

Ref: CommHR/MOF/sf 068-2025

Mr Rosen ZHELYAZKOV
Prime Minister of the Republic of Bulgaria

Strasbourg, 25 April 2025

Dear Prime Minister,

My mandate is to foster the effective observance of human rights in all member states of the Council of Europe. An important part of my work is to engage in dialogue with the governments and parliaments of member states, and to assist them in addressing possible shortcomings in their laws and practices.

I write in relation to the demolition, on 15 April 2025, of a number of homes of Roma residents of the Zaharna Fabrika neighbourhood in the Ilinden district of Sofia.

I learned with concern that the demolitions were carried out despite an interim measures ruling against this by the European Court of Human Rights, issued on 11 April 2025. I was informed that all structures in the area were demolished, impacting more than 200 people, among whom children, older people and people in poor health. It is also my understanding that personal belongings were destroyed during the demolition, with residents struggling to salvage items of immediate necessity and that the demolitions took place in the presence of numerous law enforcement agents equipped with a water cannon.

I am concerned that the majority of those affected have not been offered adequate alternative accommodation and that some of them, including vulnerable individuals, are now sleeping outdoors. They are, according to reports, deprived of access to basic sanitation and healthcare and face risks to their safety as the area remains unsecured. I have also received reports of blockages in the cooperation and engagement of authorities at various levels, resulting in the postponement of the action needed to address this situation. It is also regrettable that efforts made by civil society actors to advance measures in this case have been hindered.

These circumstances, which I understand are further exacerbated by rising tensions and the broader climate of hostility towards Roma, including opposition by other district mayors and residents of Sofia to the provision of alternative accommodation in other areas of the city, make addressing the situation of those left homeless a matter of urgency.

I respectfully ask you to take immediate measures, in coordination with all responsible authorities, to minimise the negative impacts of these demolitions and prevent the further deterioration of the situation, particularly by ensuring the provision of emergency shelter, basic sanitary and hygienic conditions and access to essential health care, social services and legal aid for those concerned. Measures to prevent any escalation of the events including violence against Roma by other residents should also be taken.

At the same time, solutions should be sought to provide affected individuals and families with adequate alternative accommodation, the suitability of which should be evaluated in consultation with those concerned and in view of their specific needs. As highlighted by the European Court of Human Rights in its judgment in the case of *Yordanova and Others v. Bulgaria* (§§ 132-133), the fact that the affected persons belong to a disadvantaged group must be taken into account. I also note the need to respect the standards outlined in Recommendation Rec(2005)4 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on improving the housing conditions of Roma and Travellers in Europe and in Resolution 2413 (2021) "Discrimination against Roma and Travellers in the field of housing" of the Parliamentary Assembly.

I would be grateful if you could inform me of any action taken to address these issues. I look forward to continuing my dialogue with you.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael O'Flaherty". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Michael O'Flaherty