



European Roma Information Office

# **Human rights abuses and discrimination against Roma**

**January, February & March 2018**

Published by the European Roma Information Office (ERIO) in Brussels in April 2018

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Funded by the Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme of the European Union 80149 –FREE-REC-NETW-2017/REC-SGA-2017-6 This publication reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

The **European Roma Information Office (ERIO)** is an international advocacy organisation which promotes political and public discussion on Roma issues by providing information to the EU institutions, civil society and governments. Through its wide network, it aims to combat racist discrimination against Roma through awareness raising, lobbying and policy development.

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# Bulgaria

## **Bulgarian Politicians Deny Police Brutality, Call for Harsher Measures against Roma “Disorderliness”**

The events that took place in the small town of Ihtiman, Bulgaria, in the beginning of February, have shown once again that police brutality against Roma is rampant in Bulgaria. On February 6<sup>th</sup>, the arrest of a Roma driver after a chase with the police turned into violent events with the driver being beaten and members of his family also arrested without motives. On the same day, a short video clip was released in the media showing a visibly intoxicated Romani man in police custody forced to perform degrading actions for the entertainment of police officers. Finally on February 8<sup>th</sup>, a 64-year-old man was killed during a raid by the Bulgarian police. According to witnesses the police pushed him off his chair and to the ground where he died shortly after. The family says when they demanded the police call an ambulance to help the man, they simply grinned and left.

These events have shed light on the presence of institutional racism and the systemic abuse of Romani communities in Bulgarian law enforcement. According to a study nearly 30% of arrestees are beaten or abused by the police, with Roma being disproportionately affected by this abuse. Yet the response from politicians has been to deny claims of violence and respond with hostility with leaders of the far-right calling for “harsher punishments” for anyone found guilty of “violence perpetrated against the police”.

Source

- <http://www.errc.org/blog/bulgarian-politicians-deny-police-brutality-call-for-harsher-measures-against-roma-disorderliness/207>

## Czech Republic

### **Czech police officer who brutally assaulted Romani workers now on trial**

On 14 February 2018 a 36-year-old police officer went on trial before the District Court in Česká Lípa, accused of abusing the powers of a public official. According to the indictment, he used a collapsible metal truncheon to beat a 41-year-old man who was harvesting legal technical cannabis in September 2015 in Písečná u Dobranova.

The police officer faces between one and five years in prison if convicted. The member of the local patrol service has rejected the charges.

The defendant testified that he behaved according to his training and considers his intervention to have been proportionate. The trial was scheduled to continue on Thursday with eyewitness testimonies.

The incident happened on 29 September 2015 when Romani temporary workers were harvesting technical cannabis, which does not contain the psychoactive material THC, in a field in Písečná. The officer defended his actions to the court by saying that at the time he did not know it was possible to cultivate cannabis legally.

Source

- <http://www.romea.cz/en/news/czech/czech-police-officer-who-brutally-assaulted-romani-workers-now-on-trial>

### **VIDEO: Czech ticket-checker assaults Romani boy, removes children from bus, police tell commuter not to film it**

On January 12, commute by children attending the Trmice Primary School was made unpleasant by an incident on a public transportation bus managed by the City of Ústí nad Labem when a ticket-checker physically assaulted a Romani boy and removed several other children from a bus. The children all had valid tickets.

The reason the ticket-checker interrupted their travel, according to eyewitnesses, is because they were wearing backpacks on their backs. The situation was captured by another commuter using a mobile telephone.

The video recording also captures audio of a municipal police officer telling the commuter to put the phone away. Police are not lawfully allowed to prevent anybody from filming in such a situation.

Source

- <http://www.romea.cz/en/news/czech/video-czech-ticket-checker-assaults-romani-boy-removes-children-from-bus-police-tell-commuter-not-to-film-it>

### **Czech attorney: Justice for online hate has been won in a case of racist assaults against two Romani brothers**

The District Court in Prostějov, Czech Republic has given a suspended sentence to a perpetrator of online assaults against Patrik and Radek Banga, who have also been awarded compensation for the non-pecuniary damages they suffered in the full amount requested. The In IUSTITIA organization provided legal services to both victims.

Radek Banga is a Czech and Romani singer who protested against an award given to the ultra-right Ortel band by the national singing competition "Czech Nightingale" (Český slavík) at the end of 2016. He published an explanation of his position using the Facebook social networking site.

As a consequence of his brave stance, he was targeted with hundreds of hateful commentaries online. His brother Patrik, a blogger and journalist, subsequently drew attention to the harassment Radek was facing.

Patrik then received the same response - hatred, intimidation, and threats. Both victims decided to actively speak out against online hatred and to defend themselves by pressing criminal charges.

Source

- <http://www.romea.cz/en/news/czech/czech-attorney-justice-for-online-hate-has-been-won-in-a-case-of-racist-assaults-against-two-romani-brothers>

## **Czech memorial to Romani genocide desecrated with pig's head**

On the last week-end of February, it has been reported that a memorial to the Holocaust victims of Romani origin located in the former concentration camp in Lety u Pisku has been violated as a pig's head was put on the memorial. This attack most likely comes after the government bought a pig's farm that was located on the site last year to build the memorial

This violation has been condemned by several organizations and politicians. Miroslav Brož, spokesperson for the Konexe organization denounced this to be a "disgusting racist attack and desecration of the remembrance site. Such attacks should not happen in a civilized country". Others have also denounced the fact that such racist attacks were part of a broader national context and the "consequence of hateful remarks made by the Czech President and by the leader of the Czech ultra-right, who should both be held accountable for their actions" said Benjamin Abtan, president of the European Grassroots Antiracist Movement (EGAM).

Source:

- <http://www.romea.cz/en/news/czech/czech-memorial-to-romani-genocide-desecrated-with-pig-s-head>

## **Brutal assailant attacks Romani woman in front of her children, Czech Police can't get their stories straight**

A brutal assailant attacked Lucie Badyová in front of her seven-year-old son and three-year-old daughter last Thursday afternoon on Kapitána Jaroše Street in the Czech town of Kadaň. He punched her, knocking her to the ground and continued his brutal assault as she was prone.

The attacker did not stop until a car drove past. He then fled the scene of his crime. "I went to the after-school club with my little daughter to pick up my son. We went shopping and then we were heading to the foundation nearby, and that man was already ahead me of the street as we were walking there. I did not notice him at all, we were just walking behind him," Badyová described the incident to news server Romea.cz.

Source

- <http://www.romea.cz/en/news/czech/brutal-assailant-attacks-romani-woman-in-front-of-her-children-czech-police-can-t-get-their-stories-straight>

## Hungary

### **'Nightmare' plight of the Roma children being taken from their families and placed at risk of abuse in Hungary's state-run care homes is exposed in shocking documentary**

The plight of Hungary's Roma Gypsies is exposed in a new documentary that reveals how children are being removed from their families and placed in 'horrific' conditions in state-run care homes.

After being placed in the care system by local authorities - ostensibly in an attempt to provide them with a better life - the Roma children actually find themselves in homes rife with drug abuse, and at risk of physical and sexual violence from both older children and staff, it is claimed.

One Hungarian care worker told BBC Three presenter Stacey Dooley that he believed as many as 300 children at the home where he works are being abused - and that he is powerless to intervene.

Source

- <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-5387799/Documentary-explores-anti-Gypsy-crisis-Hungary.html>

## Italy

### **A return of the 'nomad emergency' in Italy?**

On March 5th, the day after the general elections, Italy woke up without a government. No party won the majority necessary to form a government in the country. The Movimento 5 Stelle (5-Star Movement), which took 32% of the votes, led by Luigi Di Maio, began to probe the various possible alliances to give them the necessary numbers in parliament. They settled on the Lega di Salvini (formerly Lega Nord) which took 17% of the vote. On cue, the Lega promptly left the center-right coalition it was a part of in order to forge ahead with a new coalition which promised them a coveted role in government.

After weeks of negotiations, breaks, dialogue, meetings, and discordant statements, the two leaders have signed a contract, in which they set out the basic points of their government program. The document, which runs to 57 pages, pays special attention to the problem of the so-called "nomad camps" in the chapter dedicated to "*Security, legality and force orders*". Yes, this is still how our politicians speak about Roma, despite the National Strategy for Inclusion of Roma, Sinti and Caminanti approved by the Italian government in 2012. In a throwback to the days of Berlusconi, it seems that once again the Roma are to be considered as a security issue.

In short, the emergency security approach - that characterized the Nomad State of Emergency of 2008 to combat the so-called "Roma menace", and was declared illegal by the State Council in 2011 and by Italy's highest court in 2013 – is back.

Source

- <http://www.errc.org/news/a-return-of-the-nomad-emergency-in-italy>

### **Italian police tell roma: leave now or we will take away your kids**

Five Romani families have been forced to abandon their homes in Beinasco, Italy after police officers threatened to take away their children if they did not leave immediately. Many of the Roma are now living in caravans and campervans on the streets, in unseasonably cold weather with small children and people with medical conditions.

Source

- <http://www.errc.org/news/italian-police-tell-roma-leave-now-or-we-will-take-away-your-kids>

## Macedonia

### **Fourth Romani Prisoner Dies in Macedonian Prisons**

On January 18<sup>th</sup>, the European Roma Rights Centre announced it was suing the Directorate for Execution of Sanctions, within the Macedonian Ministry of Justice after the death on December 25<sup>th</sup> of a 39-year-old Romani man, Bekim Demir, died of a reported drug overdose in Idrizovo Prison, days before he was set to be released. He is the last of four Romani person to have died in Macedonian prisons in no fewer than 9 months. Circumstances surrounding the death of a Romani man are suspicious and uncertain. His family reported how his health was deteriorating and how he testified being routinely beaten or called ethnic slurs by guards.

It has become apparent that Macedonian authorities are either incapable of, or unwilling to fully investigate these deaths of Romani prisoners and, if necessary, prosecute those responsible. “Macedonia has been put on notice. The continuing deaths of young Roma in their prisons has not gone unnoticed, and we won’t let this go” said ERRC President, Đorđe Jovanović. “They know what they’re doing is wrong [and] if they refuse to deliver justice, then we will take this to the European Court of Human Rights.”

Source:

- <http://www.errc.org/article/fourth-romani-prisoner-dies-in-macedonian-prisons>

### **Exposing Sexual Abuse of Romani Girls in Macedonian State Care**

On February 15<sup>th</sup>, a 13-year-old Romani girl had to undergo an abortion after becoming pregnant from sexual abuse she faced while in a Macedonian state care institution in Skopje. The procedure, which her parents were denied from attending, left her traumatized. The responsible institutions have not undertaken any measures to help her and her family get out of poverty, nor have they acknowledged their failure to protect a minor from sexual abuse while in a state run institution.

Several cases of such sexual abuses on minor Romani girls in this institution have been reported since last year. The evidence of systemic sexual abuse of Romani children in this institution means that all of these children are in danger for as long as authorities continue to ignore what is happening. The Macedonian government is further victimising Romani families in poverty by failing to invest in their well-being and turning a blind eye to abuse.

Source

- <http://www.errc.org/article/exposing-sexual-abuse-of-romani-girls-in-macedonian-state-care/4629>

### **Sex Abuse Claims Rock Macedonian Youth Centre**

The head of a centre for troubled youngsters in Skopje, Macedonia has resigned on Monday for moral reasons relating to a possible sexual abuse of a 13-year-old Roma girl in the care of his centre. The girl went missing since March 2017 and was taken by force to an older man's house who is from the care facility where she was forced into sexual acts and physical labour for 30 days before escaping. They found that she was pregnant and had an abortion on February 14 which traumatized her after being transferred to another youth centre in Skopje.

Source:

- <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/child-sex-abuse-scandal-rocks-macedonia-02-19-2018>

## Slovakia

### **Centre for Roma Rights sues Slovak interior minister over discrimination**

After Slovak Roma proxy and Justice Minister expressed worries and dissatisfaction with the draft bill on suppressing criminality in Roma settlements by Interior Minister Robert Kaliňák, the European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC) is taking the ministry to court over discrimination.

The European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC) is taking the Slovak Interior Ministry to court over discriminatory policing relating to Roma, the centre reported on its website. The ERRC has been collecting evidence of discriminatory practices against Roma in recent years by police, including ethnic profiling and Roma-targeted police raids.

Source

- <https://spectator.sme.sk/c/20739861/centre-for-roma-rights-sues-slovak-interior-minister-over-discrimination.html>

### **Proxy for Roma criticises minister Kaliňák for ethnical and group discrimination**

The government proxy slammed Interior Minister Robert Kaliňák for the draft law on repressing criminality in Roma settlements, for populist discrimination and preferring repression to prevention.

The Government Proxy for Roma Communities, Ábel Ravasz (junior coalition party Most-Híd), objected to the intention of Interior Minister Robert Kaliňák (ruling Smer party) to push through the law on repressing criminality in Roma settlements.

Until now, Ravasz' office has not been part of the preparations of this bill, the proxy said, as quoted by the Sme daily. "I reject laws that divide criminals based on their ethnic minority, although this is a popular and appealing communication shortcut," he commented. The proxy also criticised the draft for preferring repression to prevention and he warned that it may even limit human rights.

Source

- <https://spectator.sme.sk/c/20739044/proxy-for-roma-criticises-minister-kalinak-for-ethnical-and-group-discrimination.html?ref=av-center>

## England

### **'It's like we don't exist': London's Gypsies stand up to be counted in the midst of housing crisis**

The UK is in the midst of a “housing crisis” among its nomadic communities, charities have warned, due to a shortage of authorised sites for Gypsies and Travellers to set up on. The crisis has led to a reported a 17% rise since July 2017 in Gypsies and Travellers setting up unauthorised encampments. Local authorities, police and MPs across the country have called for increased eviction powers to move people on when they settle their caravans while traveller groups say local authorities have failed to provide enough sites with power supplies and running water for travelling communities to live on.

Charities notably attribute the rise in unauthorised encampments to 2015 government planning policy for councils, which changed the definition of “Gypsy and Traveller” for planning purposes to mean someone who hasn’t settled somewhere permanently. The move has been criticised for disenfranchising Gypsies and Travellers who have been living in the same place for a long period of time because of old age, ill health or having children in school.

The problem also stems from the fact the no one precisely know how many Roma are living in the UK, thus they are never taken into account into territorial planning. This is in this context that the charity *Mapping for Change* has launched a census of the Roma community in the London area. They hope the new maps will force London’s councils and the Greater London Authority (GLA) to recognise the huge gaps in official understandings of the community and their needs. They show that while 768 pitches were needed across the capital in the last decade, only 10 new pitches have been provided, while 15% of existing sites have been shut down.

Their aim is also to counter the prevailing narrative that these groups are outsiders, or just a problem for local authorities. “It’s important because there’s this idea that Gypsies and Travellers aren’t really a part of the city,” says Diaconescu. “But really they have been for generations.”

Source:

- <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jan/18/gypsies-travellers-uk-housing-crisis-charities-warn>
- <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2018/jan/18/london-gypsies-counted-travellers-map-prejudice>

## **They took my life. I'm grieving for a child who is still alive'**

Children of Romani and Traveller families that are being taken away is increasing dramatically. Government figures shows that the number of children taken away since 2009 accounts for 933% of Gypsy or Roma children and 400% of Travellers of Irish heritage has increased by 400% since 2009. The five-year-old son of Romani Jessica Simpson has been taken away and she has no idea where he is and she states that they have broken her heart and took her life.

### **Source:**

- <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2018/jan/24/care-system-discriminating-gypsy-roma-traveller-children>

## Ireland

### **Roma children in Ireland 'starving' due to 'relentless' poverty**

Roma children in Ireland are going to school "starving" due to high levels of poverty, a leading member of the community said on Thursday.

Gabi Muntean, Roma community worker with the Traveller and Roma support organisation, Pavee Point, gave an emotional address at the publication of a landmark study on the community on which she was lead researcher.

*Roma In Ireland: a needs assessment*, commissioned by the Department of Justice, found more than 50 per cent of Roma live in consistent poverty with many children malnourished.

Many Roma have no income apart from what they received through begging, the report found. Almost half of Roma households (45 per cent) lived in severely overcrowded housing, often without gas, electricity, running water or sufficient food.

Source

- <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/roma-children-in-ireland-starving-due-to-relentless-poverty-1.3360375>

## France

### **According to a national report, Roms are the least tolerated in France**

The annual report of the Commission nationale consultative des droits de l'Homme reported that despite disquieting reports of hate crimes, there seemed to be a stabilizing of the 'tolerance index' at 64 out of 100 in 2017. But not for Roma, who are among the least tolerated, and whose situation deteriorated: their tolerance index is at its lowest, at 34 points out of 100.

Source

- <https://www.20minutes.fr/societe/2242031-20180322-roms-personnes-moins-tolerees-france-selon-rapport>