



It's time for Europe to end discrimination against Roma



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We hope you will feel inspired to take action on all of our campaigns but remind you that all actions are optional.

This mailing is also available to download at

www.amnesty.org.uk/youth

YOUTH GROUP ACTION

IN BRIEF

Over 10 million Roma live across Europe – 6 million of them within the European Union. They are the largest and one of the most disadvantaged minorities in the region. Discrimination over the centuries has pushed the great majority of Roma to the very margins of society – and it keeps them there. This mailing asks you to:

- Send a message to the President of the European Commission to respect its own anti-discrimination laws (includes a creative action)
- Take action for the Coastai street families in Romania who have been forcibly evicted from their homes

WHO ARE THE ROMA?

- They are believed to have originated from northern India in the 9th century.
- ‘Gypsy’ is an abbreviation of Egyptian. When they arrived in Europe people wrongly assumed they were from Egypt.
- Today, an estimated 10 to 12 million Romani people live in the countries of the Council of Europe.
- About 70 per cent of them live in central and eastern Europe, There are also sizeable Romani minorities in western Europe. Although some western European Roma maintain a nomadic* way of life, the vast majority of Roma are now settled. (*see Glossary)

DISCRIMINATION AGAINST THE ROMA

In the 21st century, Roma continue to suffer from discrimination and threats to their rights to health care, housing and education. Millions of Roma live in isolated slums, often without access to electricity or running water, putting them at risk of illness. However, they cannot get the health care they need. They receive poor quality education in segregated schools which means that they struggle to find jobs after they leave school. Unable to find work, they cannot afford better housing, buy medication or pay the costs of their children’s education. They therefore get caught in a vicious circle. The roots of this stem from centuries of prejudice and discrimination.

Racism and racist attacks

One in five Roma consider that they had been the victims of a racially motivated crime – including assaults, threats and serious harassment – at least once in the past 12 months. (EU Fundamental Rights Agency survey 2009)

Nowadays the Roma continue to experience openly racist and discriminatory language and attitudes which tend to be tolerated by wider society. The increased number of Romani people coming to Western Europe over recent years has led to an increase in anti-Roma feeling. Governments have unfortunately introduced policies that frequently add to the problem, portraying the Roma as people who pose problems to others without tackling the problems faced by the Roma.

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Governments are also failing to protect Roma from crimes and attacks motivated by racism. Across Europe Roma are stopped and searched by police often simply on the basis of being Roma. When they are victims of crime or suspects, they are rarely given equal treatment by the justice system compared to the non-Roma population.

Right to Education

- **In Serbia over 60% of Roma have not completed primary school.**
- **An EU survey on 7 countries found that 15% of Roma could not read or write and 31% had received less than 6 years of education.**

Romani children are regularly denied their right to education. The cost of clothes transport and school materials and the lack of teaching materials in the Romani language contribute to this. However, a key reason is discrimination. This is not just from individuals but from some education systems whose policies exclude many Roma children from receiving a good education. An example of this is the segregation of Romani children in separate schools or classes which offer a lower quality education.

Right to Housing

- **In Southeastern Europe, 25% of Roma live in shacks, compared to 3% of non-Roma.**
- **In Central and Eastern Europe Roma can expect to live 10 years less than the rest of the population**

The right to adequate housing includes the right to be protected from forced eviction. Many Romani people find it hard to get decent housing due to widespread prejudice. As a result, they are forced to live in slums or informal settlements often without access to electricity or running water putting them at risk of illness.

As they rarely have any basic rental agreements or contracts, most Roma communities living in informal settlements are vulnerable to eviction from their homes with little or no prior information. In such cases of forced eviction, the authorities make no attempt to offer alternative housing or adequate compensation. Not only is a home lost, but also possessions, contact with friends and family, jobs and school places. Faced with homelessness they have no choice but to live in temporary or make-shift shelters and remain at risk of forced evictions over and over again.

TIME FOR EUROPE TO TAKE A STAND

Governments across Europe have so far failed in their duty to protect the human rights of the Roma. It is even becoming common to hear anti-Roma statements from politicians and public figures. This is unacceptable because in the EU there is an anti-discrimination law that should be followed. The European Commission* has the responsibility and the obligation to ensure this law is followed and to fight against the discrimination and violence faced by Roma. The EU* prides itself on being a Union founded on the principles of liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedom. However, millions of Roma - EU citizens - are being denied their basic human rights as a result of discrimination.

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CASE STUDY: the Coastei Street Families

On 17 December 2010, 76 families, the vast majority Roma, were forcibly evicted by local authorities from Coastei Street, in the centre of the city of Cluj-Napoca, north-western Romania. The evicted families were given two days' notice that they were to be moved, with no written communication, consultation or alternatives, or opportunity to challenge the eviction offered by the city authorities.

Forty of the families were re-housed on the outskirts of the city in an area called New Pata Rat, in inadequate housing close to the city's garbage dump. The remaining 36 families were left without alternative housing. Some were allowed to build improvised shelters in the area next to the modular houses, while those without money for construction materials were left homeless.

The housing provided to the forty families does not comply with international and Romanian standards on adequacy of housing. The local authorities continue to deny that a forced eviction took place, and ignores the impact and the consequences that it continues to have on the lives of the individuals affected. Some of the issues the community face are:

- **Overcrowding:** four room houses for more than one family.
- **Inadequate facilities:** Housing does not contain a designated kitchen, sanitation facilities are poor and the rooms do not have protection from damp and mould.
- **Health issues:** Since the eviction the health of the families appears to have gotten worse, with an increase in respiratory diseases.
- **Remote location:** Access to education, health care and employment is difficult as the nearest bus stop is 2km away.
- **Job loss:** 20 per cent of individuals have lost their main source of income since moving to Pata Rat.

The families have told Amnesty International that since being evicted their 'level of living conditions regressed by 30 years'. Go to page 5 to find out how to take action for the families.

'I was in Italy for work and I received a phone call to come as soon as possible, because they are demolishing our homes. I took a plane from Rome and I arrived at 11 pm on 16 December 2010. Everybody had packed. They were told that at 5 pm the municipal police will come. Whoever had packed would be moved normally. Whoever had not would be moved by force. I asked: "Why are you moving us in the middle of the winter? Why are you sending us there with the garbage?'
Florin

'The room is very small; the water from outside is coming through the walls. It is really bad, it is a nightmare... Next to me, there is a family with 13 people, including 11 children, who live in one room.'

One of the Roma relocated to the new houses

YOUTH GROUP ACTION

TAKE ACTION 1: Sign the petition

We are calling on the President of the European Commission to show leadership and make sure the EU sticks to its own anti-discrimination law: it must protect Roma lives from forced evictions, school segregation, hatred and violence. A petition is attached to the back of this briefing, and can also be downloaded from: www.amnesty.org.uk/youth.

Send your signed petitions to: Anne Montague, Youth Coordinator, The Human Rights Action Centre, 17-25 New Inn Yard, London, EC2A 3EA. **Deadline: end of term**

Alternative Creative action: Sign the Roma Wheel

You could get people to sign the spokes of a Roma “wheel” instead of the petition. There is a template wheel at the end of this mailing.

This wheel appears on the Romani flag which was created in 1933. The flag consists of a background of blue and green, representing the heavens and earth respectively, and a spoked wheel, in the centre, representing the travelling tradition of the Romani people.



TAKE ACTION 2: WRITE FOR THE COASTEI STREET FAMILIES

We'd like you to show the Mayor of Cluj Napoca your concern about the living conditions these families have been forced to live in. Write in your own words but here are some points you could make:

- Express your concern about the over -crowded conditions, lack of hot water and gas and sanitation facilities.
- Emphasise your sadness that some of the Romani families were made homeless in the middle of the winter because of the forced eviction.

Ask him to do the following things:

- Meet with all the families to develop long term housing plans.
- Address the urgent needs of the families living in the New Pata Rat by:
 - Addressing the problem of overcrowding
 - Guaranteeing access to services such as transport, education, and healthcare
 - Creating a minimum security of tenure* and providing access to utilities like water and electricity.

Send your letters to:

In atentia primarului orasului Cluj-Napoca, Emil Boc, Primar Cluj-Napoca, Primaria Cluj-Napoca, Strada Motilor 3, Cluj-Napoca, Romania

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TAKE ACTION 3: send a message to the Coastei Street Families

Why not make an origami house with a message of solidarity on it and send it to the families?

Here is a video explaining how to make an origami house:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T-KctvxCcec>

There are further instructions here:

<http://www.origami-instructions.com/origami-house.html>

Suggested message in English:

Dear members of the Coastei Street community
I am thinking of you and I am standing by you in your fight for justice.

Message in Romanian:

Dragi membrii ai comunitatii de pe strada Coastei
Sunt cu gandul la voi si va sunt alaturi in lupta voastra pentru justitie

Send your houses to: Anne Montague, Youth Coordinator, The Human Rights Action Centre, 17-25 New Inn Yard, London, EC2A 3EA. **Deadline: end of term**

TAKE ACTION 4: Watch the film

A film screening is a great way to raise awareness about discrimination against the Roma. We recommend showing the film Our School. This documentary is about the lives of school children in rural Transylvania who are among the first participants in an initiative to bring together ethnically segregated Romani schools. <http://ourschoolfilm.blogspot.co.uk/>

Resources

The following **free** resources can be ordered from our mailing house by calling 01788 545553 and quoting the relevant product codes.

DIG 028 - 12 page, A4 briefing on Roma and Gypsy travellers

DIG 029 - Forced Eviction activist exhibition (includes some Roma images)

DIG 033 - Roma stickers

DIG 034 - Roma Postcard on racist attacks in Hungary

DIG 037 - Roma myth-buster (small leaflet which helps you answer difficult questions)

For more resources, check out our website: www.amnesty.org.uk/roma. Here you will find a range of reports and films.

Keep an eye out for a new Amnesty report on Roma which will be added to the website in mid-May.

* Glossary

European Union: an association of European nations with the purpose of making joint political and economic decisions.

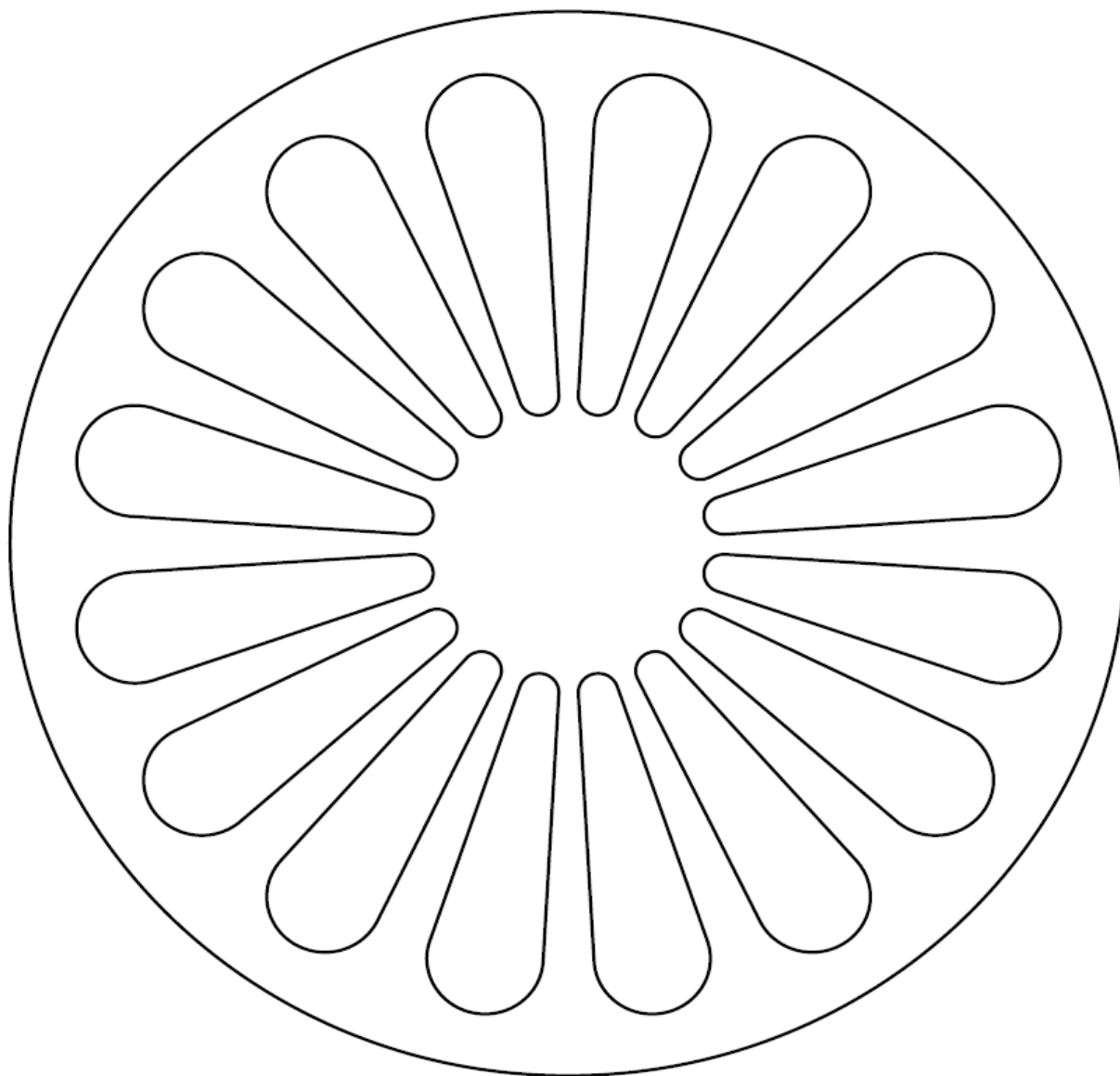
European Commission: the part of the European Union which is responsible for suggesting laws, making decisions, supporting the Union's agreements, and general organisation .

Security of Tenure: a guarantee that tenants will be able to stay in the property for a reasonable amount of time.

Nomadic: a member of a group of people who move from one place to another rather than living in one place all of the time.

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ROMA WHEEL TEMPLATE:



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HUMAN RIGHTS HERE. ROMA RIGHTS NOW!



To: President of the European Commission, José Manuel Barroso

Dear President,

The Roma are the largest and most disadvantaged minority in Europe. This is not a coincidence. It is the result of the widespread discrimination and racism against the Roma people. Many EU member states fail to enforce international human rights standards and EU anti-discrimination law.

The European Commission has the responsibility and the obligation to ensure compliance with this law and fight anti-Roma discrimination and violence.

I urge you to ensure that you use all the tools at your disposal, including legal monitoring and political pressure, to guarantee the compliance of member states with EU anti-discrimination law and human rights standards.

Name	School/College	Town & Postcode

Please send completed petitions by the end of end of term 2013 to: Anne Montague, Education and Student team, The Human Rights Action Centre, Amnesty International UK, 17-25 New Inn Yard, London EC2A 3EA. Email anne.montague@amnesty.org.uk