

EUROPEAN ROMA GRASSROOTS ORGANISATIONS (ERGO) NETWORK

Research Thematic Focus 2023

Roma access to quality and affordable housing in North Macedonia

Urmeta Arifovska – Deputy director of the Regional Roma Educational Youth Association (RROMA), Kratovo, North Macedonia.

RROMA concentrates on youth empowerment and mobilization through creativity, trainings and campaigns. Our vision for our youth is that they become promoters of positive values and active actors in social developments. Our mission focuses on the affirmation and promotion of opportunities for personal development and integration, as well as the promotion of active citizenship and self-involvement in the creation of policies that affect young people.

E-mail: Info@rromassn.org, urmeta@rromassn.org

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

95% of Roma in Macedonia live in urban areas or suburbs that are part of urban areas. 5% of Roma live in rural areas, such as in the east Macedonia in the villages of Crnik and Trabatovishte, and there is a village in Prilep where a small number of Roma families live. According to the analyzes so far, it has been confirmed that 70-80% of the Roma in Macedonia have their own homes, the remaining 30 to 20% rent. A significant number of Roma live in ghettoized areas within urban areas (cities). 80% of Roma settlements are informal and do not have a Detailed Urban Plan, and therefore a significant number of dwellings are not legalized.

✓ ***Roma homelessness***

According to unofficial sources (organizations that take care of the homeless) there are over 600 homeless people in the territory of North Macedonia, of which about 350 people are from the Roma population, and national citizens, who are long-term homeless, which means they have been in this situation for more than ten years, without significant changes in their status.

✓ ***Living conditions of the Roma***

According to the Social mapping of Roma in North Macedonia, as regards to the quality of the dwelling 15% of the Roma reported they do not have enough lighting in the house, whereas the highest incidence is reported in Shuto Orizari and Vinica. The quality of the dwelling is closely related to the material of which the house is built. Thus, around 6% reported that their dwelling is built of inadequate material. Among the municipalities, the highest frequency is noticed in Shuto Orizari, Prilep, Gostivar and Vinica.

The access to electricity is also important indicator of the quality of the dwelling – only 3% of the Roma communities reported that they do not have access to electricity. Among the municipalities, around 1% of the households reported that they do not have access to electricity in Kavadarci, Shuto Orizari and the municipality of Vinica.

The last indicator in terms of the housing conditions, at community' level is related to the public infrastructure, whether the community has access to asphalt roads. Around 12% of the respondents 18 reported that their houses do not have access to asphalt road. Among the municipalities the highest frequency is reported in Prilep, Shuto Orizari, Vinica, Gostivar.

The last part as regards to the quality of housing conditions is related to access to different facilities. As shown in the figure 5 below, 18% of the households do not have access to sewage system, 30% of them do not have toilet inside the house, 20% of them do not have toilet with a bathroom and around 10% of the Romani households do not have drinking water inside the house. On the municipal level, the most vulnerable situation was registered in Shuto Orizari, Prilep, and Kumanovo.

According to the Social mapping report of Roma, 53% of the Roma households reported that have moisture in their dwellings. In this regard, the high incidence of moisture in the dwelling greatly influence the health status of the Roma, especially the health of the children as moisture directly affects the respiratory system. Among the municipalities, the highest incidence of moisture is present in Shuto Orizari (14%); Kumanovo (7%), Bitola (5%) whereas in all the rest of the municipalities the incidence is less than 10%.

Also, as regards to the quality of the dwelling 15% of the Roma reported they do not have enough lighting in the house, whereas the highest incidence is reported in Shuto Orizari and Vinica. The quality of the dwelling is closely related to the material of which the house is built. Thus, around 6% reported that their dwelling is built of inadequate material. Among the municipalities, the highest frequency is noticed in Shuto Orizari, Prilep, Gostivar and Vinica.

✓ ***Segregation and informal settlements***

Yes, 80% of Roma live in segregated neighbourhoods as part of urban cities. 80% of Roma live in informal Roma settlements that are not legalized and are part of urban cities.

Regarding the legalization of informal settlements, the state does not take over nothing. The state invests in improving the infrastructure in Roma settlements, but where the settlement is legal and has a DUP.

Several projects are implemented through the EU in the municipalities of Vinica, Shuto Orizari, Prilep, Bitola, Shtip and Berovo, Kichevo. Those projects envisage the legalization of informal Roma settlements, which will contribute to the legalization and implementation of DUPs for Roma settlements in part of these municipalities.

✓ **Affordability of housing**

According to the analyzes so far, it has been confirmed that 70-80% of the Roma in North Macedonia have their own residences, the remaining 30 to 20% rent.

Roma allocate very little or none at all for housing costs. Given that they cannot cover the basic costs of living, it is a sufficient fact that they do not can invest in improving their living conditions.

Roma are the most affected by energy poverty. Given that 70% of the total number of recipients of social cash assistance are Roma, it indicates the fact that Roma are most affected by energy poverty. Every day they face problems paying bills and disconnection of utilities such as water and electricity.

✓ **Housing-associated bureaucracy**

Regarding the process of legalization of illegally built buildings, there is no mechanism for monitoring of requests for legalization by ethnicity. According to the previous analyzes and according to the social mapping data, about 28% of Roma have not legalized their residences due to the lack of an urban plan in the municipality for those settlements or due to inability to cover financial costs. In addition, the citizens who submitted requests for the legalization of their facilities, they have been waiting for more than 5 years for a response from the competent institutions about the status of their request.

The new draft Law on the legalization of illegally constructed buildings objects has been sent back for additional consultation and its adoption by the Parliament is expected RSM. However, the critical parts to be regulated by the bill remain yes be the subject of discussion. The same applies to the urbanization process, which continues a critical aspect that can affect the smaller number of legalized Roma residences.

✓ **Forced evictions**

In Macedonia, such a case of forced eviction has not been recorded until now, or is unknown for the research so far.

✓ **National Roma Frameworks**

According to the Strategy for the inclusion of the Roma 2022-2030 in the area of housing is provided:

1. Urbanization of Roma settlements (Measure 1: Mapping the housing situation – illegal homes, Measure 2: Carrying out and amending urban plans to include the settlements where Roma live in the General and detailed urban plans).
2. Legalization of illegally built dwellings, wherever possible (Measure 1: Law on the legalization of illegally built buildings, Measure 2: Social Housing Law, Measure 3: Financial support to vulnerable groups for the legalization of their residences).
3. Provision of permanent, decent, affordable and desegregated housing for Roma currently living in informal settlements that cannot be legalized for justified reasons (Measure 1: Introduction of a 10% quota for the distribution of social housing, Measure 2:

Construction of typical houses for people, Measure 3: Renovation of facilities for collective housing for people who do not have residences)

4. Provisions of communal infrastructure (Measure 1: Improvement of the methodology for the allocation of funds, Measure 2: Financial support for the improvement of the communal infrastructure – through capital grants and loans, Measure 3: Grants for equalization and provision of technical support to LGUs for project development)
5. Reducing exposure to pollution and contamination in Roma settlements (Measure 1: Installation of measuring stations in Roma settlements, Measure 2: Subsidized program for photovoltaic systems and air conditioners)

✓ ***Conclusion and recommendations***

1. To improve housing, education and economic opportunities for Roma and citizens living in deep poverty by improving their housing conditions and access to services based in the community.
2. Implementation of infrastructure activities in Roma settlements (construction of roads and local streets, atmospheric and fecal sewage / according to the priorities of the community and the municipality).
3. Resolving the unresolved issue of property rights, especially for wildly built dwellings.
4. Adoption of a General Urban Plan (GUP) and Detailed Urban Plans (DUP) in places where the Roma community lives.
5. Funded programs that will provide financial assistance for the reconstruction, extension and improvement of the dwellings of the Roma community.
6. To provide technical and financial support to NGOs and local governments (municipalities) to improve the living standards of Roma communities.
7. Implementation of training programs and joint cooperation of NGOs, municipalities and the community, for joint cooperation and mutual contribution to improve living standards (housing).
8. Carrying out an assessment between the Municipalities and the community, about their benefits and priorities and needs.
9. Funding of programs for the inclusion of unemployed young Roma in the field of construction, together with NGOs and municipalities will contribute to the construction or reconstruction of the households of the community.