Amnesty International, the European Roma Rights Centre and other organisations have documented how Romani people have been disproportionately affected by policies resulting in forced evictions and segregation of Roma in camps. Throughout history authorities have always used measures to marginalize and reject the Roma population. As a result, Roma have been prevented from settling. Forced eviction of Roma is a traditional and continuing expression of Anti-Gypsyism.

Objective
The hearing aims to discuss and review the situation of forced evictions of Roma in Bulgaria, Hungary, France and Italy. The objective is to use these four examples to highlight the phenomenon and to discuss how to use the EU Racial Equality Directive, the Council Recommendation on effective Roma integration measures and the National Roma Integration Strategies as well as other international human rights standards to address the discrimination against Roma in housing, particularly when it comes to forced evictions.

The hearing will offer the opportunity for civil society organisations, the concerned Member States and the European Commission to discuss specific cases, find possible ways to prevent forced evictions through EU funds and ensure that human rights safeguards are applied.

Hosts and Organisers
MEPs:
- S&D - Soraya Post, Péter Niedermüller and Damian Draghici
- GUE/NGL - Cornelia Ernst and Barbara Spinelli
- Verts/ALE - Benedek Jávor and Terry Reintke
- ALDE - Fredrick Federley
- EPP - Sirpa Pietikäinen

Organisations:
Background
In May and June 2015, local tensions between Roma and non-Roma turned into mass protests over what was described as theft and ‘illegal’ Roma housing in Garman, a village in southwest Bulgaria, and in Orlandovzi, a neighborhood in Sofia. Hundreds of protesters demanded that the Bulgarian government demolish the ‘illegal’ Roma houses and that they expel Roma. To placate the protesters, the government began to demolish 124 houses inhabited by Roma in Garman and 14 in Orlandovzi. On July 10, the European Court of Human Rights, while considering whether evictions should be stopped, issued a letter to the Bulgarian authorities asking if alternative housing was offered to the families that were living there. On July 13 and 14, Members of the European Parliament and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe called on the Bulgarian authorities to immediately put an end to the evictions and anti-Roma actions.

Despite these calls, the Bulgarian government decided to continue with the demolition of houses without ensuring that human rights safeguards were met. The authorities of Garman proceeded with the eviction on September 7, leaving 41 people homeless. On August 20, the government continued its forced evictions, this time in the city of Varna. The municipal administration demolished 46 Roma houses without giving any prior notice to the inhabitants, many of whom are children and single mothers. As a result, in both Garman and Varna, hundreds of people, including minors, have been left homeless. Only a few of the evicted people have been offered alternative housing in an overcrowded social center under very bad conditions. The majority of evictees have not been offered alternative housing. On September 15, the government announced its next target for forced evictions, which will be Peshtera, a town in southern Bulgaria.

On August 27, the Le Samaritain settlement in La Courneuve in Paris was dismantled by the French police without prior warning, leaving nearly 80 Roma families homeless. Only a few people, who were pre-identified as particularly vulnerable, were rehoused in emergency centers for 3 days. No alternative housing has been offered to the other 150 people, which is in breach of the 2012 Ministerial Circular on anticipating and preparing evictions from illegal settlements. The European Roma Right Centre (ERRC) reports that French authorities forcibly evicted more than 21,537 Romani EU citizens from other Member States in 2013 - twice as many as in 2012.

During the first half of 2015, France forcibly evicted 3,947 Roma. On August 28, Jacques Toubon, the French Ombudsman, La Voix des Roms, the Abbé Pierre Foundation and Médecins du Monde highly criticized the forced evictions. On September 11, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein also expressed serious concerns, stating “It is becoming increasingly apparent that there is a systematic national policy to forcibly evict the Roma”.

In Italy, despite the formal closure of the so-called “Nomad Emergency” in 2013, Roma and Sinti communities are still being forcibly evicted from their dwellings throughout the country. The Italian legislative framework does not foresee an explicit reference concerning forced evictions from makeshift settlements. Systematic campaigns of forced evictions have been carried out by the authorities in the cities of Rome and Milan, often accompanied by a security-centered rhetoric, and politically exploited for electoral gains. In 2013, the authorities of Rome carried out 54 documented forced evictions, affecting around 1,230 Roma. So far this year a further 69 such evictions have been carried out in the Italian capital, affecting 1,008 people. When evicting Roma and Sinti families, the Italian authorities rarely apply all the procedural protections foreseen by international human rights instruments. The affected families have no access to a legal remedy because in most of the documented cases, evictions are carried out in the absence of formal eviction orders, without a formal notice or any kind of consultation. “Associazione 21 Luglio” has reported that the Italian authorities will continue to use forced evictions against Roma and among their next targets will be 360 Roma in the city of Cosenza.
In 2014, the mayor of Miskolc in Hungary announced that the city will eradicate its Roma shanty towns. In July 2015 around 450, mainly Roma families from the ‘Numbered Streets’ neighborhood, were asked to vacate their homes or they will be evicted. The justification for the planned eviction is an amendment of the local government decree on social housing adopted in May 2014. According to ERRC, the decree aims to provide legal basis for the municipality to terminate the tenancy agreements for people living in low standard social housing. The official document offers the tenants compensation of up to 2 million HUF (approximately €6,450) to purchase a property outside of the city of Miskolc on the condition that tenants do not sell or remortgage it for five years. In addition to the threat of eviction, anti-Roma rhetoric by local authorities have contributed to the creation of petitions from several nearby villages – the document states that Roma from Miskolc would not be welcome and that those villages would not be able to provide them with social benefits or public work opportunities. The Hungarian Ombudsman also published a report about the discriminatory actions of the Miskolc Local Government.

In July 2015 the Supreme Court ruled that the regulations which oblige tenants to move outside the territory of a city and terminates tenancy agreement in exchange for monetary compensation are unlawful. The Court emphasized that the regulations constituted discrimination in access to housing and violated the right to privacy, family life and freedom of movement. However, the Court has not addressed the issue of evictions as a whole, focusing only on the provision concerning monetary compensation. Contrary to international human rights standards, all those affected by evictions in the ‘Numbered Streets’ neighbourhood have not had the opportunity to engage in any genuine consultation on their proposed eviction or explore feasible alternatives for housing solutions, a key safeguard against forced evictions. Roma families living in the ‘Numbered Streets’ are still under threat of eviction.

The targeting of a minority with measures such as systematic evictions violates international human rights standards and European Union anti-discrimination law, including the EU Racial Equality Directive. These discriminatory actions severely undermine the commitment of the Member States to the EU framework for National Roma Integration Strategies and the Council Recommendation on effective Roma integration measures. Evictions should be carried out as a last resort and in line with European and international human rights safeguards. Nobody should be rendered homeless following an eviction; authorities should provide alternative adequate housing, in consultation with the affected people. These obligations extend to all tiers of government including city authorities. Across Europe, authorities have failed to comply with these safeguards, with the majority of victims of forced evictions left homeless.