

# EUROPEAN ROMA GRASSROOTS ORGANISATIONS (ERGO) NETWORK

## *Research Thematic Focus 2023*

### **Roma access to quality and affordable housing in Albania**

**Responding organisation:** [Roma Active Albania](#) (Brixhida Xheka and Adriatik Hasantari).

#### ✓ **Background**

Over the past decade, the Albanian Government has redoubled its efforts to enhance the quality of life and integration of the Roma and Egyptian minority communities into Albanian society. This commitment extends beyond endorsing international agreements safeguarding fundamental human rights. The legal framework has been particularly aligned with European standards, a requisite stemming from Albania's candidacy for EU membership.

In 2019, the Albanian Government dedicated to achieving the inclusion, equality, and integration of Roma and Egyptian communities by formally endorsing the Poznan Declaration signed by the head of states of the Western Balkan countries.

In October 2021, the Government approved the National Action Plan for Equality, Inclusion and Participation of Roma and Egyptian in the Republic of Albania (2021-2025) in the line with the EU Roma Strategic framework

#### ✓ **Where do most Roma live?**

Considering INSTAT (The National Institute of Statistics in Albania)<sup>1</sup>, Roma and Egyptian communities consist of 11,668 peoples in total, including 8,301 Roma people living throughout the country.

Roma people live almost in all areas of Albania, but the largest communities are situated in the Central and Southeast parts of the country, either in the big towns or in villages close to them.

Many Roma communities live in informal settlements or substandard housing and most of them rented it. In addition to that, many Roma and Egyptian families are still living in non-privatized buildings such as former state company premises, chicken farm buildings ex military buildings and Huts etc.

---

<sup>1</sup> The results of the last Population Census (2011) showed that the resident population of Albania is 2,800,138 people and the community with Roma cultural affiliation represents 0.3 % of the total population, while the community with Egyptian cultural affiliation represents 0,12% only.

### ✓ ***Roma homelessness***

There are temporally homelessness Roma but this it is not a widespread phenomenon. There are no Roma coming in Albania from other countries.

### ✓ ***Living conditions of the Roma***

Many Roma communities, particularly those living in informal settlements or substandard housing often have limited access to basic services like clean water, sanitation, and electricity. Some households relying on shared or makeshift facilities, or lacking proper sewage system.

Substandard housing conditions are prone of exposure to cold temperatures, especially during winter months. Inadequate insulation, poorly constructed buildings, or lack of heating contribute to this. Mold and humidity are common problems in poorly constructed or poorly maintained housing. Many Roma families may face overcrowded living conditions due to factors like limited access to adequate housing, economic constraints, and large family sizes. This can lead to compromised privacy and increased risk of disease transmission.

Natural disaster is another factor that influenced the living condition of Roma people in Albania. Approximately, 356 families (around 1541 persons) from Roma and Egyptian minorities were affected by the earthquake of November 26, 2019<sup>2</sup> Same of them are still in temporally shelter/houses.

### ✓ ***Segregation and informal settlements***

In Albania, a significant number of the Roma population historically lived in segregated neighbourhoods, both in urban and rural areas such as Rapishta in Elbasan, former Milk factory in Pogradec, Radoneci in Korca, Shkolla e Bashkuar and Shkoza (social houses) in Tirana.

The segregated neighborhoods (or pocket of ghettos) sometimes referred to as "shantytowns" or "slums," often lacked basic infrastructure and residents face challenges accessing basic services in terms of access to education, healthcare, and employment opportunities, etc.

Efforts have been made by both the Albanian government and Roma and pro Roma organization to address the living conditions of Roma communities. These efforts have included initiatives aimed at providing basic services like water, sanitation, and electricity to informal settlements.

---

<sup>2</sup> Albania Post-Disaster Needs assessment report – February 2020

### ✓ *Affordability of housing*

The Roma population often faces economic disadvantages and discrimination, which can impact their ability to access affordable housing.

The affordability of housing depends on various factors including location, size, and condition of the housing, as well as the economic circumstances of individual households. In many cases, Roma households may spend a significant portion of their disposable income on housing costs. This can result in financial strain and make it difficult for families to cover other essential expenses.

The approved National Action Plan for Equality, Inclusion and Participation of Roma and Egyptian in the Republic of Albania (2021-2025) and the law for Social Houses, foresee the application of the rent subsidy program in the local government units and the low-cost Housing Program, through financial tools such as immediate grants or loan interest rate subsidies for the Roma and Egyptian minorities. Also, the operability of the electronic online applications for social housing and the set-up of a database at the national level is foreseen in this plan.

In addition to access affordable houses, a majority of Roma and Egyptian community lack the ability to afford adequate heating, cooling, and lighting at home and to pay the bills. Many of them have overdue bills to pay and had an agreement with CEZ (nuclear electric power generation company) to pay them in small percentage month by month.

### ✓ *Housing-associated bureaucracy*

Roma communities in Albania, face various obstacles when it comes to dealing with housing-associated bureaucracy. Some of the challenges include:

**Limited documentation:** Many Roma individuals and families lack official documents, such as birth certificates, national IDs, or property deeds. This make it difficult to prove ownership of a family home or access housing benefits.

**Discrimination and marginalization:** Discrimination and marginalization results in reduced access to government services, including housing-related paperwork. Roma individuals face bias or unfair treatment when dealing with authorities or institutions.

**Lack of legal knowledge:** Understanding and navigating the legal processes related to housing can be complex. Many Roma individuals have limited access to legal resources or assistance in understanding and completing the required paperwork.

**Financial barrier:** Obtaining the necessary paperwork may involve fees or expenses. Roma communities, which often face economic disadvantages, may struggle to cover these costs

**Language barrier:** Language differences or illiteracy can present challenges when it comes to understanding and completing paperwork. Roma individuals who speak a different language or dialect may require assistance in translation or interpretation.

**Limited access to information:** Information about housing rights, benefits, and paperwork requirements may not always reach Roma communities effectively. Lack of access to information can hinder their ability to navigate the bureaucratic process.

### ✓ *Antigypsyism in housing*

Roma communities in Albania, like in many other countries, often face antigypsyism in various aspects of life, including housing. This can manifest in discriminatory behavior and practices from neighbors, landlords, banks, and other entities involved in the housing sector.

Examples of antigypsyism in housing include:

**Discrimination by landlord:** Roma individuals and families may encounter discrimination when trying to rent housing. Landlords may refuse to rent to them based on their ethnicity, perpetuating stereotypes and prejudices.

**Segregation and isolation:** Roma communities in Albania face de facto or de jure segregation, with Roma families often concentrated in specific neighborhoods that lack adequate infrastructure and services.

**Limited access to loans and mortgages:** Discrimination from banks or lending institutions may hinder Roma individuals' ability to secure loans or mortgages for purchasing homes.

**Harassment and intimidation by neighbors:** Roma families living in mixed communities may face hostility, harassment, or intimidation from non-Roma neighbors.

Efforts have been made to address these issues through various mechanisms:

- Legal framework: Albania, like many countries, has anti-discrimination laws and regulations in place. These laws prohibit discrimination on the basis of ethnicity, including against Roma individuals in housing.
- Roma and pro Roma organization in Albania work to raise awareness about and combat antigypsyism. They provide legal assistance, advocacy, and support for affected individuals and communities.

### ✓ *Forced evictions*

Forced evictions have been a concern in Albania, affecting various marginalized communities, including the Roma. Forced evictions occurred due to a range of reasons, such as urban development projects, infrastructure improvements, or the regularization of informal settlements or private construction companies.

When forced evictions occurred, they often raised significant human rights and social justice concerns. In some cases, Roma communities have not received adequate notice or were provided with suitable alternative housing options. This led to increased vulnerability and exacerbate social and economic inequalities.

Forced evictions took various forms:

**Lack of Adequate Notice:** In some cases, affected communities, including Roma, may not receive sufficient notice before eviction proceedings. This can leave them unprepared and without time to make alternative arrangements.

**Insufficient Compensation or Alternative Housing:** Even when notices are provided, the compensation offered or alternative housing options may not meet the needs of the affected individuals or families.

**Community Displacement:** Forced evictions in some cases impacted entire communities, resulting in the displacement of multiple families or households.

However, since 29/05/2019, there is a decision of council of ministers that regulates displacement based on the UN guidelines on forced evictions.

#### ✓ *Environmental implications*

There have been instances where Roma communities in Albania and in various other countries have been located near garbage land field or in areas with poor environmental conditions. These communities may face specific environmental hazards, which can have significant implications for their health and well-being.

Some Roma live in informal settlements or substandard housing with limited access to basic amenities. These communities also lack access to clean water, sanitation facilities, and reliable electricity, further impacting their living conditions. Proximity to garbage sites or industrial areas, expose Roma communities to air and water pollution. Roma communities have limited access to green spaces, parks, or recreational areas, which can impact overall well-being.

#### ✓ *Nomadic lifestyle and Travellers*

Most Roma communities in Albania are settled, meaning they live in specific locations rather than leading a nomadic lifestyle. However, there are some Roma families or individuals who engage in seasonal or temporary migration for work or other reasons (e.g. during the summer they move in see site cities) but this does not constitute a widespread nomadic lifestyle.

#### ✓ *Implications of lacking a legal address*

Lacking a legal address or identification documents can pose significant challenges for individuals, including the Roma community in Albania. Without these vital documents, accessing various essential services can become difficult or even impossible. Some of the services that may be inaccessible without a legal address or ID include:

**Education:** Enrolling in schools and accessing educational resources requires proof of residence and identification.

**Health care:** Registering with healthcare providers, accessing medical services, and obtaining prescription medications typically require identification and proof of residence.

**Employment and social benefits:** Many employers require proof of identity and address before hiring, and accessing government assistance or social welfare programs often requires proper identification.

**Banking and financial services:** Opening a bank account, applying for loans, and accessing financial services usually require valid identification and proof of address.

**Legal protection:** Engaging with the legal system, including reporting crimes or seeking legal assistance, often requires valid identification.

**Voting:** Registering to vote in elections typically requires valid identification and proof of residence.

**Housing and tenancy rights:** Without legal documentation, it can be challenging to secure formal housing or rental agreements.

**Travel and migration:** Obtaining passports, visas, and other travel-related documents requires valid identification.

**Access to government and municipal services:** Engaging with local authorities for various services, such as obtaining permits or licenses, may require identification and proof of residence.

**Legal rights and protections:** Without legal identification, individuals may face difficulties in asserting their legal rights or seeking protection under the law

### ✓ *Housing market – what can be done?*

According to the social housing law, more than 5% of housing program beneficiaries will belong to Roma and Egyptian minorities. However, access to social housing of Roma in Albania is limited. While there are social housing programs in place, the demand often exceeds the supply, and there may be eligibility criteria that some Roma individuals or families may struggle to meet.

Additionally, even when social housing is available, there are issues related to the adequacy of the housing units, including factors such as size, condition, and access to basic services.

Albania, like many countries, experiences urbanization and rural-to-urban migration trends. This led to challenges related to housing and infrastructure development, as well as potential issues of gentrification.

Gentrification occurred in certain urban areas where there is significant investment and development, potentially leading to the displacement of Roma populations. Private developers due to the nature that they are focused on profit do not care about other vulnerable groups including Roma and therefore their development is often a threat to the informal settlements or the main threat.

### ✓ *National Roma Frameworks*

Albania complies with the international instruments on human rights and has developed its legal framework in line with the European standards. Within such context, Albania has developed an advanced legal framework and by-laws which address the issues of Roma and Egyptian minorities, based on the best international standards and practices.

The national legislation entails many legal acts and by-laws that affect all domains of Roma and Egyptians lives, including housing.

The National Action Plan for Equality, Inclusion and Participation of Roma and Egyptian in the Republic of Albania (NAPEIPRE) (2020-2025) is a strategic document that provides for the policies on Roma and Egyptians in the Republic of Albania. This document, NAPEIPRE 2021-2025 is fully aligned and compliant with the strategic objectives of the current National Strategy for Development and Integration (NSDI) 2015-2020, which is the main national strategic document that supports the sustainable social and economic development of the country and ensures the achievement of standards and progress in the process of European integration.

### ✓ *Conclusion and recommendations*

Improving the housing situation of the Roma minority in Albania requires a comprehensive approach that addresses various factors contributing to housing challenges. Here are some positive solutions, good practices, and policy recommendations:

**Social housing programs:** Increase the number of social houses available for Roma community in cities that already have this program. In addition to that, implement targeted social housing programs that prioritize marginalized communities, including the Roma, in cities that do not have this program.

**Upgrading informal settlements:** Develop and implement policies to upgrade informal Roma settlements with improved infrastructure, access to basic services, and housing conditions.

**Community-led housing initiatives:** Engage Roma communities in participatory processes to identify their housing needs, preferences, and solutions, ensuring their voices are heard in decision-making.

**Antigypsyism:** Strengthen and enforce antigypsyism actions to prevent housing-related discrimination against Roma communities.

**Cross-sectoral coordination:** Foster collaboration between relevant government ministries, local authorities, NGOs, and international organizations to ensure a coordinated approach to housing initiatives.

**Mitigate force - eviction:** Rigorously follow the steps and procedures stated at article 6, of Social Houses Law no 22/2018 and the decision of Council of Minister no 361, date 29.05.2019<sup>3</sup>.

---

<sup>3</sup> [Pamja e dokumentit - Qendra e Botimeve Zyrtare \(qbz.gov.al\)](#)