‘Europe has a shameful history of discrimination and severe repression of the Roma. There are still widespread prejudices against them in country after country on our continent.’

Thomas Hammarberg, Commissioner for Human Rights, Council of Europe

The Roma are one of Europe’s oldest and largest ethnic minorities, and also one of the most disadvantaged. Across the continent Roma people are routinely denied their rights to housing, health care, education and work, and many are subjected to forced eviction, racist assault and police ill-treatment.

On almost every indicator of human development, in almost every European country, the Roma fall far below the national average. They have lower incomes, worse health, poorer housing, lower literacy rates and higher levels of unemployment than the rest of the population.

Millions of Roma live in isolated slums, often without access to electricity or running water, putting them at risk of illness. But many cannot obtain the health care they need. Receiving inferior education in segregated schools, they are severely disadvantaged in the labour market. Unable to find jobs, they cannot afford better housing, buy medication, or pay the costs of their children’s schooling. And so the cycle continues.

All this is not simply the inevitable consequence of poverty. It is the result of widespread, often systemic, human rights violations stemming from centuries of prejudice and discrimination that have kept the great majority of Roma on the margins of European society. Europe’s governments can and must act to break the vicious cycle of prejudice, poverty and human rights violations.

WHO ARE THE ROMA?

The Roma or Gypsies are believed to have first arrived in Europe from northern India in the 9th century and were well established in most countries by 1300. Today, Roma are not a homogenous group, and this briefing uses the term ‘Roma’ to include many different sub-groups.

The word ‘Gypsy’ is an abbreviation of ‘Egyptian’, the name given to Roma immigrants when they first arrived in western Europe because they were assumed to have come from Egypt. In most dialects of the Romani language, the word that Roma use to describe themselves is ‘Rom’ (plural ‘Roma’).

Today, an estimated 10 to 12 million Roma people live in the countries of the Council of Europe. About 70 per cent of them live in central and eastern Europe, where they constitute between 6 and 10 per cent of the population. There are also sizeable Roma minorities in western Europe, especially in Spain (600,000 to 800,000), France and the UK (up to 300,000 Roma and Travellers in each). Although some western European Roma maintain a nomadic way of life, the vast majority of Roma are now settled.

THE EFFECTS OF DISCRIMINATION

- Life expectancy of Roma in Central and Eastern Europe is on average 10 years lower than for the rest of the population. World Bank, 2003
- In Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic: infant mortality rates of Roma are twice those of non-Roma. UN Development Programme, 2003
- In southeastern Europe an estimated 25 per cent of Roma live in shacks, compared to 3 per cent of non-Roma, and 56 per cent of Roma homes are not connected to a sewage system. UN Development Programme, 2003
- A detailed survey of 402 working-age Roma men and women in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia found that only 38 per cent were in paid employment; almost two-thirds reported that they had been refused employment because they were Roma. European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC), 2006
- In a survey of 3,510 Roma in seven European Union countries, 15 per cent of respondents were illiterate and 31 per cent had received less than six years of formal education. EU Fundamental Rights Agency: 2008
During World War II, it is estimated that between 250,000 and thousands were executed in the concentration camps. Thousands were gassed, shot or died of starvation, deprived of civil rights, subjected to forced sterilisation, used in medical experiments and interned in camps on the grounds that they were “the source of illegal trafficking, profoundly degrading living conditions, the exploitation of children for the purposes of begging, prostitution and criminality.”

In portraying Roma as posing problems to others, without acknowledging the problems they face themselves, the response of the French and Italian authorities to the marginalisation of Roma is typical of governments across Europe. States are also failing to protect Roma against racially motivated crime – not only isolated assaults, but vigilante attacks targeting Roma settlements or communities. In June 2010 about 20 Romani families in Belfast were forced to flee after a crowd gathered outside their homes shouting racist slogans, smashing windows and kicking in doors.

Across Europe, Roma are disproportionately stopped and searched by police, often for simply being Roma. Whether Roma are victims or suspects, they rarely receive equal treatment in criminal justice systems. This is a result both of inadequate procedures and guidelines for law enforcement officials to combat police bias and stereotyping is needed across Europe.

\textbf{CRIMES OF HATE}

In February 2009 Robert Csorba, a 37-year-old Romani man and his four-year-old son Robika were killed in a village about 40km southeast of Budapest, Hungary. They were shot dead while fleeing their house, which had been set on fire.

Local police initially treated the case as an accident and announced that the fire had been caused by an electrical fault, despite a neighbour’s report of hearing shots. But the autopsy confirmed that the Roma boy died of gunshot wounds. This was one of nine similar attacks (petrol bombs or shots fired by running) which killed six people in Hungary between January 2008 and August 2009. Numerous other attacks did not fit the headlines. An Amnesty International report on violent attacks against Roma in Hungary concluded that the failure to prevent and respond effectively to violence against Roma was due to shortcomings in the criminal justice system.
THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION

The right to education free from discrimination has been recognised in international human rights law since 1948. Despite this, Romani children are systematically denied their right to education. Roma have significantly lower enrolment and completion rates in primary education than the general population in countries across Europe.

The factors that contribute to this include the costs of transport, clothes and school materials, and a lack of Romani language teaching materials. But a key reason for educational underachievement of the Roma is discrimination. This is not limited to individual acts of prejudice by teachers and other education professionals. It is often deeply ingrained in education systems whose policies and practices exclude many Roma from quality education. Its worst form is the segregation of Romani children in schools or classes offering an inferior education.

Many countries with significant Romani populations have introduced measures to encourage school enrolment and attendance by Romani children. These include free pre-school education for Romani children, increasing the number of teaching assistants in schools with Roma pupils, cultural mediators to liaise between schools and parents, and contributions to the cost of school materials and transport. In many countries, however, these measures have had little real impact, owing to inadequate funding and uneven implementation.

UEQUAL EDUCATION

- In Romania and Bulgaria 15 per cent of Romani children never enrol in the education system, while drop-out rates for Roma are four to six times higher than the national average. Open Society Institute, 2007.
- Over 60 per cent of Roma have not completed primary school. Official censuses, Serbia.
- Enrolment rates for Roma in secondary education average around 10 per cent in central and eastern Europe.
- Roma enrolment in tertiary education averages less than 1 per cent in most European countries.

The segregation of Roma in special schools and classes remains widespread in central and eastern Europe. The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance has expressed concerns about the segregation of Roma in education in its most recent reports on Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Moldova, Ukraine, the Czech Republic, Serbia, Slovenia and Macedonia.

This segregation has many causes, including the isolation of Roma in segregated settlements and what is often described as ‘white flight’: non-Roma parents removing their children from schools that are perceived as having too many Roma pupils. To combat this, some schools place Roma children in separate classes.

In the most damaging form of segregation, Roma are placed in ‘special’ or ‘practical’ schools for children with ‘mild mental disabilities’ even when they have no such disabilities. No country has an official policy of placing Roma in special schools. They are placed there as a result of flawed assessment criteria, pressure from teachers in mainstream schools and also because some Romani parents feel that their children will be happier if they are less exposed to the prejudices of non-Roma teachers, pupils and parents. Once in the special school system, however, the children are taught a substantially reduced curriculum and rejoining mainstream education, or continuing to secondary school, becomes almost impossible.

THE CASE OF SLOVAKIA

Amnesty International has documented discrimination against Romani children in Slovakia’s education system since 2006. While Roma are estimated to comprise less than 15 per cent of the total population, Romani children represent 60 per cent of pupils in special schools, and 80 per cent of those in special classes.

Even in the mainstream school system, Romani children are often placed in Roma-only schools or classes where they receive a lower standard of education than pupils from the majority population. Teachers in Roma-only classes often have lower expectations of their students. They also have fewer resources and poorer quality infrastructure.

Many Romani children come from impoverished families and Slovak is not their first language. Therefore, they require additional language lessons, pre-school classes or classroom assistance. These are rarely provided in the mainstream school system, and when Romani children begin to fall behind, they are transferred out of mainstream education – either to special classes in mainstream schools or to special schools.

Slovak legislation categorises social disadvantage alongside mental disability to determine whether pupils have special educational needs. Roma are invariably viewed as socially disadvantaged, so the system is predisposed to categorise their children as having special needs. But rather than addressing their needs, this entrenches disadvantage for life by equating poor social circumstances with educational needs. Roma are invariably viewed as socially disadvantaged, so the system is predisposed to categorise their children as having special needs. But rather than addressing their needs, this entrenches disadvantage for life by equating poor social circumstances with educational needs. Roma are invariably viewed as socially disadvantaged, so the system is predisposed to categorise their children as having special needs. But rather than addressing their needs, this entrenches disadvantage for life by equating poor social circumstances with educational needs.

In some Slovak schools, Roma are separated from non-Roma not only in the classroom but in other aspects of school life, including the canteen at lunchtimes. Irena, a Romani mother from Krivany, said of the edible school lunch: ‘It’s like they are treating them like prisoners.’

To ensure that all Romani children can realise their right to education free from discrimination, the Slovak government needs to:

- urgently adopt strong and targeted measures to effectively monitor and address the paying for discrimination and segregation
- develop a plan of desegregation which clearly identifies bodies responsible and a timeline with yearly targets for its implementation
- provide adequate support measures for integrating Roma and non-Roma children who need extra assistance in mainstream education.
THE RIGHT TO HOUSING

The right to adequate housing, which includes the right to be protected from forced eviction, is guaranteed in several international and regional human rights treaties. But across Europe, governments regularly fail to fulfill these obligations, particularly when it comes to the Roma.

Discrimination in the labour market makes it difficult for Roma to rent homes and they are effectively excluded from social housing schemes. So millions of Roma have no choice but to live in informal settlements, often without access to electricity or running water, and without even a minimum degree of security of tenure. This leaves them vulnerable to forced evictions and other human rights violations.

FORCED EVICTIONS

Forced evictions are cruel, humiliating and in breach of international law. They most often target those who are least able to resist. Roma people are one such easy target: they are poor, socially excluded, and treated with hostility by the wider public.

In most cases of forced eviction, the authorities make no attempt to offer adequate alternative housing. Many Roma continue to live in temporary, makeshift accommodation for years after being evicted. Many have been evicted again and again. The consequences of forced eviction are not only the loss of a home, but also the loss of possessions, social contacts, jobs and school places.

In recent years Amnesty International, working with local non-governmental organisations, has documented forced evictions of Romani communities in Bulgaria, Greece, Italy, Romania, Slovakia and Serbia. Many more such evictions are taking place across Europe.

In Bulgaria, at least 200 Roma were left homeless when local authorities forcibly evicted them and demolished their houses in Gorno Ezerovo and Medni Rudnik settlements in the city of Burgas in September 2009.

In 2004 the municipal authorities of Miercurea Ciuc in central Romania forcibly evicted more than 100 Roma from a crumbling building in the town centre. Twelve Romani families had been legally resident in the building for many years, while the remaining residents had moved in or built shacks in the yard without any form of legal tenure.

After the eviction, the 12 legally resident families were housed in eight metal cabins next to a sewage plant on the edge of town. The authorities assured them that this was a temporary solution – but six years on most of the families are still there. The remaining residents were offered no alternative accommodation and most resorted to building shacks alongside the metal cabins.

In April 2009 the Serbian authorities forcibly evicted 250 Roma from a temporary settlement in New Belgrade. For many of the residents, who were originally displaced from Kosovo, this was not the first time they were torn away from their homes. The authorities offered them containers to live in, in another part of the site, but local residents tried to set the containers on fire. Since then the authorities have carried out a series of evictions of Roma communities around the city.

In Romania, where the Roma make up about 10 per cent of the population, a pattern of forced evictions, or threatened forced evictions, perpetuates racial segregation. On the rare occasions when the authorities offer alternative housing, it is often build in precarious conditions and lacks basic facilities such as water, heating and electricity. In recent years Romani communities have been relocated next to garbage dumps, sewage treatment plants or industrial areas on the outskirts of cities.

THE RIGHT TO ADEQUATE HOUSING

To fulfill this right, states are obliged to:

- ensure that everyone has a minimum degree of security of tenure, which guarantees legal protection against forced eviction, harassment and other threats;
- seek to ensure minimum standards, including habitability, access to safe drinking water, sanitation and energy;
- ensure that housing is located in areas away from pollution sources and close to employment options and essential services;
- housing should also be affordable and housing programmes should prioritise the most vulnerable.

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For years, the Romani residents had been in discussion with the municipal authorities, who owned the town centre building, over its dilapidated state. But they were not consulted about the decision to evict them. No alternative to eviction, nor any alternative relocation site, was ever considered or offered.

The relocation site smells of sewage and is inside the 300-metre protection zone required by law to separate human habitation from potential toxic hazards.

One sign to the cabins reads ‘Toxic danger’. There is only one tap at the site, and only four toilet cubicles for the whole community. The cabins are overcrowded and offer little protection from heat, cold, rain or wind.

One of the residents, Ilona, told Amnesty International: ‘The houses fill up with that smell. At night also … the children cover their faces with the pillows. We don’t want to eat when we [sense] the smell … I used to have another child, a boy, who died when he was four months old … this is why I am frightened. I don’t want to lose the rest of my children’.

Members of the community told Amnesty International that they had complained repeatedly to the authorities, but no-one listens. The Mayor’s office claims that efforts to relocate the community to new housing failed because of complaints by neighbours who did not want to live next to Roma.

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Above: The metal cabins provided as homes for Roma by the Miercurea Ciuc authorities © AI

Right: A Roma woman collects parts of metal cabins next to a sewage plant © AI

Below: Roma who were evicted from the town centre building, over its dilapidated state. But they were not consulted about the decision to evict them. No alternative to eviction, nor any alternative relocation site, was ever considered or offered.

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CAMPAIGNING FOR ROMA RIGHTS

Amnesty International’s work on the rights of Roma forms part of our global Demand Dignity campaign, focusing on the human rights abuses that are a cause and a consequence of poverty. We work with Roma communities and rights activists. Amnesty International is a member of the European Roma Policy Coalition, an informal gathering of Romani and non-Romani organisations advocating Roma and Travellers’ rights in the European Union.

European intergovernmental organisations – including the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Council of Europe and the European Union – have launched various initiatives to address the situation of the Roma. But these have suffered from a lack of concrete targets, uneven implementation and and ineffectiv monitoring. There has been little concrete improvement in respect for the rights of the great majority of Roma.

Amnesty International is calling on governments across Europe to break the cycle of prejudice, poverty and human rights violations that keeps the Roma on the margins of society. This requires comprehensive, pro-active policies to promote the social inclusion of Roma and combat entrenched discrimination in public service provision as well as in society at large. These policies should be developed in consultation with Roma communities and the organisations that represent them.

Amnesty International is also calling on European governments to:

• Adopt and implement housing policies to improve the living conditions of marginalised Roma, ensure that Roma have equal access to social housing, and combat segregation in housing
• Prevent forced eviction of Roma camps and settlements
• Combat educational discrimination against Roma and stop their segregation in mainstream education and special schools
• Adopt special measures to increase the access of Roma to all levels of education and increase their participation in education
• Give greater priority to combating anti-Roma racism and react robustly to racist speech by officials
• Respond more effectively to racially-motivated crime and invest greater resources to do so
• Develop policies and training programmes to combat anti-Roma prejudice in police services and courts.

ROMA IN EUROPE

Every country marked on this map has a Romani population, although few European states collect data about Roma in the census. The Council of Europe estimates that there are 11.26 million Roma in Europe, 5.9 million of them in countries of the European Union. Discrimination against Roma has been reported in almost all European countries. The map does not reflect every incident of discrimination against Romani people. It simply reflects the documented cases of human rights violations that Amnesty International knows about.

KEY

- Racist attacks
- Segregated education
- Forced evictions
- Expulsion/forced return of refugees

Sources: Amnesty International, European Roma Rights Centre, Human Rights Watch
ROMA IN EUROPE
FIND OUT MORE

Amnesty International reports on Roma are available at www.amnesty.org

GENERAL
Left out: Violations of the Rights of Roma in Europe, Amnesty International 2010 EUR 01/021/2010

EDUCATION

A Tale of Two Schools: Segregating Roma into special schools in Slovakia, Amnesty International 2008 EUR 72/007/2008


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Violent Attacks Against Roma in Hungary: Time to investigate racial motivation, Amnesty International 2010 EUR 27/001/2010


HISTORY
Council of Europe factsheets on Roma history www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/roma/histoculture_EN.asp

USEFUL WEBSITES
www.amnesty.org.uk/roma
Fight Discrimination in Europe www.fightdiscrimination.eu
European Roma Rights Centre www.errc.org
European Roma Information Office www.erionet.org
European Roma Grassroots Organisations Network www.ergonetwork.org

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