

WRITTEN COMMENTS

BY THE EUROPEAN ROMA RIGHTS CENTRE

Written Comments by the European Roma Rights Centre to the European Commission concerning the EU consultation on the National Roma strategic framework and their implementation

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CHALLENGING DISCRIMINATION PROMOTING EQUALITY

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INTRODUCTION

By the European Commission's own reckoning, the first EU Roma Framework was an 'inexcusable' failure. Despite Commission communications, Council conclusions, parliamentary resolutions, and the relentless gathering of data, anti-Roma racism actually worsened in many member states.

The 2020-2030 Framework Communication marked an improvement with its stress on combating racism and discrimination, more substantive Roma participation, and President von der Leyen's declared commitment to "replace antigypsyism with openness and acceptance, hate speech and hate crime with tolerance and respect for human dignity". However, the problem of implementation remains the same, and on current form, this Framework is doomed only to fail better than its predecessor.

In those Member States with the largest Roma populations, weak governance, endemic corruption, and routine segregation have gone hand-in-hand with unabashed anti-Roma racism from the highest public offices.

The problem runs deeper than the inadequacy of the new batch of rehashed and revised strategies and action plans that made little difference since 2011. The remarks by Human Rights Commissioner Dunja Mijatović at the end of her five-day visit to the Czech Republic in 2023, could apply to any of the Member States with significant Roma populations.

Despite the focus of the Council of Europe on these issues for two decades, Mijatović stated that *"while there have been some positive developments, I am concerned at the persistence of many of the same problems of discrimination and exclusion that each of my predecessors identified."* She noted that Roma continue to face discrimination in virtually every area of life, including their interactions with the police; and that the deep-rooted anti-Roma prejudices that exist in Czech society became evident in the very different treatment meted out to Ukrainian Roma compared to other Ukrainian refugees.

On the issue of inclusive education, the Commissioner expressed her concerns at the lack of progress and the failure of continuing efforts to refine testing tools to prevent Romani children from being diverted into lower quality or separate education. *"A real paradigm shift is necessary to move away from the focus on testing, since this still acts as a tool of exclusion in the education system"*.

As regards implementation, the Commissioner said that despite the strategies and action plans, there continued to be a fragmentation of responsibilities, both at the central government level and between the state and the regional and municipal authorities; and that for Czech society to become more inclusive, good ideas and intentions *"need proper implementation and enforcement. Unfortunately, an important gap still exists here."*

Similarly, the October 2022 ECRI report on Bulgaria provided some sense of the gravity of the situation and the abject failures of the authorities vis-à-vis Roma inclusion. The report described Roma and LGBTI persons as the main victims of public expressions of hatred and prejudice often by high-level politicians. Noting that both communities have come under violent attack, with Roma targeted by mob protests which led to the demolition of Roma houses, ECRI stated that, *"the positive steps taken to counter antisemitism have unfortunately not been applied to these types of hatred as well."* ECRI strongly recommended that the authorities take all necessary measures to prevent threats and violence against Roma by groups of local residents; urged that Romani homes be protected from illegal demolitions; and called on the authorities ensure that no de facto segregation of Romani children takes place in kindergartens and schools.

When it comes to hate speech from on high, Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico's recent prejudicial remarks about Roma, made in Davos, are a case in point. In neighbouring Hungary, Viktor Orbán, who previously described Hungarian Roma as a historical burden, following a court case on school segregation in 2020, stated: *"Non-Roma began to feel that they had to back down and apologize, despite being the majority. They feel like they are in a hostile environment in their own homeland."*

In July 2022, less than two months after Orbán caused outrage with his attack on "race-mixing" in Europe, the European Parliament passed a resolution on 15 September asserting that Hungary can no longer be considered a full democracy, but rather a "hybrid regime of electoral autocracy."

Within the context of the EU's Roma Framework and Anti-Racism Action Plan, the ERRC remains concerned at the repeated failures of the European Commission to take issue with hate speech from on high; and shares the wider concerns of the European Parliament resolution in 2023, that Hungary might not 'credibly fulfil' the

tasks associated with the presidency of the Council of the European Union due to the government's 'deliberate and systematic efforts' to undermine the bloc's fundamental values, its repeated breaches of the rule of law and the principle of sincere cooperation.

In addition to democratic backsliding, Member States' foot-dragging and failures to produce credible Roma strategies has further dashed any prospect of success by 2030. A synthesis report by the [Roma Civil Monitor](#) published in 2023, could not include 13 EU Member States in their assessment because, for a variety of reasons, National Roma Strategic Frameworks (NRSF) were not available. The main weakness identified in the NRSFs that were available, "*the omission of the Roma's most significant problems, including ineffective or exclusionary/discriminatory mainstream policies and services.*"

At the launch of the Strategic Framework up to 2023, we highlighted the following omissions, which remain critical for the EU to realise its ambition to make a concrete difference to the lives of Roma

On police brutality: Apart from mention of "enhancing the training strategies of law enforcement," there is nothing evident in the strategy to confront the issue of widespread police brutality against Roma. This is one of the most egregious forms of abuse suffered by Roma, and the ERRC's monitoring and case-load show that the problem goes deeper than police brutality and the accompanying culture of impunity. Structural racism is deeply embedded in the entire criminal justice system, and the impact on Romani communities goes unchecked. Unsurprisingly, many Roma no longer believe in the possibility of justice. Much needs to be done to build trust; hold law enforcement accountable; and to root out systemic racism.

On access to justice: Justice delayed is justice denied; and the ERRC regrets that the Commission neglected to include access to justice as a horizontal priority, essential for "sustainable development in peaceful and inclusive societies" (UN Sustainable Development Goal 16). Research by the ERRC has revealed that in member states and candidate countries antigypsyism is engrained and routinised in the criminal justice systems. Romani defendants face discrimination at every stage of criminal proceedings from the police to the judges, prosecutors, and even their own lawyers.

On school segregation: It is unacceptable that one of the minimum targets for 2030 is cutting the proportion of Romani children in segregated primary education by at least half in Member States with a significant Roma population. Over the past 20 years, dozens of rulings in regional and national courts, and a clutch of ECtHR judgments dating back to 2005, have ruled school segregation to be discriminatory and illegal. The European court further affirmed that states have a positive obligation to make amends for a history of segregation. For the Commission to suggest that states need only get 'half-way' to desegregate by 2030 is to make light of the rule of European law. We warned at the time that this half-way and half-hearted approach would be taken by states which continue to segregate as a signal not to bother doing anything of substance.

On Romani children in state care: Despite the EU-led and driven progress made on the issue of deinstitutionalisation, ERRC research over the past decade confirms that the over-representation of Romani children in state care institutions persists. Very many at-risk Romani families do not have access to social supports and preventative measures remain scarce, often non-existent. As a consequence, underfunding combined with institutional discrimination results in removals of Romani children from their families being a first rather than final option for the authorities.

IMPLEMENTATION GAPS AND DEVELOPMENTS SINCE 2020

Small surprise that there is little evidence of progress with regards to implementation and tangible progress in many member states, with regards to the EU's stated and sincere ambition to make a concrete difference to the lives of Roma in Europe, more than three years after the 2020 adoption of the new EU Roma strategic framework, and 13+ years after the Commission adopted its first EU framework for national Roma integration strategies up to 2020. The following identifies some of the most important issues concerning anti-Roma racism across member states since 2020, which the ERRC suggests, run completely counter to, and are incompatible with the [European Council's 2021 Recommendation](#) that Member States:

"should consolidate efforts to adopt and implement measures to promote equality and effectively prevent and combat discrimination, antigypsyism, and social and economic exclusion, as well as their root causes."

POLICING

Institutional racism against Roma and Travellers goes way beyond isolated cases of police brutality, according to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), which deplored the fact that *“violent raids and attacks against Roma villages and settlements as well as ethnic profiling, harassment, marginalisation and provocation, are part of daily life for many Roma and Travellers.”* The shooting dead by Greek police of three Romani teenagers in as many years (see below) provided stark and shocking reminders of the price of neglect.

The ERRC testified before the PACE Committee concerning its 2022 research report *Brutal and Bigoted*, which showed that police violence against Roma in six EU Member States is a product of widespread institutional racism, brutality, and impunity amongst law enforcement concerning crimes. The case files cited in the report comprise a catalogue of official lies and botched investigations, testimonies concerning incidents of excessive, arbitrary, and sometimes lethal violence against young and old, deliberate attempts to discredit and intimidate victims, and protracted struggles through the courts for remedy, where justice for Roma is often denied and always delayed

In a motion passed unanimously by the **PACE Standing Committee**, the parliamentarians stressed the systemic nature of this discrimination, which includes *“inhuman and degrading treatment, torture, excessive use of force, and violence resulting in some cases in the victim’s death”* and stated that *“antigypsyism and anti-nomadism are evident in the way in which Roma and Travellers are policed and in the culture of impunity that still too often prevails for such practices.”*

“A terrible discriminatory imbalance” In their conclusions, PACE summed up the Institutional racism of law enforcement authorities towards Roma and Travellers, *“as a terrible discriminatory imbalance: on the one hand, Roma and Travellers are very often subject to excessive surveillance, controls and use of force by members of law enforcement authorities, which violate their rights; on the other hand, when these populations are victims of criminal offences (whether committed by persons holding public authority or by private individuals), the responses provided are very often inadequate.”*

The PACE resolution, which was adopted on the basis of a **report by Jean-Pierre Grin** (Switzerland, ALDE), fully endorsed the findings and recommendations contained in the ERRC report *Brutal and Bigoted: Policing Roma in the EU*. The resolution called on states to redouble their efforts to counter racist policing, to prevent these human rights violations, and to respond appropriately when they occur; to hold all perpetrators to account, and to dismantle the institutional antigypsyism that allows these practices to continue.

According to rapporteur **Jean-Pierre Grin**, *“such blatant human rights violations destroy the confidence of Roma and Travellers in law enforcement authorities”*, a situation further worsened by discrimination in access to justice which deprives the victims of abuse of adequate remedy.

Mr. Grin found that the case law of the European Court of Human Rights reveals a *“staggering picture of the relations of law enforcement authorities with Roma and Travellers”*, and concurred with the ERRC’s assertion that the repetition of such cases was indicative of institutional racism - *“even though, unfortunately, the European Court of Human Rights only very rarely looks into this aspect of the cases it is called upon to examine.”*

He described the persistence of police brutality against Roma as all the more intolerable given that some of the ECtHR judgements date back to the mid-1990s: *“It is quite simply unacceptable that problems that have been identified for so long have not yet been resolved. Within each Council of Europe member State, we can and must do better.”*

“Impunity, a violation of human rights” The report highlighted the persistent failures by the authorities to conduct effective investigations into allegations of police abuse as tantamount to accepting impunity for serious violations of the European Convention on Human Rights, something *“which would clearly be unacceptable.”* With a view to fighting such impunity the resolution called on authorities to

- offer rapid and effective remedies to victims of police violence, giving priority to simple, flexible and accessible procedures;
- create independent investigative mechanisms, free from any political pressure, with sufficient resources and powers to effectively investigate complaints against members of law enforcement authorities and to punish offenders;
- protect victims against police intimidation, reprisals and harassment – all of which are encouraged by a sense of impunity – and provide for penalties for offenders that are commensurate with the seriousness of their actions and that are dissuasive.

The committee stressed the importance of overcoming the *“inertia, indifference, inaction, neglect, resistance or outright hostility, whether amongst the general public or within authorities themselves, (which) are all expressions of antigypsyism and anti-nomadism”*. Rapporteur Grin emphasised that combating such sentiments, and the direct and indirect harms they cause, is crucial to successfully tackling the institutional racism against Roma and Travellers that persists within law enforcement authorities; and that combating antigypsyism *“must form an integral part of all strategies designed to overcome discrimination against Roma and Travellers, including where it is committed by members of law enforcement authorities.”*

ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLES

On 11 November 2023, around midnight Greek police shot a 17-year-old Romani boy after a car chase in the town of Thebes, north of Attica. According to [media reports](#), the car, with four passengers, two boys and two girls aged 15-17, failed to stop when ordered. In the ensuing pursuit, the car was surrounded by police in a dead-end alley in the Liontari village. Witnesses said a gun shot was heard, fatally wounding the 17-year-old. The police claim that one of the underage passengers tried to snatch the policeman’s gun which ‘went off’ killing the boy. The victim’s brother claimed that it was the policeman who fired the gun. More details [here](#).

On 6 June 2023, the Ombudsperson of Slovakia, Robert Dobrovodský, issued a decision condemning Slovak police officers who brutalised and tortured a Romani family during a police raid in Milhost in 2019. The decision finds the officers’ actions to have been disproportionate, constituting humiliating and degrading treatment. More details [here](#).

In November 2022, four Italian police officers were put under investigation following a house raid, which left a 36-year-old Romani victim in a coma, faced charges of torture, giving false testimony and attempted murder. Hasib Omerovic, who has been deaf since birth, sustained serious injuries when he ‘fell’ nine metres from his bedroom window during an unauthorised police raid on his apartment on 25 July 2020. More details [here](#).

In December 2022, Greek police shot dead another Romani teenager: 16-year-old Kostas Fragoulis was gunned down by police as he fled a gas station in Thessaloniki, accused of failing to pay for €20 worth of petrol. He died from his wounds on 13 December. Demonstrations and riots broke out in a number of Greek cities, including Athens, where protestors who clashed with police chanted: “It wasn’t the petrol, it wasn’t the money, the cops shot because he was Roma.” More details [here](#).

On 23 October 2021, seven Greek motorcycle police officers in pursuit of a stolen car opened fire on the three unarmed Romani occupants of the vehicle, killing 18-year-old Nikos Sabanis, and seriously wounding a 16-year-old. Between 30 and 40 shots are clearly audible in a video recording of the incident, and a radio conversation between the police operational centre and the attending officers shows that the officers were aware that the occupants of the vehicle were three Roma.

The police press release after the incident mentioned injuries to the seven police officers, that the deceased was 20 years-old and had a criminal record, and that the minor who was shot only had light injuries. These were all later proven to be false; no police officers were injured, the victim was 18 and had no criminal record, and the 16-year-old boy was seriously wounded. More details [here](#).

In June 2021, the killing of Stanislav Tomáš in the Czech town of Teplice in June 2021, and the shocking video footage of the incident, which showed one police officer kneeling on the victim’s neck for several minutes before he lost consciousness, went viral across social media. Czech police immediately rejected the notion that their actions in restraining Tomáš had anything to do with his death, and were quick to tweet that this incident is no ‘Czech George Floyd’. Before the facts had been established, Czech Prime Minister Andrej Babiš saw fit to disparage the victim and thank the police officers for their work and commented, *“this is sad, but a normal, respectable person would have a hard time getting into such a situation.”* More details [here](#).

On 10 August 2023, human rights lawyers from the ERRC and the Forum for Human Rights (FORUM) have filed a case before the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) against the Czech Republic for the death of Romani man Stanislav Tomáš.

ACCESS TO JUSTICE

Research by the **ERRC** conducted in partnership with Fair Trials in 2021 showed how, beyond police brutality, Roma experience racial bias at every stage of criminal proceedings, which leads to skewed decisions and unjust outcomes. This abject failure of the criminal justice system is rooted in antigypsyism.

Despite the absence of ethnically disaggregated data, credible research evidence and an abundance of victim and witness testimonies suggest that Roma are among the worst affected by discrimination in the criminal justice systems across Europe. According to research cited in the **2020 Fair Trials** report, Roma in Bulgaria were twice as likely to be the victims of physical police violence than non-Roma, and those who self-identified as Roma accounted for more than 50% of new prisoners, as well as more than 50% of those serving prison sentences, despite making up only 10% of the population. In Spain, studies have estimated that around a quarter of non-foreign, female prisoners are Roma. This amounts to a twenty-fold over-representation of Roma in prisons compared with their representation in the general population.

The research corroborated earlier findings that Roma are overrepresented in the criminal justice system for a combination of reasons which include persistent racial profiling and over-policing of Romani communities, social marginalisation and higher rates of poverty, lack of eligibility for alternatives to sentencing, and a presumption of guilt rooted in wider racist narratives around so-called ‘Gypsy crime’. This racist presumption that Roma are ‘inherently criminal’ has become so embedded in popular prejudice that it not only taints verdicts, but can influence decisions over pre-trial detention and sentencing. More details [here](#).

SEGREGATION IN EDUCATION

As the ERRC cautioned, the EC’s setting of a minimum target to cut the proportion of Romani children in segregated primary education by half by 2030 in Member States with a significant Roma population, has been taken as a signal to do nothing of any substance to desegregate the school systems. Infringement procedures brought through the RED have dragged on without progress for five years against Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia for school segregation. In its evaluation of the quality of the strategies, the **Roma Civil Monitor** found that *“the measures put forward by concerned Member States (BG, CZ, EL, ES, HU, IT, RO and SK) are not sufficient to address this issue systematically.”*

The ERRC rejects any assertion that segregation is somehow ‘inevitable’. There is nothing inevitable about racial segregation, and no ‘country-specific challenges’ can provide cover for denying Romani children their fundamental rights. 2030 targets for Romani children in all aspects of their lives must be as ambitious as those for every other child in the European Union.

Racial segregation of Romani pupils in schools in Central and Eastern Europe, is perhaps the emblematic case of justice delayed and judgments not enforced. Despite ongoing infringement proceedings against three Member States, dozens of rulings in regional and national courts, and a clutch of ECtHR judgments dating back to 2005 – which have not only ruled school segregation to be discriminatory and illegal, but affirmed that states have a positive obligation to make amends for a history of segregation – the situation vis-à-vis school segregation has actually worsened under both EU Roma Frameworks.

In Hungary, the extent of local litigation challenging segregation practices, the constant appeals against court judgments and the foot-dragging by the authorities clearly demonstrate the depths of resistance from the government to meet its ‘positive obligation to undo a history of segregation’ as stipulated in Horváth and Kiss. It is the ERRC’s contention that the weight of evidence, research, and court judgments show that there is nothing incidental or accidental about the practices that perpetuate segregation and inequality. Denying Romani children equal access to integrated quality education remains deliberate, knowing and systemic in Hungary.

In a recent case on **30 March 2023**, the European Court of Human Rights issued a **judgment** against Hungary for the racial segregation of Romani children in the Jókai Mór Primary School in Piliscsaba. The court ordered that the state must desegregate the school and pay the plaintiff €7000 in damages.

In March 2023, ECRI published conclusions following up on its Sixth Round of Monitoring in Slovakia. Despite steps taken by the government to desegregate schools, amend the ‘School Act’ legislation, and increase pre-school education for Romani children, ECRI concluded that its recommendations to desegregate had *“overall been only partially implemented.”*

On 19 April 2023, the European Commission decided to refer Slovakia to the Court of Justice of the European Union for failing to effectively tackle the issue of segregation of Roma children in education. In its statement the Commission said that after carefully assessing the legislative reforms, strategies and action plans adopted to foster Roma inclusion in education, and monitoring the situation on the ground, the Commission concluded that “the reforms undertaken so far are insufficient.”

ROMANI CHILDREN IN STATE CARE INSTITUTIONS

The ERRC and *Hope and Homes for Children* have called on European states to commit to closing down institutions for children, and to provide appropriate child and family support services for Romani children who are overrepresented in state care.

The *European Union Strategy on the Rights of the Child* states that all children, including those with disabilities and from disadvantaged groups, have an equal right to live with their families and in a community. Yet in many countries throughout Europe, Romani children are routinely removed from their families and placed in children’s homes at a disproportionate rate compared to the rest of the population. Research in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Italy, Romania and Slovakia showed that Romani children can make up **between 20- 80% of children in care institutions** due to institutional biases, discrimination, and the illegal practice of removing children on the basis of poverty.

Very many at-risk Romani families do not have access to social supports and preventative measures remain scarce, often non-existent. As a consequence, underfunding combined with institutional discrimination results in removals of Romani children from their families being a first rather than final option for the authorities.

In Slovakia, where Roma account for 6-8% of the total population, an estimated 63% of children in state care were of Romani origin. A visiting delegation from the European Parliament to Slovakia reported a *“lack of implementation of the existing good strategies and the strikingly slow speed of the deinstitutionalisation process.”*

In its 2016 Concluding Observations on Slovakia, the UN CRC expressed concerns that the majority of children in institutional care were Roma, that very few were adopted, and alternative and foster care options were limited.

Based on the interviews carried out by ERRC researchers in 2020, the most common causes for removing children from their families included discrete incidents such as school truancy, a tragedy such as the death of a parent, and wider issues related to extreme poverty, lack of income, and precarious housing conditions in segregated settlements.

This concurs with the European Commission’s 2020 Country Report on Slovakia, which found that, despite the legal system prohibiting the placement of children into care on the grounds of poverty or deprivation, poor housing conditions are one of the most frequent reasons for removing Romani children from their biological families:

“Child poverty, in particular among Roma communities, is a major reason for children being placed in the state foster care system. Formal long-term care continues to be dominated by residential facilities, and the process of deinstitutionalising care for persons with disabilities is proceeding slowly. There is a lack of financial resources and of a clear and integrated approach addressing the increasing demand for healthcare and social services in long-term care. Access to quality healthcare, in particular primary care, remains relatively poor and uneven.”

The discrimination at play is a manifestation of deeply-rooted structural racism that reproduces and exacerbates inequality: the fact that 85% of Roma live below the poverty line places vast numbers of Romani children at risk. This official neglect renders family life in marginalised communities ever more vulnerable and precarious. This is especially the case in disadvantaged regions and racially segregated localities, where access to social and

essential services is, as the European Commission phrased it, “uneven and hampered by missing infrastructure.” A subsequent visiting delegation from the European Parliament to Slovakia reported a *“lack of implementation of the existing good strategies and the strikingly slow speed of the deinstitutionalisation process.”*

The UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities described progress of the deinstitutionalisation process as too slow and partial, called for it to be expedited and recommended that Slovakia stops the allocation of resources from the national budget into institutions and that it reallocates resources into community-based services.

The ERRC has brought legal complaints in seven countries (Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Moldova, North Macedonia, Romania, Slovakia, & Ukraine) which are institutionalising young children and discriminating against Romani families. The legal complaints are being taken before national equality bodies, ombudsperson’s offices, and international bodies such as the European Committee of Social Rights. The complaints are based on research carried out mostly in 2020 and 2021 into the overrepresentation of Roma in state care. They are designed to hold states accountable for their obligations under international law to respect the right of the child to family relations, and to ensure that the best interest of the child prevails at all times.

A human rights-compliant response to the existing situation of Romani children in state care calls for the total elimination of institutional care, and the development of appropriate child support services across Europe. This should be a priority for member states, and we call on them to revise their NRSF to make it so. States must provide full and adequate protection to Romani children and families at risk of separation, to fully ensure that child removal on the basis of poverty is prohibited in law and in practice. More details [here](#).

ENVIRONMENTAL RACISM

Residential segregation is symptomatic of the wider issue of **environmental racism** faced by Roma across Europe, starkly evident in forced displacement and mass evictions to make way for gentrification, tourism or corporate development projects, that pitiless confluence of neo-liberal avarice and racial prejudice. It is clear that this is a deliberate structural form of exclusion that serves to banish Romani communities to sites beyond the pale, out of sight and out of mind, to desolate locations, devoid of infrastructure or public transport or services. Much remains to be done when it comes to environmental justice to ensure that Roma and other racialised minorities are not side-lined in Europe’s colourblind, **green deals** for a climate-resilient and prosperous society that *leaves no one behind*.

Instead of the prospect of liveable or sustainable futures, Roma have been subjected to systemic policies that have segregated, displaced and impoverished communities, and endangered their lives by forcing them to subsist in toxic and polluted wastelands. As ENAR has made clear, for Roma and other racialised communities in Europe, climate catastrophe is not some future threat: *“Many European climate movements discuss taking action for future generations, but the climate crisis is unfolding here and now for many racialised communities.”*

As the Roma Civil Monitor noted, despite the gravity of this problem of residential segregation, *“most of the affected countries (BG, EL, ES, HU, IT, RO, SK) opt for mapping and analysis of segregation, or in some cases improving living conditions in segregated communities, although it could be perceived that some interventions contribute to increasing the number of Roma living in segregation.”*

In her **latest 2023 report** on the Czech Republic, the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe, Dunja Mijatović, expressed her deep concern about the lack of tangible progress on the advancement of the rights of Roma, and noted that no specific housing programmes exist to support Roma, who also face discrimination in the private rental market.

Her report spoke of systematic discrimination by local authorities towards Roma, including when purporting to combat ‘undesirable social phenomena’, and earlier attempts to prevent Roma from accessing specific types of housing support by establishing ‘**benefit free zones**’, although this was subjected to a successful legal challenge. The result of deliberate discrimination and neglect is that *“Many Roma continue to live in unsuitable housing, which can lead to situations that seriously infringe on their private and family lives, as well as on their right to health, and in some cases their right to life is put at risk.”*

In its **2023 submission to UNCERD**, concerning Italy, the ERRRC research found that families living in informal camps were persistently evicted without respect for the protections prescribed by international standards. Residents were not consulted prior to eviction and they did not receive formal eviction orders, making it difficult to challenge the evictions legally: *“The situation of schoolchildren, elderly people, pregnant women and people with health issues was not taken into consideration. Most of the time the evictees were not offered alternative accommodation, which forced them into an endless cycle of evictions from one camp to another.”*

The **2023 EU Council Conclusions** called for action to ensure equal access for Roma to decent housing, highlighted the acute lack of housing provision, policy measures or investment, combined with discrimination and segregation. These factors have, according to the Council of the European Union, caused the gap in access to housing between Roma and the rest of the population in a number of Member States to remain virtually unchanged in recent years. These conclusions signal an overdue but welcome recognition of the need to remedy these injustices and undo the institutional racism that reproduces them. The pity is that the worst offenders among the Member States have yet to pay heed, and significant progress is unlikely by 2030.