

26 September 2019

From: Daniela Mihaylova,
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Re: Introductory statement for Working session 17 “Housing and Living conditions, particularly related to the situation of forced evictions and segregation of Roma and Sinti”

The housing situation of Roma and Sinti in Europe continues to be disturbing regardless of the policy measures and strategic programs designed both on European and country level. Many Roma continue to face serious forms of discrimination and human rights violations by authorities at both national and local levels. Forced evictions without due process and provision of adequate alternative housing continue across Europe, in violation of member states' international human rights obligations. Evictions are often carried out without prior consultation with the families concerned and at very short notice, while adequate alternative accommodation is not provided. This situation increases the vulnerability of Roma families and prevents their social inclusion.

For many years, after being settled down, in many cases forcibly, Roma generally live in segregated settlements, where the living conditions are significantly worst compared to the main areas in the respective location. These include poor housing, poor public services and utilities available, limited access to public transport and poor health conditions. The property is not secured; the settlements frequently lay out of the regulated areas. The latter is a barrier before constructing of legal housing. As a result significant number of Roma across Europe lives in risky and unsecured housing. They experience every-day threat of losing their only home because of the latter being built without following of the legal procedures.

In this situation Roma and Sinti are targeted victims of forced evictions and demolitions of only homes, with no alternative accommodation secured. In many cases the latter is connected with provoked public tension, especially in pre-election situations, when that is used for motivating pro-nationalist voting. Cases are known where evictions and demolitions are used as collective sanction against the whole community in a respective location. Today's Europe states that human rights are one of the pillars of the democracy. Yet we witnessed the forced evacuation of more than 200 Roma from a camp in the outskirts of Malmo in Sweden; the demolition of Roma-owned houses in Miskolc in Hungary; the tragedy of close to 50 Roma families from the area of Artificial lake in Tirana, Albania; the demolition of more than 50 Roma-owned houses in Varna and Gurmen in Bulgaria; the clearing of nearly 400 Roma, including dozens of children from a camp inhabited for years, despite the demolitions being halted by the court in Camping River in Italy last year; the tragedy of the whole Roma community in the village of Voyvodinovo in Bulgaria, where the people have been thrown out from their only homes in the middle of the winter, demolition orders being issued overnight and some of these executed before even giving the people the chance to challenge the lawfulness of the orders in due court procedure.

We all know that member States have undertaken steps to address the situation, and between these:

- Endorsed National Roma Integration Strategies with specific sections on housing; annual plans for implementation of the Strategies and planning of specific measures;
- Local development programs (on regional and/or municipal level), in some areas designed with the participation of the relevant communities (like in the frame of CoE and EC's Romact program, developed in Bulgaria and Romania, where the bottom-up approach, which reflects the communities' priorities, has been introduced thus establishing some good practices.

However, there is still a problem with the lack of secured funding, designed to support the local authorities work on the priorities identified, to prepare regulation plans and social housing, including through the OPs.

In this situation the member States have to urgently consider the following recommendations:

- Adoption of legislative measures, allowing for the legalization of soundly constructed buildings for residential use, which constitute only homes. These should include: Detailed mapping of the areas with building constructions in Roma neighborhoods and identification of stable ones;
- Raising the capacity of local authorities to take measures to raise funds for the regulation of neighborhoods with concentrated Roma/Sinti population which should take into consideration existing construction as far as possible;
- Designation of public land for residential use, which the families will be able to purchase, and provision of support for the families with respect to the construction of buildings in accordance with construction rules and norms;
- Taking measures to construct social housing for families that do not have the resources to purchase land and/or a home and to settle them in;
- Taking measures to incorporate into national legislations the international legal framework for protection of citizens in cases of compulsory demolitions and/or evictions from only homes;
- Monitoring assessment of the progress of implementation of the NRISs' priority of improving housing conditions;
- Planning the after 2020 period taking into account the monitoring assessment and lessons learned, with specific measures on improving the housing conditions of Roma/Sinti in Europe;
- Adoption of measures to enforce the decisions of the European Court of Human Rights concerning the protection of citizens of Roma ethnic origin in cases of threats to remove their sole residences.