal against the eviction order, including giving you information about legal remedies and legal aid if you need it to seek redress from the courts.
- Ensure that you are not left homeless if you cannot afford another place to live.
- Involve you in the process, from beginning to end. Your government should engage you in an open process of genuine consultation, where you are provided with all relevant information, including on resettlement options, in a language and form that you understand, and give you an opportunity to provide your views on the options proposed and to suggest alternative plans.
- Ensure that if you are relocated, you are protected from forced evictions and have access to services and infrastructure such as water, energy for cooking, heating and lighting, and sanitation. Your accommodation should be affordable, protect you from the weather and keep you physically safe. The location should allow you to access your place of work, schooling, health care and other services and should not be on or near sources of pollution.
- Offer you compensation for any losses, such as loss of property or goods.

You may only be evicted as a last resort, once all possible alternatives have been explored!



YOUR RIGHTS!

During the evictions, you should:

- Be given reasonable time to remove your possessions and, if you wish, to salvage building and other materials from your home.
- Be aware that there are guidelines for the conduct of police and other officials who may carry out the evictions and on the manner in which the eviction may be carried out. For example, evictions should not be carried out in bad weather, during festivals or religious holidays, before elections or during or just prior to school examinations.
- Know that government officials have to be present during the eviction and that they should clearly identify themselves and present the formal authorization for the eviction action.
- Be aware that the demolition of your home should not happen before you are relocated in adequate alternative housing.

Adequate alternative housing

The state has a duty to ensure that no one is left homeless or made vulnerable to other human rights violations because of an eviction. If you are unable to afford or get alternative housing for yourself and your family, the authorities must provide you adequate alternative housing.





ITALY

Families being forcibly evicted from Tor de'Cenci camp, Rome, September 2012.

© Piero Cruciatti

ONLY CAMPS FOR ROMA

“The municipality told us that they would use force to kick us out of here, and that nobody is going to stay... We have no choice.”

Roma communities have been regularly subjected to forced evictions in Italy. The closure of the Tor de'Cenci camp, under Rome's "Nomad Plan", is a clear example of this discriminatory policy which promotes ethnic segregation.

The Tor de'Cenci camp was opened by local authorities in 1995 to house about 350 Roma evicted from another camp. Many children grew up in the camp and attended local schools. However, in 2008 local authorities announced the closure of Tor de'Cenci. From then on, the authorities neglected its maintenance, and failed to engage in meaningful consultation with the residents. The only alternative accommodation offered to residents was relocation to other "authorized" camps.

Residents opposed the resettlement, but to no avail. At the end of July 2012 the Mayor ordered the closure of the camp. Some families challenged the Mayor's decision, but the court of first instance decision went against them, and before they could lodge an appeal the Mayor had sent in bulldozers. By the beginning of October, everyone had been transferred either to La Barbuta or Castel Romano camps. Both camps were fenced, controlled by security cameras and guards, located outside the city, far from basic services, and barely served by public transport.

Although former residents of Tor de'Cenci wanted to have access to social housing, their chances were restricted. Camps continue to be the only housing option provided by local authorities to Roma.

ROMANIA

Families living in the Pata Rât settlement on the outskirts of Cluj-Napoca, September 2011.

© Mugur Vărzariu



MOVED AWAY FROM THE CITY

On 17 December 2010, approximately 76 families, the vast majority Roma, were forcibly evicted by the local authorities from Coastei Street, in the centre of the city of Cluj-Napoca, Romania. The residents had one day to pack their belongings and move to the Pata Rât area, on the outskirts of the city, next to a landfill site and a former chemical waste dump.

Once in Pata Rât, 40 families were provided with alternative accommodation, one room per family, while 36 remaining families were left homeless. Families provided with rooms share communal bathrooms with three other families.

Those who were not given alternative accommodation were told by the local authorities to “build something” on the plots of land next to the existing housing units. Some constructed improvised housing but with just a verbal agreement from the municipality, and no formal title to the land, they live in daily fear of a further eviction. Others cannot afford to build and are forced to seek shelter with relatives or friends in the already crowded rooms or in town.

The closest bus stop is approximately 2.5km away, severely affecting their access to schools, jobs, health care and other essential services.

Following the eviction, Coastei Street was left empty. Part of it was later converted by the local authority to a playground.





SERBIA

Forced eviction of Roma settlement in Belvil, Belgrade, 26 April 2012.

© Amnesty International

VIOLATIONS GO ON

On 26 April 2012, the city authorities forcibly evicted 240 Roma families living in the informal settlement of Belvil in Belgrade, Serbia. The eviction was carried out to construct access roads for the Sava Bridge.

Since 2009, approximately 2,700 Roma have been forcibly evicted by the Belgrade authorities; the eviction of Belvil highlights the repeated failure of the Belgrade authorities to comply with human rights standards.

A number of families evicted from Belvil were sent to “container settlements” around Belgrade, which do not meet international standards on adequacy of housing. These settlements are on the outskirts of Belgrade and segregated from the majority population. Their location, distance from the city centre and the costs of public transport make it difficult for people to find work and access other services.

The rest of the evicted families were sent to southern Serbia, where they had been previously registered. There, they faced further human rights violations such as homelessness, the violation of rights to water and sanitation, and the violation of their rights to freedom of movement and work.

In April 2012, the European Commission allocated €3.6 million for the provision of permanent housing for families evicted from informal settlements. However, the majority of proposed locations for the new housing units are far from the city centre, have poor public transport links, provide little or no employment opportunities and could result in the racial segregation of the Roma.

Until the permanent resettlement of the Belvil families is resolved according to international standards, the injustice goes on.





© Mugur Vărzariu

“THE MAYOR THREW US OUT OF THE CITY”

In August 2012, without much public attention, the local authority in Piatra Neamț, Romania, forcibly evicted about 500 Romani residents of Muncii Street in the city, and relocated them to new “social housing” about 7km away, separated from the city by an industrial area. In Muncii Street, conditions were very poor, without electricity and with only one water pump. People hoped that the new “neighbourhood” called Văleni 2 would be better. On arrival, however, they found the neighbourhood lacked basic amenities, such as street lighting or an adequate access road.

Dusia is one of the residents who represented her community in discussions with the local authority before the eviction. They asked not to be moved, but their request was rejected. “Even if we didn’t want to come here, they would have brought us forcibly.” However, upon arrival they realized that not only were the new houses completely isolated from the rest of the city, they had no electricity. As dusk approached, the neighbourhood sank into darkness.

When Dusia looked at the lights of the city in the distance, her eyes filled with tears. “What was there [in Muncii Street], was somehow better. Now we are really excluded from society.” Dusia said they want to go back to Muncii Street “even without water, without anything, rather than staying here. We don’t want to register our IDs here. We grew up in the city, our children grew up in the city... and now we end up on the edge of the forest, isolated from the world – why? What the mayor really wanted was to throw us out of the city, so he wouldn’t see Roma anymore. And that’s what happened.”

above: Dusia has been evicted three times. She represents her community from Muncii Street, Piatra Neamț, Romania, 2012.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Amnesty International calls on governments in Europe to:

- Immediately stop forced evictions and ensure that any evictions are carried out in compliance with international and regional standards, including the Basic principles and guidelines for development-based evictions and displacement.
- Legislate and enforce a clear prohibition against forced evictions.
- Take concrete measures to ensure some security of tenure to all people currently lacking such protection, including by regularizing or upgrading settlements, in consultation with affected communities, ensuring access to services essential for human rights, such as clean water, sanitation, education and health services.
- Only offer alternative housing that complies with international standards, ensuring that resettlement options aim to reduce segregation and include access to social housing and other housing programmes.

Amnesty International calls on the European Union (EU) to use all its available powers to:

- Ensure that in any of its member states Roma are not targeted for forced evictions, relocated to segregated and inadequate housing, or discriminated against in accessing social housing;
- Effectively monitor the use of its funds, including through the European Investment Bank, and by national authorities to ensure that EU funds do not contribute to, or result in, violations of human rights, such as forced evictions, and that funding for housing programmes does not support discrimination or segregation.



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World Habitat Day public action in Cluj-Napoca, Romania, 3 October 2011.

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Amnesty International is a global movement of more than 3 million supporters, members and activists in more than 150 countries and territories who campaign to end grave abuses of human rights.

Our vision is for every person to enjoy all the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights standards.

We are independent of any government, political ideology, economic interest or religion and are funded mainly by our membership and public donations.

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