

French Protestants decry crackdown on Roma

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France's main Protestant grouping has added its voice to criticism of a government program aimed at repatriating Roma (Gypsy) immigrants and demolishing unauthorized Roma camps. The Protestant Federation of France said it was "concerned about the new direction of policies concerning the Roma population, one of Europe's most impoverished populations."

At the end of July the French government began a crackdown on Roma communities as well as on *gens du voyage* ("traveling people," French nationals who prefer a nomadic lifestyle), after outbreaks of violence between Roma communities and police following an incident in which a traveler youth was killed by security forces.

The statement by the Protestant grouping follows Roman Catholic leaders' criticism of the government policy.

France has around 15,000 Roma from eastern Europe, especially Romania, according to the London-based Minority Rights Group International. Some long-established nomadic Roma communities claim French nationality. —ENI