

Mayor Dragoslav Pavlović

City of Niš

7. Jula 2, Niš, Serbia

gradonacelnik@ni.rs

mayor@ni.rs

EU Delegation to Serbia

Avenija 19a, Vladimira Popovića 40/V, 11073 Belgrade, Serbia

DELEGATION-SERBIA@eeas.europa.eu

Dr. Michael O’Flaherty

Commissioner for Human Rights

Office of the Commissioner for Human Rights

Council of Europe, 67075 Strasbourg Cedex, France

Secretariat of ECRI

Council of Europe, F-67075 Strasbourg Cedex, France

Office of the UN Resident Coordinator in Serbia

UN House, Bulevar Zorana Đinđića 64, 11070 New Belgrade, Serbia

rccs-unorc.serbia@un.org

Brussels, 25 November 2025

Call for Urgent Action: Electricity Cut in the Crvena Zvezda Romani Community in Niš

Dear Mayor Pavlović,

The European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC) is a Roma-led international public interest law organisation which monitors and protects the human rights of Roma in Europe and provides legal defence in cases of human rights violations.

The Group for Children and Youth “Indigo” is a national association supporting marginalised children and youth and advocating for their rights.

We are writing to you concerning the recent suspension of electricity supply to the long-standing Romani community Crvena Zvezda in Niš. The informal neighbourhood has existed for more than five decades yet remains informal due to the municipality’s continuous failure to include it in spatial and urban development plans. As a result of this structural exclusion, individual homes cannot be legalised and residents have been prevented from obtaining standard, individual electricity connections to the public power grid. Instead, the entire community has been obliged to rely on only two

collective meters, a model which is neither used in non-Roma neighbourhoods nor compliant with principles of equal access to public utilities. This structurally discriminatory arrangement exposes all households to collective billing, the accumulation of debts for which no individual household is responsible, and collective disconnection even when many families meet their obligations.

The complete electricity cut was carried out on 22 October 2025, at the beginning of winter, leaving tens of families (including children, older persons, and persons with disabilities and chronic illnesses) in unsafe and degrading conditions without the ability to heat their homes, prepare food, store medication, or maintain minimal hygiene. Access to electricity is indispensable for the realisation of a range of other rights: persons with medical conditions cannot safely store or use their medication, maintain hygiene, or carry out necessary treatments; children and students cannot study or do homework after daylight ends as early as 4 p.m, nor can they participate in any meaningful activity contributing to their development, let alone play or enjoy family life; in addition, religious and cultural practices, including the performance of customary burial rites, become significantly more difficult or impossible. The absence of light and heating also creates additional social strain inside households and within the community, as families and neighbours are left idle once darkness falls, increasing tension and conflict in an already vulnerable environment and stripping the entire community of their dignity. The risks are not abstract – during a previous electricity cut in 2018, at least one resident reportedly froze to death, illustrating the very real and potentially fatal consequences of such measures. At this moment, a resident has just been released from hospital after a foot amputation due to diabetic complications and is prevented from treating the wound properly, storing the insulin in the fridge, maintaining hygiene and recovering both physically and emotionally.

This latest disconnection is even more concerning because it occurs at a moment when the discriminatory nature of power connections, collective metering, billing practices and repeated power cuts in Crvena Zvezda is already the subject of a pending constitutional complaint before the Serbian Constitutional Court. This constitutional review follows civil proceedings initiated in 2017 by residents of the settlement together with the European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC), challenging the discriminatory and structurally harmful electricity-supply model imposed on the community. Proceeding with a full disconnection while the case remains under judicial scrutiny undermines the effectiveness of the ongoing legal remedy and intensifies the harm experienced by residents.

Such deterioration of living conditions raises serious concerns under Serbia's human rights obligations, including the Article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and its authoritative interpretation in General

Comment No. 4, multiple provisions of the Revised European Social Charter, the Council of Europe (CoE) ECRI General Policy Recommendation No. 13 on combating anti-Gypsyism and discrimination against Roma and the CoE Committee of Ministers Recommendation Rec(2005)4 on improving the housing conditions of Roma and Travellers in Europe.

Given that Crvena Zvezda's informality is a direct consequence of decades of municipal inaction, any punitive measure based on that informality—such as denying individual electricity connections or imposing collective disconnection—is both unreasonable and discriminatory. Residents have repeatedly expressed willingness to regularise their status and assume individual responsibility for their own electricity consumption but have been prevented from doing so.

We therefore urge the competent authorities to:

- Immediately restore electricity as a matter of urgency to prevent further harm during winter.
- Initiate steps toward establishing individual household metering or another fair and non-discriminatory supply arrangement.

The current situation places residents' lives, health, dignity, cultural practices and community safety at serious risk and reflects structural discrimination prohibited under both domestic and international standards. An immediate, proportionate, and rights-compliant response is required.

We look forward to your response by email to jonathan.lee@errc.org or by post to the European Roma Rights Centre, Avenue de Cortenbergh 71, 4th floor, Brussels 1000, Belgium.

Yours sincerely,

Dorđe Jovanović
President
ERRC



Tamara Simonović
Izvršna direktorka
Grupa za decu i mlade „Indigo“

