

# EUROPEAN ROMA GRASSROOTS ORGANISATIONS (ERGO) NETWORK

## “Roma access to quality and affordable housing in Romania”

### Contents

<b>1. Introduction.....</b>	<b>2</b>
1.1 Name, email and a brief overview of your organization and its Roma work.....	2
1.2 Methodology used for the research, and the geographical scope .....	2
1.3 Brief overview of the socio-economic situation of the Roma in your country.....	2
<b>2. Roma access to quality and affordable housing in ROMANIA .....</b>	<b>3</b>
2.1 Where do most Roma live.....	3
2.2 Roma exposure to homelessness.....	6
2.3 The living conditions of Roma .....	8
2.4 Spatial segregation and informal settlements .....	12
2.5 Affordability of adequate housing .....	15
2.6 Housing-associated bureaucracy and red tape.....	16
2.7 Antigypsyism in housing.....	17
2.8 Forced evictions .....	18
2.9 Environmental implications of Roma housing .....	18
2.10 Nomadic lifestyle and Travellers .....	19
2.11 Implications of lacking a legal address.....	19
2.12 Housing market – what can be done? .....	19
<b>3. Conclusion and Recommendations.....</b>	<b>20</b>
3.1 Housing measures in the National Roma Strategic Framework .....	20
3.2 Recommendations .....	21

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Name, email and a brief overview of your organization and its Roma work

Policy Center for Roma and Minorities is a foundation working for the last 12 years in education. The work is focused on working with children from deprived communities (especially in Ferentari, Bucharest) but also working on issues like violence against Roma women or cooperation with public authorities.

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## 1.2 Methodology used for the research, and the geographical scope

The research is based mostly on desk research, on the field experience of the organisation Policy Center for Roma and Minorities and on the discussions with other specialists in the field of housing and in connected fields. It covers the entire territory of Romania. There is no special research covering the living situation of Roma in Romania, but rather national and international reports about Roma that include also housing data. There are certain difficulties/limitations deriving from understanding of terms and research methodologies that clearly lead to different results. Nevertheless, data can provide a comprehensive general understanding of the living conditions of Roma, although there is a clear need for more data in many aspects.

## 1.3 Brief overview of the socio-economic situation of the Roma in your country

Data related to the situation of Roma in Romania are extracted from the recently approved National Strategy for Roma Inclusion (2022)<sup>1</sup>:

80% of Roma live under the poverty line

30% of Roma live in households without running water

10% of Roma live in households without electricity

25% of adults and 30% of children live in a household where at least one family member went to bed hungry at least once in the last month

In 2018, only 15% of Roma earned more than 2000 RON (500 Euro), compared to 52% of majority population

Besides severe poverty, Roma continues to face discrimination in accessing education, employment, health, and housing services. There is a gap between Roma and the majority population in accessing these services, that is generated by many factors like discrimination, low education, lack of services and related social infrastructure in deprived areas, etc. Hate crimes continue to be a problem.

There are fields where life of Roma has improved (like increase in earnings or coverage of services) but this is mainly the result of economic growth in Romania or results of projects implemented by NGOs or public bodies (mostly with EU and EEA funding).

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<sup>1</sup> [SNIR-2022-2027.pdf \(gov.ro\)](#)

Housing is essential for social inclusion. It has a direct influence on health conditions (space and sanitation), on education (space and sanitation) and on employment (sanitation). Roma inclusion cannot be achieved without desegregating Roma communities or without solving the legal situation of the land or houses. Housing is essential for building a good relationship with the majority population also.

## 2. Roma access to quality and affordable housing in ROMANIA

### 2.1 Where do most Roma live

#### Rural / urban

The number of Roma according to the last census (2021) is 569 477<sup>2</sup>. It was the first time in 30 years when the number decreased. On the one hand the decrease can be in line with the decrease of the population number in Romania. On the other hand, there were voices (representatives of Roma Party<sup>3</sup> and civil society<sup>4</sup>) saying the numbering was flawed in case of Roma community. For each census there were reports saying that the censors refused to go into Roma communities, although help was offered. So this might be also the case for the last census.

Roma are dispersed all over Romania, with percentages varying between 0,8% in Bucharest and 9.7% in Mures County. Other counties with high Roma percentages are Mehedinți (6.2%), Călărași (6.9%), Ialomița (7.2%), Bihor (7.3%) and Sălaj (8.6%)

**Table 1: Number and percentage of Roma in rural and urban areas:**

	1977 Total	1977 Romi	1992 Total	1992 Romi	2002 Total	2002 Romi	2011 Total	2011 Romi
Număr								
Rural	11.921.999	154.926	10.383.134	235.110	10.254.547	326.307	9.262.851	390.903
Urban	9.930.626	77.415	12.426.901	165.977	11.426.427	208.833	10.858.790	230.670
Total	21.852.625	232.341	22.810.035	401.087	21.680.974	535.140	20.121.641	621.573
Procentaje calculate având ca bază de referință situația din 2002 pentru recensămintele din 1977, 1992, 2002, pentru 2011 situația înregistrată la recensământ								
Rural	54,56	66,68	45,52	58,62	47,30	60,98	46,03	62,89
Urban	45,44	33,32	54,48	41,38	52,70	39,02	53,97	37,11
Procentaje raportate oficial la fiecare recensământ pentru populația totală								
Rural	56,4		45,7		47,30		46,03	
Urban	43,6		54,3		52,7		53,97	

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.recensamantromania.ro/rezultate-rpl-2021/rezultate-definitive/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.digi24.ro/stiri/actualitate/politica/partida-romilor-acuza-rezultatele-recensamantului-si-spune-ca-300-000-de-romi-nu-au-fost-numarati-2199963>

<sup>4</sup> <https://evz.ro/recensamant-2022-gelu-duminica-datele-sunt-incorecte-romii-sunt-mult-mai-multi.html>

The majority of Roma population lives in rural area. There is no data from the last census referring to the percentage of Roma living in rural/urban areas, but, as we can see from the last several censuses, the tendency of having most of the Roma population in the rural area is maintained (around 60% rural and 40% urban)<sup>5</sup>.

### Apartments / houses

In Romania Roma live both in houses and in apartments. There is no national statistics referring to this, but several situations can be encountered:

- In rural areas Roma usually live in houses. It is very rare that rural areas have blocks of flats in which Roma live. It might be possible to have buildings like worker s dormitories that house poor Roma.
- In urban areas Roma live both in blocks of flats (social housing for the poor Roma, or deteriorated blocks in cheap neighbourhoods, with over crowdedness and substandard living conditions that in time, if not renovated or improved, can become ghettos) and houses.
- There has been a tendency to house Roma in containers, as an alternative to social housing. It is regarded by municipalities a much cheaper solution that can be developed in a very short time (it does not require approvals from other institutions but from the municipality). It is one of the worst solutions for housing Roma, because basic living conditions are not met. It is usually used as a temporary housing for victims of floods, or other unusual situations that require forced relocation. It cannot be used for a long period.

No matter the type of housing, the problem is that buildings need regular renovation. No matter if it is social housing or privately owned, due to neglect and lack of funds, these buildings become insecure (at least from structural and health perspectives) and represent a real danger for the inhabitants. Most poor Roma live in this type of housing.

In the practice of local authorities there is no prevalent approach on the type of accommodation, it all depends on the local context. Usually, the solution is to build blocks of flats to accommodate more beneficiaries. But there are also cases of relocation into houses in rural areas (see Pata Rât case) or moving people from a compact community into houses spread inside the city. Wherever the local budget allows, for a short period of time (2 years), local social welfare departments offer money to their beneficiaries for renting a house from the market. In the case of Roma, this method is less used because of existing discrimination on the market.

If we refer to international studies, the EU FRA 2021 Roma survey<sup>6</sup> provides the following data referring to the type of accommodation of Roma in Romania:

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[https://books.google.ro/books?hl=ro&lr=&id=g2HUDgAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PA7&dq=romii+din+mediul+rural&ots=B8PdYT\\_xEW&sig=vS8T2LsMpdstXG3EU3IJjLgK7Ng&redir\\_esc=y#v=onepage&q=romii%20din%20mediul%20rural&f=false](https://books.google.ro/books?hl=ro&lr=&id=g2HUDgAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PA7&dq=romii+din+mediul+rural&ots=B8PdYT_xEW&sig=vS8T2LsMpdstXG3EU3IJjLgK7Ng&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=romii%20din%20mediul%20rural&f=false)

<sup>6</sup> <https://fra.europa.eu/en/data-and-maps/2023/roma-survey-2021>

**Table 2: Type of Roma accommodation compared to EU-8**

Type of accommodation	Percentage RO (%)	Percentage EU-8 (%)
Apartments in block of flats in good conditions	3	19
Apartments in block of flats in bad conditions	3	8
New house in good conditions	14	11
Older house in relatively good condition	37	30
Older house in bad condition	33	24
Ruined house or slum	7	5
Mobile home/caravan	0	1
Other	2	2

### Ownership

Data on the renting situation in Romania are not very exact, because we still have many renting contracts unregistered.

The EU FRA 2021<sup>7</sup> survey shows interesting figures about tenure status. As usual, data should be analysed according to the methodology of the survey.

**Table 3: Tenure status**

Tenure status	Value (%)
Own without any mortgage	60
Own with mortgage	0
Own from municipal/social housing/municipality	6
Rent from a private landlord	3
Live there without paying	30
Don't know/Refusal	0
Other	1

The National Strategy for Roma, citing an IRES (2019) report, states that 58% of Roma own a house (very close to FRA estimations).

### Informal settlements

One of the major advancements in housing area in the last years is related to informal settlements. In 2019 Law no. 151 has been adopted, with the purpose of solving the informal housing. Major achievements have been the adoption of a definition of informal settlements and the creation of a system to report the housing situation in informal settlements. Although the definition can be improved and there is no sanction if the local authorities simply ignore this legislation, we can say that premises exist for solving the informality issue.

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<sup>7</sup> idem

The legislation was followed in 2020 by methodological norms and data have been collected at the national level. According to the “Report on informal settlements in Romania” (2022)<sup>8</sup> developed based on these data, there are 393 informal settlements in Romania in which we can find 13 609 housing units with 71 695 inhabitants. This is not the number of Roma living in informal settlements, but experience shows that many of these communities are with Roma or are predominantly Roma. This report presents a lot of details about 53% of identified informal communities, from the situations of natural hazards to educational statistics.

In practice the implementation (legalisation of settlements) of legislation goes very difficult because of the prejudice and racism of mayors and people working in different relevant departments (urbanism and social welfare) but also because small municipalities do not have the human resources to collect the necessary data for intervention. Also, this new legislation needs to be correlated with other pieces of Romanian legislation.

This momentum has been generated in Romania by the fact that one of the targets assumed by Romania in the National Resilience Plan is to legalize 200 informal communities (with EU funds). Another relevant target assumed is building 8000 social houses<sup>9</sup>.

According to the research report “Informal housing in Romania” (2018)<sup>10</sup>, there are four main types of informal living in Romania:

- Group of improper houses inhabited by vulnerable groups
- Group of houses situated in areas where housing is forbidden (protected areas, natural hazard areas, etc)
- Group of houses situated near areas like garbage dumps, protected areas, etc
- People living in abandoned houses, or in houses with uncertain legal status

The same report refers to the first research in Romania in this field (2013), that identified a number of 1198 informal settlements (80% situated in rural areas) with over 63 000 families living there. Over half (59%) of people living in informal settlements were Roma.

## 2.2 Roma exposure to homelessness

According to the National Housing Strategy (2022)<sup>11</sup> there have been identified 15 000 persons living in inadequate housing in 2019. Most of them (88%) are encountered in big cities. The profile of homeless people has changed in the last years – the number of young adults has increased, while 2 new categories have appeared: elderly and entire families. The reasons for homelessness have changed from personal reasons (like addictions) to more structural reasons like evictions, lack of support policies for housing and small number of social houses.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.mdipa.ro/pages/habitat>

<sup>9</sup> <https://arenaconstruct.ro/ce-tinte-sunt-prevazute-in-strategia-nationala-a-locuirii/>

<sup>10</sup> [https://locuireinformala.ro/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Raport-de-Cercetare\\_Locuire-Informala.pdf](https://locuireinformala.ro/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Raport-de-Cercetare_Locuire-Informala.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> [http://sgglegis.gov.ro/legislativ/docs/2022/05/4\\_cq06fz23gjvw8tmpx5.pdf](http://sgglegis.gov.ro/legislativ/docs/2022/05/4_cq06fz23gjvw8tmpx5.pdf)

We do not have clear statistics on Roma homelessness, but experience from the field show that these causes (evictions and lack of social housing) have a great impact on the poor Roma communities. If we add to these statistics referring to the precarity of the living conditions, then we get a picture of homelessness affecting poor Roma

According to an ESPN report on homelessness in Romania (2019)<sup>12</sup>, 54% of Roma face a risk of eviction because they cannot afford to pay rent. The report provides more detailed data on the living conditions of the Roma population compared to non-Roma (table below).

*Table 4: Housing conditions of Roma*

<b>Table 1: Housing conditions among Roma population and their non-Roma neighbours, Romania 2011 (%)</b>					
	Roma %	Non-Roma neighbours %		Roma %	Non-Roma neighbours %
Living in very precarious conditions or very bad neighbourhoods	30	5	Overcrowding	66	25
Urban living in flats of very low quality, marginalised communities, improvised/temporary camps of very low quality and inadequate infrastructure	40-45	20	Small dwellings: with 1-2 rooms	57	32
Rural inadequate living	33		Access to basic utilities		
Living in extremely deteriorated housing			Electricity	86	98
- Urban	33		Kitchen in the dwelling	62	90
- Rural	25		Toilet inside the house	17	43
Living in refugee camps or improvised shelters			Outside toilet	82	75
- Urban	4		Running drinking water in the house	17	34
- Rural	1		No single source of drinking water	10 urban 4 rural	<2 urban and rural

*Data source: Data from 2011 regional Roma survey, reported in World Bank (2014a)*

Poor Roma for sure qualify in the ETHOS homelessness definition by all categories: rooflessness, houselessness, insecure housing and improper housing.

<sup>12</sup>

[https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?pager.offset=25&advSearchKey=ESPN\\_hhe2019&mode=advancedSubmit&catId=22&doc\\_submit=&policyArea=0&policyAreaSub=0&country=0&year=0](https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?pager.offset=25&advSearchKey=ESPN_hhe2019&mode=advancedSubmit&catId=22&doc_submit=&policyArea=0&policyAreaSub=0&country=0&year=0)

FEANTSA country fiche (2017)<sup>13</sup> identifies as a negative issue for Romania the big discrepancy between the number of social houses (28 000-29 000) and the number of requests for social housing (over 67 000). If we consider the fact that local authorities may influence the criteria for receiving social housing in a way that does not prioritize people in (deep) poverty, we can conclude that the risk of homelessness for poor Roma population is high. Romania has a 'housing last' approach, because first you need to prove that you have the means to cover rent, utilities etc. Mostly Romanian Roma are exposed to homelessness, not Roma from another country.

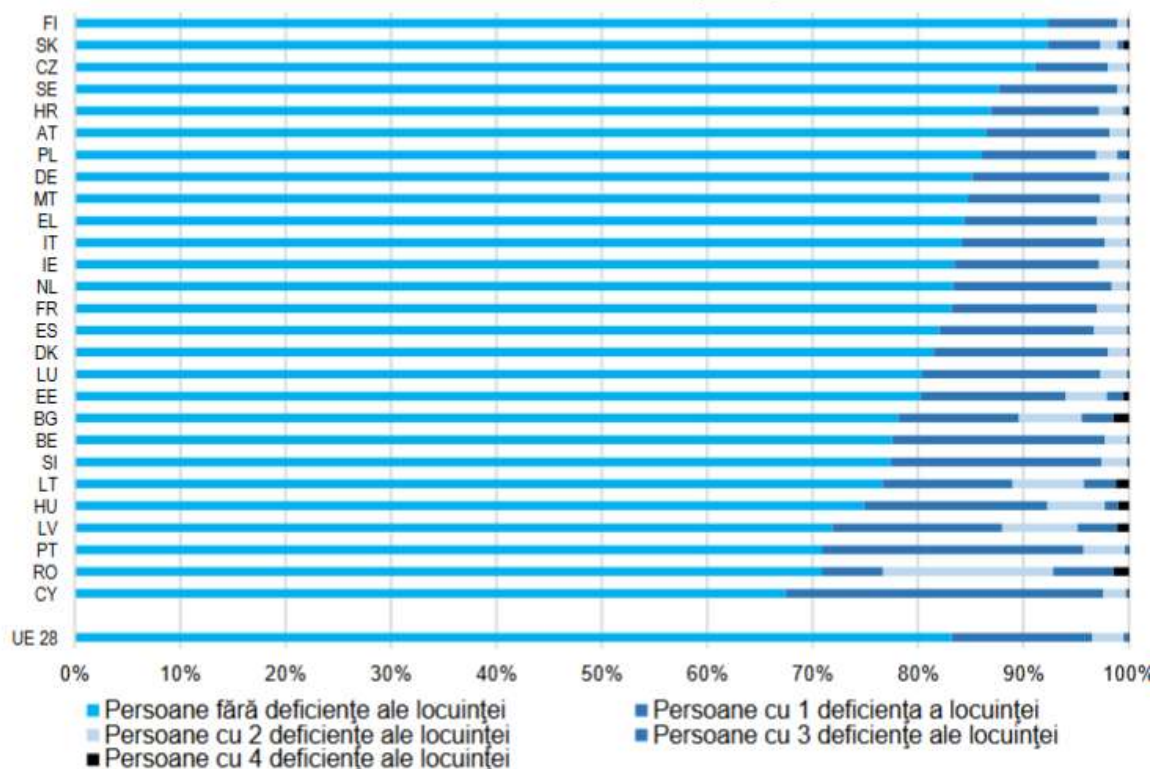
## 2.3 The living conditions of Roma

### Context

First, we need some context about living conditions in Romania. Romania (together with Portugal) has the second highest rate of material deprivation related to housing (29.1%), while the EU average is 16.8%.<sup>14</sup>

**Figure 1:** Material deprivation from the housing perspective in EU 2019

Figura 35. **Deprivarea materială din punct de vedere al condițiilor de locuit în statele membre ale Uniunii Europene, în anul 2019**



Sursa: <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/en/web/income-and-living-conditions/data/database> 2.09.2021

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.feantsa.org/download/romania-cfsh-jan-2017-final2599276833334601432.pdf>

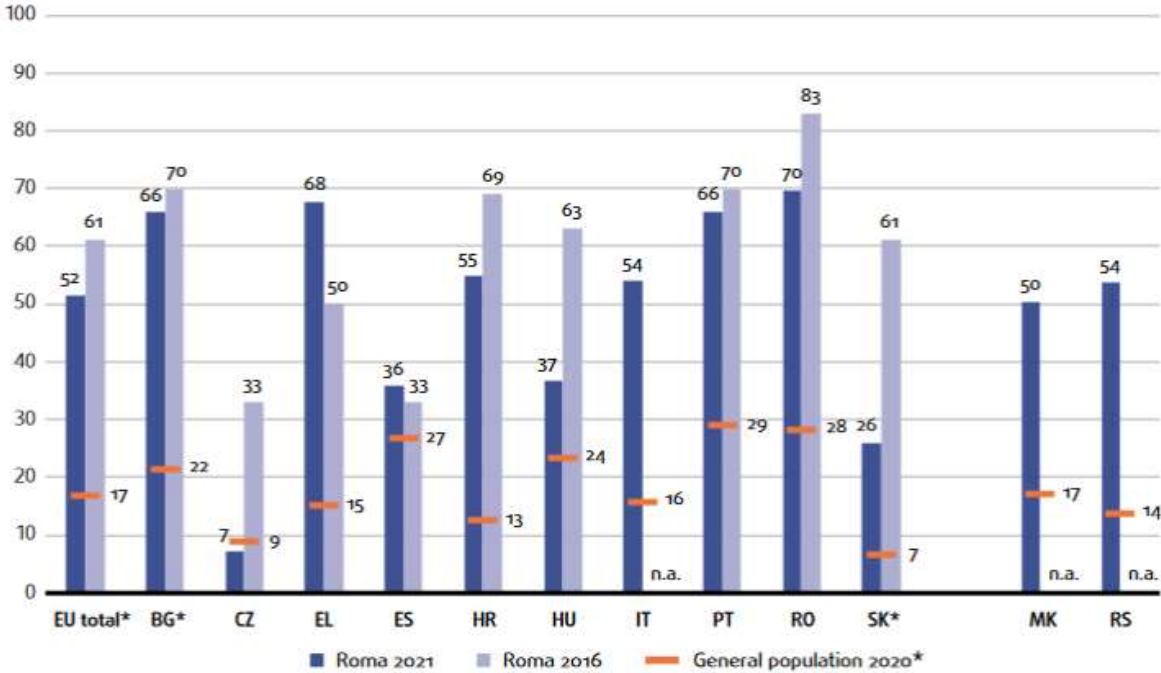
<sup>14</sup> [https://insse.ro/cms/sites/default/files/field/publicatii/dimensiuni\\_ale\\_incluziunii\\_sociale\\_in\\_romania\\_2020.pdf](https://insse.ro/cms/sites/default/files/field/publicatii/dimensiuni_ale_incluziunii_sociale_in_romania_2020.pdf)



When it comes to Roma, EU FRA research provide congruent data, with Roma in Romania suffering of highest rates of housing deprivation (70%).<sup>15</sup> A progress can be observed in relation to 2016 data.

Figure 2: People in housing deprivation

FIGURE 23: PEOPLE LIVING IN HOUSING DEPRIVATION (%)<sup>a,b,c,d</sup>



Sources: FRA, Roma Survey 2021; EU-MIDIS II 2016; Bulgaria: BNSI/FRA 2020; Slovakia: EU-SILC MRK 2020; Eurostat 2020

The situation of Roma housing in Romania is no exception. In the EU countries with significant Roma population, the housing indicators look far worse than the same indicators referring to the majority population:

*“The housing situation of marginalized Roma are far worse than the national average, many families live in substandard, severely overcrowded units in segregated settlements. Another feature of Roma related social inequality problem that the majority of marginalized Roma people live in rural areas (with the exception of the Czech Republic) where they have little chance for labor and housing market integration.”<sup>16</sup>*

A recent report on housing of the Economic and Social Council Romania (2022)<sup>17</sup> points out several important structural deficiencies of the Romanian housing system, with direct impact on vulnerable groups:

- A bad quality of existing housing stock (overcrowdedness and improper management)
- High seismic risk

<sup>15</sup> [https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/fra-2022-roma-survey-2021-main-results2\\_en.pdf](https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2022-roma-survey-2021-main-results2_en.pdf)  
<sup>16</sup> Affordable housing in Central and Eastern Europe (2017)  
<sup>17</sup> [https://www.ces.ro/newlib/PDF/2022/CES\\_Studiu-locuire\\_digital.pdf](https://www.ces.ro/newlib/PDF/2022/CES_Studiu-locuire_digital.pdf)

- Housing of vulnerable groups is inadequate, the state's intervention in this field is inadequate. Important problems are insecurity of tenure, housing and social exclusion, discrimination and exclusion due to lack of identity papers
- Criteria and process of social housing allocation are not transparent
- Reduced accessibility to housing due to high prices
- The housing legislation is old (1996) and the competencies between the central and local levels do not follow a very functional and harmonized logic
- Lack of quality data on social housing (data from social housing programs are not very accurate)
- Different types of support for housing are not very well targeted, they are fragmented and sometimes overlapping
- Stimulants for building new social housing are missing, the stock is getting old and not properly managed, some of them might end up in a ghetto type community

### Indicators of Roma living conditions

There have been several studies over the year that demonstrate the poor living conditions in deprived Roma neighbourhoods. They use different methodologies, different data collected in different years. This is why results might differ. In this research, we will refer to the most recent reports: FRA Roma Survey, Roma Civil Monitoring and Romanian National Roma Strategy. The last two also use older data collected by different institutions.

According to EU FRA Roma Survey 2021<sup>18</sup>, most important indicators related to the living conditions reveal the following situation:

- 70% of Roma live in housing deprivation
- 87% live in overcrowded housing
- 40% live with no tap water inside
- 56% don't have indoor flushing toilet or bathroom inside
- 19% live in an area with environmental problems
- For 23% the house is too dark; for 19% there is too much noise; 26% have a leaking roof or damp walls; 8% live in an area with crimes and violence
- The house has 1 room (21%), 2 rooms (37%), 3 rooms (21%), 4 rooms (10%), 5 or more (8%)
- 45% are connected to sewage and 88% to electricity

According to another FRA report (2018), the number of rooms per person is 0.7 (compared to 1.0 for the majority population)<sup>19</sup>

According to National Roma Integration Strategy (2022)<sup>20</sup>, the most important indicators for Roma living conditions are:

- 58% declare they have ownership of the house (citing IRES, 2019)
- 61% live in 1 or 2 rooms houses (citing IRES, 2019)

<sup>18</sup> [https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/fra-2022-roma-survey-2021-main-results2\\_en.pdf](https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2022-roma-survey-2021-main-results2_en.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> [https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/fra-2018-anti-gypsyism-barrier-roma-inclusion\\_en.pdf](https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2018-anti-gypsyism-barrier-roma-inclusion_en.pdf)

<sup>20</sup> <http://anr.gov.ro/images/2022/Monitorul-Oficial-Partea-I-nr.-450Bis.pdf>

- 67% live in neighbourhoods where all or majority of people are Roma
- 32% live in deprived housing
- 25% live in neighbourhoods with pollution or ecological problems
- More than 50% live in overcrowded housing
- 16.5 live in houses considered unsafe for living

The Civil Society Monitoring Report on the Implementation of the National Roma Integration Strategy in Romania (2019)<sup>21</sup> shows a slight improvement of the living conditions of Roma between 1998 and 2016, and if we compare to more recent data then we see this trend continuing, but again, improvements are very small. Here are several examples from the report:

*“The living conditions of Roma in Romania have not improved considerably; they have not kept up with Romania’s economic and social development. While in 1998 the average living area per person in the case of Roma was 8 m<sup>2</sup> (12 m<sup>2</sup> for the majority), in 2012 it went up to 13.16 m<sup>2</sup> but was two times less than for the majority population (26 m<sup>2</sup>). The same remark concerning the improvement of living conditions is identified in the FRA data: the room/person indicator (excluding kitchen) was 0.5 in 2011 and 0.7 in 2016.*

*In 2012, 83 three-quarters of the Roma used wood stoves for heating, while the same heating was used by 48 percent of the majority population (a 27 percent difference). It is very important to note that two percent of Roma households have no heating at all (they cannot afford it) in the winter conditions of a temperate continental climate.*

*In 2012, 22 percent of households were without property ownership documents. This was an improvement compared to 1998 when 37 percent of households were in this situation. But seven percent of people in Roma households stated they had been evicted from their home or the land where they had lived in the past ten years.*

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*In 2016, 68 per cent of the Roma (36 per cent of the majority population) had no access to water in the home. Compared to 2011, there was an improvement of 9 per cent for the Roma population and 8 per cent for the majority population. It should be noted, however, that in 2012, 26 per cent of the Roma did not have access to running water, and 17 per cent did not benefit from this service although it was available in the area.*

*According to FRA 2018, the proportion of the Roma population with access to drinking water inside the house (32 percent in 2016) was at the same level as in countries like Bhutan, Ghana and Nepal.*

*In 2016, 95 percent of Roma households had access to electricity. In 2011, the percentage was 87, so there is an improvement. However, in 2012, seven percent said they did not have access to electricity, although this facility was available in their area.*

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<sup>21</sup> <https://cps.ceu.edu/sites/cps.ceu.edu/files/attachment/basicpage/3034/rcm-civil-society-monitoring-report-2-romania-2018-eprint-fin.pdf>

*According to data on access to sewerage in 2012, 16.7 per cent of Roma households did not have access to the sewage system, although this service was available in the neighbourhood. In the case of the compact (segregated) Roma communities identified in SocioRoMap in 2015 (177,525 households inhabited by 722,844 people), only 14 per cent of the households were connected to the sewerage system.”*

Apart from numbers, there are problems that are affecting very much poor Roma communities and little has been done to solve them:

- 1) Insecurity of tenure – since 2019 a new legislation addresses this problem, but in the field the progress is very slow
- 2) Forced evictions – still continuing to happen, without any legal perspective to stop them, while alternative housing is not provided
- 3) Evictions of informal communities is not considered eviction by the local authorities but considered eviction by the National Council for Combating Discrimination) so alternative housing is not provided
- 4) Discrimination largely affects living conditions of Roma, from two main perspectives: the financial perspective (building new housing requires a lot of money and qualified personnel that can access funds; on the other hand social housing generates costs to the local municipalities) and the electoral perspective (improving living conditions of Roma is not seen favourable by the majority)
- 5) Lack of political will to intervene, despite the fact that this is a basic human right and sometimes living conditions are totally unacceptable
- 6) Lack of basic utilities (water, sewage) has severe consequences on health, education and employment perspectives

There are a lot of factors that influence the living conditions in poor Roma communities. Statistics show a slight improvement, probably generated by the mayors or local civil society actors who could access grants, or general programs (like cadastre program). The structural problems still remain, and discrimination will continue to affect directing resources to Roma communities. Even if interventions do not require financial resources (like the legalization of settlement), local authorities are reluctant or lack the trained human resources to intervene.

## 2.4 Spatial segregation and informal settlements

There are several indications in the studies that more than half of Roma population live in segregated communities.

The SocioRoMap<sup>22</sup> national research uses the term “compact community” which is believed to be similar to segregated community. The research found 2 315 compact Roma communities in which there are 177 525 households with 722 844 inhabitants.

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<sup>22</sup> <https://ispmn.gov.ro/uploads/04%20SocioRoMap%20brochure%20Ancheta%20%20%20%20expertilor%20-%202009.pdf>

**Table 5:** Distribution of compact communities and population according to the number of households

**Tabelul 6.** Distribuția grupărilor/comunităților compacte și a populației grupărilor compacte după numărul de gospodării care alcătuiesc gruparea/comunitatea compactă

Tip de comunitate (după nr. de gospodării)	Comunități compacte		Populație	
	Nr.	%	Nr.	%
Nu sunt date	5	0,2	16558	2,3
Sub 20	682	29,5	33064	4,6
20–49	676	29,2	90573	12,5
50–99	448	19,4	130311	18,0
100–149	190	8,2	941406	13,1
150 și peste	314	13,6	357932	49,5
<b>Total</b>	<b>2315</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>722844</b>	<b>100</b>

Segregation matters among others because it affects access to public services. The same research offers details about the distance towards different service providers like general store, school, health unit and city hall.

**Table 6:** Walking distance to the general store, school, city hall and medical unit

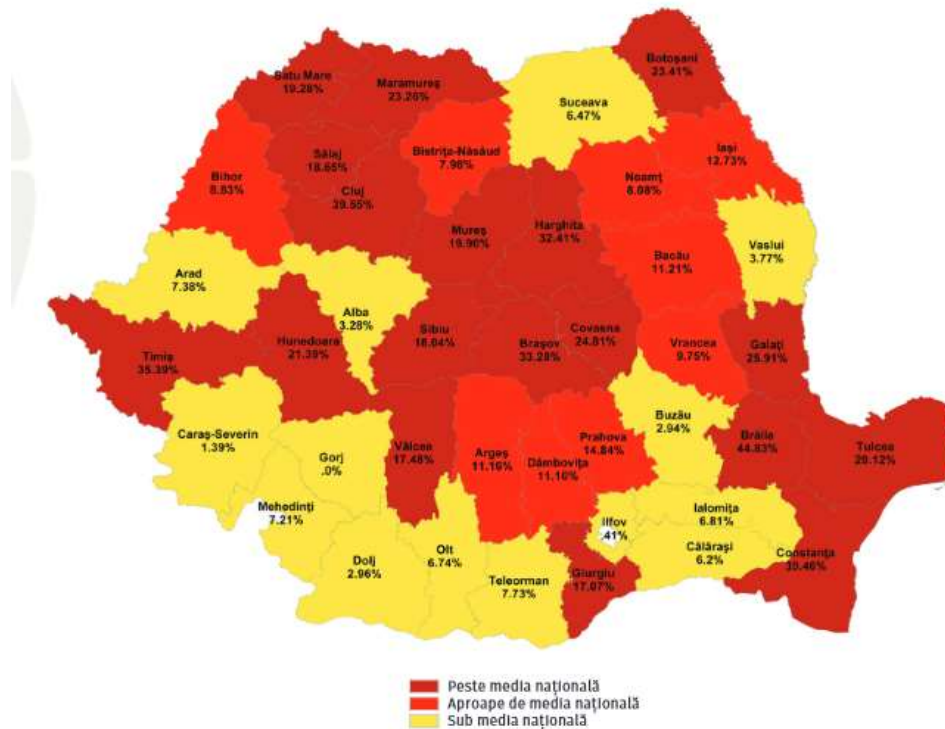
**Tabelul 9.** Aproximativ la câte minute de mers se află următoarele facilități/furnizori de servicii față de grupul compact de romi? (procentele sunt calculate din totalul comunităților compacte raportate)

	...la mai puțin de 10–15 minute	...la 15–30 de minute	...la 30–60 de minute	...la mai mult de o oră	Date lipsă
Magazin alimentar	79,3%	13,8%	1,6%	0,3%	5%
Școala primară (I-IV)	55,9%	33,3%	5,4%	0,4	5,1%
Primărie	29,2%	37,8%	21,3%	6,7%	5,1%
Dispensar medical	35,2%	38%	16,8%	5,1%	5,1%

Segregation is also linked to precarious living conditions. The map bellow shows the proportion of people living in precarious housing in compact communities:

**Figure 3: Proportion of people with precarious housing in compact groups**

**Harta 12. Proporția în grupările compacte a celor cu o situație precară de locuire, pe județe**



The National Strategy for Roma Inclusion stated that segregation seem to affect smaller Roma communities: more than 52% communities are inhabited by less than 150 persons and half of them are situated on the outskirts.

The ESPN report “National strategies to fight homelessness and housing exclusion”<sup>23</sup> states that 56% of the Roma population live in segregated settlements.

No matter the numbers, all seem to indicate that over half of the Roma population lives in segregated settlements.

There are several aspects that are important when talking about segregation:

- 1) Segregation in housing is not at all regulated in Romania. Unlike segregation in education, there is no definition, no indicators and no way to measure it (regulated and uniformly understood by researchers, policy makers, local authorities and other stakeholders). Research show the perception of people living in segregated communities and/or of people living nearby. To intervene effectively, this needs to change.
- 2) This lack of regulations comes in contrast with the use of structural funds and the EU guidance on the use of structural funds. Although in the programming period 2014-

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[https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?pager.offset=25&advSearchKey=ESPN\\_hhe2019&mode=advancedSubmit&catId=22&doc\\_submit=&policyArea=0&policyAreaSub=0&country=0&year=0](https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?pager.offset=25&advSearchKey=ESPN_hhe2019&mode=advancedSubmit&catId=22&doc_submit=&policyArea=0&policyAreaSub=0&country=0&year=0)

2020 an annex to the applicant's guide was dedicated to this issues, and the projects had to explain clearly how they contributed to desegregation and non-segregation, there is absolutely no information about the way EU funded projects have done this.

- 3) Segregation is not always simple to identify. Sometimes there are obstacles in the way (like the community is beyond a fence, or the railroad or at significant distance from other settlements), but sometimes the segregation is just symbolic (maybe only half of the street is considered segregated or there is a symbolic barrier).
- 4) Segregation is historical and it is based on a strong prejudice against Roma population. There is a strong reluctance at all levels to approach this topic.
- 5) The main policy document in the housing field - "The National Housing Strategy 2022-2050"<sup>24</sup>- recognizes that all urban agglomerations have segregated communities and relates them mostly to informal settlements. Citing another research, this document states that inhabitants of segregated communities do not necessarily expect to be relocated but rather they want to improve their living conditions. In my opinion, this is a generalization and in the long term can maintain segregation.
- 6) There is a connection between segregated and informal settlements. This does not mean that if we manage to legalize a community the segregation problem is solved. The two issues should be ideally addressed in order for the inhabitants to have access to adequate living conditions.

Example:

Romania has entire cities that have a (declared or not) policy of segregating Roma and putting them on the outskirts. The first big case was Piatra Neamț which indeed, despite all national and international interventions, has relocated most (if not all) poor Roma communities in the nearby villages. Another famous municipality is Miercurea Ciuc which has several segregated communities on the outskirts. The most recent has been put in containers as a result of a fire that burnt their houses 2 years ago and of 2 years of failed policies to integrate and provide them with social housing. There is another community (more than 10 years old) that lives in containers near the waste water treatment station, where the containers became extremely degraded, with people living in extreme poverty.

## 2.5 Affordability of adequate housing

Buying or renting from the free market is not accessible not only to poor Roma, but also to other vulnerable groups. Accessibility of housing is addressed by the government mainly by social housing programs and financial support for expenses related to housing. If we look at affordability indicators, comparing to other countries, in Romania housing is accessible. But also Romania has highest percentage of people at risk of poverty and social exclusion in the EU<sup>25</sup>. Affordability is usually measured in housing cost overburden rate. Romania does not have a high rate in urban areas (4.7%) but it has a high rate in urban areas (10.8%)<sup>26</sup>.

The ESPN report "National strategies to fight homelessness and housing exclusion" reveals that 54% of Roma families in urban areas and 39% in rural areas cannot afford to pay the rent,

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<sup>24</sup> [http://sgglegis.gov.ro/legislativ/docs/2022/05/4\\_cq06fz23gjvw8tmpx5.pdf](http://sgglegis.gov.ro/legislativ/docs/2022/05/4_cq06fz23gjvw8tmpx5.pdf)

<sup>25</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/w/ddn-20230614-1>

<sup>26</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/cache/digpub/housing/bloc-2b.html>

thus being more vulnerable to evictions. Buying a house is usually linked to long-term credit usually for middle-class families, while poor families do not qualify.

In practice we need to consider another phenomenon for Romania: migration. There are entire villages (Roma and non-Roma) that go to work in other countries. An important part of remittances is spent on improving housing and in buying/building new house.

In Romania 33,3% of the households are confronted with energy poverty, while 19% confront with hidden energy poverty<sup>27</sup>. Starting with 2015/2016, the discussion about energy poverty was very much related to Roma, as they were the ones with the lowest access to electricity and/or other sources for heating.

Policy Center for Roma and Minorities Foundation, together with ENEL has developed a program addressing energy poverty for Roma in Ferentari for 5 years. The project focused on solving the problems of Roma families with the electricity company, by mediating and finding solutions agreed by both parties. We supported people with problems mostly related to bureaucracy, correct information, solutions for particular situations, a more convenient payment schedule of debts and decreasing their expenses on electricity. We supported ENEL in ensuring better communication and solving their problems with the clients. Moreover, ENEL was actively involved in solving small common problems of their clients (like small renovations of the block of flats).

But since the liberalization of energy prices, more households were affected by energy poverty. In a short time discussion has moved from Roma and vulnerable groups to the entire population, because of the magnitude of the problem and because it was hard for the specialists to create an instrument of intervention that would differentiate among different degrees of poverty. Now, Roma benefit from all the other financial support that is addressed to all population.

## 2.6 Housing-associated bureaucracy and red tape

In Romania there is no flexibility in paperwork preparation. Same conditions apply to all. One example is related to the aid for heating the house, which is granted only by the municipality where you have your domicile. If you live in a different place, this aid is impossible to access.

There are cases also when Roma give up asking for their rights, because the papers might be costly both in time and money.

Access of Roma to small credits that can be used to improve housing situation is facilitated by one initiative of EC and COE Development Bank: the HERO project. Access of Roma to small credits to be used in housing renovation is a long-time preoccupation and this project is addressing this, involving all relevant stakeholders.

There is a need for helping Roma with bureaucracy not only related to housing but to other issues relating to their rights. The help the elderly people receive from their families is very

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<sup>27</sup> <https://www.mediafax.ro/economic/orse-saracia-energetica-ia-amploare-in-romania-20982761>



limited. Any connection/disconnection to utilities like energy, water, sewage, requires a certain degree of literacy and having some basic information about the purchased service.

In conclusion mostly the elderly and illiterate need serious help in this issue. If the family, neighbours or public workers cannot help with this, then the service can become inaccessible.

## 2.7 Antigypsyism in housing

The Civil Society Monitoring Report on the Implementation of the National Roma Integration Strategy in Romania (2019) refers to antigypsyism in housing in the following way:

*“Regarding Roma people’s access to housing, one must keep in mind discrimination. According to the FRA report (2018), in 2011, 29 per cent of the Roma respondents in Romania stated that they felt discriminated on grounds of ethnicity when looking for housing”.*

According to the FRA Roma Survey (2021) only 6% of Roma in Romania suffered discrimination in the last 5 years in the housing field. Only 2% tried to buy or rent a house or an apartment in the last year.

Another FRA survey<sup>28</sup> (2021) shows that 24% felt discriminated because of their ethnicity when looking for a house in the last 5 years.

The following aspects are very important:

1. There is discrimination towards Roma in renting from the free housing market, due to the prejudice against Roma. Very few cases are reported. The National Council for Combating Discrimination has 3 cases related to allocation criteria for social housing and 5 cases related to rents.
2. Exclusion from housing takes many forms. Most encountered is creating a scoring system that is discriminatory and gives Roma less chances than other categories, by giving a small number of points for ex. for each child and bigger no. of points to the level of education or to married couples.
3. Relocating Roma in the city in the same neighborhoods with majority population (desegregation) may create protests and lead to violence. It did not happen lately but there were cases like Miercurea Ciuc where the pressure on municipality was high and Roma ended up in containers.
4. There are other cases when petitions are made to move Roma out of their neighborhood like in Constanta.<sup>29</sup>
5. There is anti-discrimination legislation and bodies that should apply it, but in practice, things move very slowly. On the one hand, cases are not reported (either people don’t know where to report, or they are scared to report as this means going against the municipality. On the other hand, this entire process takes a lot of time and people are discouraged.

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<sup>28</sup> [https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/fra-2022-roma-survey-2021-main-results2\\_en.pdf](https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2022-roma-survey-2021-main-results2_en.pdf)

<sup>29</sup> [https://www.petitiononline.com/referendum\\_pentru\\_mutarea\\_romilor\\_din\\_cartierul\\_henri\\_coanda\\_din](https://www.petitiononline.com/referendum_pentru_mutarea_romilor_din_cartierul_henri_coanda_din)

6. Antigypsyism in housing is the most obvious form of social exclusion. There are big chances that other types of intervention to fail, as housing influences directly health, education, and employment. We should consider this aspect when designing any type of intervention or community development.

According to an IRES report<sup>30</sup>, 11% of the non-Roma would accept a Roma as a relative, 19% as a friend, 16% as a neighbor, 12% to live in the same city/village and 35% to live in Romania.

## 2.8 Forced evictions

Forced evictions are still an issue in Romania. Local authorities do not consider a forced eviction dismantling an informal community (although it might have been there for decades). There is little (or none) alternative housing offered.

Roma are given a notice in most of the cases but a short one (2 weeks), insufficient for solving housing situation. There are individual cases of evictions, but in many situations, there are entire (small or bigger) communities evicted. Therefore, it is not easy for local authorities to provide alternative housing. Also, the social housing stock of municipalities is very small.

A very famous case of eviction is the case of Alba Iulia (G2 block). The municipality refused to renew the social renting contracts for people living in a worker's dormitory type of housing, while for the ones who owned the apartments, they could only offer only a small amount of money as compensation (market price). In 2017 a number of 200 Roma have been evicted (elderly children, persons with disabilities) have been forcibly evicted because the municipality wanted to build a public parking in that place. The National Council for Combating Discrimination has sued the municipality and won. But the Alba Iulia municipality appealed and the highest court in Romania agreed with their eviction decision. According to Juridical Resource Center this decision has created a very dangerous precedent<sup>31</sup>, as municipalities and courts will use this decision in the future to justify more and more forced evictions. The explanation and reasons of this decision has not been issued yet.

## 2.9 Environmental implications of Roma housing

There are many situations of environmental racism. The most known in Romania is Pata Rât case, but there are other communities living near garbage dumps (Câmpina), on polluted soil (Baia Mare), on the side of the rivers, near the water waste treatment plant (Miercurea Ciuc) on sliding soil, etc.

All these communities live in deep poverty, the housing conditions usually ensure their survival, not adequate living. Many of them are informal or mostly illegal settlements.

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<sup>30</sup> [https://ires.ro/uploads/articole/ires\\_agentia-impreuna\\_perceptia-romilor-in-timpul-pandemiei-covid-19\\_2020.pdf](https://ires.ro/uploads/articole/ires_agentia-impreuna_perceptia-romilor-in-timpul-pandemiei-covid-19_2020.pdf)

<sup>31</sup> <https://alba24.ro/sentinta-controversata-in-cazul-blocului-turturica-din-alba-iulia-la-inalta-curte-crj-va-crea-un-precedent-periculos-in-romania-973381.html>

All these communities are equally important. There are several issues to underline here:

There is a process, a history, and several layers of intervention. First, there is a history that needs to be discovered and understood. Usually, this history is mingled with discrimination and the unclear status of the settlement. Then there is the legal status that can be discovered by doing legal research. Finally, there is the issue of social integration which basically is very hard without spatial inclusion and security of tenure. The research process should cover at least these layers.

There is a need for research and action. We know we have these communities, from time to time the press brings them to attention, but we cannot answer simple questions about the size of the phenomenon, where it is spread, how many Roma are affected, etc.

Then we need an awareness raising campaign at the policy makers level. The entire topic of environmental justice is not very well spread among NGOs, policy makers, public, and politicians.

An important actor should be the local community. We need to empower local community in order to cooperate and work with all the stakeholders for solving the situation.

The final aim would be the relocation of these communities, that is why we need an assessment of the living conditions. We need to incentivise the local and central authorities to take action.

We need a system of prevention and fast signalling of these types of situations, to stop this process from growing.

There is also a problem with the informal communities, where the garbage is not collected and may become/create sources of infections and diseases. A small percentage of Roma communities (in the rural area) use different fuels for heating, that are more polluting.

## 2.10 Nomadic lifestyle and Travellers

Not the case

## 2.11 Implications of lacking a legal address

There is no service available without an ID or a legal address, except for emergency health treatment. The problem in Romania is that the ID is related to an address and the address is related to ID and renting/property papers. This debate has been going on in Romania for many years, authorities seem to lack the will to solve this issue. The immediate consequence of solving this issue for the local municipalities would be an increase in different types of social welfare to be provided, which will represent a burden for local budgets.

## 2.12 Housing market – what can be done?

As shown above, there is a huge gap between the needs and the state's intervention. If we add to this the unclear and discriminatory allocation criteria (please see the ROAMCT guide on social housing allocation criteria<sup>32</sup>), we can see that there is a need to stimulate a stronger intervention of the state in social housing.

Targeting Roma in social housing intervention at the central level did not work until now. The state wanted to build 300 houses for Roma in 2008 and it is still not clear what are the results of this program. The only way is to increase the funds allocated for building social housing and to ensure that Roma are not excluded from allocation process.

There is also the approach of providing Roma with necessary small amount of money or materials to renovate their houses, but security of tenure also needs to be addressed in this context. This approach has been developed by Habitat for Humanity (not with a focus on Roma) and the EC/CoE Development Bank project HERO. This approach will also contribute to the reduction of homelessness among Roma.

There are not so many Roma communities situated in the city centres, living in improper housing. There is no data on this, but the phenomenon of relocating Roma from the city centres is not so intense as it was like 10 years ago or more.

Private developers or multinationals do not have a role to play in Roma housing. It is very possible that they might improve the living conditions of Roma in some communities as part of their CSR programs, but usually this type of intervention focuses on other vulnerable groups like young people leaving childcare institutions.

The social housing market is underdeveloped compared to the needs and, unless other models involving private actors are involved, remains the only viable solution for providing housing to poor Roma, who cannot afford to access the free market.

### 3. Conclusion and Recommendations

#### 3.1 Housing measures in the National Roma Strategic Framework

The National Strategy for Inclusion of Roma<sup>33</sup> is a very good document when it comes to housing, in the sense that the Roma housing problems are very well documented, with latest research in the field (which is very important due to the scarcity of ethnic segregated data in this field). It makes a good distinction between housing problems and infrastructure problems. Improving the living conditions is the first objective mentioned by the strategy. Under this specific objective, there are 6 main actions:

1. Including Roma communities in national social housing programs
2. Including Roma in national programs related to infrastructure (electricity, sewage, water)
3. Including Roma in local programs related to infrastructure (local development programs for road building/rehabilitation)

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<sup>32</sup> <https://coe-romact.org/content/ro-guide-social-housing-awarding-criteria-local-authorities>

<sup>33</sup> <http://anr.gov.ro/images/2022/Monitorul-Oficial-Partea-I-nr.-450Bis.pdf>

4. Identification of solutions for families at risk of being evicted
5. Prioritization of Roma communities in the national cadastre programs
6. Including Roma communities in national programs addressing natural hazards/calamities

Looking at these priorities, they cover the main needs of Roma communities in terms of housing. Still, there are some important issues missing:

1. Environmental injustice/racism is not mentioned
2. The issue of informal communities is not addressed (covered by different legislation)
3. Illegal evictions are not addressed
4. The issue of segregation is not addressed either

To conclude, the approach of the strategy is based on mainstreaming (inclusion of Roma in the 6 national programs), which makes evaluation very difficult, as there are problems with the ethnic identification of the beneficiaries of the national programs, in the sense that ministries might not collect such data. Not to mention the fact that the inclusion of Roma in these programs is decided at the local level, according to the needs. In my opinion, the capacity to influence the inclusion of Roma in these programs is limited at the central level, unless some agreements are made (like in the case of the national cadastre program). I have no information related to how this strategy will be related to all 6 national programs mentioned as priorities.

There are clear indicators and monitoring processes specified, so it should make it easy to follow the implementation.

### 3.2 Recommendations

Structural recommendations:

1. Improvement of the housing legislation – legislation is very old and needs to be adapted to present realities. Among others, criteria for social housing allocation should be improved. Potential beneficiaries should also be more clearly defined (who is social housing for?).
2. Administrative empowerment – the governmental office dealing with housing strategies (in general) is very small. At the county and local level, there is a lack of expertise in housing for vulnerable groups. Responsibilities are not very clear and provisions of the legislation referring to poor housing should not be optional for local authorities.
3. Increase the expertise of human resources from NGOs and other stakeholders at the local level (including Roma communities) related to issues concerning living in poverty.
4. Address prejudice and discrimination among public functionaries dealing with Roma poor housing.

Segregation

1. Without any legislation advancement in the field of segregation can be very limited, if at all.

2. EU funds should be monitored in relation to investments in segregated communities.
3. Incentives should be offered to local municipalities for desegregation.

#### Informal communities

1. Operate changes in the legislation to make interventions more efficient.
2. Make clear the responsibilities of county and local authorities, together with possible consequences if this issue is not addressed.

#### Development

1. Introduce the housing first policy. The general approach in Romania is that housing should be provided in the end, after making sure employment and other necessary conditions are met.
2. Increase funding for building social housing.
3. Address urgently the situation that puts in danger the life of the inhabitants (insecure housing, environmental and other natural hazards, etc)

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