

DEMAND DIGNITY

DEMAND DIGNITY

DEMAND DIGNITY



DEMAND DIGNITY



DEMAND DIGNITY

DEMAND DIGNITY

DE

PUSHED TO THE MARGINS

Five stories of Roma
forced evictions in
Romania

AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL



Amnesty International is a global movement of more than 3 million supporters, members and activists in more than 150 countries and territories who campaign to end grave abuses of human rights.

Our vision is for every person to enjoy all the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights standards.

We are independent of any government, political ideology, economic interest or religion and are funded mainly by our membership and public donations.

AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL



This work forms part of Amnesty International's Demand Dignity campaign, which focuses on the human rights violations that drive and deepen poverty. As part of the campaign, Amnesty International is calling on all governments to prohibit forced evictions, uphold the right to adequate housing and ensure that victims of human rights violations, including violations of economic, social and cultural rights, have effective national and international remedies.

A forced eviction is an eviction which is undertaken without legal protections such as genuine consultation with affected communities to identify all feasible alternatives to evictions, provision of adequate notice and legal remedies, compensation and adequate alternative housing for those who cannot provide for themselves.

Cover photo: A woman prepares a meal outside her home in Craica, a largely Roma informal settlement in Baia Mare, Romania, October 2012. Between May and June 2012 the local authorities forcibly evicted around 500 Roma from the site and demolished their homes.

© Mugur Vărzariu

First published in 2013 by
Amnesty International Ltd
International Secretariat
Peter Benenson House
1 Easton Street
London WC1X 0DW
United Kingdom

© Amnesty International 2013

Index: EUR 39/003/2013 English
Original language: English
Printed by Amnesty International,
International Secretariat, United Kingdom

All rights reserved. This publication is copyright, but may be reproduced by any method without fee for advocacy, campaigning and teaching purposes, but not for resale. The copyright holders request that all such use be registered with them for impact assessment purposes. For copying in any other circumstances, or for reuse in other publications, or for translation or adaptation, prior written permission must be obtained from the publishers, and a fee may be payable. To request permission, or for any other inquiries, please contact copyright@amnesty.org

amnesty.org/Roma

PUSHED TO THE MARGINS

Five stories of Roma
forced evictions in
Romania

AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL



CASE STUDY LOCATIONS



CONTENTS

FOREWORD	4
CLUJ-NAPOCA FROM COASTEI STREET TO PATA RÂT	6
CLAUDIA'S STORY	8
BÉLA'S STORY	20
BAIA MARE FROM CRAICA TO CUPROM	28
RODICA'S STORY	30
W.'S STORY	38
PIATRA NEAMŢ FROM MUNCII STREET TO VĂLENI 2	46
DUSIA'S STORY	48
AFTERWORD	56
WE HAVE RIGHTS	58
ENDNOTES	60



FOREWORD

Roma from Romania continue to feature regularly in European press headlines. More often than not, they are portrayed as people with “a distinct lifestyle” who “do not want to integrate” with wider society. But readers learn little, if anything, about the daily realities and personal stories of Roma, who have been subjected to centuries of persecution and discrimination across the continent, and whose marginalization at the fringes of modern life has been anything but their choice.

At around 2 million people, Roma in Romania represent about one tenth of the country’s total population. A survey in 2012 by the European Union (EU) Fundamental Rights Agency and UN Development Programme (UNDP) estimates that as many as 90% of Romani households experience severe material deprivation.¹

Despite Romania’s domestic and international obligations to guarantee and protect the right to adequate housing for all, there are no accessible state alternatives or support for marginalized groups such as Roma. As a result, many end up living in informal settlements and slums. Lack of security of

tenure is the norm in these settlements, making residents especially vulnerable to forced evictions and homelessness.

This report brings together the stories of four women and one man – Claudia, Rodica, W., Dusia and Béla – Romani people with a shared experience of forced evictions in Romania. Their personal journeys from eviction and resistance to relocation expose the profound impact on peoples’ lives of loss of home and livelihood, disconnection from social circles, stigma, difficulties in accessing education or health care and the trauma of eviction itself.

The report focuses on three locations where the authorities have forcibly evicted entire Romani neighbourhoods: Coastei Street in Cluj-Napoca, Craica in Baia Mare and Muncii Street in Piatra Neamţ. Amnesty International has been working with these communities since 2011, some of whose residents have already been forcibly evicted two or three times in their lives.

Under international law, the Romanian government is required to protect people against forced evictions,

“It’s a trauma, what we experienced. Even when I am 80 years old I will not be able to tell my grandchildren... It was horrible. I don’t even want to remember.”

Silviu, husband of Claudia Greta, whose family was forcibly evicted in December 2010

harassment or other threats – regardless of whether they rent, own or irregularly occupy their home or the land they are living on. The report demonstrates, however, that current domestic law in Romania does not protect people who lack formal tenure status, such as those living in informal settlements, or social housing tenants whose lease has not been renewed. These failures in Romania’s housing legislation continue to expose many people, particularly those from marginalized communities, to forced evictions.

METHODOLOGY

The testimonies included here were collected during Amnesty International research visits to the communities between April 2011 and March 2013. They document first-hand experiences of forced evictions and their consequences, and provide a personal perspective on events at each location through the residents’ eyes.

Following introductory meetings with the communities, Amnesty International conducted additional visits both to monitor forced evictions and to provide and exchange

information on housing rights and protection against evictions. In the case of former Coastei Street residents, Amnesty International has been campaigning jointly with the community for their relocation and for recognition of and redress for the human rights violations committed by the local authority that carried out the forced eviction.

Local officials working with the communities have acknowledged Amnesty International’s engagement, in co-operation with the Cluj-based Working Group of Civil Society Organizations (gLOC) and the European Roma Rights Centre, as a source of empowerment for community members.²

Everyone interviewed for the report was fully consulted on the use of interviews and photographs for international campaigning and advocacy. Where requested, names have been withheld to protect identities.

For the recommendations linked to this document see *Pushed to the margins – Recommendations to the Romanian government* (Index: EUR 39/006/2013).

CLUJ-NAPOCA FROM COASTEI STREET TO PATA RÂT

Coastei Street was once a predominantly Romani neighbourhood of about 350 residents. Located in the centre of Cluj-Napoca, one of Romania's most populous and vibrant cities, the community was well placed to access work, public transport and services such as schools and health care. Many of the residents had lived in the area for over 20 years.

But at 7am on 17 December 2010, without adequate notice or consultation, the city authorities forcibly evicted the entire neighbourhood, giving residents a day to pack their belongings and move out. The vast majority of residents were relocated to Pata Rât, an industrial area at the outskirts of the city, known for its landfill and a chemical waste dump.

In the course of the past 40 years, Pata Rât has been transformed from an area inhabited by four families living by the landfill to a large urban slum with 1,500 mostly Romani residents. Increasingly, people have moved to the area after losing their homes and failing to find better alternatives. An estimated 42% of Pata Rât's residents have been relocated there by the local authorities.³

Forty of the families evicted from Coastei Street were provided with alternative accommodation in Pata Rât at the top of a hill in an area now called Colina Verde. Families were allocated one room of either 16 or 18m² in housing units comprising of four rooms, sharing a communal bathroom with only cold-running water. Tenants were required to pay subsidized rent and utility costs. The other evictees – about 36 families – were left homeless. Thirty of them chose to construct shelters in



© Mişgur Vărzaru



Pata Rât. Both groups continue to be subjected to inadequate housing conditions, including overcrowding and a lack of adequate washing and sanitation facilities. In the housing units, four families must share two toilets and one shower. Those not allocated accommodation were told to ‘construct something’ on plots of land at the top of the hill. These improvised houses initially had no sanitation facilities and some still lack proper insulation. Some eventually managed to construct bathrooms. However, without formal authorization to build on the land, these families remain at risk of further evictions.

Pata Rât is known in Cluj-Napoca as the Roma ghetto, the place at the landfill. In a number of reported cases, potential employers have rejected people for work after discovering they lived there.⁴ Fearing stigma and further discrimination, former Coastei Street residents are reluctant to have Pata Rât named as their domicile on their identity papers.⁵

Before the 2010 eviction, Cluj-Napoca’s Vice-Mayor told Amnesty delegates that the relocation was necessary because of land ownership issues and to facilitate a development project. But more than two years later, Coastei Street remains barren except for a playground built by the local authority in 2011.

In December 2010, approximately 350 mainly Romani people were forcibly evicted from their homes on Coastei Street in central Cluj-Napoca and relocated to inadequate housing, on the fringes of the city, close to a landfill and former chemical waste dump.





CLAUDIA'S STORY

“

I don't want money... I just want us to be moved from here. People in other countries should find out the truth, the real truth of how things [are now], [and] all unite and help us somehow.

”

Former Coastei Street resident Claudia Greta and her family were relocated to Pata Rât, on the outskirts of the city, after being forcibly evicted in December 2010.

Claudia Greta, a woman in her late twenties walks briskly up the dirt road in Colina Verde in the neighbourhood of Pata Rât. She has just returned from the city with her children and she's busy. She needs to prepare afternoon snacks for her three sons, help them with their homework and clean the room they live in.

Claudia had lived on Coastei Street since she was nine. Hers was the largest family in the community. After the eviction, she moved with her husband and sons to a room in one of the Pata Rât housing units. She speaks with calm authority about the eviction, life in Colina Verde and the deep scar that the experience left on her and her family.

LOSING EVERYTHING

How does someone move all their possessions acquired over 20 years with just a day's notice? "We had goldfish," says Claudia. "All of them died... I had some furniture and a big TV and all my things fell down from the truck [during the relocation]... including the fridge. [Almost] all I worked for... got lost on the way here."

The municipality's allocation criteria for those families who were offered alternative housing remains unclear. They were simply asked to sign contracts. The remaining residents not provided with shelter lacked the means to seek alternative accommodation elsewhere. Some of Claudia's relatives were among them. She invited them to stay in the room her family had been allocated. "Eleven of us lived in this room. My brother and my sister-in-law did not receive a house; neither did their daughter, my mother and my [step-]father. [So] we all gathered here." Claudia's brother and his family stayed with her for five months before managing to construct an improvised house of their own in Colina Verde.

Accommodating everyone in such a small space was a struggle. "We had... four beds in the [room]. That's all. We kept one part of the clothes in boxes and the other part outside. And we only had the stove."

More than 30 people share the bathroom in Claudia's housing unit including immediate neighbours and nearby residents whose improvised shelters lack sanitation.



Claudia finds it difficult to talk to people from Cluj about the conditions they live in now. “I feel ashamed,” she says. “They don’t know... where and how we live; that we stay in one room, we wash ourselves here, we eat here, we do the homework here, we do everything here... I need to ask my children to get out or turn away to the wall when I wash myself... What else [can I] do? Where else can I wash?”

Above: A bulldozer demolishes homes at Coastei Street in the early morning of 17 December 2010. Residents had been given 24 hours’ notice of the forced eviction.

Right: An evicted Coastei Street resident gathers her possessions in temperatures reportedly as low as -20°C.



POST-EVICTION TRAUMA

Being overcrowded, not having enough money, fearing for the future and trying to come to terms with the loss of their home, Claudia's family almost fell apart. Her husband, Silviu, admits he thought of leaving her and the children. Claudia cries, adding: "We were [very] overcrowded... I couldn't make everyone happy. I was arguing a lot with my brother... He even reproached us [for getting] a house [when] he didn't as if it was my fault... I assume I received it because I have three children and he has only one... It was very difficult."

Claudia explains that they had a car before the eviction but were forced to sell it because no one in the family had an income. "My brother used to work in construction, but at that time his boss had no work. We needed food; the bills had to be paid."

She's tried her best to ensure that her children's lives are not disrupted by the relocation, but sometimes her anxiety shows. "[B]efore I used to be happy, I used to make jokes. But since I am here, I feel old, tired. I don't have so much patience with my children as before... When I wake up in the morning and I see the garbage dump I feel like crying, but I don't cry... [so as not to] affect the children. I don't want them to ask me why I am crying, I don't want them to see me like this."



© Mugur Varzanu

Housing units in Colina Verde, Pata Rât, October 2012. Forcibly evicted Coastei Street families who were offered accommodation were allocated one room in four-room units, sharing one communal bathroom. Those left homeless had to construct informal shelters.



NO ESCAPE

Talking with other women in Colina Verde, it's clear that the fatigue Claudia describes is endemic. A day starts early here. They have to help their children to get ready and catch the school bus at 7.15am, then catch up on domestic work or do part-time jobs, rush back home to take care of the children after school, prepare the dinner and clean. There is no escape or time to rest.

Claudia's eldest son helps by taking his younger brother into school in the morning. This gives her a little time to do domestic chores and care for her youngest child when he's not in nursery. But then she must catch the bus to collect her first-grader, whose classes finish earlier than his older brother's.

"We come home, I give them [something] to eat, we do the homework, prepare the school bags for the next day. They play a bit outside. In the evening we wash ourselves, they change to go to bed and that's pretty much it. [In Coastei Street], it wasn't so different, but I had more time. Here time flies very quickly. I leave home at 10 in the morning to pick [up my son in first grade] and I return at 1pm... Without [even] doing anything I feel tired. The travel tires me."

Claudia's husband does shift work as a driver. He is currently the only breadwinner in the family. She says: "It is enough. We buy food; we pay the electricity. I don't complain. [But] you know, there is always space for better things."

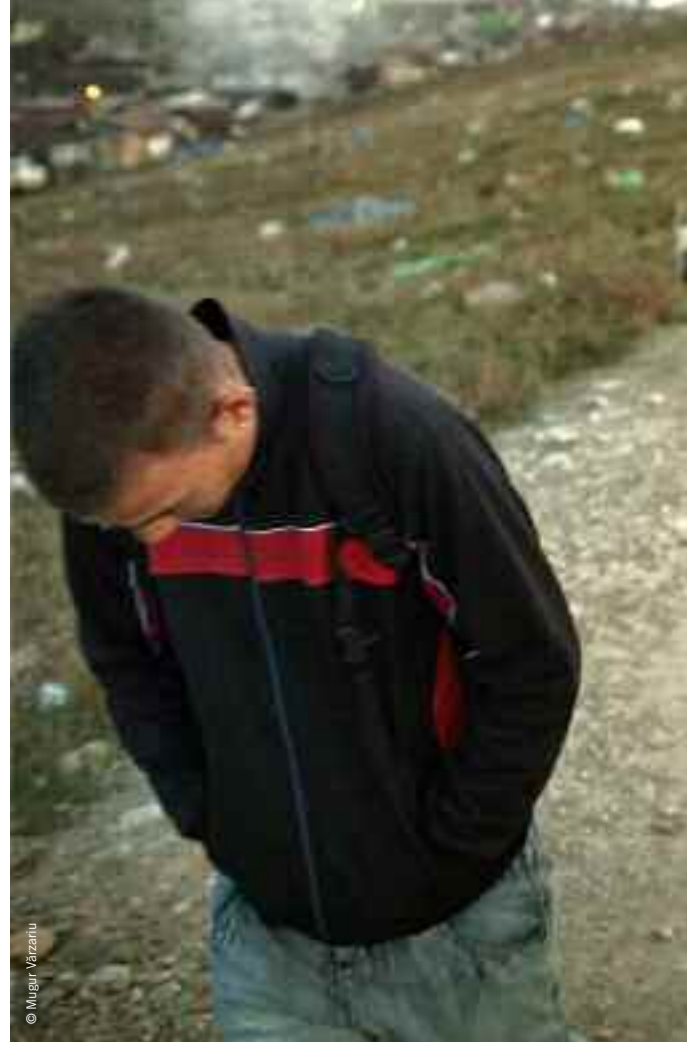
SHUT OUT OF THE CITY

Claudia says that she would rather live anywhere other than Pata Rât: “They threw us close to garbage as if we are garbage as well... [I]t’s not that we want to go back to the centre. But to move us here... away from the city? We want... to have good neighbours, even if we were not friends, but at least we would greet each other... [W]e are Gypsies and we are quite proud. It’s not that we accept everything.”

Pata Rât lies about 8km from the city centre and has poor transport connections. Besides the school bus, the nearest bus stop is a 20-25 minute walk away from Colina Verde.

“The children... didn’t realize the tragedy of what was happening,” says Claudia. “As time passed, they saw how difficult it was for them with transport, you are losing many hours on the way... during that time they could have studied.”

Claudia’s older son used to play football for a local team. She thinks he has talent. “He was the only left-footed player in the team. His coach loved and appreciated him very much. He did football for almost two years. But since we moved here... I don’t have time to take him... so I don’t let him go anymore... I’m scared as there are many streets to cross... many cars. But... if he had continued playing, maybe he would have been successful... and maybe this is how I ruined his future. And he is not the only child in this situation... Most of them had such activities, playing football, boxing, athletics.”



© Măgur Vărzănu

Colina Verde looks out over the landfill, a chemical waste dump and the surrounding Romani settlements of ‘Dallas’ and Cantonului Street. The city is barely visible in the distance. There is a sense that the people here have been expelled. Things that were easily accessible in Coastei Street are a luxury in Pata Rât, explains Claudia. “In the afternoons, the children would go to the library. They were doing their homework there on their own. Here there is no place where they can go to use computers. It was different. The market was close. [Here] one evening [my son] had high fever and I had no medicine and there is no pharmacy... [Before the eviction] we were in the centre and we had everything, [...] everything was close by. And, you know, we grew up there.”



After a moment, she adds: “About eight or nine months after [the relocation], I took my child to the park... He was so amazed, as if he had never seen a park in his life before.”

Above: Teenagers walking to catch the school bus into town. Public transport is limited in Pata Rât and residents find it hard to access education, employment and health services.
Right: Claudia shared her single room at Colina Verde for five months with members of her extended family who were not allocated housing after the forced eviction.



THE STIGMA OF PATA RÂT

Claudia's husband holds a leaflet with a photo of Colina Verde residents at a demonstration calling for justice for their community. His family are among the protesters. "I never thought of seeing my children being photographed in newspapers because they have no place to stay or because they are very poor and thrown [to] the outskirts of the city," he says.

The people evicted from Coastei Street clearly feel the stigma of living in Pata Rât. They fear that people in Cluj-Napoca associate Pata Rât with the landfill, poverty and exclusion.⁶ Claudia feels it especially in relation to her children's school: "Initially, no one knew where we were moved [to], only the head teacher of my older son... He asked for the exact address... in case there is a problem. My identity card is registered [at a different] address... but I had to tell him where I live... So [now] in [my son's] school book it [says] 'Pata Rât'. I don't like it, but there's nothing I can do."

The majority of children from Colina Verde attend the Simion Barnuțiu primary school, about 8km away. According to Claudia, the teachers and classmates there are aware that the Coastei Street families were evicted and relocated to Pata Rât. "They know that we ended up among the garbage... Now they think that we live from the garbage that they throw away."

Claudia has also encountered prejudice associated with where they live when seeking health care: "When [my son] was hit by a truck, the ambulance came and picked us up. They made all kinds of enquiries... Finally they

took us to a room. When the doctor came, he said... 'You people from Pata Rât don't take care of your children and they always get hit by cars.'" The reality, however, is that refuse trucks attended the landfill frequently and presented a constant danger to the children living nearby. Claudia's son was lucky to escape with only minor injuries.

Finding a job, too, has proven difficult since moving to the area. "[B]efore my husband found [his current] job, I don't even know how many CVs he sent... at Baumax, Carrefour, all these big companies... [Even though] he is an experienced driver, everyone refused him. Not directly, but they were saying 'We will call you'. And no one called him back because of where we live. I have a cousin who was about to start a job in fast food. Initially they didn't know... where she was living. When they wanted to do the paperwork to hire her and saw [her address], they told her they didn't need a woman for work anymore."

Although Claudia's husband works, the family's income is not enough for them to move to private accommodation in town. They have applied for social housing, but so far without success. While the municipality prioritizes housing for low-income families with children, applicants must meet certain criteria, such as having income from regular employment.⁷ This is a difficult requirement to meet for unemployed Colina Verde inhabitants, given their limited access to transport and the discrimination they experience when seeking work.

Above right: Children playing near the housing units in Colina Verde.

Right: Satellite image showing the distance between Pata Rât area and Coastei Street in the city of Cluj-Napoca.



© Mugur Vărzaru



Image © 2013 DigitalGlobe © Google Earth

CALL FOR RELOCATION

Throughout spring and summer, the air in Pata Rât is thick with the combined smells of the landfill and the chemical waste dump. Waste paper, plastic bags and other garbage cover the hills all around.

Colina Verde residents complain of deteriorating general health since relocating. A number of children have developed respiratory and other diseases. Claudia's children have also been ill, she believes, as a result of their proximity to the landfill. "They caught stomach viruses. I stayed in the hospital for a long time with my smallest child, who is three years old. It was quite difficult."

Like the other evictees from Coastei Street, Claudia and her husband want to be moved away from Pata Rât. They are concerned that the longer they stay there, the more difficult it will be to reintegrate with the rest of society. "Willingly or not, we stay here and we will need to adapt. [But] when you go back to civilization, you seem crazy [to others]."

Claudia thinks it is important that their story is heard outside of Cluj-Napoca. "I don't want money... I just want us to be moved from here. People in other countries should find out the truth, the real truth of how things [are here], [and] all unite and help us somehow."



Amnesty International, local NGOs and representatives of Romani communities in Cluj-Napoca demonstrate against forced evictions for World Habitat Day on 3 October 2011. The former Coastei Street residents are calling for adequate alternative housing and compensation for their losses.







BÉLA'S STORY

“

They made a square [on the ground] and said, ‘you have this much [land]...’ And they brought... a truck full of boards. They threw them on that piece of land and that was it. I had no one; it was in the middle of the winter...

”

Bookseller Béla Novak was among 36 families who were not offered alternative accommodation after being forcibly evicted from Coastei Street.

Béla points to the ground in his improvised house. There is no floor, just well-trodden earth. The walls consist of thick, uninsulated boards. It's a single room with a bed, a table and chair and antique prints on the walls. Piles of books lay all around. Béla, now in his early sixties, with cheerful blue eyes and thin-rimmed glasses, is a second-hand bookseller. He constructed the house with the help of his son but couldn't afford to insulate it or put a floor in. The cold, along with the rats, can enter easily.

Béla was relocated to Pata Rât – on the site of the Colina Verde housing units – a few days after the Coastei Street eviction. He was not offered any alternative accommodation.

A LIFE-LONG PASSION FOR BOOKS

Béla's ancestors came to Cluj in the late 19th century. "My parents and grandparents, and great grandparents were trading horses. They would bring them from Serbia and Russia, from Hungary and other places... when it was easier to move around, before the [First World] War."

The youngest of five children, Béla's passion for books was apparent early on. He and his father had reading competitions, he recalls. "Of course, my father read first, and then it was my turn... I was very little but I liked reading. And I read Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, Gogol, Dickens, Zola." He took a great interest in history and geography, topics which he studied independently and discussed with the friends and acquaintances he met through his bookselling, including university professors, doctors or engineers.

In 2012, Cluj-Napoca's Mayor Emil Boc became one of his customers. "He was impressed. 'Wow, books from my youth!' And I gave him exactly what he needed... I had a Cluj guide and the speeches of Gheorghe Gheorgiu-Dej [a Romanian Communist leader before Ceaușescu⁸] and he was delighted."

Right: Béla's improvised home in Colina Verde, March 2013. He could not afford to lay a floor or insulate the structure, making it susceptible to the cold and rats.
Below right: City authorities told families who were not provided with alternative housing to "build something" on the land in Colina Verde.



© Amnesty International



© Laurent Ziegler

COASTEI STREET

Béla used to live on Aurel Vlaicu Street, 3km from the city centre and about a kilometre from Coastei Street. “I had a four-room apartment; we were like a normal family,” he says. But unfortunate personal circumstances forced him to sell up in 1994, when he could no longer pay the bills, and he and his family moved to Coastei Street. “With the little money that was left, I bought a room [with] a kitchen. We were six children, me and my wife.”

Although Béla and his wife separated while living on Coastei Street, the family remained in the neighbourhood. “On Coastei, before the demolition, I was satisfied. Satisfied in the sense that... I was earning my own bread, I didn’t have problems with anyone, I was selling books. I didn’t want to make a fortune or anything. I just wanted to live, that’s all... I was making enough to live, to pay for the water, electricity.”

FORCED EVICTION

On 15 December 2010, municipality officials arrived in Coastei Street. “[They] brought us some forms. This was just... a trick, something to confuse people. They thought ‘[I]f he is Gypsy, he is stupid, he won’t realize.’ They said that those who wanted to submit [an] application [for social housing], [could do so] at the municipality... I submitted the application and the next day the answer came.” Béla’s application for alternative housing was rejected. Residents were given notice of



the demolition of their homes and told that they would have to move within 24 hours. “I was the last one whose house was [bulldozed] because I didn’t want to leave. There were more than 1,500 volumes of my books [left in the house]... lots of my books remained there [with] some older things, antiques.” Like the other residents, Béla was never compensated for his losses.

Immediately after the demolition, Béla was in shock. He and a handful of others stayed on in the street for three more days. “I was making fire out of wooden boards and it was minus 20 degrees, can you imagine?” Béla used the wood and materials from the demolished houses to maintain the fire while he squatted in his former neighbourhood. “I was making fire all night. And then [the local authorities] came and took us... to



Left: Béla at work on his book stall in the centre of Cluj-Napoca. The lack of formal tenure on his home prevents him from registering his book-selling business.

Below: Cluj-Napoca city centre, near the site of the former Coastei Street community.



Pata Rât... They made a square [on the ground] and said, ‘you have this much [land]...’ And they brought... a truck full of boards. They threw them on that piece of land and that was it. I had no one, it was in the middle of the winter... I stayed where I could, here and there.”

Béla got through the winter but was faced with the same situation the following year. “My son returned from Italy... and he built that shack, but because of [lack of] money he wasn’t able to finish it... You saw that on the floor there is nothing, even now there is nothing, it is still the same...”

Béla barely survived his first two bitterly cold winters in Pata Rât. “It was very, very difficult. Especially [being]

alone, you come from [work] to cut the wood, to make a fire... to cook something, wash and so on...” In February 2012, Béla ran out of wood. Unable to make a fire, he nearly froze to death. “I was lucky [my son] came and took me with him. This way I escaped.”

In October 2012, as the prospect of another winter approached, Béla decided to apply for temporary dormitory accommodation for people in need. “Now that the authorities allowed me to continue selling books and didn’t bother me [I could save] some money.” Disliking the lack of freedom and privacy in the dorms, however, Béla decided during the following spring to move back to the improvised house in Colina Verde.

LIFE IN COLINA VERDE

Béla keeps his books – over 2,000 in total – in Pata Rât now. Except for weekends, he travels to the centre of Cluj-Napoca every day to sell them at his street stall. He carries them in two or three bags, catching a lift with the school bus in the mornings. When he has too many to carry a friend with a car helps out. When it's cold, he returns home early on the last school bus of the day.

Along with the other families who received no alternative accommodation, Béla worries about having no security of tenure: “The problem is you never know when [they will] come and say ‘gentlemen, you need to leave’.” Although residents were told that they were ‘allowed’ to construct buildings in Colina Verde, they were not given tenancy agreements for the land or any form of authorization to build on it.

Without formal tenure, Béla has been unable get an identity card with a permanent address, which prevents him from registering his book-selling business or accessing certain welfare benefits, such as heating allowance.

The warm autumn day is drawing to a close and Béla has to return to his stall. He doesn't want to think about the future too much. “[T]o be honest, I am afraid to talk about a plan. The current situation in Romania is not stable. It's not safe. If you go to work you earn very little... If you go to do business, a small one like I do, it's enough just to earn your living, just to exist, apart from that... nothing.” He sighs and adds: “I would like to be able to go through the winter, and to register my



documents for that place. While I'm healthy and I can walk, I can earn my bread. I don't want anything from anyone. This is it.”

In 2011, in response to criticism from NGOs over the forced eviction in Coastei Street, the municipality of Cluj-Napoca began exploring the possibility of developing a housing project with the UN Development Programme. In a series of meetings with the evicted families, the local authorities made a commitment in 2012 to start relocating people in 2013. However, to date, details of the planned relocation have remained vague.

In February 2013, in a meeting with Amnesty International, the European Roma Rights Centre and NGO Fundația Desire, the Romanian Minister



Left: Colina Verde lies at the top of a hill overlooking a landfill and a former chemical waste dump.
Below: Children in Colina Verde getting ready for school in September 2011.



of Regional Development acknowledged that the situation of Roma living in Pata Rât was “unacceptable”. Yet, no explicit commitment has been made by the Minister to address the situation of the evictees in line with international human rights law and standards.

Among Romania’s housing rights obligations is the duty to consult with affected people on alternatives to a planned eviction⁹ and to provide residents with adequate notice beforehand; the authorities must also avoid carrying out evictions in particularly bad weather.¹⁰ But with only 24 hours notice and an eviction in freezing winter temperatures, the authorities have clearly failed the residents of Coastei Street. The authorities also failed to ensure that those who cannot

provide for themselves are given adequate alternative accommodation.

The government has recognized that: “[I]ack of decent housing and utilities, of documents of property on houses and lands leads to social exclusion, blocking the access to social assistance, medical assistance, education and, in general, to all citizens’ rights.”¹¹ Yet, in practice, local authorities continue to carry out evictions in already socially vulnerable – mostly Roma – communities.

BAIA MARE FROM CRAICA TO CUPROM

Spread between a decommissioned railway and a small stream, Craica is a Romani settlement in the north-western city of Baia Mare. The area has been inhabited for more than 20 years and is one of the largest informal Romani settlements in Romania.

In 2012, the municipality forcibly evicted about 500 people from Craica – almost half of its residents – and demolished their homes. About 70 families were evicted between 11 and 13 May and moved into the offices of a former metallurgical factory, CUPROM, next to an industrial estate at the edge of the city.¹² The second wave of evictions and relocations happened on 1 June, about a week before local mayoral elections.¹³ Some 50 families were offered accommodation in other blocks at CUPROM including a former chemical processing laboratory.

At the time of the relocation of Craica residents, the buildings at CUPROM were not adapted for residential use. Families were allocated either one or two rooms with no heating and poor insulation and sanitation facilities. On most floors, there were no more than four communal bathrooms, which in some cases meant up to 20 people had to share one toilet. Washing facilities were limited to a tap in the bathrooms. There were no cooking facilities and people had to improvise food preparation in their rooms.

The eviction at Craica was preceded in January 2012 by a local authority census, in which residents were asked about their preferred housing options. None of the options provided involved remaining in Craica.



© Mugur Vazariu

In April 2012, the municipality presented demolition orders to the Craica families. Some residents told Amnesty International of being harassed and intimidated by local 'leaders' into accepting the accommodation at CUPROM. After the intervention of international organizations, the local authority organized two public meetings with residents to

Left: Roma have been living in Craica, Baia Mare, since the 1990s. In May and June of 2012, 500 Romani inhabitants were forcibly evicted from the site.

Below: An election campaign poster, by then mayoral candidate Catalin Chereches, pledges to demolish informal settlements in the city.



conditions in CUPROM with an Amnesty International delegation, Mayor Chereches said: “You are telling me that there is a problem due to the fact that they have a kitchen on the hallway? ... I stayed in a student house for four years with just one kitchen on the hallway. Do you want us [also to insulate] the buildings, perhaps? These are conditions [a] hundred times better than what they have [in Craica].”¹⁴

The forced eviction in Craica provoked strong criticism. Foreign embassies in Bucharest expressed concerns over the adequacy of the housing in CUPROM.¹⁵ The Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights called for an investigation into the relocation to inadequate housing and reparations for those affected.¹⁶ About 30 NGOs organized a protest in Bucharest to bring the forced eviction to the attention of central government.

Some 500 people are still living in Craica. One of them, Rodica, whose husband is the local priest, actively resisted the eviction.

discuss options for relocation. However, not all affected people in Craica were informed about the meeting.

On 10 June, Catalin Chereches, whose mayoral campaign pledges had included demolishing Romani settlements in the city, was confirmed as Mayor of Baia Mare with 86% of the vote. In a discussion about







RODICA'S STORY

“

You go to bed with fear and wake up with fear. You know that anytime – night or day – they can come, and you are left [with no roof over your head]...

”

Craica resident Rodica and her family were among those who resisted the forced eviction by local authorities.

Rodica, with her humble smile and lively eyes, invites us into the blue house that serves as Craica's chapel. It is getting dark and we apologize for intruding at dinner time. Rodica, who refused to be relocated to CUPROM, begins to tell us how the recent forced evictions in Craica have affected her life.

Craica has been home to Rodica and her husband for almost 20 years. It's also home to their 10 children and two grandchildren. In her life, she has already been evicted twice. She explains that she used to live in a house nearby in Vasile Alecsandrei neighbourhood. "[Then] Ceaușescu came up with an idea to demolish the [Roma] houses and build blocks of flats."

That was over 35 years ago. After that eviction, Rodica and her family bought an apartment. But when her son developed a blood disease, she was forced to sell it to cover his treatment costs. Then, they moved to Craica and built a house in the settlement.

LIFE IN CRAICA

Rodica is 55 years old and does not have a job. She makes her living by collecting plastic, metal and other materials at the city's landfill, which she sells for recycling. It is hard, precarious and informal work and she goes every day.

Saving little by little, Rodica and her husband managed to build their house in the western part of Craica. "[W]e made the foundation, me and my man. We didn't have a metre [rule], so we used [our feet for] measuring... and we paid to build it up."

The land Rodica and her husband built the house on does not belong to them. Their income does not allow them to buy a plot of land elsewhere and, although they would be happy to rent a piece of land and build a house with all the necessary documentation, the municipality has provided no details on viable alternatives.

EVICITION NOTICES

In fact, the Baia Mare authorities had been attempting to clear the Craica settlement for a number of years. In April 2012, all the residents received eviction notices and demolition orders scheduled for 3 May.

While Rodica and her husband were at work, local authority representatives arrived and presented the eviction notices to their children. When she came back, they were crying and the house had been marked with a 'D', for "demolition".



© Amnesty International

Two weeks later, the head of the social services department, accompanied by armed police officers and other officials came to the settlement. “[T]hey started shouting ‘if you don’t leave, we’ll throw you out using force’,” says Rodica. The families were then offered alternative accommodation at CUPROM, but without adequate consultation or feasible alternatives being presented.

“Almost everybody went [to CUPROM] as they thought it would be better,” says Rodica. “The moment they left [Craica], their houses were demolished.”

Above: The demolition of houses in Craica begins in May 2012. *Right:* Rodica’s family in front of the community’s chapel, marked by local authorities with a “D” for demolition.



© Mugur Vărzaru

RELOCATION TO CUPROM

The three CUPROM buildings are located in an area separated from the street by a gated fence. Initially, the families who agreed to the relocation were given three-year tenancy contracts for rent-free accommodation. Rodica recalls the promises the municipality made. “They said that [we would] not have to pay anything for three years: no rent, no electricity or water... Many went there when they heard that... of course they went.”

Despite Romania’s Civil Code clearly recognizing a contractual agreement as being based on free will between two or more people¹⁷, the municipality unilaterally changed the CUPROM contracts two months after the relocation. The three-year tenancies were reduced to one year and an obligation to pay the rent was introduced, with the threat of eviction for anyone failing to comply. Later, the municipality began charging the tenants for electricity also. Since the introduction of rent charges, the cost of accommodation in CUPROM has risen from 20 RON (4.5 euros) to 50 RON (11.5 euros) plus another 50 RON (11.5 euros) for electricity. Those renting two rooms must pay 70 RON (16 euros) plus electricity.

Some of the rooms allocated to families in CUPROM contained storage units with industrial equipment and dangerous chemical substances, including sulphuric and acetic acid. ‘Toxic’ hazard warning signs were still displayed on the walls and the windows.

Rodica had decided that, before consenting to move, she would go to CUPROM to see the conditions there



Left: Building No. 2 of the disused offices of the former CUPROM factory, where Roma from Craica were relocated.
Below: Potentially hazardous chemicals still present in one of the CUPROM buildings when the Roma from Craica were moved in.



for herself. When she entered one of the buildings, she was shocked. “There were some iron wardrobes with a lot of jars... marked with a ‘danger’ sign,” she explains. “I opened [one] and my eyes and mouth were burning, I couldn't breathe. They were full of chemicals... That is why I [called it] the camp of death.”

The NGO Romani CRISS reported that, on 1 June 2012, a few dozen adults and children at the site began suffering from nausea, vomiting, dizziness and headaches. Ambulances were called to the location to provide medical assistance and two adults and 22 children were taken to hospital. They were discharged after a few hours.¹⁸



RESISTANCE

Rodica's family was among those who refused to move to CUPROM. "[T]hey came to write down those who wanted to [be moved]... When I returned from work I saw [the head of the social services department] with the police... He said: 'Come, come, you have to move, we have to demolish'. I asked [why]. 'Because you received [accommodation in CUPROM].'"

Rodica refused the 'offer': "[I said:] 'How can you come and demolish my house? You didn't build my house. I will not go in those rooms. I have seen them. You cannot take me to the camp of death with my children... even if you come with the bulldozer, I still won't go out of my house.'"

Eventually, the authorities let Rodica – along with about 450 other residents – stay in Craica. Her house was not demolished. She believes having support from outside the community was key. "When they heard that we called [Amnesty International] and Mr Mugur [a freelance photographer] came, they started saying 'those who want to go, can go, those who don't, we will not force you.'"

Rodica's courage inspired other family members and neighbours also. They supported each other in the decision to stay in their homes. "We all agreed we wouldn't go. Whatever happened we wouldn't be leaving."



Left: Craica settlement was home to more than 1,000 Roma before the forced eviction took place in 2012.

Below: Approximately 500 residents were forcibly evicted from the site and their homes demolished.



UNCERTAIN FUTURE

So far, the authorities have failed to begin a genuine dialogue with Craica residents to identify housing solutions jointly with them. “[It is] because [the mayor] hates us,” says Rodica. “Everywhere you go they say: ‘Get out, Gypsy!’ Even the police... If you go to the municipality to arrange something, they ask: ‘What do you want, money?’... They offend us.”

Rodica and her family feel their lives have been shattered by the evictions in their community. The threat of losing their home is now a permanent feature of their lives. “You go to bed with fear and wake up with fear. You know that anytime they can come, and you are left [with no roof over your head]... Where should I take [my children]? Don’t [the authorities] have children too?”







W.'s STORY

“

They kept saying they would throw us out, so that's why we came... [But] this is like a prison.

”

'W.' accepted the offer of rehousing in CUPROM, partly out of fear that her family would be made homeless.

W. sits on the sofa beneath a large window in her room in CUPROM and lights a cigarette. It's October and the holes in the wall let the cold in. The room serves as bedroom, kitchen, living room and bathroom for her partner and two children. The last time we met, she was living in a small house in Craica. That was a year ago. Her house was demolished during the evictions in May 2012 and she and her family moved to a room in the CUPROM building. When they first arrived, she cried.

MEMORIES OF CRAICA

W. used to live with her partner in a block of flats in Melodiei Street, Baia Mare. They, along with other families who had nowhere else to go, were squatting in an empty apartment building. In 1993, they were evicted.

Carrying what possessions they had, they walked along the track of a disused railway line to Craica. W. recalls that there were only one or two houses in their part of the settlement then.

She and her partner constructed their house from whatever material they could find. "We started making a shack out of nylon sheeting," she says. "[Later] we made a house of wood filled with mud. [W]e lived on Craica until they came to demolish [it]..."

Despite the hardships, life for the couple was good in Craica. Everything was close by. They knew their neighbours and felt relatively safe. For W., CUPROM doesn't begin to compare. "If you don't have the money for the bus you cannot go anywhere. Or if you are sick, only the ambulance can save you. It takes you to the hospital and that's it... [But] [h]ow do you return home? By foot?"

W. continues: "We were in open [space in Craica]. [H]ere, [it's like] we are in a prison. [In Craica], we were paying 1 million old lei¹⁹ (23 euros) per month and [the electricity] was on non-stop and we didn't have issues with anyone. Have you seen the cameras here? [...] So that we don't break anything, they put cameras, to see what we are doing."



Despite the CCTV surveillance, W. does not feel safer in CUPROM. In Craica, her children played outside all the time. “But here... I cannot let them outside. I must keep them only inside the house.”

Above: Children look out from one of the CUPROM buildings. Local authorities broke the original promise of no rent or utility costs during the first three years.
Right: A Romani boy plays in the debris of a demolished dwelling in Craica.



FORCED EVICTION

W.'s family – and others in Craica – received their first eviction notice in the summer of 2011. Following protests by human rights organizations and foreign embassies, the evictions were put on hold in September 2011.²⁰ Responding to a letter from an Amnesty International activist, the Mayor of Baia Mare, wrote on 6 September 2011 that, when addressing the issue of informal settlements, local authorities would respect national law and international human rights standards.

The eviction reappeared on the political agenda in the spring of 2012, however, during the local elections campaign. The mayor had promised to demolish Romani informal settlements in the city and, in April 2012, the families living in Craica received demolition notices for their homes.

W. recalls the days leading up to the eviction: “When they gave the notices they said ‘Craica will be evacuated.’... [They said] ‘You have to sign that this property is not yours and that you have to leave Craica.’ [...] After[wards], they wouldn’t let anyone pass to go to the shop or anything. We were surrounded. They came with the second notices, [and then in less than] two weeks they came to carry out the demolitions.”

Initially, the Baia Mare local authorities offered W.'s family alternative accommodation in a block of flats in Horea Street. Known as a Roma ghetto, the estate is separated from the rest of the neighbourhood by a 2m-high wall erected by the local authority in July



© Mugur Vărzaru

The buildings at CUPROM are not adapted for human habitation. Housing conditions there do not meet the standards required under either Romanian or international law.



2011. In November 2011, the Romanian equality body, the National Council for Combating Discrimination, held that the construction of the wall amounted to discrimination. “[W]e refused [to move to Horea] and they said they would place our request for some other place. Since then, they didn’t give us anything.”

After the second demolition order, W.’s family decided to leave Craica for CUPROM, partly out of fear that they would be made homeless. “They kept saying they would throw us out, so that’s why we came. Instead of throwing us out, leaving us on the streets, [it was] better [to] come here. [But] this is like a prison.”

W. did not see the room in CUPROM before her relocation: “I came here and I cried for a whole day,” she says. “If I had come [before], I wouldn’t have moved. If the house hadn’t been demolished I’d have returned.”

Now that she lives in CUPROM, W. rarely goes to the city. “We don’t have money for the bus. If we go once, we buy more so that we have [enough to last]... [In] Craica, we would go 10 times to the shop. I would go to buy something, return home and then come back to get something else... [H]ere, I cannot go back. If you didn’t buy what you need, if you forgot, that’s it. I don’t like to borrow. If I have something I have, if not I don’t.”

THREATS AND BROKEN PROMISES

The residents who agreed to be moved to CUPROM were told that they would not have to pay for utilities, and would be moved to social housing or offered other housing alternatives after three years.

However, the municipality started charging the CUPROM tenants for electricity – their only source of energy for cooking and heat. W. objects to the idea of paying any such charges on principle precisely because of the promises made to the residents before the move.

W.'s family had sold their wood-burning stove following the eviction. "We were told we couldn't bring it. [The local authority] said that they would not allow us to bring the stove as the walls would get smoked [up]." Instead, residents were told to buy electric heaters, which are much more costly to run than the wood-burners and put more pressure on already tight family budgets. In addition, the electricity has been cut off several times. "Many times I was left with the food on the electric hob and wasn't able to finish cooking."

The electricity and rent for the room W. occupies with her partner and two children cost 100 RON (23 euros). "It is a lot of money... Every month we are in debt and it is impossible for us to overcome... I have to pay for food, for medicine..." W. accepts that nothing is for free but disagrees with the amount they have to pay for accommodation. "Why did [the mayor] lie? They should have calculated [the rent] so that we could afford to pay it and also sustain [other basic expenses]."

The CUPROM residents have shared bathrooms on each floor. "The bathrooms are separated, for men and for women... One of my cousins was in the hospital one month ago. She had a bad bellyache and she thought it was because of the bathroom... [It turns out] she had some infection on her ovaries. The doctors at the hospital said it's not good [that she shares a bathroom with 10 other women]. This is what I fear, even for my children."

When she lived on Craica, W. kept a few chickens. She had to give them up, too, and now has to buy all the groceries. "It's bad because only [my partner] works. I don't have any income from anywhere, only the child allowance... Many people say they don't like it here. They say it was better on Craica. Many [have] called [the head of the social services department] saying they want to move from here. [But] his phone was off."

W. and her partner fear being evicted again in the future, as the tenancy in CUPROM is only temporary. "They can throw us out whenever they want, they [can] let us stay here till they want." The fate and future of W.'s family lie entirely in the hands of the local authorities.

In the information circulated by the municipality to a minority of Craica residents and NGOs, the relocation to CUPROM was one of four options presented. The others included provision of land, relocation to 'modular houses' and social housing.²¹ In practice, however, the municipality failed to provide detailed information about the proposed alternatives, which would have enabled the residents to make an informed decision. In the end, all those residents who agreed to the demolition of their houses in Craica accepted CUPROM tenancy contracts.



© Mugur Varzantu

A number of them told Amnesty International that they agreed to relocation under duress and often without understanding what they were actually signing. They also asserted that they would have preferred to stay in Craica.²² State and local authorities are obliged to ensure that all feasible alternatives to eviction are explored in full consultation with the people affected. The facts of the eviction process in Craica, particularly the intimidation of residents, the failure to provide complete information about public meetings and alternative housing, as well as relocation of residents in inadequate housing in the CUPROM buildings, indicate that the Baia Mare authorities failed to engage in genuine consultation with the affected people, making the eviction unlawful.

Chemicals left in cupboards at CUPROM. The NGO Romani CRISS reported that, on 1 June 2012, two adults and 22 children at the site had to be taken to hospital after they began suffering from nausea, vomiting, dizziness and headaches.

PIATRA NEAMȚ FROM MUNCII STREET TO VĂLENI 2

In August 2012, the local authorities in Piatra Neamț, a city in the north-eastern region of Romanian Moldova, forcibly evicted about 500 Roma from housing units in Muncii Street and relocated them to ‘social housing’ in Văleni 2, an isolated area about 7km away from the city centre and separated from it by a deindustrialized area and a river. For most of them it has been their second eviction in 10 years.

The residents evicted from Muncii Street acknowledge that there were problems with the housing units there, for example overcrowding. Families were assigned two 15m² rooms, only one of which had windows. A pump at the entrance to the units was the only water source and up to five families shared the communal bathrooms. Yet, despite these difficulties, they feel that life was comparatively better there than it is in Văleni 2. Although Muncii Street was separated from its nearest neighbourhood by a railway, the city and services such as hospitals and schools were closer and more easily accessible.

Rumours of eviction and relocation to Văleni 2 were creating anxiety in the Muncii Street community as early as 2010. In February 2012, residents found that their electricity had been cut off due to payment arrears. With temperatures of -20°C, pregnant women, children and the disabled were particularly vulnerable to health risks. Dusia, an energetic lady in her fifties, resisted the eviction jointly with other members of the community.



© Mugur Vărzanu

Muncii Street, Piatra Neamț October 2012. Some 500 Roma lived in the community before being forcibly evicted in August 2012 and relocated to Văleni 2, several kilometres outside the city.







DUSIA'S STORY

“

We are completely marginalized. What was there, how it was there, was somehow better. Now we are excluded from the society. We are really excluded.

”

Former Muncii Street resident, Dusia, and other members of the community describe to Amnesty delegates their forced eviction that was carried out in August 2012.

In her life, Dusia has experienced eviction three times. In 2001, she had to move out of her flat due to rent and utility arrears. She had nowhere to go and was homeless for six months. Eventually, she found an empty room in a block of flats in Dărmănești, a neighbourhood in north-western Piatra Neamț.

“After that, other Roma came because there were free rooms and because they were [also] living on the street,” Dusia explains. “[W]e had stayed there for seven years [and then] the municipality received some funds to renovate the block.”

In 2007, the authorities relocated the Dărmănești residents, along with the Romani residents from a block in Aleea Ulmilor, to the housing units at Muncii Street. “[T]hey said that after it is renovated, they would let us back. But they never did.” The tenancy agreements for the social housing units at Muncii Street were not renewed after they expired in 2009, leaving residents at risk of forced eviction.

FORCED EVICTION

“Once he [the mayor] had thrown us out of the city centre... [and] put us on Muncii... he did [what he could to ensure] that we would not even be on the edge of the city, but isolated close to the forest. And he succeeded...”

In July 2012, Muncii Street residents received a verbal notification of their eviction and relocation to Văleni 2. Not wanting to be relocated again, they asked the municipality to let them remain on Muncii Street and to improve housing conditions there. Dusia says: “We asked not to be moved, to be given electricity... They said it was not possible because the area will be used as a market.” Yet, as of March 2013, no redevelopment had been undertaken at Muncii Street and the abandoned housing units remained standing.

Gradually, more and more residents were persuaded to begin raising the money required to obtain tenancy agreements for houses at Văleni 2. The new contracts cost 220 RON (50 euros) for one-room apartments and 300 Ron (70 euros) for two-room apartments. “[P]eople didn't have electricity [in Muncii Street],” says Dusia. “[T]here was only one pump [for water]. They thought here [in Văleni 2] it's going to be better, thinking they will receive electricity.”

Dusia and about 10 other families resisted the move for as long as they could but eventually were forced to relocate to Văleni 2 as well. “[The authorities] told us: ‘You cannot fight back because it will be worse... The land is not ours anymore, it was sold... So you have to



leave willingly otherwise we'll bring the masked men.' The masked [police] men came, with tractors, and we were taken away."

ISOLATION AND DANGER

Văleni 2 is situated about 1km from the nearest bus stop and a housing estate where young Romanian families live. The walk to it is along a muddy, unlit road.

"If you were in our place," Dusia asks, "[wouldn't you want] at least electricity, a road, a bus and a grocery store to buy bread? Wouldn't you feel better to see a bit more light when you go outside [at night]? There are risks. The forest is close, there are bears, wolves."

In addition to the isolation, Dusia is unhappy about the quality of the houses in Văleni 2. She points to the wall: "You know, I talk to you and it can be heard on the other side! The walls are empty, two plasterboards filled with foam. If you... punch it, [your fist] will go [through to] your neighbour's side."

Other residents agree. One woman explains: "[The local authority representatives] came to threaten us not to damage the sinks, but... if you lean on them a little, they fall apart. Even the bathtubs have plastic legs... [the neighbours] wanted to take a cold-water shower and it broke, it fell down. And they put the blame on us, saying that we break everything."

Dusia talks to residents in front of the Văleni 2 housing units, October 2012.

Dusia adds stoves to the list of problems: “We made a fire and the door of the stove cracked, with just one fire. There are a lot of problems, not only these. We don't know what to deal with first. Day by day, there is hunger. We don't have money for transport to go and buy bread. [By the time you] buy your bread it is already dark and you return home in the dark. You came this way and you saw how far it is... We've had enough!” She cries.

The residents of Văleni 2 feel abandoned and desperate. “We are completely marginalized. What was there [in Muncii Street], how it was there, was somehow better. Now we are excluded from society. We are really excluded.”

One of Dusia's neighbours believes such marginalization contributes to Roma migration: “This is why we run away to France... because of the Romanians, because we got fed up with the poverty here. And we go there for food and for clothes... When the Romanians exclude us, [when] they throw us out of the city, of course we run away.”

For many residents in Văleni 2, the cycle of poverty seems insurmountable. One woman talks about the obstacles to finding work: “They should put us to clean the streets in France, we will not refuse. We work. Here in Romania they ask for 10 school grades to [be] a sanitation worker... many of us don't have [an] education. And because [of this], we live in poverty, we have to [work] on the fields.”



Left: The housing units at Văleni 2 are isolated from the rest of the city. The closest bus stop is 1km away and the walk to it is via an unlit, muddy road.

Below: The Roma community in Muncii Street was close to the centre of Piatra Neamţ. Residents could easily access schools, health and other services.



Fears of further eviction remain ever-present among the families, too. City officials pay regular visits to Văleni 2 to carry out ‘monitoring’ exercises. “Police... or municipality officials come and check whether people are at home,” says Dusia. “They ask who lives here and there... I don’t think it’s normal that they give you a house and then they come and monitor you... Whenever I want to leave the house, I have to ask someone to stay at my place.”



A CITY WITHOUT ROMA

The Romani families at Văleni 2 want to go back to Muncii Street. “Like that, [even] without water, without anything, rather than staying here. We should go back. We don't want to get our IDs here.” The IDs are significant because they require the registration of a permanent address, and the families do not want to be left here, at the margins of the city.

Currently, there are no public transport links connecting Văleni 2 with the city. The unlit, unmaintained road to the nearest bus stop is a hazard, especially for small children. Requests by the community to extend the bus route have been rejected by the local authority.

And when community representatives went to the city hall to ask for a school bus to be laid on, officials reportedly called the police. “Yes, they called the police to throw us out,” says Dusia. “We were only asking for a school bus for the children. There were children [with us] of kindergarten age... 5-year-olds. We took them with us on the streets.”



© Mugur Vărzaru



In October 2001, the Mayor of Piatra-Neamț announced his intention to create a Roma ghetto on a former chicken farm.²³ His statement provoked strong criticism by international human rights monitoring bodies and NGOs²⁴ as well as government officials in Romania.²⁵ Despite this, Romani families were still evicted from the town centre and relocated to the housing units in Muncii Street and a former chicken farm in the Speranța neighbourhood.²⁶ Now, some 11 years later, the local authority seems finally to have achieved its aim of pushing Roma out of Piatra-Neamț, to the outskirts of the city.

As evening descends, Romani residents in Văleni 2 light candles – the only source of light for those households without an electricity supply.

AFTERWORD

The testimonies in this report reflect a pattern of human rights violations by the Romanian authorities in relation to Roma and others living in informal settlements. In particular, forced evictions are being undertaken before all feasible alternatives have been explored and the lack of security of tenure experienced by evictees only increases their risk of eviction again in the future.

In all the cases researched, the local authorities failed to provide people affected by eviction with opportunities for genuine consultation or access to effective remedies, despite the fact that housing rights have been violated. Those who were rehoused were placed in inadequate accommodation and, in one case, a number of people were made homeless as a result of their eviction.

Since 2010, Amnesty International has been calling on the Romanian government to end forced evictions of Roma and other vulnerable groups while urging the Ministry of Regional Development to amend the Housing Law to ensure that:

- Everyone has at least a minimum degree of security of tenure, which provides them with protection against forced evictions, harassment and other threats;
- Forced evictions are expressly prohibited and safeguards established, which must be complied with prior to any eviction being undertaken, in accordance with international human rights standards;
- A framework is created to ensure affordability of housing, including by reviewing social housing programmes, rent regulations and pricing of materials for low-cost housing construction;

- Relocations to areas which are unsafe and/or polluted, and which pose a risk to lives and to health, are also prohibited;
- Everyone has equal access to housing and protection from discrimination through amendments to the Housing Law, expressly prohibiting segregation on the basis of race or any other form of discrimination;

So far, the Romanian government has failed to act to ensure that the experiences of Claudia, Béla, Rodica, W. and Dusia are not repeated. As a result of this failure, residents of informal settlements and all residents lacking formal tenure status remain at risk of forced evictions.

Romania is a state party to a range of international and regional human rights treaties, which guarantee protection against forced evictions and the right to adequate housing and associated rights for all without discrimination. These treaties include the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the European Convention on Human Rights and the Revised European Social Charter.

Under these treaties, Romania has an obligation to ensure that the right to adequate housing, including the right to protection from forced evictions, is respected throughout the country.

These provisions have been inadequately incorporated into Romanian law.²⁷ The Code of Civil Procedure provides some safeguards against forced evictions



but these apply only to tenants or owners who have formal tenure status, rather than guaranteeing security of tenure for all – as required under international law. The Code explicitly excludes protection against forced evictions for those who live in informal dwellings.²⁸

These legislative flaws allow local authorities to sweep away long-established communities entirely and relocate them to inadequate housing, out of sight of the rest of the population, under the pretext of ‘inner-city regeneration’ and ‘development’. They also leave vulnerable groups without any protection, often resulting in their further marginalization and poverty. For those affected by forced evictions, this remains a primary obstacle to accessing an effective remedy, including restitution, rehabilitation, compensation,

satisfaction and a guarantee of non-repetition. As a result, people who lack security of tenure often experience forced evictions several times in their lives.

The Romanian government must act urgently to end such violations of the right to adequate housing and ensure that it protects, respects and fulfils the housing rights of all people and put an end to forced evictions.

Residents in Craica in Baia Mare watch the preparations for the demolition of houses carried out by the local authorities in May 2012.

WE HAVE RIGHTS



“I want to ask [the new mayor of Cluj-Napoca] to take action – to understand that we are not alone, that we are supported by a lot of people... And to do everything possible to move us from that garbage dump. To see that... we have rights which must be respected.”

Claudia, December 2012



“We don’t want him to give us palaces, nor to get villas, we just want a piece of land to make our own houses.”

Rodica, October 2012



“We grew up in the city... our children... grew up in the city... and now [we] end up at the edge of the forest, isolated from the world? Why? What the mayor really wanted was to throw us out of the city, so he wouldn’t see Roma any more. And that’s what happened.”

Dusia, October 2012



© Amnesty International

“They told us: ‘Sign!’ I told [the official] I didn’t know how to sign. I was told to sign [anyway]. I asked: ‘But did you read me out exactly what is written there?’ I was told: ‘Sign!’ They surrounded the houses with people until they gave [the eviction] numbers to the houses and [delivered] the summons.”

W., March 2013



© Magui Văzaru

“[T]he municipality should know there is someone who can put pressure, because if there was no one to put pressure there would be a disaster.”

Béla, October 2012

ENDNOTES

1. According to Eurostat, people who are 'severely materially deprived' experience a severe lack of resources to cover their living and housing expenses. See page 25, "The situation of Roma in 11 EU Member States", FRA 2012, at <http://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2012/situation-roma-11-eu-member-states-survey-results-glance>
2. Amnesty International's meeting with the UNDP project team on a "Model Project for making the most of EU Funds for Sustainable Housing and Inclusion of disadvantaged Roma (explicitly but not exclusively targeted) in Cluj-Napoca Metropolitan Area". Cluj-Napoca, Romania, October 2012.
3. See page 3, "Landfill: Space of advanced and racialized urban marginality in today's Romania" October 2012. Analysis produced within the ongoing research project Spatialization and racialization of social exclusion. The social and cultural formation of 'gypsy ghettos' in Romania in a European context (2012-2014). Available at <http://sparex-ro.eu/?p=487>
4. Amnesty International interviews with Colina Verde residents, October 2012. According to recent research by the European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC), currently about 49% of Colina Verde residents have identity papers registered with an address at Pata Rât. See "Taken from the City: Romanian Roma evicted to a rubbish dump", ERRC, December 2012. Available at: <http://www.errc.org/cms/upload/file/romania-report-pata-rat-17-dec-2012-en.pdf>
5. See page 9, "Taken from the City: Romania Roma Evicted to a Rubbish Dump", ERRC, December 2012.
6. Eniko Vincze, an anthropologist, describes the stigma of Pata Rât: "The symbolism of disposed waste is associated with people living nearby the landfill, while inhabitants embody odours and dirtiness of this toxic environment, and stigma attached to the milieu becomes integral part of their self-identification and the image others have on them." See page 3, "Landfill: Space of advanced and racialized urban marginality in today's Romania", October 2012.
7. On file with Amnesty International.
8. General Secretary of the Romanian Communist Party from 1965 until 1989, when he was overthrown and killed in a revolution.
9. CESCR, General Comment 7, The right to adequate housing: forced evictions, 20/05/1997, paras 13 and 15
10. CESCR, General Comment 7, The right to adequate housing: forced evictions, 20/05/1997, para. 15
11. See page 8, "Strategy of the Government of Romania for the Inclusion of the Romanian Citizens Belonging to Roma Minority for the Period 2012-2020", 2011, available at http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/files/roma_romania_strategy_en.pdf
12. See "Romania: Roma relocated to live in unsafe old office." Amnesty International, 11 May 2012 (EUR 39/008/2012). Available at <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/EUR39/008/2012/en/65646a1c-b84d-47f9-b67e-b3c27d350d1b/eur390082012en.html>
13. See "Romania: Authorities of Baia Mare should not relocate Roma in inadequate housing", Amnesty International, 7 June 2012. (EUR 39/009/2012). Available at <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/EUR39/009/2012/en/f47f4bbc-b421-4fe6-bdfc-2fff23afc35a/eur390092012en.html>
14. Interview with the mayor of Baia Mare, 10 May 2012.
15. For example, the US Embassy issued a statement on 6 June expressing concerns over relocation of Roma from Craica to CUPROM. See US Embassy Statement on the Roma Housing Situation in Baia Mare. Available at: <http://romania.usembassy.gov/policy/media/pr-06062012.html>
16. See "Romania: Commissioner concerned about the relocation of Roma in a toxic building", Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, 7 June 2012. Available at: http://www.coe.int/t/commissioner/News/2012/120607BaiaMare_en.asp
17. Article 1.166 of the Romanian Civil Code, 287/2009.
18. Open Letter on the situation in Baia Mare, Romani CRISS, 6 June 2012. Available at <http://www.romanicriss.org/PDF/Open%20Letter%20Baia%20Mare.pdf>
19. The previous Romanian currency. The interviewee was referring to the old currency when talking about expenses.
20. See "Romania: Further information: Eviction of Roma halted", Amnesty International, 19 September 2011 (EUR 39/009/2011). Available at: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/EUR39/009/2011/en/6673588a-5065-424c-b950-056ccd729cf6/eur390092011en.html>
21. Meeting organized by the local authority of Baia Mare, 10 May 2012. Interview with G., a resident in CUPROM, on 6 October 2012.
22. Interview with F. E. C. in Craica on 9 and 10 May 2012. Interview with A. M. Z. CUPROM residents, 6 and 7 October 2012.
23. See "Second case Report – Ghetto in Piatra-Neamț. Observations from the field." Istvan Haller, 22 October 2001. Available at: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/balkanhr/message/2942>
24. For example, The Romani CRISS, the European Roma Rights Centre, The Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organization for Co-operation and Security in Europe (ODHIR – OSCE). See Cosima Rughiniș. "Relocation projects for 'ghetto' neighborhoods: Housing practices underlying stereotypical discourses". International Conference of the University of Toronto: Adequate and Affordable Housing for All. June 2004. Available at: http://www.urbancentre.utoronto.ca/pdfs/housingconference/Rughinis_Relocation_Project.pdf
25. Dezideriu Gergely and Madalin Morteau. "Piatra Neamț Case". October 2001, page 6. Available at www.greekhelsinki.gr/bhr/english/countries/romania/criss_22_10_01.doc
26. See pages 15-17, "Housing Rights of Roma and Travellers across Europe", Vasile Galbea, Housing Rights Watch 2010. Available at http://www.noticiasph.org/IMG/pdf/3870_roma_issue_en.pdf
27. See pages 2-3, "Unsafe Foundations: Secure the Right to Housing in Romania" Amnesty International, 8 May 2012 (EUR 39/002/2012)
28. Law no. 202/2010: Art. 578 (1), which modifies the Code of Civil Procedure.



**I WANT
TO HELP**

WHETHER IN A HIGH-PROFILE CONFLICT OR A FORGOTTEN CORNER OF THE GLOBE, **AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL** CAMPAIGNS FOR JUSTICE, FREEDOM AND DIGNITY FOR ALL AND SEEKS TO GALVANIZE PUBLIC SUPPORT TO BUILD A BETTER WORLD

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Activists around the world have shown that it is possible to resist the dangerous forces that are undermining human rights. Be part of this movement. Combat those who peddle fear and hate.

- Join Amnesty International and become part of a worldwide movement campaigning for an end to human rights violations. Help us make a difference.
- Make a donation to support Amnesty International's work.

Together we can make our voices heard.

I am interested in receiving further information on becoming a member of Amnesty International

name

address

country

email

I wish to make a donation to Amnesty International (donations will be taken in UK£, US\$ or €)

amount

please debit my

Visa

Mastercard

number

expiry date

signature

Please return this form to the Amnesty International office in your country.

For Amnesty International offices worldwide: www.amnesty.org/en/worldwide-sites
If there is not an Amnesty International office in your country, please return this form to: **Amnesty International**, International Secretariat, Peter Benenson House, 1 Easton Street, London WC1X 0DW, United Kingdom

amnesty.org



PUSHED TO THE MARGINS **FIVE STORIES OF ROMA FORCED** **EVICIONS IN ROMANIA**

Roma in Romania are being denied their right to adequate housing and subjected to continuing poverty, insecurity and social exclusion as a result. Despite Romania's obligations to protect the right to adequate housing for all, Roma and others living in informal housing remain vulnerable to forced evictions and many experience eviction several times during their lives.

Focusing on three locations where hundreds of people have been evicted, this report examines the emotional and social impact of forced evictions on the lives of five Romani people, their families and communities, and the daily challenges they face in being denied an equal place in society.

amnesty.org/Roma

Index: EUR 39/003/2013
June 2013

AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL

