

EUROPEAN ROMA GRASSROOTS ORGANISATIONS (ERGO) NETWORK

“Roma access to quality and affordable housing in Slovakia”

Introduction

This report was prepared by Zuzana Havírová from the Roma Advocacy and Research Center www.romadata.org which has long been dedicated to Roma inclusion in all areas of life. Through its research and advocacy activities, the organization contributes to the formation of public policies aimed at strengthening the rights and position of Roma in Slovakia and improving the living situation of Roma from poor and marginalized localities.

The main objective of the report is to describe the situation in accessibility and quality of housing for Roma in Slovakia. We have chosen secondary analysis as a method for the elaboration of the report, analysing documents, research studies and public policies in the field of housing. Secondary data analysis is a useful tool for comparing studies and data collected by other researchers. In the process of secondary analysis of research data, we analysed the results that show differences in housing conditions between Roma and majority population. It is important to note that the data in the analyses are based on ascribed ethnicity, or data from the Atlas of Roma Communities¹, as it is not possible to collect data based on ethnicity in Slovakia. We have supplemented the secondary analysis with information that we have gathered over many years of research work.

This report focuses on a group of Roma living in marginalized Roma communities (MRC). In the approved government strategic document entitled Strategy for Equality, Inclusion and Participation of Roma until 2030 from the Office of the Government Plenipotentiary for Roma Communities, a part of Roma communities is defined as marginalised:

- segregated settlements, which are considered Roma by their surroundings and in which various structural disadvantages are accumulated;
- settlements which are considered by their surroundings to be Roma, located on the periphery and inside villages or towns, in which various structural disadvantages accumulate;
- Roma populations who do not live in settlements but face disadvantaging socio-economic conditions due to structural inequalities.²

According to the Eurostat definition, a person living in an overcrowded household is defined as a person living in a household that does not have a minimum number of rooms, i.e.: one room for the whole household; one room for a couple in the household; one room for each single person aged 18 and over; one room for two persons of the same sex aged between 12

¹ The Atlas of Roma Communities is a settlement-based survey of the living conditions of Roma in Slovakia.

² Roma Equality, Inclusion and Participation Strategy 2030. Resolution of the Government of the Slovak Republic No. 181/2021 of 7.4.2021.

and 17; one room for each single person aged between 12 and 17 who is not included in the previous category; one room for two children aged 12 or younger. Unsatisfactory housing is defined as dwellings of households that are either too dark (households subjectively feel that their dwelling is 'too dark', i.e. there is not enough daylight coming through the windows and consider this to be a problem for the household), or dwellings with leaking roofs, damp walls/floors/foundations or rotting window frames/floors, or without a flushing toilet or without a bathroom in the dwelling, or without a working plumbing system.³

The share of unemployed people from the MRC environment is 38%. While in the general population the median equivalent disposable income for a one-person household is € 7,462 / year, in the MRC environment it is only € 2,335. Almost 85% of MRC people live below the official poverty line. Within the general population, this share is 12.2% - almost seven times lower. About 17% of people from MRC live on less than € 3.8 per day. Children under the age of 15 make up more than a third of MRC people (36%) living below the poverty line. This fact testifies to the reproduction of generational poverty in the MRC and the considerably limited possibilities of escape from it. The share of people older than 64 years in the MRC environment is three times lower than in the general population (5% to 17%).⁴

Poverty and social exclusion are closely linked to housing conditions. If housing conditions are inadequate, the process of integrating excluded groups into society is also unsuccessful. This is especially true if we are talking about segregation in the housing sector because segregation deepens poverty and social exclusion, and the lack of opportunities in the areas of education and employment. According to Granovetter's theory of the power of weak ties⁵, segregation is the reason why people living in segregated environments have low chances of integrating into society. And even if housing conditions in segregated areas improve, there will still be barriers related to segregation that will prevent residents of these communities from becoming a full part of society.

Roma access to quality and affordable housing in Slovakia

The Roma live in Slovakia in different socio-economic conditions. According to the Atlas of Roma Communities⁶ about 400 thousand live in Slovakia Roma, of which 46.5% of Roma live integrally among the majority population in the same socio-economic conditions, 11.5% live in settlements within the municipality, 23.6% live in settlements on the outskirts of the municipality and 18.4% live in segregated communities.

³ Markovič, F. - Plachá, Ľ. Income and living conditions in marginalized Roma communities: selected indicators from the survey EU SILC_MRK 2020. Bratislava: USVRK, 2020. https://www.romovia.vlada.gov.sk/site/assets/files/1561/analyticka_sprava_eu_silc_mrk_2020_elektronicka_final.pdf?csrt=1221162527741040827

⁴ Grauzelová, T - Markovič, F. Income and Living Conditions in Marginalised Roma Communities. Selected indicators from the EU SILC MRK 2018 survey. Bratislava: USVRK SR, 2018

⁵ Granovetter, M. Economic Action and Social Structure: The Problem of Embeddedness. In. *American Journal of Sociology*. [online] 1985, vol. 91, no. 3 [cit. 2023-03-03] Dostupné na internete: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2780199?origin=JSTOR-pdf> . ISSN 1537-5390

⁶ In 2019, another geographical survey of Roma communities took place. However, due to the use of a different methodology in the detection and subsequent inaccurate interpretation of the data, we do not draw this data.

Most Roma communities are in the Banská Bystrica, Košice and Prešov regions. Most of the settlements in which marginalized Roma live are rural, with a smaller proportion located in urban areas. In these regions we find the largest number of segregated Roma communities, in which several disadvantages and generational poverty accumulate⁷. Roma from these communities represent approximately one third of all Roma living in Slovakia.

Roma concentrations are characterised by the absence of basic amenities, which are mostly located only in the non-Roma part of the village. Roma dwellings are often in a very poor technical, static, and hygienic condition. There is also a high proportion of residential buildings that are not approved or are in a poor condition, such as shacks, unimobunks, etc. Almost 35,000 Roma live in shacks and more than 48,000 Roma live in unauthorised brick and wooden houses. The largest number of inhabitants living in shacks is in the Prešov and Košice regions. These regions also have the highest proportion of Roma population. In other regions, the number of inhabitants living in shacks ranges from 62 (Bratislava region) to 2001 (Banska Bystrica region).⁸

The most common type of housing in the MRC is brick houses, where 62% of households live. The 23 % of MRC households live in apartment houses and 15 % in non-standard types of dwellings (shacks, wooden huts, unimobunks and other non-residential dwellings). Within the total population, 48% of households live in houses and the remaining 52% live in flats. 54 % of MRC households have a legally settled housing relationship. At the same time, the proportion of MRC households with a legally settled housing arrangement decreases gradually as the spatial exclusion rate of the locality increases.

Sufficient personal space in the dwelling is one of the basic determinants of housing quality. However, almost 9 out of 10 (88 %) people in the MRC live in households that are considered overcrowded according to the Eurostat definition. Within the total population, 30 % of people live in overcrowded households. On average, there are 3 persons per room in MRC households and 1 person in the total population. At the same time, the average size of MRC dwellings is almost half that of the general population (46 m² vs. 85 m²).

More than a quarter (28%) of MRC people live in households where there is no connection to a drinking water source and so they use external sources - public well, dispenser, stream, or water from relatives/acquaintances. Half of the MRC persons have a connection to public sewerage in their household. Regarding the availability of sanitation facilities, 35% of MRC persons live in households that do not have a shower/bath or flush toilet inside the dwelling. 6% of MRC persons live without electricity in the home; for a further 15%, the connection is inadequate/failing.

Almost half of the MRC (47%) live in places where they believe there is pollution, dirt, or other environmental problems. Within the total population, this is 10% of persons. The rate of connection to utilities decreases as the spatial exclusion rate of a locality increases, while the incidence of pollution increases with spatial exclusion.

⁷ Mušíinka et al, *Atlas rómskych komunít na Slovensku 2013* (Bratislava: Regional Centre UNDP in Bratislava, 2013), available at: https://www.minv.sk/?atlas_2013

⁸ Sika, P. - Vidová, J. Housing conditions of the Roma population in the regions of the Slovak republic. Scientific Journal FINANČNÉ TRHY, Bratislava, Derivat 2021, ISSN 1336-5711, 1/2021

Although the quality of their housing is generally significantly lower, on average, MRC households spend a larger proportion of their income on housing (22%) than households in the general population (18%).

Regarding the availability of sanitation facilities, 35% of people from the MRC live in households that do not have a shower/bath or flush toilet inside the dwelling. At the same time, 89% of these people do not have a personal hygiene centre in the locality where they live, so their options for taking care of basic personal hygiene are severely limited. Given the association of these two variables, the highest proportion of people without household sanitation facilities is in concentrations outside the village/town (40%), and conversely, the lowest is in concentrations inside the village/town (25%). Among integrated households, this is 16% of people.

According to the survey, 50% of people from the MRC live in households with a connection to a public sewerage system, 12% use a cesspit, 2% use a septic tank, and more than a third of people (36%) do not have a connection to any wastewater disposal system in their dwelling. In terms of location, the situation is worst in concentrations outside the village/town, where 42% of the inhabitants do not have any type of sewerage system in their home. Sewerage, together with an internal source of clean water, are essential components of standard housing and their absence poses a major problem for the household. Between 2014 and 2018, there were 4,693 documented cases of illness associated with lack of access to clean water or sanitation. 90% of these cases were found in communities where the population, or part of it, did not have access to sanitation or did not use it for various reasons.⁹

One in fourteen households in marginalised Roma communities is without electrical wiring and approximately one in seven households has inadequate wiring. In the general population, we record that 6.3% of all majority households reported that they have infrastructure of given types, but it is not adequate. Thus, it can be concluded that in the households of the general population all three infrastructure items are in place, or the inhabitants use non-public types of plumbing or sanitation. The overall average housing area in marginalised Roma communities is 50 m² for brick houses, 43 m² for flats in apartment buildings and 22 m² for shacks or unimobunks. The average total housing area for the general population is 116 m² for houses and 62 m² for flats. In the general population, the average number of people per household is 2.9 and in marginalised Roma communities it is 4.5.¹⁰

A long-term problem complicating the improvement of housing conditions for people from the MRC is the undeveloped land and housing in the localities where they live, or the lack of an official ownership relationship to their dwellings. According to the survey, 54% of MRC households have a legally settled relationship to their housing, whether in the form of a purchase contract, registration in the cadastre or a rental contract. In the case of integrated households, this figure is 78%. The proportion of MRC households with legally settled housing gradually decreases as the rate of spatial exclusion of the locality increases.

⁹ Markovič, F. - Plachá, L. Income and living conditions in marginalized Roma communities: selected indicators from the survey EU SILC_MRK 2020. Bratislava: USVRK, 2020. https://www.romovia.vlada.gov.sk/site/assets/files/1561/analyticka_sprava_eu_silc_mr_k_2020_elektronicka_final.pdf?csrt=1221162527741040827

¹⁰ Grauzelová, T. - Markovič, F. Income and Living Conditions in Marginalised Roma Communities. Selected indicators from the EU SILC MRK 2018 survey. Bratislava: USVRK SR, 2018.

While 4 out of 5 households in the locality where persons from the MRC live outside the concentrations (in the Roma majority municipalities) have legally settled housing, in the concentrations outside the municipality this figure is less than half (46%).

In terms of ownership of the dwelling, significant differences can be observed between majority and Roma. Compared to the total population, the share of homeowners in the MRC is three times lower (92 % vs. 31 % of households). In contrast, the share of renting households is almost three times higher in the MRC (19% vs. 7% of households). There are also differences in the type of tenancy. While most MRC tenants (60%) reported living in so-called social housing where they pay below market rent, 10% of tenants in the overall population live in this type of housing. In the case of integrated households, 65% own a house or flat, 11% live in rented accommodation, roughly half live in social housing (6% of households).

The higher proportion of MRC households in social housing is a result of state and local government housing policy. Due to the lack of social housing in Slovakia, unlike in countries such as Austria or the Netherlands, this segment is primarily reserved for households with lower incomes who would not be able to afford housing at market prices. Construction costs are partly covered by subsidies from the Ministry of Transport and Construction of the Slovak Republic, and there are 2 qualitatively different types of social housing - lower and higher standard.

The lower standard flats, more attractive for local governments also because of the higher cost coverage by subsidies, were intended as a tool to solve the housing problems of the MRC. Although exact data are not available, it is assumed that many MRC households in social housing rent this type of apartment. Apart from the problematic nature of the very existence of the double standard of social housing, which also predisposes Roma households to worse conditions, the sustainability of this practice is also questionable from a pragmatic point of view.

Compared to the normal standard, these dwellings are smaller, which can in many cases pose a major space problem for the average size of the MRC household compared to the general population. According to the survey, the average total area of social housing with MRC tenants is 45 m², with an average of up to 3 persons per room, 92 % of households can be considered overcrowded. The complete absence or poor quality of basic equipment in these dwellings has also been demonstrated in the past in several locations. Conditions in each location are an equally important determinant of the quality of housing. Almost half of the people from the MRC (47%) live in places where there is pollution, dirt, or other environmental problems. The variation between different types of locations is considerable, with the proportion of people perceiving their surroundings as polluted increasing with the degree of spatial exclusion – while in concentrations inside villages/towns it is 39%, in concentrations outside villages/towns it was 62% of people. The proportion was 23% among integrated households and 10% in the general population.¹¹

¹¹ Markovič, F. - Plachá, L. Income and living conditions in marginalized Roma communities: selected indicators from the survey EU SILC_MRK 2020. Bratislava: USVRK, 2020. https://www.romovia.vlada.gov.sk/site/assets/files/1561/analyticka_sprava_eu_silc_mrk_2020_elektronicka_final.pdf?csrt=1221162527741040827

Based on the above data, we can conclude that Roma living in marginalised Roma communities suffer from homelessness according to the ETHOS definition. Substandard housing conditions in segregated areas are one of the characteristics of the ETHOS definition of homelessness, and some Roma living in shacks or makeshift dwellings on land they do not own are also exposed to the uncertainty that their housing will be demoted.

In Slovakia, Roma also suffer from typical homelessness. In the town of Skalica, for example, there have been around 20 homeless people in the last 5 years, at least 10 of whom are Roma. However, this number has gradually declined as several have died. Empirical data specifically on homeless Roma is not collected and therefore it is not possible to say how many Roma are living on the streets without a roof over their heads. We do not record Roma from other countries who are homeless on the streets.

Spatial segregation is generally defined as the spatial exclusion of individuals and groups and has a strong socio-economic aspect, especially when individuals of the same socio-economic status reside in the same place. Spatial segregation based on ethnicity has long been recognised as a major structural mechanism through which ethnic minorities are denied equal access to opportunities in education, health, employment, and housing. Residential segregation also reduces opportunities for the creation and development of social ties and contacts between members of ethnic minorities and members of the majority population. Residents of segregated settlements have limited opportunities to establish and develop inter-ethnic social contacts, which are important in building mutual respect, developing tolerance and the employment of individuals in different spheres of society.¹²

The main factors of spatial segregation include: social class, ethnic minority, stage of life and family cycle, and religious affiliation. Of these, the most intense factors are belonging to an ethnic minority or race.¹³ In the case of marginalized Roma communities, it is a combination of racial or ethnic and social-class segregation. A typical manifestation of the spatial marginalization of Roma is the emergence of remote Roma settlements, literally cut off from the world (in rural environments) and the emergence of urban and suburban ghettos. Such settlements are referred to as Roma settlements, a term that is also used by the Roma themselves and has its equivalent in the Romani language (*romano gav*). Although there is no precise definition of the term Roma settlement, it can be stated that these are ethnically homogeneous settlements, segregated not only spatially, but also socially.

Among the most common characteristics of settlements, difficult conditions for access to basic rights - education, housing, health, employment, access to services, adequate income - are mentioned. Among the known problems of Roma settlements' inhabitants are poor quality housing connected with complicated land ownership relations, worse health status compared to the majority population, poor educational level and qualifications, in many settlements limited access to basic infrastructure (e.g., drinking water).

The spatial marginalisation of Roma is a two-sided process. On the one hand, there is the "expansion" of ethnically homogeneous communities, to which Roma originally dispersed in

¹² Havířová, Zuzana. Exclusion from the labour market in the context of anti-Roma racism. UKF: Helping Professions, 2022, vol. 5, Issue 2. pp. 40-54. Doi: 10.17846/PP.2022.5.2.40-54

¹³ Džambazovič, R. Spatial Aspects of Poverty and Social Exclusion. *Sociology* 39, 432-458.

Slovak or Czech towns are moving (or more precisely, returning), mainly for economic reasons. On the other hand, the emergence of such mono-ethnic areas is supported by the departure of the majority population from areas with a higher concentration of Roma. The creation of ethnically homogeneous areas shifts the understanding of the problem from a social to an ethnic one. The majority society begins to avoid such areas, the internal cohesion of the community increases, and the community begins to lock itself in.¹⁴

The availability of adequate housing for people from marginalised backgrounds remains a challenge, but it is insufficiently covered by the state. One of the reasons for this is the fact that the state approaches this issue from a more individualistic perspective, i.e. the individual bears the primary responsibility for dealing with his/her housing situation, depending on his/her capabilities. The Housing Policy Concept 2030¹⁵ states that the basic mission of the state is to create a stable environment that strengthens the responsibility of citizens and enables them to live according to their income situation.

However, there are groups of people in every society who, due to the nature of housing as a commodity, are unable to secure adequate housing. In accordance with the principle of solidarity, it is also necessary to help these population groups through state intervention in the housing market. The long-term objective of state housing policy is to gradually raise the overall standard of housing so that it is affordable to the population and so that every household can afford adequate housing. The basic vision of the state until 2030 is to achieve a gradual increase in the availability and quality of housing in the Slovak Republic by focusing on increasing the affordability and physical accessibility of housing, with an emphasis on the development of all forms of rental housing. Improving the quality of the existing housing stock is an integral part of this vision. To achieve this vision, it is necessary to create a framework for the involvement of all actors in the housing development process in addressing the proposed tasks, to create space for the participation of all levels of decision-making and to strengthen the partnership between the public, private and non-governmental sectors at both horizontal and vertical levels.

The concept mentions marginalised Roma communities as vulnerable groups in housing, but the proposed measures do not address in any way the segregation and inadequate housing conditions of Roma from excluded localities. This document is supposed to cover the housing policy of the Slovak Republic until 2030, but Roma living in segregated localities are not a target group of the state's housing policy, even though the concept refers to the principles of the state's social policy and the principle of solidarity. This misunderstanding of segregation as a structural problem of the state leads to the topic being transferred to the local level, while not all municipalities where segregated localities are located have the will to address this unsatisfactory housing situation of Roma. The concept suggests strengthening the capacity to carry out social work with vulnerable groups in housing, but the authors of the concept completely overlook the fact that segregation in housing cannot be solved by social work, but that measures need to be taken in other key areas such as employment and housing.

¹⁴ Rusnáková, J. - Rochovská, A. Segregation of inhabitants of marginalized Roma communities, poverty and disadvantages related to spatial exclusion. *Geographia Cassoviensis* VIII, 2/2014. Available at http://www.humannageografia.sk/clanky/Rusnakova_Rochovska_tlac1.pdf

¹⁵ Housing Policy of the Slovak Republic until 2030, available at: <https://www.mindop.sk/ministerstvo-1/veda-a-vyskum-10/dokumenty-a-materialy/koncepcie>

The Office of the Plenipotentiary of the Government of the Slovak Republic for Roma Communities (ÚSVRK), in accordance with the Slovakia Programme, is preparing a national project, the subject of which will be comprehensive assistance in arranging legal relations to the land under the settlements.

On the website of the Office of the Government Plenipotentiary for Roma Communities it is written that the arrangement of property relations to the land under the settlements is the first step towards improving the conditions for a dignified life for the benefit of the inhabitants of the MRC. At the same time, the settlement of land under settlements opens up the possibility for municipalities to raise the standard of living of the whole community (e.g. through the introduction of sewage systems, utilities, etc.).

The actual process of settlement land regularisation will be preceded by an analysis of the land tenure relations under the settlements. Based on the result of the land ownership analysis, an appropriate process for land settlement will be recommended to the municipalities. The process of land settlement will take place in two ways: land settlement through geometric plans, on the basis of which purchase or lease agreements and settlement of legal relations through simple land improvements.

The Office, through its staff, will provide free of charge for the duration of the national project: legal support, which will consist in particular of: drawing up purchase contracts, lease contracts and other necessary legal documents for land settlement purposes; consultancy and mediation support, consisting in particular of: methodological support for municipalities in direct consultation with the municipality in the field in solving problems related to land settlement (meetings with the municipal council, land owners, residents of dwellings); geodetic work, which will mainly consist of analysing the ownership relations under the settlements, drawing up geometric plans for purchase and lease contracts, mapping documents for applications for simple land improvements; coordination support, which will consist mainly of coordinating activities for the settlement of land under settlements, systematic work with the inhabitants of the settlements in preparation for land acquisition, ad hoc problem solving in the villages.

During the month of September/October 2023, municipalities will be contacted by the staff of the Office (regional coordinators) who will explain to the municipalities how to participate in the project, and will also assist the municipalities throughout the duration of the project. Municipalities can also participate on their own initiative, without waiting to be contacted by the coordinator. Terms and conditions for participation in the project as well as information about the project are under preparation.¹⁶

However, it should be stressed that desegregation work is also needed in such localities, as this is the real way to break out of generational poverty and get opportunities in different areas of life.

¹⁶ <https://www.romovia.vlada.gov.sk/narodne-projekty/narodny-projekt-asistencia-obciam-s-pritomnostou-marginalizovanych-romskych-komunit-pri-usporiadani-pravných-vztahov-k-pozemkom/?csrt=13056434988655946209>

Housing affordability aims to ensure that the price of housing corresponds to the financial situation of the population. Affordability or unaffordability equally affects owners as well as tenants. It is experiencing the phenomenon of poor owners, where although a household or individual owns the dwelling in which they live, the cost of running the dwelling, together with other costs of living, makes it increasingly difficult for these groups of households to maintain a reasonable standard of living.

A different perspective can also be seen in the concept of energy poverty, a condition in which individuals or households do not have sufficient financial resources to provide heating and other energy necessary for the functioning of the household. In general, housing affordability has deteriorated recently. Real estate prices have risen faster than household incomes in recent years, and other housing-related expenditures also account for a larger share of total household expenditures. Housing costs are therefore a greater burden on households. By default, lower-income households are most negatively affected. Today, however, even middle-income earners are beginning to experience rising housing prices as a problem.¹⁷ The average price per m² in Slovakia in the first quarter of 2023 was EUR 2,556. If we consider that the average area of an apartment is 60 m², it means that the average price of an apartment/house is 153 360 Eur.¹⁸

Roma from poor localities belong to a group for whom adequate housing is largely unaffordable. Roma living in poor, excluded localities in dwellings that do not meet basic living standards have little to no opportunity to buy their own house or apartment. This is due to insufficient income to enable them to apply for a mortgage and the non-existence of savings. They also have very low chances to rent an apartment among the majority population in the cities, as the rent of a 2-room apartment is usually around 500 - 600 Euros per month + utilities, which can vary depending on the number of people in the apartment. Another cause is antigypsyism, which manifests itself in the form of rejection of Roma tenants in the neighbourhood. We will write about this later.

The most widespread housing development policy, which is the construction of lower standard dwellings, has brought improvements in sewerage connections and access to electricity. A certain part of the Roma population from marginalised communities lives in municipal rental flats, where the rent ranges from 100 - 300 EUR per month + utilities. In the past, the construction of rental dwellings proved to be the only option to help Roma out of unfavourable housing conditions, but the issue of segregation was also insufficiently addressed in this case, as geographically some of these sites were in the extravillage of the municipality. Another problem was that these were lower standard dwellings.

The legislation defines a lower standard apartment as smaller (from 45m² to 55m²) and less equipped than a normal standard apartment (from 56m² to 60m²). According to a decree issued by the Ministry of Health, the minimum requirements for lower standard flats include an area of at least 12m² for the main occupant and an additional 6m² for each additional person living in the household, while each such flat must have a total area of at least 15m² of

¹⁷ Housing Policy of the Slovak Republic until 2030, available at: <https://www.mindop.sk/ministerstvo-1/veda-a-vyskum-10/dokumenty-a-materialy/koncepcie>

¹⁸ <https://nbs.sk/statisticke-udaje/vybrane-makroekonomicke-ukazovatele/ceny-nehnutelnosti-na-byvanie/ceny-nehnutelnosti-na-byvanie-podla-krajov/>

living space, access to drinking water with the possibility of installing water heating equipment, a toilet, shower or bath, connection to the sewerage system, and technical preparation for the installation of heating. A lower standard dwelling unit that uses coal or wood for heating should also have a storage area. Lower standard rental flats are basically just a space without any equipment, but with technical preparation for its installation later. Any future tenant must therefore expect significant additional costs, for example for the installation of heating, shower, toilet, or kitchen. Centre for the research of ethnicity and culture has repeatedly argued that the minimum standard of such housing falls below the minimum standard for adequate housing set out in Article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.¹⁹

Since most Roma dwellings in poor localities are located on land they do not own, they are illegal dwellings. Related to this are the many obstacles faced by Roma from such localities. One is, for example, the impossibility of applying for a housing allowance, as this can only be obtained if the applicant in material need produces the ownership certificate of the dwelling or a rental contract. If middle-class Roma decide to buy a house or an apartment, they usually have no problems with providing the necessary documents to the bank. Our organisation has not yet found a case of middle- and upper-class Roma having problems with documenting their income or other documents in case they decided to apply for a mortgage or buy a home from their own savings.

The Roma living in illegal dwellings do not even have the possibility to register an address, in most cases there is no address. That is why their ID cards show the municipal office as their address. This is a legal way for those who have no way to get their home address.

The legislation defines social housing as targeting individuals and families whose income corresponds to a minimum level set by law. Slightly higher income levels apply to families with disadvantaged people, single parents or families with people providing social, health or cultural services, or young people discharged from institutional care. However, in general, social housing policy does not represent a comprehensive approach to addressing the housing issue of low-income families.

Moreover, in practice it is not a temporary solution with the ambition of creating a pathway into the mainstream housing market for disadvantaged individuals and families, but rather a permanent solution. In addition, although the legislation in force does not distinguish between the different target groups, in practice it is impossible not to notice the ethnic divide, where tenants of ordinary housing are usually non-Roma and tenants of lower standard housing are usually Roma.²⁰

This is one of the manifestations of antigypsyism. In addition to structural segregation, the Roma also encounter individual manifestations of antigypsyism, which consist, for example, in the fact that when they want to move from an excluded locality to the majority, the

¹⁹ Center for the research of ethnicity and culture and other NGOs. Monitoring report of the civic society on the implementation of the national Roma integration strategy in Slovakia. assessment of progress in key areas of the strategy. Bratislava, CVEK: 2019.

²⁰ Center for the research of ethnicity and culture and other NGOs. Monitoring report of the civic society on the implementation of the national Roma integration strategy in Slovakia. assessment of progress in key areas of the strategy. Bratislava, CVEK: 2019.

majority population writes petitions to prevent the Roma from moving in. This applies not only in the case of a tenancy but also when Roma want to buy a flat/house in their personal ownership.²¹

We recorded such a case during our investigation, when a Roma family wanted to buy a house in a village in the Prešov region, but several residents of the village filed a complaint with the municipal office, demanding that the municipality prevent the sale of the house to the Roma family. A similar case was reproduced by our partners from the Veľký Krtíš district, where a family wanted to buy an apartment in an apartment building, but the owners of the apartments wrote a petition stating that they did not want to have Roma as neighbours. In the end, even though the Roma family had a mortgage, they did not buy an apartment in the apartment building.²² We did not find any cases of Roma being discriminated against when applying for a mortgage in a bank, because the fact is that poor Roma, who face more discrimination because of their background and because they are poor, do not apply for mortgages in banks.

Forced evictions of Roma have occurred in our country only in exceptional cases since 2013, and efforts have been made to find adequate alternative housing for Roma. This is also since in 2012-2013 the Ombudsman intervened against forced evictions of Roma in several localities and the European Roma Rights Centre filed a lawsuit against the municipal authority for illegal eviction of Roma from the Nižné Kapustníky district of Košice. In January 2022, the Košice II District Court ruled in favour of the Roma, finding that the City of Košice had violated their human dignity and right to privacy and committed unlawful discrimination based on their ethnicity. It is still only a first instance decision, but it is still a landmark ruling in this area.²³

We have not seen cases of individual evictions, but that does not mean that they have not happened. If people have to be forcibly evicted against their will from the houses or land they occupy, the state has a duty to provide: thorough and full consultation with the people affected by the forced eviction, that adequate, adequate and timely notice is given to the evicted people, that remedies are provided to the evicted people (e.g. compensation or restitution) for the violation of their rights, that excessive force or violence is not used in the eviction, adequate alternative housing is provided for evicted people.

Environmental discrimination is still an area that is not being addressed effectively enough in the case of Roma housing in Slovakia. Although there are several analyses and reports that some Roma-occupied areas are unsatisfactory for health in terms of environmental burdens, there has been no significant improvement. Flooding, floods, polluted groundwater, and hazardous waste dumps are conditions in which several thousand Roma live and no action is being taken by the relevant authorities.

To a large extent, landfills are located next to Roma communities because of the inefficiency of waste disposal and, at the same time, the lack of finances for Roma to pay for this service.

²¹ <https://spravy.pravda.sk/regiony/clanok/660425-svrcinovskych-osadnikov-v-cadci-nehcu-starostka-je-z-toho-znechutena/>

²² Statements from field data collection

²³ <https://kosicednes.sk/spravy/okresny-sud-rozhodol-v-prospech-romov-vystahovanych-pod-zamienkou-odvozu-odpadu-z-ich-domov/>

Whether communities have been established near existing landfills is debatable, as there is no information on how many of them were established, but rather that settlements have been established in places where landfills did not exist before. Some Roma also burn their own waste, which can cause toxic fumes, and also various other things that should not be burned. Unfortunately, a certain proportion of the population has no knowledge of what can be burned and what is no longer allowed. For example, the community of Plavecké čtvrtky is located on land under which a gas pipeline is located.

In the area of housing, the Strategy for Roma Inclusion, Equality and Participation 2030 has set the global goal of eliminating inequalities between members of marginalised Roma communities and the majority population of Slovakia in housing and combating discrimination against Roma in access to housing, including the elimination of residential segregation. It is precisely to reduce residential segregation that the Action Plan sets out to prepare rental housing projects that will reduce residential segregation by 2024. In addition, the Action Plan also includes pilot affordable housing projects Housing first or Rapid re-housing, a pilot project for self-help reconstruction of suitable housing using a micro-loan system.²⁴

These objectives should be implemented in cooperation with investors and with the respective municipalities, as they are key in construction and planning. Different solutions should be sought, and it is certainly not appropriate to focus on just one solution, such as social housing, but social housing can be a solution for a certain group of people. To achieve the objectives of the strategy, it is necessary to think first about the elimination of segregation in housing and, in this spirit, to plan and implement steps that will lead to the gradual elimination of residential segregation. Therefore, if social housing is approached, it is not appropriate to address the whole locality, but individual inclusion among the majority is necessary so that Roma are not the target of hatred and social exclusion.

There are no nomads or Travellers currently living in Slovakia.

Conclusion

The area of housing is crucial in the integration of Roma into society, because if a person lives in substandard conditions, he or she faces multiple disadvantages and poverty, which deepens into generational poverty. Roma in Slovakia live in a variety of socio-economic conditions, but approximately 150,000 Roma live in a variety of socio-economic conditions. Roma live in substandard, poor and even inhuman conditions without access to drinking water and basic infrastructure facilities.

The segregated environment in which Roma live negatively determines their opportunities in the fields of education, health, and employment. This is a fact that has been empirically proven in several research (see e.g. Rusnáková, Rochovská, 2014). Improving technical equipment and infrastructure alone will not help Roma from segregated backgrounds to integrate into society, as those ties with the majority that they do not have due to segregation prove to be crucial in their integration into society.

²⁴ Roma Equality, Inclusion and Participation Strategy 2030. Resolution of the Government of the Slovak Republic No. 181/2021 of 7.4.2021.

In Slovakia, Roma living in substandard, poor and even inhumane conditions without access to potable water and basic infrastructure face many disadvantages and barriers to accessing better housing. Roma also face antigypsyism in housing, and if there is a negative narrative about Roma in society, it will be impossible to make positive policies in housing.

This study shows that the conditions in which Roma live in segregated localities are diametrically opposed to those of the majority, and the state tries to hold Roma individually responsible for this situation. However, we know from history how these localities were created, and we know that it is the majority and decisions at the level of the localities that are responsible. It is therefore most desirable at the present time for the state and, by extension, the localities, to start implementing policies that will lead to the desegregation of the Roma, because this is the most effective way for the Roma to gradually integrate into society.

Localities are the ones that have the most power in making planning decisions and we need to negotiate with localities and look for ways to do housing development in a way that is not segregated and non-conforming. There is a fundamental question that should be asked in this area: "is this a place in which the majority would live?" If the answer to this question is "no", then such a solution is not suitable for Roma citizens either.

Recommendations

- 1.** There is a great need for the pilot projects mentioned in the study and included in the action plan of the Strategy for Equality, Inclusion and Participation 2030 to be evaluated after a certain period to see what their impact on inclusion has been and whether the quality of life of Roma has changed, including in relation to the majority. And if it is found that these projects have not produced the expected result, it is necessary to terminate them and look for other ways.
- 2.** Legislation in housing policy should be changed to take account of the historical causes of the creation of segregated Roma localities and to prepare housing laws so that they are primarily non-segregated.
- 3.** In the case of the housing allowance, legislation must be changed, and the allowance must stop being linked to legal documents from the dwelling, because this is precisely the measure that does not reflect the historical origins of the excluded Roma communities. We could take inspiration, for example, from the Czech Republic, where a housing allowance is paid to those families whose housing costs represent 30% of household income.
- 4.** Measures need to be taken to reduce antigypsyism and strengthen the coexistence of different groups. An example might be an approach that will regulate rental housing or house building so as not to be exclusionary.
- 5.** We need to start actively addressing the environmental burdens that poor Roma face. The environmental environment and the threatening factors that reduce the quality of housing and endanger the health of the population need to be addressed.

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