Human rights abuses and discrimination against Roma

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The European Roma Information Office (ERIO) is a European 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”

On 6 February, 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 8 February, 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 say 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:

Czech Republic

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

On 12 January, 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 Roma 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:

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

On 14 February, 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 Roma 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:

**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:


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 hab 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:


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

On 15 March, a brutal assailant attacked Lucie Badyová in front of her seven-year-old son and three-year-old daughter 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 of me on 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:


**Romani girl attempts suicide after bullying at her primary school in Czech town**

A pupil in the eighth grade of the Slovanka Primary School in the town of Česká Lípa has attempted suicide because her fellow pupils bullied her. It is likely that they picked on her because of her Romani origin. "It began with insults because of what I look like and what I am. They said I am a shitty gypsy," the girl, who has Romani forebears on her father's side, told TV NOVA.

The principal believes it would aid primary schools if they could introduce conditional expulsion, which is possible at secondary schools. The school management has done its best to convince the pupils' parents to withdraw them from the school, but the parents disagreed with that option.

Source:


**Czech President alleges Romani people "don't want to work" and that "slapping them" is the best way to deal with them**

Czech President Miloš Zeman recently visited the Olomouc Region and spoke at a public meeting in Kojetín during which he insulted Roma, saying in the context of unemployment that it was absolutely clear "who" the 5 % of people without work in Kojetín are. He then went on to praise the example of the pre-1989 totalitarian era, when Roma people "had to work" and would be imprisoned if they did not.

This is not the first time the current President has verbally abused Roma - in November 2017, speaking on the television program "This Week with the President", which is regularly broadcasted by the Barrandov cable television station, Zeman alleged that 90 % of the "inadaptable citizens" of the Czech Republic are from the Romani minority and just 10 % are "white drifters". Speaking on the same program in June 2017, he cast doubt on whether the
state should buy out the industrial pig farm in Lety u Písku that had been built at the site of a former concentration camp for Romani people during the Second World War.

Source:


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### 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.”
‘They took my life. I’m grieving for a child who is still alive’

Children of Roma 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 Roma 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:


Legal case against injunctions begins

More than 20 local authorities in England have obtained injunction orders giving them the powers to fine, imprison or seize the property of Gypsies and Travellers if they continue to camp on open land. London Gypsies and Travellers, an organization that supports Gypsies and Travellers living in London as they seek to gain greater control over their lives, is opposing these actions in London, and on 26 November went to the High Court to try and stop the London Borough of Bromley preventing people from camping on 171 parcels of land in the borough. “We will be asking the court to consider the lawfulness and proportionality of the injunction sought by Bromley,” said Debby Kennett, LGT’s CEO. “We are very pleased to have legal representation from the Community Law Partnership and Garden Court Chambers.”

Source:


Gypsy pupils experience bullying and racism, MPs told

Bullying, racism and feeling left out of the curriculum are major factors in low school attendance rates among Gypsy, Roma and Travellers (GRT) children community, MPs have heard. They have the worst educational outcomes of any ethnic group, with just 21 in England sitting A-levels in 2016. Sean Harford, national director for education for Ofsted,
said: "Exclusions are very high - exclusions, absence, a lack of previous education, certainly in the case of Roma children coming from Eastern Europe, and areas of bullying and racism."

Professor Kalwant Bhopal, from the Centre for Research in Race and Education, at Birmingham University, said traveller education services had been "drastically reduced", impacting on attendance. "Quite often when Traveller children complain about racism to their teachers, it's not seen as racism because they're white groups - and so I think we need clearer guidelines on how this group is treated and the discourse and the narrative around how Gypsies and Travellers are treated."

Source:  

**Enquiry launched to investigate racial harassment in higher education**

The Equality and Human Rights commission have launched an inquiry to understand the types of racial harassment experienced at publicly funded higher education institutions (HEIs), such as universities or higher education colleges.

In 2017, research done by LKMco, in partnership with Kings College London’s Widening Participation department revealed barriers ‘at every level’ that make Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils one of the most under-represented groups in UK universities. They want to hear from staff and students who have experienced, witnessed or helped in an incident of racial harassment from September 2015 onwards.

Source:  

**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.
Germany

Romani father wins case against German court for incorrectly assigning kid to school for mentally disabled

A court in Cologne, Germany has decided that a 21-year-old plaintiff Roma man originally from Serbia, deserves compensation for the fact that he was incorrectly recommended to attend a "special school" for mentally disabled children for 11 years. The kid was first recommended for enrolment into "special school" in Bavaria at the age of seven on the basis of IQ tests that were administered in the German language.

The loss of income incurred as a consequence of completing his compulsory school attendance later in life was calculated by him at almost EUR 40 000. He has additionally requested compensation in the amount of 20.000€ for the psychological damage that he has suffered as a result of this experience, especially post-traumatic stress.

Judges based their ruling on the assumption that if the kid had been allowed to attend a mainstream school he would have completed all of the basic education requirements by the age of 16. By assigning him to "special school" he was denied that opportunity, which has correspondingly had consequences detrimental to his professional prospects.

Source:


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:

## Italy

### Court in Rome convicts four perpetrators of 2011 pogrom on Romani camp in Turin

On the 13 July, a court in Rome found four people guilty of ethnic and racial hatred when they set fire to a Roma camp in the Vallette suburb of Turin in 2011. The appeals court in Turin had upheld the first-instance conviction but reduced the sentences to between two and four years in prison. The arson was committed after an adolescent girl accused two Roma men of rape, allegations that reportedly turned out to be false.

Several hundred enraged people took to the streets to protest the alleged crime. A group of about 50 armed with Molotov cocktails, rocks and sticks separated from the demonstration, headed to the Roma encampment, and set fire to their caravans, shelters and tents.

Source:

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

Five Roma 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.
Macedonia

Fourth Romani Prisoner Dies in Macedonian Prisons

On 18 January, 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 25 December of a 39-year-old Roma 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 Roma to have died in Macedonian prisons in no fewer than 9 months. Circumstances surrounding the death of a Roma 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 Roma 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:

Exposing Sexual Abuse of Romani Girls in Macedonian State Care

On 15 February, a 13-year-old Roma 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 Roma girls in this institution have been reported since last year. The evidence of systemic sexual abuse of Roma 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 Roma families in poverty by failing to invest in their well-being and turning a blind eye to abuse.

Source:


**Sex Abuse Claims Rock Macedonian Youth Centre**

The head of a centre for troubled youngsters in Skopje, Macedonia has resigned 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 14 February which traumatized her after being transferred to another youth centre in Skopje.

Source:


**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:

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:


Four Romani girls and their mother die in house fire, police investigates racist comments about the news on their own Facebook page

On 30 November in the village of Richnava, five people, four of them children, died in the early morning hours of Friday when their home in eastern Slovakia caught fire. The Czech News Agency was informed of the incident by the fire-fighter service.

The victims of the blaze are Roma, and comments began to quickly appear beneath the online media articles about the tragedy that were anti-Romani and racist. Such behaviour even appeared in discussions on the official Facebook profile of the Slovak Police. The Slovak Police have intervened forcefully against the racist comments and those writing them. "All of the racist commentaries have been delivered to a specific department and the authors of them can anticipate a summons soon. Their access to the page has been blocked so they no longer have any way to 'erase' their tracks," the Slovak Police stated.

Source:

Slovak hospitals hold new Roma mothers against their will

Slovakia’s Ministry of Health strongly recommends four-day stays for mothers and babies, regardless of their health. But many hospitals — seeking insurance reimbursements — have turned that guidance into a mandate. An investigation by The Associated Press has found that women and their newborns in Slovakia are routinely, unjustifiably and illegally detained in hospitals across the European Union country. Women from the country’s Roma minority, vulnerable to racist abuse and physical violence, suffer particularly. They are also often poor, and mothers who leave hospitals before doctors grant permission forfeit their right to a significant government childbirth allowance of several hundred euros. “Detention in African hospitals is about money, but in Slovakia, it’s about power,” said Zuzana Kriskova, a maternal rights activist. “Women are having their fundamental human rights violated when they have no freedom of movement and cannot decide how their child is to be treated.”

Source:
➢ https://www.apnews.com/a3e7b6cbd5a54edf83eac720ec49597

Sweden

Homeless Roma and other EU migrants face widespread discrimination and dangerous conditions

Thousands of homeless and destitute EU migrants, mostly of Roma origin, are living in desperate and dangerous situations across Sweden while the country’s authorities deliberately deny them access to the most basic services, a new report from Amnesty International has found.

The report is based on 58 interviews with EU migrants all of them from Romania and the majority of whom are Roma, together with numerous civil society organisations and public officials across the country. Its key finding is that inadequate legal and policy frameworks mean that many in this group fall through the cracks, with serious consequences for their health and lives. The lack of access to shelter exacerbates other problems including the fact that lacking a permanent address, their ability to find employment is severely limited, compelling many to resort to begging.

Roma EU migrants in Stockholm are also subject to intimidating and disproportionately harsh treatment by the police. A number of women interviewed in the city described how they had been repeatedly moved on from where they were begging or even forcibly driven to random locations outside of town where they were abandoned. The Stockholm police
confirmed this practice, claiming that the women disturbed the public order, in spite of the fact that there was no evidence of such behaviour and that begging is not banned or subject to licensing.

Source:

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### Ukraine

#### Ukrainian police investigating Neo-Nazi attack against Romani camp

On 24 June, a group of masked assailants, armed with bars and knives, attacked the Roma camp late Saturday and early Sunday, killing a 24-year-old man and harming four other people, including a 10-year-old boy. According to the most recent information, after the attack on the Roma settlement in the forest on the outskirts of Lviv, police arrested a total of eight people, a 20-year-old suspected of organizing the assault and seven presumed assailants between the ages of 16 and 17 at the scene of the crime.

Juliya Shevcenkova, the Lviv Prosecutor, told the AFP that "two juveniles are in custody," adding that six others await the court’s decision. On Monday Canada and the USA condemned the murderous attack.

Source:

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#### Roma in Ukraine: 20 years of police terror

In October 2001, five members of the Fedorchenko family were burned to death and two others seriously injured when their home was set alight in Kremenchug. A police major confirmed the likelihood of involvement of an officer from the Department of the Fight Against the Illegal Use of Drugs in the arson. Years later, ERRC noted that despite strong evidence against the officer “no investigation against him had been launched and continues to perform his duties in a different police department of the same city.”

In 2006, in a UN submission, the ERRC detailed how this sense of police impunity and the absence of viable legal remedies leave Roma open to extortion by law enforcement officials.
A quick review of the last 20 years reveals that Roma communities have endured a virtual reign of terror that includes rapes, beatings and murders, extortion and intimidation at the hands of police officers, who have often colluded with mobs of ethnic Ukrainians and far-right extremists in racist acts of terror and violence.

Source: