

Dear Mayor Terziev,

We, the undersigned organizations and individuals who have supported the Roma families of Zaharna Fabrika before, during, and since their forced eviction on 15 April 2025, are writing to express our deep concern regarding the current situation of the families, notably the ones accommodated in the Temporary Crisis Centre in Zaharna Fabrika and the uncertainty they continue to face.

We are writing because of recent developments, including reports concerning a meeting held on 22 July 2026 between non-Roma residents of the Zaharna Fabrika neighbourhood and representatives of the municipal and other authorities, which have heightened the uncertainty experienced by the affected Roma families and underscore the need for urgent clarification and action by Sofia Municipality.

More than a year after losing their homes, a number of the affected families remain in temporary accommodation without clear information about when they will be rehoused or what options are available to them. This continuing uncertainty affects their ability to work, care for their children, maintain their children's education and plan for the future. Temporary crisis accommodation cannot become a substitute for a sustainable housing solution. The families need a clear pathway towards safe, affordable and adequate housing, developed in consultation with them and adapted to the circumstances of each household.

Reported statements during the meeting at Ilinden Municipality on 22 July

On 22 July 2026, representatives of Ilinden Municipality, the Director of the Temporary Crisis Centre, Ms. Minka Yovcheva, Director of the Social Services for Children and Adults Directorate, and members of the Zaharna Fabrika Initiative Committee (a committee established by non-Roma residents) met to discuss the future of the Roma families currently accommodated in the Temporary Crisis Centre. The meeting was held without the participation of Roma residents and representatives of civil society.

According to Roma residents, representatives of the authorities addressed them outside the Temporary Crisis Centre and told the Roma residents that it was their responsibility to find housing on the private rental market. Some Roma parents also report that they understood that statements made by representatives of the competent authorities to mean that, if they failed to secure housing or if their behaviour did not meet the expectations of the social services, their children could be placed in alternative care and could return only after the parents had obtained stable housing. They further report that residents were instructed to spend as little time as possible in the alley outside the Temporary Crisis Centre and not to go outside after 10 p.m.

These accounts require an urgent and clear response from Sofia Municipality. The Municipality should confirm what was communicated to the families, the context and basis for the statements, and whether these statements reflect any formal assessment, instruction or planned action.

Parents report that they left the interaction believing that their inability to secure private rental accommodation could place their family unity at risk. Communication by public officials should

provide families with clear information about their rights and the support available to them. It should not intensify insecurity or create the impression that poverty and homelessness constitute parental neglect.

Poverty and homelessness must not lead to family separation

We, the undersigned organizations, would like to stress that the affected families face substantial barriers in accessing the private rental market, including housing costs that are unaffordable for people living in poverty and also facing racial discrimination. Requiring Roma families to overcome these barriers without adequate institutional support transfers responsibility for resolving the consequences of their displacement entirely onto them.

We would like to reiterate that the Roma families in question find themselves in their current situation due to the actions and omissions of the authorities themselves—specifically, the unlawful actions taken by the Mayor of the Ilinden District on April 15, 2025 (facilitated by the government through agencies of the Ministry of the Interior) and your own failure to exercise the powers vested in you under Article 44, Paragraph 14, Item 9 of the Local Self-Government and Local Administration Act, both regarding the initial events of April 15, 2025, and following the formal notification subsequently submitted to you.¹

It should be noted that following his visit to Bulgaria between 29 June and 3 July 2026, the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights expressed concerns about the incidence of forced evictions and [called](#) the Bulgarian authorities among others to “ensure that the National Housing Strategy currently under preparation adequately addresses the specific housing situation of Roma communities, including those living in informal settlements”.²

It should also be noted that on August 25, 2026, the European Court of Human Rights issued a judgment in the case of *Aleksieva v. Bulgaria* (No. 30915/23) concerning a previous, similar case in the capital’s Orlandovtsi district; the Court found that the demolition procedures merely had the “appearance of lawfulness,” as the individuals whose homes were affected were effectively excluded from the administrative proceedings and subsequently failed to receive effective judicial protection.³ Currently, a case regarding the events of April 15, 2025, in the Zaharna Fabrika district – as well as the subsequent actions and omissions of the Bulgarian authorities – is also pending before the Court.⁴

Access to affordable housing constitutes a central component of the right to adequate housing.⁵ In order to comply with Bulgaria’s international human rights obligations, the municipality, as an organ of the state, must ensure that all people including those living in poverty and vulnerable to marginalization and discrimination such as the Roma have access to affordable housing.

In the case of children, states are obliged to take appropriate measures to assist parents and caregivers to implement the right to an adequate standard of living. States must also “in case

¹ Ref. no. SOA25-NTs62-680/08.07.2025.

² Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, Bulgaria can go further to enhance long-term care for older people and secure housing for Roma communities, 6 July 2026.

³ Case of *Aleksieva and Others v. Bulgaria* (No. 30915/23)

⁴ Case of *Ilieva and Others v. Bulgaria* (No. 11201/25)

⁵ Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) General Comment No. 4: The Right to Adequate Housing (Art. 11 (1) of the Covenant), adopted at the Sixth Session of the CESCR, on 13 December 1991 (Contained in Document E/1992/23), para. 8 c.

of need, provide material assistance and support programmes, particularly with regard to nutrition, clothing and housing”.⁶ The Committee on the Rights of the Child has highlighted that these prescriptions leave no leeway for state discretion.⁷ To comply with this obligation, states must provide support to parents and caregivers, particularly concerning subsidized adequate housing and income generation.⁸ Neglecting to provide financial support when family members are unable to provide for the children, violates the state’s duty to ensure affordable housing.⁹

According to the UN Guidelines for the alternative care of children: “Financial and material poverty, or conditions directly and uniquely imputable to such poverty, should never be the only justification for the removal of a child from parental care, for receiving a child into alternative care, or for preventing his/her reintegration, but should be seen as a signal for the need to provide appropriate support to the family”.¹⁰

Further, in line with the principles underpinning Bulgarian child protection legislation, the family is the primary and most appropriate environment for a child’s upbringing and development. Public authorities should therefore prioritise measures that support parents and preserve family unity, including appropriate housing, financial and social assistance. Poverty, homelessness or parents’ inability to secure accommodation on the private rental market should trigger effective support for the family, rather than be treated, in themselves, as grounds for separating children from their parents.

Information concerning increased police presence

We are also concerned by information received by the undersigned organisations that the police presence in and around the Temporary Crisis Centre may be increased. The authorities should clarify the purpose, legal basis, scope and expected duration of any such measure. In the current context, a visible increase in police presence without a clear explanation or safeguards could heighten fear among residents and contribute to their stigmatisation. Any police presence must have a clear lawful purpose, be limited to what is necessary, be applied without discrimination and take full account of the presence of children. It must not be used to intimidate residents, restrict lawful movement, discourage families from raising concerns or penalise their engagement with civil-society organisations.

A clear and sustainable rehousing plan is needed

The present situation risks reproducing patterns seen in previous cases. For example, families affected by an eviction in Zaharna Fabrika in 2019 still remain in temporary accommodation for prolonged periods without access to sustainable housing solutions. Emergency accommodation must be accompanied by an adequately resourced and time bound plan for permanent or long-term housing.

⁶ Convention on the rights of the child. Art. 27

⁷ Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC), General comment No. 21 (2017) on children in street situations, 20 June 2017, CRC/C/GC/21, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/general-comments-and-recommendations/general-comment-no-21-2017-children-street>

⁸ CRC, General comment 21 (previously cited)

⁹ UN Special Rapporteur on adequate housing, Report, 15 August 2023, A/78/192

¹⁰ Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children, A/RES/ 64/142, 24 February 2010, para. 15.

We understand that work on a broader municipal housing strategy or framework has been undertaken by the Sofia Municipality. The Municipality should confirm the current status of the above mentioned housing strategy and clarify whether and how it addresses the needs of the affected families, what housing options are being considered and when concrete solutions that are human rights compliant will become available. The development of a broader strategy must not delay immediate, household-specific measures for the families currently living in the Temporary Crisis Centre in Zaharna Fabrika and other Roma families affected by previous evictions in the area and still living in temporary accommodation.

Communication to civil society

We are surprised and concerned that the administration of Sofia Municipality is systematically excluding civil society organizations including signatories to this letter, from participating in such meetings and accessing information, despite being well aware that they work with the Roma community in the Zaharna Fabrika neighbourhood. We are also surprised and concerned that the affected Roma community was also not involved in the discussions on these matters. We call the municipal authorities to provide an explanation for this approach.

We call on Sofia Municipality to:

1. **Clarify publicly and in writing what was communicated by the authorities to the affected Roma families on 22 July 2026**, including whether parents' inability to secure private rental housing or alleged failure to comply with expectations at the Centre was linked to the possible placement of their children in alternative care.
2. **Confirm that no child will be separated from their family solely because of poverty, homelessness or inability to access the private rental market** and that any child-protection intervention where necessary will be based on an individual assessment and will prioritise support within the family.
3. **Guarantee that no family will be required to leave the Temporary Crisis Centre before safe, affordable and adequate alternative housing has been secured** with reasonable notice and without disruption to children's education, healthcare, employment or family support networks.
4. **Develop and communicate a time-bound rehousing plan for every affected household** based on individual needs assessments and genuine consultation with the families. The plan should identify available housing options, financial and rental support, the responsible municipal units and clear implementation deadlines.
5. **Clarify the rules governing the Temporary Crisis Centre**, including the basis for any restrictions on residents' movement, the procedure through which residents may raise concerns or challenge decisions, and the safeguards against arbitrary or discriminatory treatment.
6. **Clarify the purpose, legal basis, scope and expected duration of any increased police presence in and around the Temporary Crisis Centre** and communicate this information to residents in an accessible manner. Ensure that any police presence is limited to what is necessary, applied without discrimination and does not intimidate residents, restrict lawful movement or interfere with their ability to raise concerns and engage with civil society.

7. **Ensure that no family experiences retaliation or other adverse consequences** because they have raised concerns or communicated with civil-society organisations and public institutions.
8. **Provide information about the status, content, funding and implementation timetable of Sofia Municipality's broader housing strategy**, including how affected communities and civil-society organisations will participate in its development and monitoring.
9. **Clarify why civil society organisations with experience of supporting the affected families as well as the Roma affected families were not invited to participate in the relevant discussions or provided with timely information.** Ensure their meaningful participation in future consultations and their timely access to information relevant to the situation and rehousing of the families.

We request a written response by the end of 1 October 2026 and a meeting involving representatives of the Mayor's office, the responsible Deputy Mayor, Ilinden District, the relevant municipal directorates, representatives of the families and the undersigned organisations.

We recognise that addressing Sofia's housing challenges requires coordination across municipal and national institutions. The organisations supporting the families have developed substantial knowledge of the barriers they face and of measures that could contribute to sustainable solutions. We remain ready to contribute constructively to an approach that protects family unity, prevents homelessness and enables the families to rebuild their lives with security and dignity.

Sincerely,

Amnesty International Bulgaria
ATD Fourth World Bulgaria
Bulgarian Helsinki Committee
Integro Association