Media Release
Announcement of Publication

No One Left Behind:
Mission Report on the Right to Housing
and Related Human Rights of Roma in France

29 June 2018

The UN Human Rights Regional Office for Europe today published “No One Left Behind: Mission Report on the Right to Adequate Housing and Related Rights of Roma in France”.

France counts some 570 slums, inhabited by circa 16,000 persons. Roma from Romania and Bulgaria reportedly make up the majority of persons living in slums.

In January 2018, France reinvigorated its policy to eradicate informal slums or squats (“bidonvilles”). The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) undertook a mission to France from 25 to 29 March 2018 to gain an in-depth understanding of the progress, challenges and opportunities in the enjoyment of the right to adequate housing and related rights by Roma, particularly in light of the new policy and recommendations issued to France by international human rights bodies and mechanisms. The team visited Paris and Île-de-France, Marseille and Toulouse where it interviewed a broad range of stakeholders.

On the occasion of the launch of the “No One Left Behind” report, Regional Representative for Europe Birgit Van Hout said, “While progress has been made, France is yet to fully implement the recommendations of the UN on the right to adequate housing, which is a fundamental human right. The substandard housing conditions of slum dwellers our team witnessed, combined with repeated forced evictions and segregated housing arrangements, contribute to a cycle of marginalization and precariousness that heightens the stigma attached to being Roma.”

Extensive evictions of Roma have been carried out in France in recent years, with over 10,000 persons reportedly evicted every year since 2014. A number of persons have been evicted multiple times. A surge of evictions of Roma took place immediately before the 2017-2018 winter moratorium and continued throughout the winter moratorium.
“The right to adequate housing is a lever for the realization of many other human rights and therefore warrants special attention,” said Van Hout, “forced evictions without sustainable alternatives disrupt the schooling of children and jeopardise the right to education.” It is estimated that forced evictions in practice cost, on average, six months in the schooling of every child.

The Instruction of January 2018 holds the potential for human rights-friendly policies – since it recognizes that past practices of forced evictions did not work, and that a stronger engagement is needed to ensure the sustainable exit of persons from informal slums toward accessing their rights. The UN Human Rights Office report therefore calls for the strengthening of political will and action at all levels across the country and highlights that more resources are needed.

Human Rights Officer Claude Cahn said, “The cycle of slum housing coupled with periodic forced eviction should be replaced by inclusion in mainstream, integrated housing with appropriate support. The opportunity created by the new Instruction should be seized to conceive and implement policies that protect and promote the human rights of the most excluded, so that no one is left behind.”

For further information on the “No One Left Behind” report, please contact Tomas Goldstein: tomasgoldstein.consultant@ohchr.org

Note to Editors:
The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights is mandated by the UN General Assembly to promote and protect the effective enjoyment by all people of their human rights. On the basis of the international human rights treaties and recommendations issued by the international human rights mechanisms, the Office of the High Commissioner (OHCHR) offers practical guidance to States for the design and implementation of human rights-based laws, policies and programmes. In doing so, OHCHR pays particular attention to the most excluded and marginalized, and to persons in situations of particular vulnerability. Based in Brussels, the Regional Office for Europe is one of OHCHR’s 60+ field presences around the world working to advance the protection and promotion of human rights for all: http://www.europe.ohchr.org/EN/Pages/WelcomePage.aspx

According to the National Consultative Committee for Human Rights (CNCDH) in France, negative public attitudes against Roma and Travellers are the highest, compared to other groups in France. When reviewing the human rights situation in the country, the UN Treaty Bodies have repeatedly expressed concern regarding discrimination, violence and hate speech, including “the rise of racist and discriminatory discourse and behaviour” against Roma and Travellers; as well as concerns related to the lack of effective exercise of the right to adequate housing, and patterns and practices of forced evictions. Other concerns expressed by UN Treaty Bodies as relates to Roma and Travellers in France comprise other economic, social and cultural rights including education, health, work and work-related rights and social security; the rights of the child; discrimination against Romani women and girls; as well as – where Travellers are concerned – the right to vote.

The mission team sought to examine progress in the implementation of recommendations of UN human rights mechanisms addressed to France in this area. It met with national and local government authorities, staff of the ombudsperson and the national human rights institution, civil society, service providers and rights-holders. With the support of various stakeholders, the team visited several informal slums, squats and temporary lodging arrangements. The mission members also had the opportunity to take part in a seminar convened by DIHAL, the inter-ministerial body with coordinating responsibilities for slum eradication policy, which involved a broad range of stakeholders from different parts of the country. In addition, OHCHR received written material before, during and after the mission, from a variety of sources.

The No One Left Behind report highlights specific concerns, as well as recommendations, regarding housing, education, employment and health, and collective or arbitrary expulsion from French territory.
The title of the report “No One Left Behind” is derived from a core principle of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in which States committed to redouble efforts for the inclusion of persons in extreme states of exclusion, such as the communities described in this report. Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11 commits to eliminating disparities in the field of housing.

This year is the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the UN on 10 December 1948. Article 1 of the Universal Declaration states that “all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.” You too can Stand Up for Human Rights: www.standup4humanrights.org.