

EUROPEAN ROMA GRASSROOTS ORGANISATIONS (ERGO) NETWORK

Research Thematic Focus 2023

Roma access to quality and affordable housing

Responding organisation: [Voice of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians in Kosovo](#) (Erodita Qehaja).

✓ ***Where do most Roma in your country live?***

In Kosovo, the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities live in urban and rural areas, but in most cases in informal settlements, because we have many cases when informal settlements are located in urban areas. They usually live at home, more often private homes, not rented.

✓ ***Roma homelessness***

The homeless are usually from other countries, but the exact number of Kosovo citizens is not known.

✓ ***Living conditions of the Roma***

Usually, most of them have access to municipal services. Those who live in rural areas usually have problems with access to running water. In all the other aspects mentioned, the communities are exposed.

✓ ***Segregation and informal settlements***

They live in both types of areas, urban and rural. They live in separate neighbourhoods, few live in common neighbourhoods with the majority population.

There are many informal settlements. Various researches have been done but the statistics have not been published yet for various government interests. So far there have been few attempts to fix these neighbourhoods and unsuccessful ones. Our organization, Voice of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians in Kosovo, is currently implementing the project "Social Justice for Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians in Kosovo" and part of this project is the transformation of the settlements, which aims to: formalize these neighbourhoods through advocacy in institutions to include the transformation as part of spatial planning laws/documents; regenerate and urbanize these neighbourhoods; encourage investors for neighbourhood development; desegregate these neighbourhoods and generate employment".

✓ ***Affordability of housing***

Usually the communities live on social assistance and cannot afford rent, buy a house, or pay the bills.

✓ ***Housing-associated bureaucracy***

Communities in Kosovo face many difficulties to prove the property or to return the property in their name, because they usually live in the properties of Serbs who left Kosovo. They also do not have the financial means to buy the property or any house. We still do not have the legal framework for what will happen to the properties of Serbs who no longer live in Kosovo, but their properties are exploited by the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities.

✓ ***Antigypsyism in housing***

Communities usually live in segregated settlements and their neighbors are from the same community. But in cases where they live in other settlements, there is direct or indirect antigypsyism. Our organization has done a lot of advocacy at the central level to intervene in the laws, especially the discrimination law, and all we have achieved so far is that we have implemented the platform for reporting discriminatory cases and now the government has this platform under its service. Communities have lack a lot of social aspect to have access and services in banks.

✓ ***Forced evictions***

Evictions are not frequent, but we cannot say that there have been no cases. There are also cases when a municipality has made a solution to regulate the residence of communities, but the solution has been related to the physical side and not the social side, because that community has remained segregated.

✓ ***Environmental implications***

Most of the settlements where the community lives are close to garbage, and the municipalities that have made solutions are rare. Communities living in such places face various diseases, substandard living conditions, and various health consequences that affect future generations.

✓ ***Nomadic lifestyle and Travellers***

In Kosovo, repatriated persons are handled by the Ministry of Communities and Returns, which in each Municipality has a Directorate for Communities and Returns. Each Municipality handles its repatriated citizens and forwards the requests of the Ministry. The Ministry has had numerous calls to support residential communities, but not all of them have been able to house them in total. There are still families who live in rent.

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

In Kosovo, no service can be performed without legal identification and these cases are frequent but not as much as they were after the war because there were many awareness campaigns and mobile groups that helped the registration of persons.

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

Social housing was not the best possible solution for communities and has not been applied much in Kosovo. Not as much as in the countries of the region.

We stand very well with spatial planning documents at both local and central level. But the problem is the municipalities which do not have enough budget to implement the plans. When we have interested investors, the way to implement their plan is very difficult and very often not realized and this results in the investors leaving.

Private developers play a very important role in the development of a city or settlement. A private investor may have an easier access to a municipality due to his familiarity with high-level officials and this then damages the municipality or settlement because the project is developed according to the investor's idea without much consideration of the existing situation or analysis of the needs of the residents.

As an organization, we are advocating for sustainable housing and we managed to get the government to start a draft law for sustainable housing.

✓ **National Roma Frameworks**

We do not have a housing strategy only, we are in the process of advocating for the start of a housing strategy.

✓ **Conclusion and recommendations**

The best solution for communities is the drafting of sustainable housing policies, which means housing based on housing standards and norms. If a state manages to draft these policies and implement them, then the communities would not seek to leave a state. When policies are drawn up, it seems that different analyses should be done first: for example: what do communities know how to work in order to offer the possibility of job generation; what kind of capacity building do they need; how women can be empowered, children can go to daycare, create adequate conditions to send children to daycare. Etc.

✓ **References**

Many years of experience during the implementation of projects in the field.