

WANDERING: THE MAIN PROPOSALS FROM PUBLIC AUTHORITIES FOR ROMA PEOPLE AFTER AN EVICTION

In France, systemic racism and anti-Roma sentiment culminate in the eviction of Roma or those thought to be Roma from informal settlements. However, there are frequently no supports and housing solutions offered to Roma after they have been removed from these sites. When they are offered, they are often inadequate and act as little more than a stopgap between the eviction and the Roma person's re-entry into homelessness. While it is a widely held view that Roma in a precarious situation do not attempt to integrate into French society, Lila Cherief explains how they are being prevented from doing so.



By **Lila Cherief**, Lawyer and Research Analyst, Collectif National Droits de l'Homme Romeurope

ANTI-ROMA SENTIMENT IN FRANCE

Everywhere in Europe, Roma people remain victims of structural racism, which has multiple consequences for their lives, and France is no exception. The European Commission regularly tries, through ten-year plans, to improve the living conditions of Roma people, by asking Member States to present national strategies and report on their implementations. The latest plan proposes minimum goals to be reached for 2030 in areas such as fighting discrimination, combating poverty, facilitating children's education, closing the gender gap in employment and promoting access to housing and drinking water.

Back in 2013, the former French Prime Minister Manuel Valls, made racist and intolerant remarks against the Roma, stating they were inherently "different" from the French population and "will have to return to their country." This gave the feeling of impunity to the many local public authorities and the general public who shared his views.

This racism is still vividly present today in the French society; *le Défenseur des droits*¹ in his report "Discrimination and origins: the urgency to act"² denounced the systemic nature of discrimination in France, in particular against Roma people: "People of foreign origins or perceived as such are disadvantaged in access to employment or housing and more exposed to unemployment, to precariousness, poor housing, police checks, poor health and educational inequalities."

In France, the repeated evictions experienced for many years by Roma people living in informal settlements are among the most visible expressions of racism against Roma people in very precarious situations.

The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) regularly reiterates that Roma people constitute a "disadvantaged and vulnerable minority." As such, the Court ruled in a 2020 decision condemning France that "this socially disadvantaged group" and their particular needs must be taken into account in "the proportionality assessment that the

In France, the repeated evictions experienced for many years by Roma people living in informal settlements are among the most visible expressions of racism against Roma people in very precarious situations."

national authorities were under a duty to undertake, not only when considering approaches to dealing with the unlawful settlement but also, if eviction was necessary, when deciding on its timing and manner and, if possible, arrangements for alternative accommodation.”³

EVICTIONS OF ROMA FROM INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS IN FRANCE

Between 1st November 2019 and 31st October 2020, a coalition of 7 organisations including Romeurope monitored all evictions from informal settlements, squats, camps etc., and identified 1,079 evictions in metropolitan France.⁴

The towns of Grande-Synthe and Calais alone represent 88% of the evictions reported for the entire metropolitan territory. Most of them are not Roma but live in very similar and inadequate housing (tents, shacks, etc.).

Among those 1,079 evictions, 122 were reported outside Calais and Grande-Synthe and our organisations noted a greater presence of certain nationalities, in particular: Romanian, Bulgarian, Albanian, Moldavian, Ukrainian. In these countries, Roma communities represent an important part of the population and suffer from extreme racism and discrimination. Although they are far from constituting the totality of the inhabitants of squats and slums, it is important to note that Roma are highly represented. Exclusion, racism and discrimination therefore constitute the harsh reality in



Of **122** reported evictions,
46% have targeted Roma occupied living spaces

France for Roma communities, who are disproportionately impacted by poor housing and evictions. Of these 122 reported evictions, at least 57 have targeted living spaces occupied by Roma people or people perceived as such, which represents 46% of evictions.

The proposal of a stable solution to people after they are evicted is very rare. The proposals made after these 57 evictions which targeted informal settlements occupied by Roma people or those perceived as such were the following:

- For 29 evictions, all or some of the evicted persons were not offered any solution, (i.e. 50.87% of the evictions).
- For 24 evictions,⁵ all or part of the evicted people were put in temporary shelters (school, gymnasium, social hotel, CHU, CAO, CAES, CPO, HUDA, AT-SA, PRAHDA;⁶ 42.10% of the evictions).
- For 1 eviction, some of the evicted people were oriented towards a longer-term housing solution with a dedicated social worker to help improve their situation (1.75%).
- For 13 evictions, no information is available.⁷

SUPPORTS AVAILABLE TO EU CITIZENS VS NON-EU CITIZENS

In France, Roma people (or people perceived as such) inhabiting these informal settlements who are European citizens (mainly Romanian or Bulgarian citizens), have a better access to temporary shelters compared to non-European citizens. They benefit from a governmental policy for the “slum clearance” which is driven by the January 25th 2018 bylaw “aiming at giving a new impetus to the slum clearance” signed by eight ministers.⁸ Its scope essentially targets the metropolitan territory and the Government’s actions are directed towards the social inclusion of European citizens.

However, many Roma and non-Roma people living in informal settlements are not European citizens, and therefore cannot benefit from this public policy which aims at more social inclusion. Moreover, even if some European citizens living in informal settlements have access to housing, school, employment or health, thanks to those

programs financed by the government, a lot of them are still being evicted on a regular basis. “Wandering” - moving frequently - is the only solution left.

ROMA PEOPLE IN FRANCE: VULNERABLE DESPITE THE CRITERIA

In the context of a housing and temporary accommodation crisis in France, only people considered to be the most vulnerable (which is based on extremely variable criteria), are likely to be oriented towards an accommodation solution after an eviction. Indeed, in some regions, the vulnerability criteria necessary to benefit from shelter are particularly restrictive, for instance:

- Parents of children under the age of 3 (children under the age of 1 in certain areas)
- Pregnant persons
- People affected by a visible vulnerability

These criteria go against the law guaranteeing unconditional accommodation in France.

When a proposal is made following an eviction, it is temporary, usually only for a few days. This only briefly postpones a return to the streets. These unsustainable solutions do not allow the evicted Roma people to escape their precarious situations for a long period, nor to plan for the future or anchor themselves in one place.



When support is offered following an eviction, it is temporary, usually only for a few days. This only briefly postpones a return to the streets.”

Repeated evictions and the absence of permanent rehousing solutions thus lead to lack of healthcare and schooling, while also violating the right to housing and compromising the possibilities of social inclusion of Roma people.

These systematic eviction policies reinforce the precariousness of Roma people and people living in informal settlements in general, and result in situations of instability and constant wandering. They also feed the racism that is very present in French society. The latest report from *la Commission Nationale Consultative des Droits de l'Homme*⁹ on the fight against racism, anti-Semitism and xenophobia reminded us that Roma people are the most poorly perceived minority by the French people.¹⁰ To illustrate, 53% of the people questioned within the framework of this report consider that “the Roma do not want to integrate themselves in France.” However, the question remains: “does France offer them a fair chance to do so?”

ENDNOTES

- 1 The « Défenseur des droits » (Defendor of Rights) is an independent state organization. This organization has two missions: defend people whose fundamental rights are not respected and provide equal access for every person to those fundamental rights.
- 2 Le Défenseur des droits, *Discriminations et origines : l'urgence d'agir*, 2020 [[available here](#)]
- 3 ECHR, May 14 2020, *Hirtu and others v. France*, req. n° 24720/13
- 4 L'Observatoire des expulsions de lieux de vie informels, *Note annuelle 2020*, Novembre 2020 [[available here](#)]
- 5 For 104 evictions (including the Calais territory and the town of Grande-Synthe), all or part of the evicted people were put in temporary shelters (school, gymnasium, social hotel, CHU, CAO, CAES, CPO, HUDA, AT-SA, PRAHDA...) (9,63%)
- 6 These acronyms refer to different temporary rehousing solutions provided by the French State: the solutions offered may vary depending on a person's administrative statute.
- 7 For one eviction, a contributor from the Observatory of evictions from informal living spaces can report that different solutions were offered by the state, for instance a mid-term/long-term rehousing solution for some people, while some will receive no solution. Indeed, inside one eviction the solutions offered by the State will vary depending on the profile of the evicted persons and the criteria implemented by prefectures to benefit from a temporary shelter (serious vulnerability, professional integration, children's schooling, administrative statute).
- 8 This instruction is [available here](#). The government's actions towards “slums/informal settlements” are presented here (content in French and newsletter in English available) : <https://www.gouvernement.fr/resorption-des-bidonvilles>
- 9 The « Commission Nationale Consultative des Droits de l'Homme » (National Constitutive Commission for Human Rights) is the national institution in charge of promoting and protecting Human rights in France.
- 10 Commission Nationale Consultative des Droits de l'Homme, *rapport 2019 sur la lutte contre le racisme, l'antisémitisme et la xénophobie*, 2020