



Roma access to quality and affordable housing

*in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary,
Romania, Slovakia, Spain – and other 6 countries*

Florin Botonogu

Policy Center for Roma and Minorities, Romania
/ ERGO Network

FEANTSA Forum 2024

Vienna

What is the ERGO Network?

- European umbrella organization of **30 national members** representing grassroots Roma communities across Europe, founded in 2008.
- *Objective:* to **combat poverty, inequality and antigypsyism** and to **strengthen Roma civil society** and participation in decision making at local, national and European level.
- Advocates for **better policies** on national and European level, organises public debates and campaigns, **builds the capacity of (pro-)Roma activists**, and provides spaces for networking and mutual learning.



Snapshot: Roma in Europe

- **The umbrella-term 'Roma'** covers diverse groups, including Roma, Sinti, Kale, Travellers, Romanichels, Boyash/Rudari, Ashkali, Egyptians, Yenish, Dom, Lom, Rom and Abdal.
- An estimated **10 to 12 million Roma live in Europe**, of which approximately 6 million are citizens or residents of the EU.
- *Key figures:* 80% are at risk of poverty; 41% report experiencing antigypsyism; only 43% are in paid employment; poor health, education, and housing indicators compared to the majority (*EU FRA*).



Roma access to quality and affordable housing – ERGO Network case studies 2023

- **Roma access to quality and affordable housing** was chosen as thematic focus topic for ERGO Network in 2023.
- Researchers in **six countries** (Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, and Spain) each prepared a **case study** on their national context.
- **Additional benchmarking** evidence was provided by a further 6 European countries – Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ireland, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Türkiye.
- The work yielded a comprehensive [EU synthesis report](#) **with national and European recommendations.**



KEY MESSAGE 1:

Roma living conditions are significantly worse than those of the majority, while most Roma experience *de facto* homelessness.

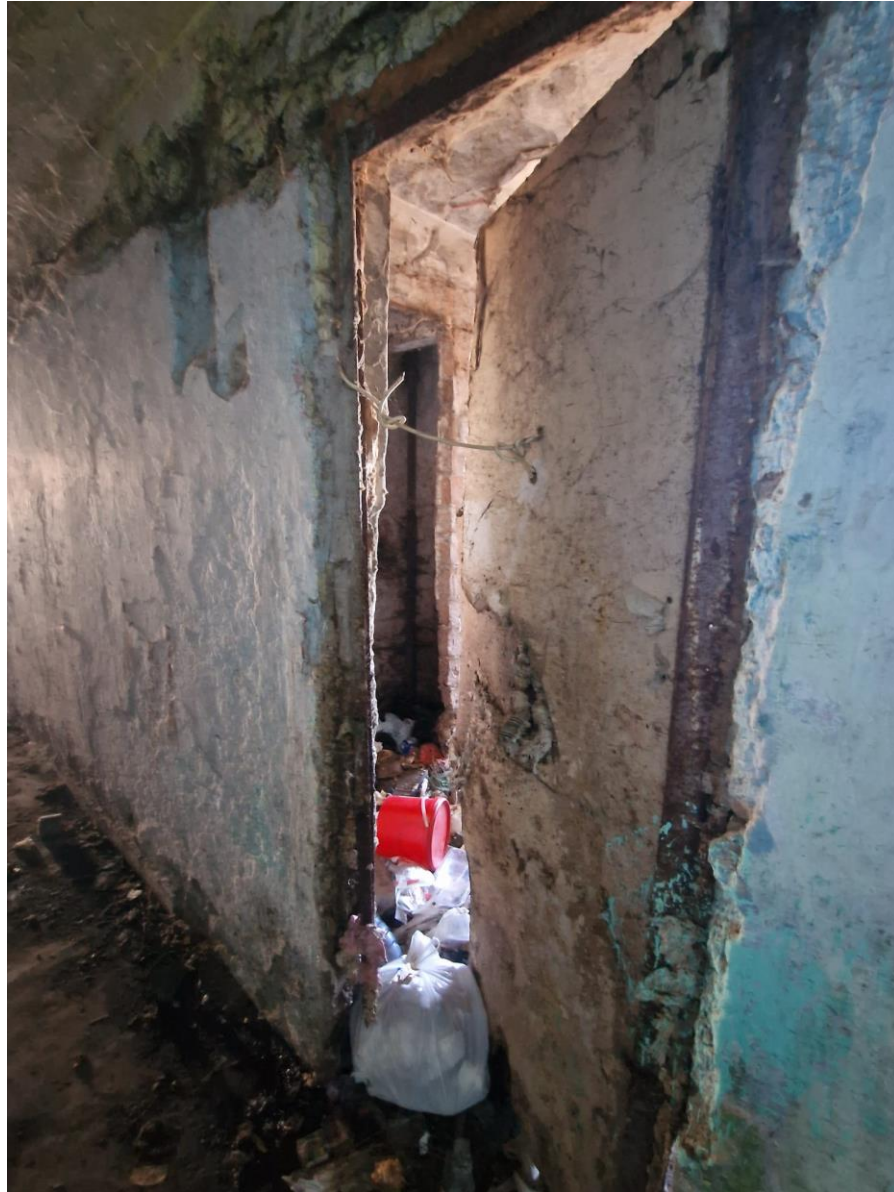
- Many Roma live in **insecurity of tenure** and **cannot prove ownership**.
- They mostly live in **dilapidated houses, unrepaired flats, shacks, squats**.
- Many of them experience **cold, heat, mould, humidity, darkness**.
- Most Roma households are **not connected to utilities**, including running water, sanitation, but also gas, electricity, internet, waste collection.
- **Overcrowding** significantly affects **most Roma** households.
- According to the [ETHOS](#) definition, **most Roma in Europe are homeless**.

➤ ***Urgent and significant investment is needed to improve the structural condition of the dwellings that most Roma inhabit, including their connection to utilities, in order to render them compliant with the United Nations definition of adequate housing.***

















KEY MESSAGE 2:

Most Roma live in segregated communities and / or informal settlements, many exposed to environmental hazards.

- Whether in rural or urban environments, **Roma settlements are at the margins**, cut off from the majority.
- The settlements are often **not recognised by local administration** and hence are **not covered** by utilities or services.
- The 'houses' in them are often **not houses**, by any definition.
- Many such settlements are **located on undesirable land**, such as polluted former industrial sites, or close to landfills.
- In these cases, the **Roma are exposed to environmental harms** like polluted air and water, noxious fumes, pests, and diseases.
- *We need comprehensive desegregation plans with clear targets, including the legalisation of irregular housing situations and tackling the environmental impact of unsuitable locations.*





KEY MESSAGE 3:

High costs of housing and overcomplex administrative procedures further reduce Roma access to housing.

- **Housing is simply unaffordable** for most Roma, whether renting or buying, with housing costs far exceeding incomes.
 - Most Roma also **experience energy poverty**, accumulating arrears that often lead to their **disconnection from supply**.
 - Housing-related **administrative procedures are incredibly intricate** and difficult to comply with for many Roma.
 - **Not having a fixed address** often means you don't exist in the eyes of the state and may mean **no ID papers** in some countries.
- *Roma housing and energy poverty must be addressed through better access to income and better regulation of the housing and utilities market, while associated bureaucracy should be simplified.*



KEY MESSAGE 4:

The Roma continue to face antigypsyism and forced evictions.

- Landlords **won't rent** and banks **won't loan** to Roma, while the majority **don't want them as neighbours**.
 - As **the Roma are denied housing**, even social housing, spatially **segregated informal settlements** proliferate.
 - The precarious status of informal housing leaves the Roma with **no rights**, exposed to **abusive collective forced evictions**.
 - Tackling antigypsyism in housing is not enough without broader efforts to **build tolerant, multicultural communities**.
- *Anti-bias training must be compulsory for all housing actors, including local authorities, alongside strong anti-discrimination legislation; evictions should be a last resort, and must entail due notice and the provision of decent alternative housing.*



KEY MESSAGE 5:

Social housing holds great potential for Roma housing, but it is currently under-utilised.

- The **open housing market is prohibitive** due to both costs as well as antigypsyism, **social housing plays a key role**.
- But in most countries, the **supply is low**, the **stock is old**, and offers are located in already **segregated communities**.
- Additionally, **conditionality, eligibility, as well as costs of rent and utilities** are still hard to meet for Roma living in poverty.
- Unfortunately, **some local authorities discriminate** against the Roma and **overlook them** for social housing allocation.
- *The social housing stock needs to be expanded and improved, while its allocation should follow a rights-based, housing-first approach, reducing conditionality and unaffordability and ensuring that vulnerable groups such as the Roma are prioritised.*



KEY MESSAGE 6:

Roma communities and their civil society organisations must be involved, to co-create sustainable ways forward.

- There must be **pro-active outreach to the Roma and their representatives** so that measures respond to actual needs
- **A partnership approach** must involve all stakeholders in order to repair historical antigypsyism and distrust.
- Roma beneficiaries and their civil society organisations need to be **equal partners** in the development and implementation of housing policies.
- *Policy makers and all housing actors must cooperate with Roma stakeholders and their civil society representatives to ensure evidence-based solutions, support disaggregated data collection, foster common understanding, and bridge cultural gaps.*



Conclusions and way forward

- Europe's Roma experience **dire living conditions**, in **substandard dwellings** located in **segregated, informal settlements**, facing constant **risk of eviction** => all this is both the result, and one of the causes of **rampant antigypsyism**.
- All 6 Roma National Frameworks include housing as an objective, but in some (BG, HU, RO, ES) **targets are vague**, **concrete measures are lacking**, and there are **doubts about the political will** needed for actual change.
- Benchmarking with **Ireland, the Western Balkans, and Türkiye** shows that the issues identified are not unique to the 6 main countries.

Access to quality and affordable housing is a fundamental right and a pre-requisite for a life in dignity and for full participation in the labour market and in society.



Policies and legislation

EU Roma Strategic Framework

EC guidelines on desegregation

EP resolution of 5 October 2022 of the situation of Roma people living in the settlements of the EU

CoE Recommendations on improving the housing conditions of Roma and Travellers in Europe

National legislation

Local policies





Thank you for your attention!

- **Read** our synthesis research report: [here](#)
- **Find out** more: www.ergonetwork.org
- **Contact** us: info@ergonetwork.org

