

# SLOVAK MUNICIPALITY SUED FOR DISCRIMINATION FOR RELOCATING ROMA TO A LANDFILL

**Brussels, 23 August 2023:** The Forum for Human Rights, in cooperation with the European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC), have brought a collective complaint against the municipality of Martin, Slovakia on behalf of Romani families living dangerously near to a landfill on the outskirts of the city. The Roma were relocated to the segregated community named 'Bambusky' by the municipality in the late 1990's, with more arriving in 2008, in accommodation built only metres away from the rubbish dump. The collective complaint has been brought to Martin District Court and alleges discrimination by the municipality based on segregation and the proximity of the municipality-owned housing to hazardous waste.

*"This Roma community has lived dangerously near the landfill for more than twenty years. The authorities were aware of this situation and have done nothing to find solutions. The situation is unacceptable and clearly discriminatory. We now turn to the Slovak courts with hope to find justice for the Roma community living in Bambusky, including safe, non-segregated, and dignified housing"* said FORUM's director Alexandra Dubová.

The community of approximately 300 people (including at least 100 children) originated in the late 1990's when the municipality moved Roma to purpose-built, segregated apartments and shipping containers next to the landfill. Further expansion occurred in 2008, increasing the number of people living in close proximity to the waste. The landfill had been operating since 1994 and was a site storing extremely hazardous waste until 2001, after which it continued as a landfill for regular waste. Shortly after the residents of Bambusky were moved there, they complained about the smell from the nearby landfill as well as the poor hygienic conditions, skin conditions they suffered, and the rats which their children had to guard against. The locality is also without access to basic services such as hot water and public lighting and has poor road access.

*"Authorities force Roma onto dirty, dangerous, and polluted land all over Europe. The EU's new European Green Deal promises – 'no person and no place left behind' – all the while Roma are left to rot on landfills, industrial wastelands, and other poisoned environments all over the continent. Segregation of Roma in conditions not fit for human habitation is one of the most visible signs of antigypsyism in our society, and it must be challenged directly by taking those responsible to court"* said the ERRC's President Đorđe Jovanović.

According to the [Institute of Environmental Policy](#), the site is one of the most dangerous landfills in Slovakia. In May 2018, much of it was engulfed in a fire which fortunately did not reach the homes in Bambusky. However, their proximity to the rubbish dump puts the Roma at an increased risk of fires. In 2009, an environmental impact assessment was carried out when the landfill was being enlarged.

The assessment allowed the expansion to go ahead, having little regard for the Roma at Bambusky despite detailing the numerous health hazards they face. The [report](#) mentions a “*residential part of Bambusky for inadaptable citizens*” which carries a “*risk of the possibility of transmission of infectious and other diseases to humans... by animals coming into contact with the waste (birds, rodents, insects).*” The report concludes that the prevailing winds and distance from the landfill mean there should be no negative effects from the landfill faced by the population of the city of Martin, “*with the exception of Bambusky.*”

In its [2022 report](#), the Slovak Academy of Sciences' Forecasting Institute identified Bambusky as one of the three most problematic locations in Slovakia in terms of dwellings in proximity to official landfills. According to the researchers, the risks for Romani communities living close to the landfill are significantly higher than for non-Roma who live in the near area.

The organisations' complaint demands that the municipality provide alternative housing in a non-segregated area of Martin which is away from the landfill, or other environments hazardous to human health. The ERRC and Forum for Human Rights are committed to finding justice for this community, whether that comes through the District Court of Martin, a higher Slovak court, or an international human rights tribunal.

Roma are disproportionately forced to live in environmentally hazardous environments across Slovakia. At the [lower estimate](#), there are some 4800 Roma living in close proximity to landfills in the country. Elsewhere in Europe, segregated Romani communities are often found in toxic areas unfit for human habitation. The ERRC has recorded, campaigned, and litigated against numerous similar cases of environmental racism across Europe, including the eviction of Roma from Cluj Napoca to the landfill at [Pata Rât](#), the winter eviction of [vulnerable Roma \(including pregnant women\) in Skopje](#), North Macedonia to a riverside wasteland without access to water, and the UN's creation of IDP camps for Roma, Ashkali, and Balkan Egyptians on [lead-contaminated land in Mitrovica, Kosovo](#).

This press release is also available in Slovak.

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