

ARTICLE





Governments across Europe fail the Roma in multiple ways. Discrimination, forced evictions, segregation and sub-standard education are the norm in many countries.

“The European Union has legislative arsenal at its disposal to ensure that discriminatory violence, and discrimination more generally, are addressed. However, the European Commission, which is responsible for overseeing the application of EU laws in the member states, has to date failed to take clear and decisive action to address discrimination and violence against Roma in member states,” said John Dalhuisen.

Amnesty International calls on national governments and the European Union to commit, visibly and wholeheartedly, to eradicating the scourge of anti-Roma discrimination, intolerance and violence across the region.

Czech Republic

Throughout the summer and autumn of 2013, Czech far-right groups staged series of anti-Roma protests in dozens of towns and cities across the country. The protests meant systematic harassment of Romani communities.

Between June and October 2013, far-right extremists joined by the local residents held regular marches through the city of Ěeské Budijovice to a housing estate following a conflict at a children’s playground between Roma and non-Roma adults.

Štefan, a Romani man told Amnesty International: “Some people do not realize that [during the demonstrations, the Roma] have to stay at one place, that children... are afraid. This lasts the whole day and leaves trauma... Nobody deserves to experience something like this. People experienced this during the war and I think that in the year 2013, in the 21st century, we don't have to experience it again.”

France

Having fled discrimination in their countries, many of the 20,000 Roma in France live in informal settlements where they rarely have access to basic services, such as water and sanitation. They are often forcibly evicted from their shelters, harassed by the police or other citizens and sometimes attacked.

On the evening of 22 November 2011, the police went to the informal settlement next to the church of St. Martin d'Arenc in Marseille with the aim of forcibly evicting the 10 Roma families who lived there. They allegedly sprayed tear gas inside the tents where children were sleeping and then destroyed the tents and other personal belongings.

R. was beaten up by the police. He said: “I wanted to run away but I couldn't see anything, I just saw a gate in front of me, I tried to reach out to it but as soon as I approached it, I just had the feeling that my leg broke and then I don't remember anything else. R. underwent surgery for a fractured thighbone and spent six months in a rehabilitation centre.

Roma migrants in Marseille do not generally report cases of harassment and violence because of lack of trust in the police or fear of further victimization. S., a Roma social worker who used to live in an informal settlement, said: “Roma people are really scared of the police; I usually take kids to the hospital for medical treatments and they are afraid whenever they see the police on our way”.

Greece

The estimated 250,000 to 350,000 Roma living in Greece have been at the receiving end of discriminatory treatment for generations.

During 2012 and 2013 a series of pogrom-like attacks against a Roma community took place in Etoliko, a village in western Greece.

Irini told Amnesty International her experience of an attack on 4 January 2013 when approximately 70 individuals threw Molotov cocktails, stones and wooden planks at their homes: “When I saw them coming, I grabbed my children and locked us up in the house. My children were crying, screaming... I was frightened. Looking out of the window I knew most of them, we grew up together. They threw a glass bottle from the window and set the house on fire.”

Six houses and four cars were firebombed or damaged by the attackers that day. Several Roma told Amnesty International that they felt betrayed by the police. One said: “I could see just two policemen from inside the house... They were just staring and asking people to stop. They did nothing more than this”.