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ROMA ACCESS TO QUALITY AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING

**in Bulgaria, Czech Republic,
Hungary, Romania, Slovakia,
Spain**

**With additional benchmarking
evidence from 6 other
European countries**



This report was written by Amana Ferro, Senior Policy Adviser with the European Roma Grassroots Organisations (ERGO) Network, based on an extensive data collection exercise among the ERGO Network national membership, carried out between April and September 2023. Members in Bulgaria (Integro Association), the Czech Republic (Life Together), Hungary (Autonómia Foundation), Romania (Policy Center for Roma and Minorities), Slovakia (Roma Advocacy and Research Centre), and Spain (Federation of Roma Associations in Catalonia) have provided direct evidence through in-depth national case studies. Additional benchmarking evidence was contributed by ERGO Network members in Albania (Roma Active Albania), Bosnia and Herzegovina (OTAHARIN), Ireland (Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre), Kosovo (Voice of Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptians), North Macedonia (RROMA), and Türkiye (Zero Discrimination Association).

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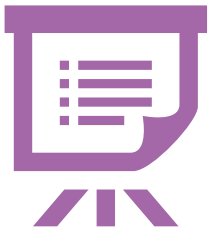


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“Is this a place where the majority would live?
If the answer to this question is no,
then it is not suitable for the Roma either.”

Roma woman, Slovakia



KEY MESSAGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS



Roma living conditions are significantly worse than those of the majority, while most Roma experience de facto homelessness.

Urgent and significant investment is needed to improve the structural condition of the dwellings that most Roma inhabit, including their connection to utilities, in order to render them compliant with the United Nations definition of adequate housing.



Most Roma live in segregated communities and / or informal settlements, many exposed to environmental hazards.

Countries need to develop comprehensive desegregation plans with clear targets and indicators, which should also tackle the legalisation of irregular housing situations and the environmental consequences stemming from the use of unsuitable locations.



High costs of housing and overcomplex administrative procedures further reduce Roma access to housing.

Roma housing and energy poverty must be addressed through improving access to income and better regulation of the housing and utilities market; bureaucratic procedures should be simplified, including decoupling access to services from ID papers and a fixed address.





→ **The Roma continue to face antigypsyism and forced evictions.**

Anti-bias training must be compulsory for all housing actors, including local authorities, coupled with strong anti-discrimination legislation and mechanisms; evictions should be a last resort, and must entail due notice and the provision of decent alternative housing.



→ **Social housing holds great potential for Roma housing, but it is currently under-utilised.**

The social housing stock needs to be expanded and improved, while its allocation should follow a rights-based, housing-first approach, reducing conditionality and unaffordability and ensuring that vulnerable groups such as the Roma are prioritised.



→ **Roma communities and their civil society organisations must be involved, in order to co-create sustainable ways forward.**

Policy makers and all housing actors must cooperate closely with Roma stakeholders and their civil society representatives, to ensure evidence-based solutions, support disaggregated data collection, foster common understanding, and bridge cultural gaps.





INTRODUCTION

Rationale

Europe is facing a deep housing crisis, where supply is scarce and housing costs represent an ever-increasing share of disposable incomes.

Many Roma¹ are unable to meet these costs on the housing market, or to prove legal ownership of the family abode, which exposes them to forced evictions, with entire families ending up homeless. The Roma are also forced to leave their homes because of blatant displays of antigypsyism on behalf of local authorities, who move them to unsuitable encampments out of sight. Banished at the margins, many Roma end up living in informal settlements and segregated neighbourhoods, in inadequate dwellings without access to utilities' infrastructure, in unsanitary conditions, exposed to environmental hazards.

The [EU Roma Strategic Framework for Equality, Inclusion, and Participation 2020 – 2030](#) includes, as one of its four sectoral objectives, "Increase effective equal access to adequate desegregated housing and essential services". This objective is further broken down in two targets, namely to *reduce the gap in housing deprivation by at least one third* (ensuring that, by 2030, the majority of Roma do not face housing deprivation), and to *cut the gap in overcrowding by at least half* (ensuring that, by 2030, the majority of Roma no longer live in overcrowded households). While welcome, these two objectives overlook many other housing aspects that affect wellbeing.

More encouragingly, the [Council Recommendation on Roma Equality, Inclusion and Participation](#) of 12 March 2021 includes a much more comprehensive section on "Access to adequate desegregated housing and essential services", which calls on Member States to "ensure equal treatment of Roma people in access to adequate desegregated housing and essential services." There is a long list of proposed measures, covering a wide range of relevant housing issues. Ensuring access to housing and to adequate services, and providing support to the homeless, are also extensively covered by the [European Pillar of Social Rights](#) (Social Pillar), the compass for Europe's recovery, chiefly in its Principles 19 and 20 among others, while it is also supported by Goals 6, 7, 11, 13 and 15 of the [Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs) of the United Nations.

¹ The umbrella term "Roma" encompasses diverse groups, including Roma, Sinti, Kale, Romanichels, Boyash/Rudari, Ashkali, Egyptians, Yenish, Dom, Lom, Rom and Abdal, as well as Traveller populations (gens du voyage, Gypsies, Camminanti, etc.), in accordance with terminology used by the [European Commission](#).



With this report, ERGO Network aims to provide data and strong grassroots evidence about Roma concerns as well as good practices in what concerns access to quality and affordable housing, in a bid to contribute to better policy-making and to inform the implementation of EU initiatives such as the EU Roma Strategic Framework for Equality, Inclusion and Participation and the European Semester (including the Recovery and Resilience process, the European Pillar of Social Rights and its Action Plan, and the Sustainable Development Goals). The present research will also feed into relevant policy initiatives and related advocacy at national level.

Methodology

Between April and September 2023, ERGO Network researchers in **Bulgaria** (*Integro Association*), the **Czech Republic** (*Life Together*), **Hungary** (*Autonómia Foundation*), **Romania** (*Policy Center for Roma and Minorities*), **Slovakia** (*Roma Advocacy and Research Centre*) and **Spain** (*Federation of Roma Association in Catalonia*) prepared comprehensive national case studies about Roma access to quality and affordable housing in their country.

In **Bulgaria**, semi-structured interviews were carried out with the mayor and the secretary of the municipality of Yablanitsa as well as with six representatives of Roma communities from the municipalities of Botevgrad and Peshtera. This was complemented by an analysis of successful local practices of Roma housing inclusion from the municipalities of Botevgrad, Yablanitsa, and Byala Slatina. Equally, a comprehensive desk review of relevant sources was carried out, including statistical data, reports, analyses, studies from institutions and non-governmental organisations.

Read *Bulgaria's national case study on Roma access to quality and affordable housing* [here](#).

In the **Czech Republic**, quantitative research (518 questionnaires with a return rate of 100%) was enriched by qualitative research (life stories). The field study took place within the city of Ostrava. Additionally, data for 721 clients was obtained through collaborations with Charita České Budějovice, ROMA Servis Brno, ROMODROM Brno, Citizenship Counseling Center Ústí nad Labem, Citizenship Counseling Center Ostrava, SAS Diakonie ČCE Vsetín, EUROTHOPIA, o. p. s. Opava, Regional charity Chrudim, Charity Přerov. The findings were further complemented with insights from the organisation's work with Roma families and their children over many years.

Read the *Czech Republic's national case study on Roma access to quality and affordable housing* [here](#).

In **Hungary**, desk research was conducted to cover relevant studies published on the topic in the past period. The work was preceded by the R-Home Programme, which carried out research and policy recommendations on the housing situation of Roma in five countries (Bulgaria, Romania, Italy, France and Hungary). This project included a number of interviews and analyses. The case study also builds on Autonómia Foundation's direct experience in a number of previous programmes, including participating and initiating several local housing programmes in Hungary.

Read Hungary's national case study on Roma access to quality and affordable housing [here](#).

In **Romania**, the case study is based on a combination of desk research and extensive field experience, as well as on discussions with housing and other relevant experts. As there is no dedicated research on Roma housing, general Roma reports were used, which include references to housing. Nevertheless, the data can provide a comprehensive general understanding of the living conditions of Roma, although there is a clear need for more research in many aspects. The information applies to the entire country.

Read Romania's national case study on Roma access to quality and affordable housing [here](#).

In **Slovakia**, the research relied on the secondary analysis of documents, research studies, and state policies in the area of housing, constantly looking at the differences in housing status and living conditions between the Roma and the majority

population. It is important to note that statistical data is based on attributed ethnicity or on information from the Atlas of Roma Communities, because in Slovakia it is not possible to collect information based on ethnicity. The secondary analysis was supplemented with data collected through many years of research in marginalised Roma communities.

Read Slovakia's national case study on Roma access to quality and affordable housing [here](#).

In **Spain**, desk research covered the main available studies and reports on Roma housing, some of which FAGiC was already involved with. The case study also draws on the organisation's experience of over two decades with Roma housing programmes in Catalonia, mediating between entities and Roma community residents and providing direct advice and support on legal and administrative procedures, particularly to the most vulnerable families.

Read Spain's national case study on Roma access to quality and affordable housing [here](#).

Additional benchmarking input was provided in the framework of the European Commission-funded project "Romani women - Power of change" by our members in **Albania** (Roma Active Albania), **Bosnia & Herzegovina** (OTAHARIN), **Kosovo** (Voice of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians), **North Macedonia** (RROMA), and **Türkiye** (Zero Discrimination Association). Further additional input was supplied by our members in **Ireland** (Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre). These contributions are summarised in dedicated subsections in each chapter of this report.



The present report is a synthesis of the different national submissions, and it includes:

- A brief snapshot of the socio-economic situation of the Roma living in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, and Spain.
- A detailed look at the Roma housing situation and living conditions in all countries covered by the report, as well as at the obstacles that the Roma face in accessing quality and affordable housing.
- Concrete recommendations for improving the availability, accessibility, affordability, quality, and inclusiveness of Roma housing.

While the detailed secondary sources for all national data quoted in this report are mostly not included for brevity reasons, a complete list of all references used is available at the end of each of the six national case studies (linked above), as well as in the other national submissions (linked below), or upon request.

This synthesis report was written by **Amana Ferro**, Senior Policy Adviser with the ERGO Network staff team in Brussels. It was endorsed by the participating researchers and national contributors in October 2023.

National researchers

Kamen Makaveev, expert for European programmes and projects, is affiliated with Integro Association (**Bulgaria**), which brings together 12 local Roma civil society organizations from different parts of the country, united by their common goal to achieve an equal and respected position of the Roma community among the other members of Bulgarian society. Integro strives to give visibility to the problems and needs of the Roma from remote settlements. The organization's activities are aimed at community mobilization and creating an active Roma leadership capable of challenging the passivity of both Roma and public authorities, so that they can share the responsibility for overcoming inequality, social exclusion and poverty among Roma, and for achieving cohesion and prosperity at the local level and in society as a whole. The association's guiding principles are the enforcement of human rights, democratic procedures, transparency, partnership and trust in the community and society. For more information: www.integrobg.org/en/.

Mgr. Bc. Helena Jedináková, DiS Pavla Vjačková, Bc. Magda Odehnalová, and Mgr. Sri Kumar Vishwanathan are affiliated with the organisation *Vzájemné Soužití – Life Together* (**Czech Republic**). The organisation was founded in 1997 and has since been working so that the Roma can come to enjoy the same rights and opportunities in the Czech society. In 1999, the organisation established Ostrava's first free Legal and Social Advice Office, with a full-time lawyer and several teams of social workers to serve the people and influence public policy. Dignity of all and respect for each other is a cornerstone of Life Together's philosophy. The organisation carries out work in many areas (housing, education, health, human rights, employment), has carried out field research and studies, and has organised successful demonstrations against unconstitutional barriers on accessing housing benefits. For more information: www.vzajemnesouziti.cz.





Miklós Kóródi and **Tibor Béres** are affiliated with the Autonomía Foundation (**Hungary**), an independent, private foundation established in 1990 to strengthen civil society, support excluded groups and, above all, promote Roma integration. Its aim is to support the development of civil society in Hungary, including Roma integration. It does this primarily by supporting civic initiatives in which people mobilise local resources to achieve their goals. Since its establishment, the Foundation has supported and implemented hundreds of Roma inclusion programmes, participated in numerous research projects, and has an extensive network of contacts. For more information: www.autonomia.hu.

Florin Botonogu is the President of the Policy Center for Roma and Minorities (**Romania**), a foundation that has been working on Roma inclusion in one of the most deprived areas of Bucharest for the past 12 years. PCRPM is a founding member of ERGO Network. The main focus of its intervention is on education, working with children from deprived communities, such as the flagship programme “Alternative Education Club”, which provides remedial and alternative education for 100 Roma children in the Ferentari ghetto. Additionally, the foundation is working on issues such as violence against Roma women and supports the community in different ways to access social services. It equally mediates relations between beneficiaries and local authorities, facilitating administrative processes. For more information: www.policycenter.eu/en/.

Zuzana Havírová is the President of the Roma Advocacy and Research Centre (**Slovakia**), a civil society organisation established in 2014, dedicated to Roma inclusion in all areas of life. Through its research and advocacy activities, the organisation contributes to the shaping of public policies aimed at strengthening the rights and position of Roma in Slovakia and improving the living situation of Roma from poor and marginalised localities. The organisation focuses on supporting Roma community development through an inclusive approach, based on active cooperation between the minority and the majority population. RARC is based in Skalica, where it has built outstanding partnerships with various local actors, as well as being involved in national and international activities. For more information: www.romadata.org.

Alba Fernández, Pedro Vargas, Annabel Carballo-Mesa, and Bianca Galusca are affiliated with **FAGiC** - Federation of Roma Associations in Catalonia (**Spain**). This is an umbrella organisation created in 1991 and bringing together 96 local Roma associations from all over Catalonia, making it the most representative Roma organisation in Catalonia. FAGiC was created with the aim of defending and promoting the rights of the Roma within the Catalan society and of denouncing any form of xenophobia or discrimination towards the Roma population. Its main purpose is to improve actions aimed at the Roma, gather information about their aspirations and concerns, and establish a communication channel between the Roma and the rest of the Catalan society. For more information: www.fagic.org.

Additionally, benchmarking evidence was provided for this report by:

ALBANIA: **Brixhida Xheka** and **Adriatik Hasantari**, *Roma Active Albania* – <https://www.facebook.com/groups/raaaf/>

Read their full submission [here](#).

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA: **Dragana Nešković** and **Dragan Joković**, *Center for Integrative Inclusion of Roma and Romani Women OTAHARIN* – www.otaharin.org

Read their full submission [here](#).

IRELAND: **Jenny Liston** and **Lynsey Kavanagh**, *Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre* – www.paveepoint.ie

Read their position papers [here](#) and [here](#).

KOSOVO: **Erodita Qehaja**, *Voice of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians in Kosovo (VORAE)* – <https://www.vorae.org>

Read their full submission [here](#).

NORTH MACEDONIA: **Urmeta Arifovska**, *Regional Roma Educational Youth Association RROMA* – www.rromassn.org

Read their full submission [here](#).

TÜRKIYE: *Zero Discrimination Association* – <https://www.sifirayrimcilik.org/en/>

Read their full submission [here](#).





SNAPSHOT OF THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC SITUATION OF THE ROMA IN SIX COUNTRIES

The six main countries participating in this research have some of the highest numbers of Roma residents in the European Union. In all of them, **Roma communities are (among) the hardest hit population groups** in what concerns poverty, unemployment, exclusion, antigypsyism, and very poor overall socio-economic indicators. This pre-existing state of dire inequality was **significantly worsened by the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic** and associated measures, as well as by the recent **spikes in inflation and cost of living**, on the backdrop of **widespread, historical antigypsyism**.

In **Bulgaria**, despite more than 20 years of policy for Roma integration and social inclusion, the socio-economic situation of the majority of Roma in the country is still dramatic. The lives of many Roma continue to be marked by extreme poverty, unemployment, low education, inadequate housing, poor health and welfare. The relative share of Roma at risk of poverty in 2022, according to the National Statistical Institute, was 63.2% for adults and 76.2% for children under 18. Many Roma live in overcrowded households, with poor living conditions, without sanitation and utilities. The poor level of education of the Roma community is determined by the low proportion of Roma children attending kindergarten, by early school leaving, and by educational segregation. Access to health care for many Roma of working age is difficult due to unpaid health insurance contributions, a lack of doctors and nurses in remote settlements and large urban Roma neighbourhoods, as well as poor road infrastructure and poor communication between Roma and staff in emergency medical centres.

In the **Czech Republic**, in 2016, more than 58% of Roma were at risk of income poverty, six times more than the majority. Up to 80% of Roma live in excluded localities – a city district, street, group of houses or settlement where everybody lives in poverty and exclusion. This leads to *de facto* ghettoisation and isolation, while quality of life in these localities is constantly deteriorating, including the health of children and adults. Housing is unsuitable and unhealthy, yet housing costs take up most of a household's disposable income. The Roma are often employed in menial, low-paid jobs or in the grey economy, and many are unemployed, with limited access to social protection. Children's participation in education is often hindered by these circumstances. A resigned attitude is prevalent and passed on between generations. Fear of discrimination or distrust in the surrounding world can lead to negative patterns of behaviour which breed tensions with the majority, with the contribution of the media and social networks.

In **Hungary**, the Roma population, which accounts for around 6-8% of the Hungarian population, is the poorest, most excluded, and most vulnerable group in society. The gap between the Roma and the majority has been growing since the change of regime, mainly due to segregation in housing as well as in other aspects of day-to-day life, especially in education. Moreover, the educational and labour market position of Roma remains weak, leading to a persistent and deepening poverty. This is often coupled with a negative, often hostile, climate surrounding Roma, which is reflected in prejudice and discrimination from the majority. A significant proportion of the Roma live in segregated settlements, where housing and living conditions are significantly worse than the national average and than those of non-Roma living in the immediate vicinity.

According to the Fundamental Rights Agency, 75% of Roma in Hungary live below the poverty line.

The share of early school leavers among young people aged 18-24 was 68%, and a quarter of Roma aged 45 and over had not completed any level of formal education. Income poverty rates are closely correlated with the concentration of Roma in settlements: the proportion of Roma living below the poverty line was highest in areas where respondents perceived that Roma residents lived 'exclusively' or 'predominantly' in segregated conditions.

In **Romania**, the recently approved National Strategy for Roma Inclusion (2022) states that 80% of Roma live under the poverty line, 30% live in households without running water, 10% 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 2 000 RON (€ 500), compared to 52% of the majority population.

Besides severe poverty, the Roma continue to face discrimination in accessing education, employment, health, and housing services, leading to a gap between them and the majority population in the take-up of these services.

Hate crimes continue to be a problem. Some improvements can be observed as a result of NGO intervention and targeted EU and EEA funding.

In **Slovakia**, according to the Atlas of Roma Communities, there are about 400 000 Roma, with most Roma communities located in the Banská Bystrica, Košice, and Prešov regions, where we also find the largest number of marginalised and segregated Roma communities, in which several disadvantages and generational poverty accumulate. Roma from these communities represent approximately one third of all Roma living in Slovakia.

The unemployment rate for Roma living in marginalised communities is 38%.

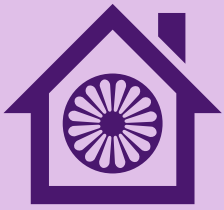
While in the general population the median equivalent disposable income for a one-person household is € 7 462 / year, it is only € 2 335 for Roma living in these communities, with 85% of residents living below the official poverty line (compared to 12.2% in the general population). About 17% live on less than € 3.8 per day. Children under the age of 15 make up more than a third of marginalised Roma communities (36%), living below the poverty line. The share of people older than 64 years in these communities is three times lower than in the general population (5% to 17%).

In **Spain**, the Roma have been present since the 15th century and have always had to face persecution, assimilation attempts, and social exclusion. Currently, the Spanish Roma population is estimated at around 725 000 – 750 000 people by the European institutions. The majority of the Roma experience strong inequalities in accessing economic and social rights. Poverty affects more than 80% of the Roma, particularly children. A Fundación Foessa report (2019) about the Roma community in Spain found worsening indicators in what concerns education, employment, health, and housing.

Only 17% of the Roma over the age of 16 have completed secondary mandatory school, compared to almost 80% of the general population.

The Roma register high unemployment rates and high rates of self-employment which is often precarious. Access to the labour market is highly determined by social and sociodemographic factors, but also by discrimination and other cultural factors. Only 34% of Roma declared being in good health, as opposed to 48.8%, and this number likely decreased further after the pandemic. Access to housing has also worsened, with an increase in Roma living in 'irregular situations' (squatting).





ROMA ACCESS TO QUALITY AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING

All six countries report that the Roma access to housing is significantly impaired compared to the majority population,

as **the vast majority of them experience homelessness**, according to the **ETHOS** definition. Whether the Roma live in urban or rural areas, in flats or in houses, in rentals or in own dwellings, **their living conditions tend to be considerably poorer** than those of non-Roma, including the **lack of utilities and services coverage**, **unsafe and unsound structures** that often cannot be considered homes, **exposure to environmental hazards**, as well as **chronic overcrowding**, where multiple family members may reside in one small room. Additionally, the Roma mostly live in **informal and/or segregated communities**, which have flourished unchecked not least due to **mass forced evictions** without the provision of alternative housing, and which entail, among others, **insecurity of tenure**, **lack of identity papers** as the addresses do not exist, **isolation from any municipal services** or support. As over 80% of Roma live in poverty, including energy poverty, **housing costs represent an unaffordable burden** on very strained household budgets, which means that the Roma can only afford very poor accommodation and are often evicted due to **unpaid rent or utility bills arrears**. Most of these obstacles to quality and affordable housing stem from **historical, widespread, deeply-rooted antigypsyism**, exhibited by local authorities, public services, landlords, banks, neighbours, and society at large.

The following chapters delve into the details of these harsh realities, as well as propose some possible ways forward, including **reaping the full potential of social housing** and investing in other subsidised public housing schemes, while fully combatting segregation; and **supporting the Roma to improve their current housing**, through regularising informal settlements, providing building and renovation support, improving access to utilities, and ensuring assistance with complex bureaucratic procedures.

While the main scope of this research covers the six **EU Member States with the highest number of Roma** living on their territory, the challenges and barriers that the latter face in accessing quality and affordable housing are **not unique to these countries**. Additional evidence was provided by our members in the **Western Balkans and Türkiye, as well as Ireland**. Their contributions highlight the same findings as in the other six countries: **access to quality and affordable housing for Roma is difficult** and hindered by a number of factors, including **poverty and antigypsyism**, and a **lack of a rights-based, housing-first approach** to support the most vulnerable in their quest for adequate shelter.

Where do the Roma live?

The Roma in the six countries **live in both urban and rural areas**, with most of them residing in towns and cities in the **Czech Republic** and **Spain**, compared to most of them residing in villages in **Hungary** and **Romania**, and an almost even distribution in **Bulgaria**. In all countries, **a significant proportion of the Roma live in segregated areas**, whether it is Roma rural settlements or peripheral neighbourhoods in towns and cities. Regardless of where they live, **Roma living conditions are generally very poor**. It is not uncommon for them to live in **social housing**, but this often doesn't mean that the quality of housing is better. In several countries, the Roma live in dwellings that can't even be classified as houses or flats, as they are **shacks, huts, containers, or improvised structures**. Many Roma have a hard time **proving ownership of the family abode**, as well as meeting **exorbitant costs on the private rental market**. For this reason, some live in **squats or other types of precarious accommodation**, often in irregular legal circumstances.

In **Bulgaria**, according to the 2021 census, 266 720 individuals identified as Roma, while expert estimates place the real number over 500 000. There is an almost even urban-rural distribution, with slightly more Roma (54%) living in cities. Regardless of whether they reside in detached houses or apartment complexes, most of them live in segregated areas. Ownership of many dwellings is difficult to prove, as many families do not have the necessary documents, and there are quite a few dwellings with an uncertain legal status (over a quarter according to some studies, even more according to others). Since some of them are not in areas designated as residential, it is very difficult to obtain the necessary legal documents (permits), and it completely prevents investments in utilities' infrastructure. While there isn't any statistical data on the amount of Roma that rent out their housing, the overall share percentage-wise is considered to be a lot smaller.

In the **Czech Republic**, there are approximately 250 000 – 300 000 Roma, according to qualified estimates, while the 2021 census only recorded 21 691 people as Roma. The majority of Roma in the country live in cities in rented accommodation – a fact also confirmed by the survey carried out for the purpose of this report, where 72.8% of respondents said to reside in urban private rentals, where landlords employ disadvantageous short-term contracts to make a profit. None of the interviewed respondents had their own home. Additionally, there are currently 2 000 Roma families in poverty living in 23 hostels in Ostrava. Social hostels are long-term housing for the socially disadvantaged, but the conditions are poor and unsuitable, which greatly impact people's lives. The recent sharp rise in energy prices has only deepened the Roma housing crisis.



In **Hungary**, the Roma are concentrated in smaller settlements, which also represents a significant spatial disadvantage. Most Roma live in villages (38%), which also corresponds to a converse trend of non-Roma to move out of rural areas in search of opportunities. About a third of the Roma (33%) live in small towns, 15% in big cities, and 14% in Budapest. For those living in the capital (and also, but to a lesser extent, those living in big cities), they live in rented flats, most commonly municipal or social housing. In smaller settlements, where these are not available, they tend to live in detached houses. However, it is very common, especially in segregated settlements, that ownership is unclear and hard to prove.

In **Romania**, the 2021 census recorded 569 477 Roma people, while estimates place the real number around 2 million. They are dispersed uniformly all over Romania, with no county exceeding 10% Roma population. Around 60% of these live in rural areas, where they reside in houses, while the others live in urban centres, in flats (which are often social housing) but also in houses. Municipalities have even employed the cheap solutions of housing Roma in containers, which is a terrible proposition as basic living conditions are not provided. It is not possible to have accurate data on renting in Romania (to

Roma or non-Roma), as many rental contracts are not registered. While since 2019 there is new legislation aimed at improving security of tenure, progress is very slow on the ground.

In **Slovakia**, 46.5% of the Roma live among the majority population in the same socio-economic conditions, 11.5% live in urban settlements, 23.6% live in settlements on the outskirts of municipalities, and 18.4% live in segregated neighbourhoods. Within the total population, 48% of households live in houses and the remaining 52% live in flats. Almost 35 000 Roma live in shacks and more than 48 000 Roma live in unauthorised brick and wooden houses. The most common type of housing in marginalised Roma communities is brick houses, where 62% of households live. 23% of people in these communities live in apartment houses and 15% in non-standard types of dwellings (shacks, wooden huts, containers and other non-residential dwellings). Only 54% of households in these communities have a legally settled housing relationship, but their share decreases gradually as the spatial exclusion rate of the locality increases. Although exact data is not available, it is assumed that many Roma in marginalised communities rent social housing flats with poor living conditions.

Tenure status of Roma in Romania	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

In **Spain**, Roma live in both rural and urban areas, with a slight observed predominance in urban areas, particularly in segregated neighbourhoods at the periphery of big cities. Accordingly, most of them live in flats, but some also live in houses. 34.3% of the Roma community are homeowners, compared to 74.1% of non-Roma. 48.6% of the Roma community live in rented accommodation, of which 38.6% is social renting and 10% is private renting, compared to 25% of the non-Roma population. Some Roma (6.1% in 2018) live in very precarious tenure, such as sublet housing, squatting, or free housing provided temporarily by institutions. Settlements, particularly informal ones, are on the rise, but there are not too many, the most prominent being historical settlements, but also some newly-created ones.

Benchmarking with Ireland

Throughout this report, when benchmarking with Ireland, a distinction is operated between the **Irish Traveller** community and **Roma who arrived to Ireland** over the past decades from other European countries, primarily from Eastern Europe. There are approximately 11 680 Traveller families living across the country. **65% rely on local authorities** for accommodation; 16% in private rented; 7.5% own their

accommodation and 11% are reported as homeless; **either living on the side of the road or doubling/trebling up** on already overcrowded sites. Most **Roma** (a population of approximately 16 000) live in **private rented accommodation**, while 13% live in social housing.

Benchmarking with Western Balkans and Türkiye

It is reported that, in all cases, the Roma live **throughout the country**, rather than being concentrated in specific regions, though there are some historical Roma communities in particular geographical locations. There is a clear **predisposition for urban / suburban / peri-urban environments** in most countries (BiH, KO, MK, TK). In most of the five countries, the Roma live in **informal and / or segregated settlements** (AL, BiH, KO, MK). The types of **housing arrangements are mixed**, covering a combination of owning and renting (TK), some renting but mostly owning (MK), majority owning (BiH, KO), and majority renting (AL). Many Roma live in **houses** (BiH, KO, MK), while some also occupy **former State premises** - industrial or agricultural or military (AL). In some countries (BiH, TK), **ownership is complicated to prove**, whether it concerns the houses or the land they are built on.

As part of the commitments of the Roma Inclusion Decade (2005-2015) and the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020, housing projects for Roma were implemented, including the reconstruction of old and construction of new residential units for the Roma population. This was done with funding from the Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees (MHRR), IPA funds, as well as financial support from international non-governmental organizations such as Caritas Switzerland, Hilfswerk Austria, World Vision, Care International, and others. Roma families were accommodated in social housing units, where each family has a separate entrance and garage.

Bosnia and Herzegovina



Roma exposure to homelessness

There is consensus in the six countries that, **according to the ETHOS definition** developed by FEANTSA, **most Roma experience homelessness**. This typology is based on four dimensions, where only one is sufficient to be considered homeless: rooflessness, houselessness, living in insecure housing, and living in inadequate housing. In addition, there is a clear **lack of data regarding Roma homelessness**, including sleeping rough, which is indispensable for public policies to adequately target this vulnerable group. **Poverty, high housing costs, lack of affordable accommodation including social housing, leaving an institution (prison or state care), forced evictions, and anti-gypsyism** are some of the reasons driving the Roma to homelessness. The **EU Council Recommendation on Roma Equality, Participation, and Inclusion** calls on Member States to enact “measures to provide social support and access to mainstream services for homeless Roma people”.

In **Bulgaria**, there are very few people, Roma or otherwise, who sleep rough. However, according to the ETHOS definition, where two categories are related to the adequacy and security of the accommodation, the number of Roma living in dwellings that do not meet the conditions covered in these categories is very large. Almost two-thirds of Roma households - 65.8%, live in conditions of household

deprivation (too dark, have a leaking roof or window, damp walls or floors, lack sanitation), compared to 18.7% on average for the country and 11.7% for ethnic Bulgarians. Taking into account the number of illegal dwellings or those in an unclear legal state, it can be concluded that a very large part of the Roma in a vulnerable situation live in some state of homelessness.

In the **Czech Republic**, there are no statistics regarding the share of Roma among those sleeping rough, but also most Roma avoid identifying themselves as such to authorities, given widespread, historical antigypsyism. However, according to the ETHOS definition, most Roma in the country experience so-called “hidden homelessness”. Many of them live with relatives and acquaintances, in overcrowded

apartments, in technically and hygienically inadequate dwellings. For Roma who come from Slovakia without a valid residence permit, the chances of obtaining housing is very small, so they also end up experiencing homelessness. From the responses of the survey carried out for this report, as many as 29% of respondents knew someone who was homeless in their area.

A Roma mother and her son live in a one-room apartment in an excluded location. Her daughter lost her place to live in a public hostel, so she moved in with her partner and 5 young children. They are now nine people living in one small flat. The daughter has very little chance of getting her own home, also because there is a great shortage of apartments suitable for larger families in the Czech Republic.

A Roma woman from Slovakia had lived in the Czech Republic for more than ten years, giving birth to three children fathered by a Czech citizen. However, she was assessed by the Czech authorities as being a foreign national who is a burden on the Czech social system, and as a result she is not entitled to any benefits. As it is not possible for her to secure housing, she lives with different relatives – her mother, her mother-in-law, her aunts etc.

Ostrava, Czech Republic

In **Hungary**, Roma homelessness increased significantly in the 2000s, where 19% of people experiencing homelessness identified as Roma in 2004. In 2016, using the ETHOS definition, a third of them were Roma. These homeless Roma tend to be younger and less educated than non-Roma homeless people, and many of them end up experiencing homelessness after having served prison time or having been in state care. They support themselves by begging.

In **Romania**, 15 000 people have been identified as living in inadequate housing in 2019, most of them in big cities. The profile of those experiencing homelessness has changed, and now includes more young adults, older people, and entire

families. The reasons for homelessness have changed from personal (like addictions) to structural (evictions, no support policies, insufficient social housing, an employment-first approach etc). Roma experiencing poverty qualify under all categories of the ETHOS definition: rooflessness, houselessness, insecure housing and improper housing.

In **Slovakia**, according to the ETHOS framework, all Roma living in marginalised communities suffer from homelessness, particularly in what concerns substandard housing conditions, segregated areas, shacks and makeshift dwellings on land they do not own, and the constant uncertainty and risk of being evicted or having their abode demolished.



In **Spain**, a total of 28 552 homeless people were cared for in accommodation and catering assistance centres in 2022, 24.5% more than in 2012. While 76.7% are men, the proportion of women is on the rise. The average age is 42.9 years old, and 50.1% are of Spanish nationality while 49.9% are foreigners. Unfortunately, there is no statistical breakdown of data by ethnicity, so it is unknown how many are Roma. A study into Roma homelessness in Spain, using the ETHOS methodology, is badly needed, as field experience shows that many of them fall under this definition of homelessness. While Spain has a comprehensive national strategy for homeless people, it makes no reference to the Roma, which is a regrettable missed opportunity.

Benchmarking with Ireland

In 2018, the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC) reported that “members of the Traveller Community are **the most at risk of being homeless**” in Ireland, with approximately **39% of Travellers experiencing homelessness** according to ETHOS, compared to 6% of the majority population. There was a **12% increase** in the numbers of Travellers living in temporary accommodation over a 5-year period. Almost **half (45.7%) of Roma have been homeless** at some stage in their lives, but this figure would be significantly higher if it also included **hidden homelessness**. In 2021, 66% of calls to the National Roma Infoline were made on account of Roma being homeless. A 2021 survey of 41 Roma families (with 111 children) in Dublin found that **59% were living in private emergency accommodation**, and 39% didn’t have a keyworker. In May 2022, it was estimated that in one county in Ireland (Tipperary) 75% of the Roma population were homeless and / or living in insecure housing with a risk of homelessness.

“I lived in homeless accommodation with my husband and 4 children while I was pregnant with my fifth child. We all slept in one room with a double bed and a bunk bed. Some days I had to spend all day outside in the rain with my four young children because we were not allowed back in the accommodation until the evening”.

Roma woman, Dublin, Ireland

Benchmarking with Western Balkans and Türkiye

Roma rough sleeping is reportedly not an issue in most of the countries covered by this report, as those without a roof usually find accommodation with family, with a few exceptions. In **North Macedonia**, 350 out of the 600 homeless people

identified by homeless organisations were Roma, who have been in this situation for more than ten years. The previous Action Plan for Roma inclusion in **Bosnia and Herzegovina** recognised the need to provide the Roma with adequate housing, with a focus on Roma homelessness and plans to create a list of beneficiaries for social housing programmes.

Living conditions of the Roma

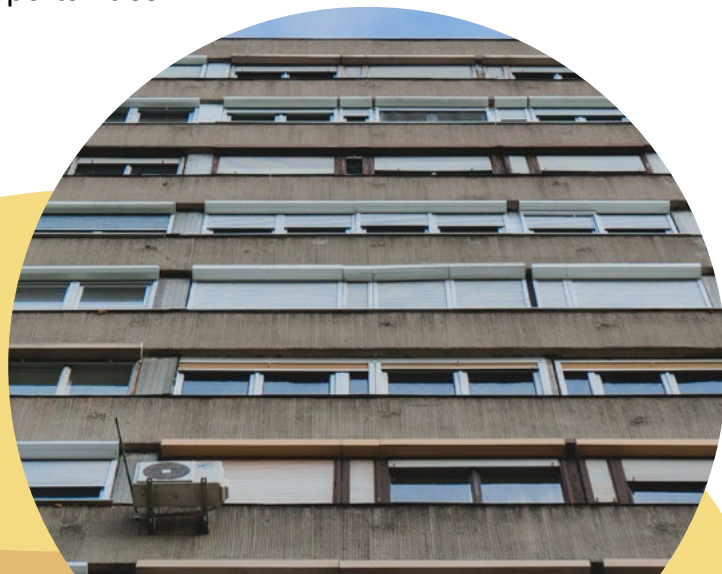
All six countries point to **dire living conditions** experienced by the Roma, regardless of where they live. To begin with, many Roma houses are located in **dilapidated and polluted areas**, some of which are not even deemed residential, so **utilities are lacking**, including access to electricity, gas, water, but also – importantly – access to the sewage system and sanitation.

Many dwellings are unsafe and would not even correspond to the definition of a house. Inside, the most commonly reported problems, affecting significant shares of the Roma population, are **darkness, dampness, mould, leakages, cold, and heat.**

Additionally, a very significant issue, highlighted by all countries, is the small size of dwellings, which leads to **overcrowding**, particularly in families with many children, or when several families are forced to share living space to reduce costs or because they can't access housing otherwise. The **EU Council Recommendation on Roma Equality, Participation, and Inclusion** calls on Member States to enact “measures to ensure access to essential services – such as tap water, safe and clean drinking water, adequate sanitation, waste collection and management services, environmental services, electricity, gas, transport, financial services and digital communications – and physical infrastructure, by safeguarding continuity of basic utility services, both under normal conditions and during pandemics, ecological catastrophes and other crises”.

In **Bulgaria**, a fifth of Roma don't have running water, and almost half lack a bathtub, shower, or toilet. Nearly every fourth Roma (23.5%) lives in a home with a leaking roof, damp walls, or rotting floors, all of which are health hazards. 71.5% live in overcrowded dwellings or housing conditions. Large, multigenerational households with many children live in very cramped accommodation. There are multiple documented

cases of settlements where there is about one square metre for each family member, which means no personal space and people even have to sleep in shifts. This context particularly affects children, with severe consequences both to their physical health and development, as well as to their mental wellbeing and educational opportunities.



In the **Czech Republic**, 41% of respondents to the survey carried out for this study reported living with damp, mould-covered walls. 32% of those questioned said that they were cold in their apartment, they must use direct electric heaters. Roofs often leak, basements are soaked, the main door to the building is damaged and cannot be closed, there is unmaintained sewage. Most Roma live in old, unmaintained apartment buildings and hostels, where owners are only interested

in collecting rents, but do not do repairs. Additionally, the living space is very small – 75% of respondents said they lived in only one room with their often-large families, while 14% lived in two rooms and only 11% in apartments with more than 2 rooms. It is not uncommon for two or three families to share an apartment unit in a hostel, with common bathroom and kitchen corner, but sometimes the latter is missing, and there is only a small stove in the living room.

A Roma mother and her six children, aged from 4 months to 9 years old, lived in an apartment that consisted of one room and a kitchenette. The walls of the apartment were covered with mould up to the ceiling. There was no heat source in the apartment. The ceilings were wet due to unmaintained drainage on the upper floor. In the winter months, the temperature dropped below minus ten degrees. There were only two mattresses and a pile of blankets for the children in the apartment. The children used the toaster to warm their hands over it. One of the children misjudged the distance and burned his palms and fingers, so he had to be medically treated. We tried to quickly find new housing for the family, but it was very difficult due to the large number of children. In the end, the mother and her children had to move to a dormitory, where she and her children live in one room and share bathroom facilities and a kitchenette with another family. Again, they live in very unsatisfactory conditions, but the mother is happy that she is not on the street with her children and that the apartment has central heating and they are warm.

Ostrava, Czech Republic

In Hungary, according to the Fundamental Rights Agency, 91% of Roma live in overcrowded housing.

The proportion of Roma households without piped drinking water is steadily decreasing (17%) but is still very high compared to the overall population (2%). The proportion of households supplied with electricity does not differ from the non-Roma households significantly (96-98%)

but the number of properties disconnected by the authorities from electricity supply due to utility debts is much higher in Roma settlements. Unfortunately, no data on this phenomenon was found, but field experience certainly confirms this. Segregated settlements have much worse housing conditions, with a complete lack of infrastructure and a dilapidated built environment.

In **Romania**, the country experiences the joint second-highest rate of housing-related material deprivation (29.1%), while the EU average is 16.8%. The Fundamental Rights Agency found that the Roma in Romania experienced the highest rate of housing deprivation (70%) of all countries reviewed, with living conditions being far worse than the national average: 40% don't have tap water, 56% don't have sanitation (toilet, bathroom), 23% live in houses that are too dark, 19% live in areas that are too noisy, and 26% have a leaking roof and damp walls. Only 45% are connected to sewage and 88% to electricity. Additionally, 87% live in overcrowded dwellings, and 61% in accommodations that only have 1 or 2 rooms. The National Roma Strategic Framework notes that 16.5% live in houses considered unsafe for living.

In **Slovakia**, Roma settlements lack basic amenities, and many dwellings (shacks, huts, containers etc) don't even meet the standard definition of a house. 88% of people in marginalised Roma communities live in houses that are overcrowded, with an average of 3 persons per room, while the size of a dwelling (46 m²) is almost half that of the general population (85 m²). Additionally, 28% have no drinking water, and only about half are connected to sewage, with 35% living without running water or sanitation. One in fourteen households (6%) in marginalised Roma communities is without electrical wiring, and approximately one in seven households (15%) has inadequate wiring.

In **Spain**, 28% of Roma live in overcrowded accommodations, 6.1% do not have a full bathroom, and 9% lack at least one utility service (water, electricity etc). More importantly, all these indicators are on the rise. In 2018, 21.3% of Roma households considered that they needed housing rehabilitation, compared to 5.2% of the rest of the population. In addition to cold and heat, they are also exposed to humidity.

Benchmarking with Ireland

Both **Travellers and Roma** live in **insecure and unsafe accommodation**, and they experience **severe overcrowding**. Larger family sizes also means that both communities need **amplified space** than what is available on the social housing or private rental market, which leads to **doubling or trebling** with family members in cramped spaces. **The failure to implement local Traveller Accommodation Programmes** has resulted in the lack of provision of Traveller specific accommodation forcing many Traveller families to reside in deteriorating, **unserviced and uninhabitable sites**. Almost a quarter (24%) of Roma live in households of 8 or more people, and 7% with 10 or more. A further 45% report **not having enough beds** in their accommodation.

There are many instances of families living with rat infestations, damp, broken windows, leaking or no toilets, and no water, electricity and/or refuse collection.

Landlords collect rent but **do not perform maintenance or repairs**, for example 38% of Roma in county Tipperary are paying rent to landlords in cash **without receipts or a lease agreement**. Emergency homeless accommodation means **very tight spaces, with no basic facilities for cooking or washing clothes**, and often this becomes Roma families' main home for a year or more.

Benchmarking with Western Balkans and Türkiye

Across most of the five countries, the Roma live in the same **substandard housing conditions** as reported by the EU Member States, particularly those living in informal and/or segregated settlements.

The issues most commonly reported refer to **limited or no access to clean water, sanitation, sewage, electricity, heating, or roads, as well as issues with darkness, humidity, cold, and over-crowdedness.**

The latter leads to both an absence of privacy as well as the transmission of diseases, and it is often the result of several families sharing an abode. In **Albania and Türkiye**, poor housing quality leads to **natural disasters like earthquakes** having a particularly devastating effect on Roma communities, who then find it impossible to repair the damages to their houses. The situation appears **better in Bosnia and Herzegovina**, where numerous state projects have been carried out to improve the living condition of the Roma, including **renovation of existing buildings, new constructions, and improving infrastructure** in Roma communities – including roads, facilitating access to services. However, a number of **smaller settlements are yet to benefit** from these initiatives.



According to a number of recent surveys, 15% of Roma reported not having enough lighting in the house, with the highest incidence in Shuto Orizari and Vinica. Around 6% reported that their dwelling was built of inadequate material, particularly in Shuto Orizari, Prilep, Gostivar and Vinica. Only 3% of the Roma communities reported not having access to electricity – in Kavadarci, Shuto Orizari and Vinica. Around 12% reported that their houses did not have access to an asphalt road, especially in Prilep, Shuto Orizari, Vinica, Gostivar. 18% of the households did not have access to the sewage system, 30% did not have a toilet inside the house, and around 10% did not have drinking water inside the house, with the most vulnerable situations in Shuto Orizari, Prilep, and Kumanovo. 53% of the Roma households reported moisture in their dwellings, with the highest incidence in Shuto Orizari (14%), Kumanovo (7%), and Bitola (5%).

North Macedonia

Spatial segregation and informal settlements

Most Roma in the countries reviewed in this report live in segregated settlements, namely neighbourhoods or areas where **all or most residents are Roma**. These can be **remote rural communities**, separated from the rest of the world, or **ghettos within big cities**. Some of these settlements have **an informal status**, first of all stemming from **the land they are built on** (which is not residential, or does not belong to a municipality, or the residents do not have ownership of it), but also from the constructions, which sometimes **do not meet the definition of a house**. These communities have dire living conditions, are **cut off from services, transport links, and infrastructure**. Additionally, their existence **breeds and feeds antigypsyism** and prejudice. While few steps have been taken by Governments to end spatial segregation in the six countries, some encouraging measures are reported regarding **formalising the status of these settlements** – however, sometimes even when the legal framework and the funds exist, **local authorities are reluctant to implement the needed measures**. The **EU Council Recommendation on Roma Equality, Participation, and Inclusion** urges Member States to put in place “measures to monitor, prevent and combat any spatial segregation and promote desegregation by drawing up concrete plans to tackle housing issues with the involvement of local communities and affected Roma communities”.

In **Bulgaria**, many Roma live in segregated neighbourhoods, urban or rural. While there are no settlements consisting only of irregular dwellings (amounting to an informal settlement), this is valid for parts of neighbourhoods or entire neighbourhoods in various cities and villages across the country. They have been around since the 19th century and consist of buildings (or structures) erected without the necessary building permits, in areas not always considered residential. Up to three quarters of

Roma live in such neighbourhoods. Their isolated nature and unclear legal status mean that they are missing infrastructure, public transport, utilities, or amenities. There are currently no state instruments to legalise these dwellings and regularise their status, or to desegregate them. This situation is noted in many studies and research documents, and it both stems from a practice of excluding the Roma, as well as perpetuates it.

In the early 1960s, in the village of Marchevo, a group of Roma basket-makers were forced to resettle to the outskirts of the village. While they consisted of only a few families at first, as a result of the high birth rate and rapid development of the improvised settlement by the end of the 20th century there were already over 500 people living in this area. The living conditions were completely unbearable – people living in dugouts and mudbrick cottages, with no access to electricity or water supply and no toilets. The children did not go to school, and their parents made a living with whatever they could find out and about. In order to not disturb the local population, the neighbourhood was hidden using a fence. As there were many residents who could be useful for electoral purposes, these people were registered on a non-existent street not in the village, but in the neighbouring municipal centre of Garmen. It wasn't until the 21st century that some steps were taken toward solving the myriad problems of the neighbourhood, but it still continues to exist in a very troubled state.

Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria

In the **Czech Republic**, the majority of Roma live in segregated housing, which are called socially-excluded localities (SEL). The people living there often don't even know how to read or write, and accessing employment is virtually impossible, including due to lack of local opportunities. In such closed-off localities, attitudes and norms are born, shared, and reproduced, perpetuating a cycle of mutual misunderstanding with the rest of society. There are no informal settlements, the Roma will take up residence wherever they find owners willing to accept them. The number of Roma living in socially-excluded localities is on continuous rise, as more and more Roma fall victims to the unequal distribution of wealth and power that defines our societies.

In **Hungary**, there were over 1 600 settlements in the country in 2011, housing up to 300 000 people (3% of the country's population). This spatial concentration of poor Roma has not changed. According to the same survey, 26 000 people were living in absolute poverty in peri-urban poor Roma settlements, partially or totally deprived of minimum infrastructure. Around 60% of the segregated settlements were in small villages, 30% in towns and less than 10% percent in large cities and the capital. One third (33%) of the settlements were built in

the 1960s-1970s in very poor quality and with low comfort; a fifth of the settlements (18%) were built in the 1990s, most of them also of very poor quality; 12% were urban slums; and 8% were shacks or similar. The state has recently announced four rounds of desegregation programmes, with EU money – but studies show little to no improvement in desegregation.

In **Romania**, 67% of Roma live in neighbourhoods where all or the majority of people are also Roma. At least 56% live in segregated communities, which are 2 315, comprising 177 525 households, with 722 844 inhabitants. These communities do not benefit from infrastructure or public services, and are located far from shops, schools, health services, or local administration, and feature precarious living conditions. There is no legal definition for housing segregation and no indicators, despite the fact that EU funds are ring-fenced for this. There are also 393 informal settlements in Romania, comprising 13 609 housing units with 71 695 inhabitants, most of which are Roma. Steps have been taken since 2019 to tackle informal housing, which is also an objective in the Recovery and Resilience Plan, but in practice there has been very little progress because of resistance from local authorities.

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 Neamţ 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 wastewater treatment station, where the containers became extremely degraded, with people living in extreme poverty.

Romania

In **Slovakia**, spatial segregation based on ethnicity denies minorities living there equal access to opportunities in education, health, employment, and housing, as well as for social participation and coexistence with the majority. The country has both remote, rural Roma settlements, as well as urban and suburban ghettos. Housing policy in the country does not address the structural issues that lead to the existence of segregated communities and informal settlements, while local authorities resist any changes. Encouragingly, the Government recently launched a national programme to regularise the land under these settlements, while also providing free legal assistance to residents and methodological support to local authorities. However, these localities also need desegregation work, to break generational poverty and ensure equal opportunities.

In **Spain**, field experience indicates that most Roma live in segregated urban neighbourhoods, but there is no official statistical data. This is the result of exclusionary policies, but also of the financial inability of Roma to afford housing elsewhere. A large majority (77%) of people living in informal settlements and shantytowns are Roma, most of them aged under 30. As many as 93% of adults and 99% of children in these settlements experience severe poverty. The living conditions are atrocious, the residents mostly can't access income support, and they lack utilities (running water, sanitation, electricity, temperature control). Virtually no efforts were made by the Government to remedy this situation, however the new Law on Right to Housing identifies housing as an asset of general interest, which is a step forward and might also benefit the Roma.

Benchmarking with Ireland

Despite the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act 1998 requiring each local authority to implement 5-year accommodation programmes for Travellers in their areas, the majority have **consistently failed to do so**. Traveller accommodation is usually provided in **isolated and peripheral margins of towns**, whereby the spatial landscape is demarcated by segregation from the general population.

These areas have poor access to public services, employment and schools, and are without adequate access to public utilities such as water, electricity or gas.

These overcrowded conditions have considerably less space per person than the national average and are in a state of considerable disrepair.

A significant number of Traveller families are living in **Traveller specific accommodation** which are lacking footpaths, public lighting fire hydrants and safe play areas, the latter being unavailable for the majority of Traveller families (77.5%).

Benchmarking with Western Balkans and Türkiye

The Roma have historically lived in **segregated neighbourhoods in all five countries**, which have blossomed in both rural and urban environments, typically at the margins. While **many are also informal communities (MK, KO)**, some are mostly formal (AL, BiH). These settlements, particularly the informal ones, are often akin to ghettos, shantytowns, or slums, as they feature **precarious dwellings, poor living conditions, and impaired access to services and utilities**. The residents have very few opportunities to access health-care, education, employment, or social participation. In some countries (AL, BiH,

MK), Governments have made significant efforts in recent years to **improve the situation of informal settlements**, including through regularising their legal and administrative status, in order to ensure better access to services. However, in **Kosovo**, there have only been **few and unsuccessful attempts** to make things better for the Roma living in these communities. In **Türkiye**, people who built their homes on public land can pay a fee called *ecrimisil* (compensation for unauthorised use), which semi-officialises their dwelling. But most importantly, **no country reports efforts to desegregate** these communities and to ensure diverse, multiethnic living environments for all.

The Voice of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians (VORAE) is currently implementing the project “Social Justice for Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians in Kosovo”, which includes a component on the transformation of informal settlements, which aims to formalise these neighbourhoods through advocacy towards institutions and involvement in the development of spatial planning. The project also aims to regenerate and urbanize these neighbourhoods, as well as to desegregate them, to encourage investors to develop them, and to generate local employment. The first model building will be constructed this year, to serve as an example for investors and the Government for further development of the settlements.

Kosovo



Environmental aspects of Roma housing

In line with historical, widespread antigypsyism, **the Roma have been consistently pushed to the margins** not only of society, but quite literally of the geographical space – read more in the [report](#) that ERGO Network prepared together with the European Environmental Bureau on **environmental racism**. In most of the six countries, Roma communities have been forcibly relocated to, or only allowed to settle on, **land that was undesirable** for the majority population, including because of the **environmental hazards** it presented, whether natural (sliding terrain, flood zones etc) or industrial (polluted ground or groundwater, landfills etc). Some Roma communities **exploit the recyclable materials in landfills** next to their homes as a means of survival and sole source of income, but **the lack of waste disposal services** in many Roma settlements (due to either lack of infrastructure or the Roma's inability to pay for these services) has also led to the **spontaneous emergence of dumping sites** for the community's waste. As these are breeding grounds for **pests and disease**, residents try to dispose of the waste by regularly burning it, including noxious materials like plastic, which creates **toxic black smoke that lingers**. Additionally, burning solid waste or other types of 'dirty', unsuitable fuel is an **inexpensive way for poor families to keep warm**, however with disastrous health consequences. The **EU Council Recommendation on Roma Equality, Participation, and Inclusion** calls on Member States to put in place "measures to improve the living conditions of Roma people, to prevent and to tackle the negative health impact of exposure to pollution and contamination."

In **Bulgaria**, every second Roma household (49%) resides in a polluted area, and all informal settlements are located next to unregulated landfills. Some settlements appeared next to existing landfills to exploit recyclable materials, or in other cases landfills appeared as these communities lacked waste disposal services. These dumping grounds breed pests like rats, and are often set on fire as a form of disposal, which releases toxic fumes. As many Roma families are energy poor, they often burn whatever they can to heat their homes, including waste or other noxious materials. This has a tremendous impact on health, particularly pulmonary diseases.

In the **Czech Republic**, there is a historical tradition to direct or allow Roma to settle on land that was not economically or agriculturally usable, which often happened to be formal industrial sites, with environmental implications. Many Roma live in buildings that once served as dormitories for industry workers, which are dilapidated and neglected and pose major health and safety risks. When even these lands become attractive to developers, they are pushed away to even more unsuitable locations, and so on.

The Roma living in Centrum Ostrava, Stodolní ul. Přednádraží first had to move to Přednádraží, which was a workers' colony, and then they had to move out of Přednádraží again, because the houses were razed to the ground and the developers want to assert their interests there. These people were mostly evicted without the right to alternative housing. They are moving to other excluded locations in the hope that a similar scenario will not happen again so soon.

Ostrava, Czech Republic

In **Hungary**, Roma settlements are mostly located outside majority settlements, on land that has the least value and which is not suitable for agriculture. While there are no Roma communities located next to existing landfills, waste accumulates in these settlements as there is no waste collection, creating extreme littering in these segregated communities. This 'dirty' image considerably contributes to antigypsyism by the majority population. In addition, the waste in question is particularly hazardous: asbestos-containing materials, plastics, animal carcasses. Burning occurs often as means of disposal, which emits thick toxic black smoke that lingers, particularly from incinerating plastic.

In **Romania**, the National Roma Framework states that 25% of Roma live in polluted areas. There are many Roma communities situated next to landfills, some as means of livelihood, but others as a result of direct environmental racism, where the Roma were moved there by public authorities (e.g., Pata Rât, Câmpina). There are also communities built on polluted soil (e.g., Baia Mare), next to the wastewater treatment plant (e.g., Miercurea Ciuc), or on sliding terrain. Waste is not collected in most informal settlements, so garbage accumulates and becomes breeding grounds for pests, infections, and disease. Some of it is burned as means of disposal, but also instead of fuel to heat homes, alongside other toxic materials.

In **Slovakia**, almost half of marginalised Roma communities (48%) are situated in areas affected by pollution, dirt, or other environmental problems, such as flooding areas, polluted groundwater, gas pipelines, and hazardous waste dumps. Despite multiple reports on the topic, environmental racism is still not adequately tackled. The more spatially excluded and poor a locality is, the less waste collection takes place, and the more environmental hazards accumulate. This leads to landfills appearing next to communities, and often the waste is burned indiscriminately, causing toxic fumes.

In **Spain**, 32% of Roma people live on the outskirts of settlements, on undesirable or former industrial grounds, close to existing or former factories, landfills, thermal plants, wastewater plants etc, while 17% are at risk from flooding rivers. 85% of households in shantytowns suffer from pollution and dirt, 79% are at risk from living near roads, 77% are at risk from pollution, and 69% have noise problems. Many people living in these communities collect scrap metal for a living, which contains toxic elements for human health. Waste is sometimes burnt in communities, as means of disposal or for heating purposes.

Migrant Roma squat in old, abandoned factories, which have terrible living conditions and no supply of electricity or water. There is also no privacy, as most families must share common spaces. The municipality created a service dedicated exclusively to assisting these families (mainly from Romania) called SISFAM-ROM – Service for social intervention for Roma families. The service was recently expanded to also cover the migrants of African descent who have moved into these factories over the past years.

Barcelona, Spain



Benchmarking with Ireland

A quarter of **Traveller** families (24.4%) considered **where they lived to be unhealthy** or very unhealthy and appreciable numbers (26.4%) considered their **place of residence unsafe**. The living conditions and living environment of Travellers are

considered the **single greatest influence on their health status**. The majority (82.5%) halting sites or group housing schemes for Travellers have **some form of environmental hazard** nearby (electricity pylon, telephone mast, dumps, major roads, industrial pollution).

An investigation by the Ombudsman for Children's Office (OCO) highlighted the poor living conditions in a Local Authority run halting site where 66 Traveller children and their families were living. The investigation found a number of serious issues, including inadequate sanitation, extreme overcrowding, persistent rodent infestations, inadequate heating systems, unsafe electrical works and a high rate of childhood illness caused by the living conditions. The investigation found that the Local Authority failed to consider the best interests of the children and did not meet their obligations in relation to Traveller accommodation provision.

Ombudsman for Children's Office (2021) No End in Site Report, Ireland

Benchmarking with Western Balkans and Türkiye

Evidence from **Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo** indicates that there are **several Roma communities located close to landfills** or in areas with similarly poor environmental conditions. This proximity entails **significant**

implications for health and safety, with repercussions on wellbeing and quality of life, and effects lasting for generations. In **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, the Government has undertaken specific efforts to **better monitor landfills** and contain pollution and contamination. However, **no efforts to relocate these communities** to better areas have been reported.

Affordability of adequate housing, including energy poverty

In all six countries, **the housing market is often inaccessible** even to large parts of the majority population, let alone vulnerable groups and those experiencing poverty, such as the Roma. **Rents are high**, and have recently increased, so have deposits, while **purchase prices have also seen an upturn**, as well as interest rates. This backdrop, coupled with the fact that over 80% of Roma experience poverty, means **housing of any kind is simply unaffordable** to most of them. Different schemes like **housing assistance and social housing alleviate this burden** somewhat, but this is not the case in all countries, and the measures are largely insufficient to actually solve the situation.

Many Roma families are left without money for food after covering housing costs.

Additionally, **most Roma experience energy poverty**, finding themselves unable to pay for utilities and hence often **seeing themselves disconnected from service**, or having to heat their energy-inefficient homes through polluting means. The **EU Council Recommendation on Roma Equality, Participation, and Inclusion** urges Member States to put in place “measures to ensure equal access to housing assistance and to take into account the specific needs of individuals and families”, but it is unclear whether what is meant is financial assistance.

In **Bulgaria**, most housing in the larger cities is unaffordable to those from vulnerable communities, including the Roma, so they are relegated to substandard accommodation with unclear legal status. Over 80% of the households in a ROMACT study had an income that barely allowed them to cover food and bills. Over 20% cannot regularly cover their utilities bill, and thus have their provision suspended. All poor Roma families in Bulgaria can be considered energy poor, as what they are left to live with after paying bills is below the poverty line. 75% of Roma households cannot afford to adequately heat their homes, compared to 45% of non-Roma.

In the **Czech Republic**, purchasing a home is unaffordable for ordinary Roma, as mortgage conditions are too strict even for many non-Roma middle class. 88% of those surveyed for this report did not even have a bank account, as their funds would be seized for debt repayment. Rejected by most landlords for being Roma, they have to pay exorbitant amounts for very poor-quality dwellings, with no money left over for food. 76% of respondents couldn't find housing because it was too expensive, or they were rejected for being Roma or having too many children. 74% relied on housing assistance and housing supplements to cover rent and utilities. The latter are a huge burden on Roma budgets, increased by the recent rise in energy prices. It is common for Roma families to be disconnected from utilities because of unpaid bills or arrears.

In **Hungary**, housing discrimination, inadequate subsidies, high rents and few rental properties make it very difficult for the Roma to afford adequate housing. These developments perpetuate the 1 300 – 1 600 Roma slums and encourage the emergence of new ones. Low-income Roma households have a very hard time meeting housing and food costs. Government measures to help them cope with energy prices were not targeted and insufficient, and the associated bureaucracy was a deterrent for Roma families. Most Roma burn firewood for heating, which is very expensive and polluting, and dilapidated, uninsulated homes only increase heating costs. Roma families also face difficulties with their electricity bills and accumulate significant arrears.

In **Romania**, buying or renting on the open housing market is not accessible to poor Roma or other groups experiencing poverty. A recent report reveals that 54% of the Roma families in urban areas and 39% in rural areas cannot afford to pay the rent. 33.3% of all households live in energy poverty, while 19% live in hidden energy poverty. Social housing is only accessible for those who can produce proof of employment, which leaves behind the poorest Roma. Wherever the local budget allows, housing subsidies are offered for two years to poor families to rent on the open market, however this doesn't work for Roma because of landlords' antigypsyism.

The Policy Center for Roma and Minorities Foundation, together with energy provider ENEL, developed a programme addressing energy poverty for Roma in the Ferentari neighbourhood of Bucharest 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. People were supported to access information, file the right paperwork, and negotiate payment schedules based on their circumstances, while they also received practical advice on how to decrease their electricity expenses.

Bucharest, Romania

In **Slovakia**, housing is largely unaffordable for Roma from marginalised communities, as they have insufficient income to apply for a mortgage, or even to afford rent. In recent years, this is an issue for the Slovak society as a whole, including middle-income earners, but the impact on low-income households is of course much more significant. Even when they are able to meet costs, they are often rejected

by landlords and other tenants. Roma households spend 22% of their income on housing, compared to 18% for the majority population. Even those who already own their homes cannot afford repairs or upgrades, so the dwellings deteriorate. Additionally, many Roma experience energy poverty concerning heating and energy bills.

In **Spain**, access to housing is difficult for the population in general, as there is insufficient public housing and private housing takes up a large portion of household incomes. This particularly affects the Roma, a majority of whom live in poverty. In addition, they face antigypsyism on the housing market and struggle to meet mortgage and other bureaucratic requirements.

58.6% of Roma households cannot afford to adequately heat their homes, 55% have delays in

paying utilities, 47% have been threatened with loss of service, and 36% have delays in paying rent or mortgage instalments.

Those living in shantytowns, squats, or other irregular dwellings cannot take advantage of Government support measures, while energy poverty also leads to dangerous practices in the search for heat and light, like causing fires or explosions or grid overload.

According to the most recent data provided by the Ministry of Transport, Mobility and Urban Agenda, the average purchase price in the third quarter of 2022 stood at 1 740 euros per square metre, reaching 2 000 euros in 6 provinces. Data from the Housing and Land Observatory for 2021 show that 40.9% of those living in rented housing at market prices dedicated more than 40% of their income to paying the rent. In the European Union as a whole, this same percentage is much lower, at 21.2%, and in the Euro area it is even lower, at 20.9%.

Spain

Benchmarking with Ireland

Affordability is a **key obstacle for both Travellers and Roma** when trying to access suitable housing, which is compounded by **extremely high rents** on the private market. 80.2% of Travellers are **unemployed**, while the Roma are disproportionately exposed to **precarious or unregistered work**. This means that many are **struggling to meet rental costs** even if they receive housing benefits and bridging the gap places them at a **high-risk of poverty**. Additionally, there is a shortage of appropriate accommodation on the

market for **larger families**, particularly within their budget. There is a **heightened risk of energy poverty for Traveller families** living in mobile homes or trailers and particularly for those living on unauthorised sites including at the roadside, with **energy costs overall being considerably higher** than for the majority population. Frequently trailers acquired are relatively old, in sub-standard condition and largely energy inefficient. Travellers accessing money and budgeting services were in **fuel poverty**, with the average percentage of household disposable income taken up by fuel costs amounting to 21%.



A Roma family of 2 adults and 5 children, one minimum wage income, has been awarded a housing benefit of € 1 200 per month, where all suitable accommodation for their family would be between € 2 400 and € 3 500 monthly. Another challenge is being able to pay the deposit and first rent in advance (requested by all landlords). The majority of the families are struggling to live from one paycheck to the other and cannot afford to save enough money to cover this payment. In most situations, it could have been prevented for the family to experience homeless accommodation, if the deposit and first rent were granted under mainstream housing benefit.

Dublin, Ireland

Benchmarking with Western Balkans and Türkiye

Affordability of housing was also identified as an issue in all five countries, as the Roma experience high rates of poverty and low rates of employment, while having to spend a **significant portion of the household income on housing**, which makes it hard to cover other essential expenses, including food. Lack of financial power also means that the Roma **cannot afford to be homeowners** and are instead relegated to **renting very low-quality accommodation** (BiH). Social benefits

are insufficient to afford rent or pay the bills, much less buy property (KO, MK). Additionally, many **Roma are in debt due to utility bills** and arrears (AL, MK, TK), and often end up being **disconnected from services** because of non-payment. In **Türkiye**, the Roma **depend on coal distribution by the Government** to heat their homes, and some Roma are even considering a return to camping in tents, faced with ever rising housing prices. In **Albania**, rent subsidies and other **financial tools are foreseen** for the Roma minority, to aid with housing costs.

Those who cannot afford housing cohabit with their immediate families and share the costs. Situations of parents living with their married adult children and with their families are common. There are instances where three or four nuclear families live in the same house. Building a room adjacent to the main house for the newlywed family members is a common practice.

Edirne, Türkiye

Antigypsyism and discrimination in housing

Discrimination of Roma is one of the most powerful barriers in what concerns access to housing, and it manifests itself across all actors – from **local authorities** overlooking the Roma when dispensing social housing or other facilities, to **owners** who won't rent or sell to Roma, to **neighbours and other residents** who don't want the Roma in their midst, the latter going as far as to start petitions asking for them to be excluded from their locality.

Spatial segregation, which was discussed previously in this report, is the direct result of antigypsyism, manifested either as conscious decisions to forcibly relocate Roma communities to the edge of the locality, or a de facto consequence of the fact that the Roma are unable to secure accommodation elsewhere.

As time passes, **prejudice grows but is better concealed**, as the Roma see themselves denied housing also on grounds such as having too many children, not having a certain education or employment level, or not being legally married. **Antidiscrimination legislation is insufficient** on its own, when reporting procedures are cumbersome and when it is not coupled with pro-active measures to foster inclusion, solidarity, and peaceful coexistence. The **EU Council Recommendation on Roma Equality, Participation, and Inclusion** includes several provisions for combatting antigypsyism, unfortunately none of them relate to it specifically in the housing context, aside measures against segregation and forced evictions.

In **Bulgaria**, 17.7% of Roma reported feeling discriminated when trying to find housing, but discrimination in housing is not accounted for in the country's Protection Against Discrimination Act. Many landlords won't rent to Roma families, while many from the majority population would

not want to live next to the Roma. This has led to the Roma themselves not wishing to live where they feel unwanted. In recent years there has been an increase in the number of cases of violence in Roma neighbourhoods, instigated or provoked by politicians and their actions.

In a recently conducted survey on the attitudes of the general majority towards the Roma in the municipalities of Sungulare and Antonovo, only 40% of respondents would not mind living in close proximity to Roma families. Over 10% of respondents believed that Roma should be completely expelled from the settlements and even from Bulgaria as a whole.

In the **Czech Republic**, 72% evaluate coexistence with Roma as bad, and 24% as very bad. While it cannot be proven with statistics that the Roma are discriminated in terms of housing, fieldwork provides

ample evidence that the Roma are routinely moved to socially excluded places and completely uninhabitable apartments, as well as face prejudice from the non-Roma majority.

In a Roma family of four with two children, both parents were employed on a full-time contract. They had to move out from where they lived as the owner was selling and, while they were given priority to purchase the flat, their combined income was not enough to cover mortgage repayments. They started looking for another place to rent, but after visiting 12 different apartments, and despite having proof of income and being able to pay a deposit of 1 500 euro, they were rejected everywhere by landlords.

Ostrava, Czech Republic

In **Hungary**, Roma access to non-segregated housing is very difficult due to discrimination by landlords, but the same also holds true for municipal rental housing. Various Hungarian and international initiatives used the so-called 'mystery shopping' method, confirming this. Although prejudice has actually increased in recent times, people have learned how to hide it better by claiming other rejection grounds, making it more difficult to detect, report, and combat.

In **Romania**, 29% of Roma felt discriminated against when looking for housing on the open market. Symmetrically, only 16% of non-Roma would accept Roma as a neighbour, 12% agree that they live in the same locality, and only 35% think the Roma should live in Romania. Antigypsyism also plays an important political and electoral role: mayors have little incentive to implement Roma housing inclusion measures as most of their non-Roma electorate explicitly opposes it. Anti-discrimination legislation exists, but few complaints are filed, because most Roma don't know their rights, procedures are complicated and lengthy, and they fear repercussions from the municipality.

Relocating Roma in the city in the same neighbourhoods with majority population (desegregation) may create protests and lead to violence. In Miercurea Ciuc, the pressure on the municipality was so high that the Roma ended up in containers. In other cases, like the city of Constanța, petitions were initiated by residents to move Roma out of their neighbourhood.

Romania



In **Slovakia**, in addition to structural segregation, the Roma are also rejected by non-Roma as neighbours, with petitions being

signed to prevent the Roma from moving in. This also occurs when the Roma want to rent or buy on the open market.

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 a block of flats, but the other owners wrote a petition stating that they did not want to have Roma as neighbours. In the end, even though the Roma family had secured a mortgage, they did not buy the apartment in the apartment building.

Slovakia

In Spain, antigypsyism in housing is very visible, from evicting Roma from localities, not wanting to rent to them, or not accepting them as neighbours.

There are laws to counter housing discrimination, as well as national and regional frameworks to counter antigypsyism, but their implementation is still to be seen.

While the document may protect the person, the system works against the person.

Benchmarking with Ireland

Travellers experience the highest levels of racism and discrimination in relation to accommodation, being almost **ten times as likely to report discrimination** in access to housing as the general population, even after education and employment status are held constant. The overwhelming majority of **landlords (82%) would not rent to Travellers**. The Fundamental Rights Agency found that Irish Travellers had one of the **highest rates of reported discrimination (73%)** when trying to rent or buy housing over the previous 5 years. **93% of Roma also report facing discrimination** in accessing the private rental market, with **many landlords refusing to accept Roma as tenants**. This high incidence of discrimination means that Roma families are often forced to **accept whatever housing is available** to them, which can be substandard/unsafe. Traveller children are often told to **hide their identity from neighbours**, and family visits are restricted, while young Travellers **cannot engage openly with their peers** for fear of being evicted – which leads to **isolation and detrimental impacts** on mental health and wellbeing.

Benchmarking with Western Balkans and Türkiye

Discrimination against Roma or **antigypsyism is also prevalent in these countries**, not only in housing but also in other areas of life, most notably healthcare, education, and employment (AL, BiH). In **Bosnia and**

Herzegovina and Kosovo, there is **significant resistance from the majority to welcome Roma residents** in their building or community. Our members urge their Governments to take more decisive action to counter antigypsyism, **in partnership with Roma and pro-Roma organisations**.

Roma individuals and families encounter discrimination when trying to rent housing, as landlords may refuse to rent to them based on their ethnicity, perpetuating stereotypes and prejudices. Roma communities in Albania face de facto or de jure segregation. Discrimination from banks or lending institutions may hinder Roma individuals' ability to secure loans or mortgages for purchasing homes. Roma families living in mixed communities may face hostility, harassment, or intimidation from non-Roma neighbours.

Albania

Forced evictions



In most countries (with the exception of Slovakia), the **Roma live in constant fear of losing their abodes**. This has to do with **insecurity of tenure**, both individual (they **cannot prove ownership** of the dwelling they inhabit, or they are squatting) and collective (**the entire settlement is informal**, occupied, on public land etc, even if it has been there for decades). As tenure cannot be enforced, the **Roma find themselves with no rights**, forcibly relocated at will by local authorities either because of antigypsyism or for economic pursuits, but most often **without notice, support, or alternative accommodation**. Individual Roma families also face risks of eviction from **racist landlords**, who may decide on a whim to end a rental contract, as well as because of **unpaid rent or utilities**, a very important issue for the Roma who overwhelmingly live in poverty. Whether individual or collective, the experience of **losing one's shelter is devastating for people**, who are often **threatened, intimidated, and brutalised** in the process, and end up **losing a significant share of their personal belongings**, including important documents and medicines. **The EU Council Recommendation on Roma Equality, Participation, and Inclusion** calls on Member States to enact “measures to prevent forced evictions by promoting early warning and mediation, to organise support for people at risk of eviction and, when necessary, to provide adequate alternative housing, focusing particularly on families”.

In **Bulgaria**, Roma in illegal dwellings live under constant threat of having their abodes destroyed and ending up on the street, despite the fact that they had lived there for decades. Inter-ethnic tensions and rises in anti-Roma sentiments motivate vote-seeking mayors to implement such measures. Demolition letters are

sent, but many uneducated Roma do not understand them. The period 2019-2020 was the peak of the Roma housing demolition trend, when hundreds of Roma – including children, elderly and the disabled – were evicted and no alternative housing provided.

According to data from the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee (BHC), more than 100 Roma were evicted from the village of Vojvodinovo in January 2019. Most of the houses of the evicted Roma were demolished soon after the incident. Neither the demolition orders nor the subsequent legal proceedings of the Roma families that wanted to return to their homes took into account the necessity or proportionality of the measures taken by the local authorities.

On July 24th, 2019, about 20 “illegal” dwellings in the “Kolumka” neighbourhood were demolished in the city of Burgas. The buildings consisted of large brick houses built on land that was designated for street infrastructure. In the last few years, the Municipality of Burgas has gone on to demolish over 400 illegal buildings in the Roma neighbourhood of “Gorno Ezerovo”, as well as the “Pobeda” neighbourhood and the Roma portion of the “Meden Rudnik” neighbourhood.

On September 12th, 2019, about 38 “illegal” buildings were demolished in the Roma neighbourhood “Maksuda” in the city of Varna. Out of all affected residents, only one person with disabilities was relocated into a government institution.

On the 4th of August, 2020, the Municipality of Stara Zagora began the forced demolition of illegal buildings in the Roma neighbourhood “Lozenets”. According to their inhabitants, these houses were built there more than twenty years ago.

Bulgaria

In the **Czech Republic**, many Roma find themselves evicted because of unpaid rent, failed paperwork requirements that the Roma didn't understand, but also landlord whims. Most Roma who rent have monthly contracts with very little security, which can be terminated any time for any

reasons. 34% of respondents for this case study experienced intimidation, arrogance and loss of belongings such as important documents, birth certificates, or school supplies for children. This jeopardises employment, education, and access to services and benefits for the evicted family.

A Roma woman with her husband and children were evicted from an apartment overnight, without any prospect of where to go. When the family was not at home, the owner locked the apartment and did not allow them further access. The woman's husband was severely diabetic and had insulin in the apartment, but the owner didn't care. In the end, the police had to intervene, because the woman's husband found himself in danger.

Přednádraží is an abandoned workers' colony in the Přívoz district of Ostrava, which was damaged by floods in 1997 and became uninhabitable. Many Roma families were relocated into the damaged houses from the centre of Ostrava, to make room for the city's entertainment district. In 2010, the sewage system in the unkempt Roma ghetto burst, and around the same time water provision was stopped because of unpaid bills, which attracted protests from those who had paid. Subsequently, the local authorities decided to evict residents from the houses. Of the original 400 inhabitants, two-thirds went to live in hostels in various parts of Ostrava. Only a small part received a municipal apartment. At the end of July 2012, 76 adults and 101 children still lived in Přednádraží, but they were also evicted from there, as the colony was demolished at the beginning of 2019. A similar situation was experienced by people in the settlement of Bedřiška in Ostrava Mariánské Hory, Silesian Ostrava – Liščína.

"One day someone knocked on our door, when I opened it, I found out that it was the owner of the house with the police. She told me that I had to move out immediately. My lease hadn't ended yet, I didn't have any debts. To this day, I don't know why I had to move out, everyone there had to move out. I was afraid of the police, I had nowhere to go, there was no time, I had to leave now. No replacement housing was discussed, let's just leave now."

Ostrava, Czech Republic

In **Hungary**, there are several documented cases of evictions, mostly affecting families who have accumulated bills or rent arrears. Since 2005, the Government has introduced an on-and-off moratorium on evictions, which has helped somewhat. However, mass evictions are still practiced at the initiative of local authorities, who justify it on grounds of property development

– for example in Budapest in the Illatos Street housing estate, or the Numbered Streets neighbourhood in Miskolc. In the latter, families were moved to an un-serviced area in the suburbs of the city, where they could not even obtain a registered address. This means they ceased to exist for public authorities, becoming ineligible for services, off the grid and segregated.

In **Romania**, 54% of Roma were at risk of forced eviction in 2019 because of inability to pay rent. However, entire communities also see themselves uprooted by local authorities. Because dismantling informal settlements is not considered eviction (since there is no ownership), no

alternative housing is provided and no rights of tenants are respected, even if they had lived there for generations. A two-week notice, which is sometimes provided, is amply insufficient. Given the very limited stock of social housing, relocation options don't even physically exist.

In 2017, 200 Roma (children, elderly, persons with disabilities) were forcibly evicted from a former workers' dormitory, because the municipality wanted to build public parking on the location. Those who were renting this social housing saw their contracts suspended, while the small number of those who owned were given a symbolic financial amount as compensation. The National Council for Combating Discrimination sued the municipality and won, but the ruling got appealed, and the highest court in the country agreed with their eviction decision. This ruling created a very dangerous precedent, as it will justify more and more evictions.

Alba Iulia, Romania

In **Slovakia**, forced eviction of Roma have occurred only exceptionally since 2013, when the Ombudsman intervened against the practice in several localities and the European Roma Rights Centre sued the municipal authority for antigypsyism and for the illegal eviction of Roma from the Nižné Kapustníky district of Košice and won, which is a landmark ruling. The state has a duty to provide thorough and full consultation with the people, adequate and timely notice, alternative housing, and compensation or restitution for the violation of their rights, as well as to refrain from the use of excessive force or violence.

In **Spain**, lack of access to housing means that many Roma families have to squat, and they are often evicted without alternatives. The country was condemned on at least eight occasions by the United Nations for this. The Law 24/2015 states that public administrations must provide adequate rehousing. While this is enforced, the emergency solutions don't act as a bridge to stable housing, so families find themselves on the street once again. Poor families also see themselves evicted if they cannot pay rent or mortgage. Legal notice is given, but there is nothing one can do to appeal the decisions, and social workers are often rude to Roma victims.

The REALLOTJEM (REHOUSING) programme of the Housing Agency of the Government of Catalonia was created in 2021 in response to the lack of social flats for families placed in emergency accommodation (paid for by the state) after having been evicted. The families can look for a flat on the private market and the administration will pay the owner 18 months in advance. But the demand is so high, implementation is taking much longer than expected.

Spain

Benchmarking with Ireland

Travellers and Roma are often subject to **eviction from private rented accommodation** due to the lack of security of tenure for many renters. The Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act of 2002 has been used to **evict Travellers living on unauthorized sites** or on the roadside while they are waiting to be accommodated by a local

authority. When **Roma experience exploitative living conditions**, it is difficult to seek support or redress, as they often do not have a rent book or are not registered with the residential tenancies board, **unaware of their rights as tenants**.

A young Roma single mother was living with her baby in rental accommodation and could no longer afford to pay her rent. Her landlord moved her belongings outside the house and asked her to leave the property. She did not know what to do and called the Roma Infoline, where she was provided with information on her rights and entitlements as a tenant. The Residential Tenancies Board was also contacted and they informed the landlord of the potential legal consequences of not letting the young mother and child stay in their home. As a result of this intervention, the tenants were able to remain in the flat.

Dublin, Ireland



Benchmarking with Western Balkans and Türkiye

The situation of forced evictions in the five non-EU countries covered by this report is **more mixed than in the EU Member States** reviewed above. For example, in **Albania**, forced evictions have been a concern and have occurred because of urban development projects, infrastructure improvements, the regularization of informal settlements or the interests of private construction companies. These evictions were carried out **without adequate notice, with insufficient compensation or alternative**

housing, displacing entire communities in clear breaches of human rights and social justice, thus exacerbating vulnerability and social and economic inequalities. However, in other countries (BiH, KO, MK) there has been **no record of forced evictions**, which either do not exist, or are too few and far between. In **Türkiye**, there have been past cases of **collective evictions from informal dwellings**, which were carried out with notice but without the consistent provision of alternative housing.

Housing-related administrative exclusion

Owning or renting, obtaining building permits, applying for a mortgage, or even signing a utilities' contract can be a **daunting bureaucratic process** even for the reasonably educated middle class. But for marginalised Roma, some of whom don't even know how to read or write, or don't speak the language of the majority, or don't understand the requirements, or are unable to comply because obtaining documents is costly and complicated, these **administrative procedures are an insurmountable obstacle** to securing and maintaining housing. There is also a **distinct unwillingness from local authorities** to support these processes, by pro-actively initiating the legalisation of settlements or dwellings, or by assisting Roma residents in their administrative endeavours. This leads to the **proliferation of Roma informal living arrangements**, which entail multiple disadvantages for the residents and perpetuate a state of **housing insecurity and deprivation**. In countries where **having an identity document is tied to a fixed address** (Romania, Bulgaria), the Roma in irregular housing situations cease to exist from the perspective of the state, and are **cut off from rights, resources, and services**. As mentioned in a previous section, the **EU Council Recommendation on Roma Equality, Participation, and Inclusion** urges Member States to put forward "measures to provide social support and access to mainstream services for homeless Roma people", which should be construed to also cover **those living in housing and documental irregularity**.

In **Bulgaria**, the bureaucratic procedure for obtaining building permits or for regularising one's housing situation is too complex and difficult to comply with for most uneducated Roma living in poverty.

No financial or other assistance – such as support workers – is available, and additionally most institutions already display discriminatory anti-Roma attitudes.

There is no legal framework to regularise informal housing. Since 2011, obtaining an ID card is tied to stricter rules around proof of legal residence, which left 200 000 people undocumented. Not having an ID card is like not existing – a person cannot access social or health services, or utilities, they cannot claim benefits or seek employment, cannot register their children at school etc.



In the **Czech Republic**, many owners would only rent upon presenting proof of employment, which excludes those receiving benefits or earning a living in the informal economy. There are strict requirements to be fulfilled in order to qualify for housing benefits. The lack of a legal

address means, for many Roma, losing important documents or missing deadlines, which often incurs loss of benefits. Additionally, many Roma do not have ID cards, which means that they cannot access any service, public or private.



A Roma family had to leave their rented apartment because of unpaid utility bills, but the owner did not issue them a formal letter of termination of lease. The family found a new home and requested a housing supplement from local authorities. However, this was denied because they could not show proof of termination of the previous lease. Instead of going to a new home, the family was forced to move in with relatives, where they still live.

A Roma mother with two children was told to move out, and the owner changed the lock before she could retrieve her personal belongings or documents. She had to move in with her mother, together with her children. She could not cash in her parental allowance and child benefits at the post office because she did not have a valid document proving her identity. This was her only source of income, and social services could also not provide any help as she was undocumented.

Ostrava, Czech Republic

In **Hungary**, it is almost impossible for Roma families living in small settlements to qualify for housing benefits, as they cannot provide the needed documents, or their dwellings are not even recognised as homes. The dismantling of social services at local level means that there is no help available from local authorities to sort out unclear ownership of properties, including

informal ones passed down through generations by verbal agreement. Luckily, having an ID does not require a fixed or permanent legal address, and these informal dwellings can nonetheless serve as correspondence address, otherwise access to municipal services would not be possible.

A Roma family with three children living in a small urban segregation wanted to apply for the state housing subsidy for families, but they did not understand the administrative conditions of the subsidy and could not complete the necessary paperwork due to functional illiteracy. They were supported through the process by the Autonómia Foundation staff, but their request was denied as they had utility arrears, and they were lacking the necessary own contribution.

Hungary

In **Romania**, bureaucracy is very strict and suffers no exceptions, and preparing the necessary paperwork is so difficult, costly, and time consuming that many Roma give up on asking for their rights.

All these processes, even basic rent or bill payment, entail a minimum level of literacy which should not be taken for granted – but no support is put in place for the vulnerable.

It is impossible to obtain an ID without solid proof of a legal address, and there is no service or accessing rights without a valid ID card. Local authorities seem to wilfully ignore this issue in a bid to avoid having to provide more social services and benefits to these people.

In **Slovakia**, only half of Roma in marginalised communities have the required tenure documents, and an important problem is that many Roma dwellings were built on land they do not own. This means they cannot apply for housing allowance or other benefits. It is difficult for those who are poor or uneducated to navigate the required paperwork, and support only comes from family members, neighbours, or social workers – but aside few exceptions (for instance, the mayor in Raslavice) local authorities do not provide assistance to vulnerable Roma residents.

In **Spain**, close to all local Roma have IDs and are officially registered at a fixed address, but often that is not where they live (it could be a relative's address, or even that of an NGO supporting them). This means that, in theory, they can access services like other citizens, but also that they might not receive important correspondence, or miss deadlines, or lose documents.

Since the pandemic, many bureaucratic procedures have been digitalised, leaving many Roma behind the digital divide.

Even before, information and support were not pro-actively made available to vulnerable residents. Migrant Roma in an irregular situation cannot access any services.

Benchmarking with Ireland

Choice-Based Letting (CBL), the allocation system for social housing, is inaccessible to people with little to no literacy and/or access to a computer with internet.

Over half (59.9%) of Travellers do not have access to the internet, compared with 18.3% for people in the general population, and these do not include Travellers who are living on the side of the road or in emergency accommodation. Equally, 50% of Travellers had poor functional literacy. Most Roma miss out on their entitlements to homeless services and social housing support due to the rigidity of the administrative process and the too stringent criteria. It is similarly difficult for them to seek support or redress when experiencing exploitative living conditions, as complaint mechanisms are often inaccessible due to a lack of accessible information, language barriers, the digital divide, and the fees involved.

Benchmarking with Western Balkans and Türkiye

The Roma in some of these countries also face very similar constraints when it comes to navigating the ever-complex bureaucracy and administrative processes connected to housing. These constraints include the lack of documents, whether ID cards or property deeds or others (AL, BiH, KO), lack of administrative and legal knowledge and limited access to information (AL), cost of documents, including travel expenses (AL, BiH, KO), language barriers (AL), and widespread antigypsyism by public and private offices they encounter (AL).

In addition, not having a valid identity card excludes people from accessing vital services and rights, including education, healthcare, housing, employment, social benefits, banking, legal protection, electoral rights, and travel, among others (AL, BiH, KO).

Encouragingly, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, nearly all municipalities provide free legal assistance to help address issues related to Roma housing, which is a significant step forward to enable the Roma to exercise their rights.



Nomadic lifestyle and Travellers

There are **no longer Roma people who embrace a nomadic lifestyle** in most countries covered by this report. This was not always a voluntary choice or natural evolution, but the result of **enforced settling by Governments**, which came without accompanying support measures, such as adequate housing. Nonetheless, individual cases of Roma people or families moving around due to frequent evictions or in search of employment opportunities still exist. The **EU Council Recommendation on Roma Equality, Participation, and Inclusion** calls on Member

States to enact “measures to support the construction and maintenance of halting sites for Travellers”.

In **Bulgaria**, the nomadic lifestyle mostly ceased around the middle of the 20th century, and was characteristic of specific professional groups, such as the basket-makers (Koshnichari) and tinsmiths (Kalaidzhi). A 1958 decree sought to end “vagrancy and begging”, so over 14 000 Chergari Roma were forced to settle where they were when the decree was issued. This led to the appearance of many informal settlements, most of which continue to exist in an irregular state, with dwellings that cannot be called homes. Other Roma still move around in search for better opportunities, and face antigypsyism and exclusion everywhere they go.

There are no nomadic communities or Travellers in **Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, or Spain**. In the latter however, there are communities who change their homes because of seasonal work, connected to agriculture or fairs. Additionally, insecurity of tenure and constant evictions mean that, de facto, many families live a lifestyle that is akin to nomadism.

In the **Czech Republic**,

nomadism has been prohibited since 1958,

and there are no suitable premises for short-term settlement – on the contrary, one may be punished for unauthorised obstruction of a public space. While there are some people sleeping rough who often move abode, very few of them are Roma, since they tend to seek accommodation with relatives.

Benchmarking with Ireland

In 2021, approximately 3 000 **Travellers** lived in **unofficial sites or on the side of the road** which are unsafe and lack access to running water, electricity, toilets and refuse collection. Halting bay sites **lack basic sanitation facilities, are rat infested and pose clear fire safety threats**. Alternatively, Travellers are forced to live on the roadside, in car-parks, or industrial spaces under **constant threat of eviction**. Such circumstances

contribute to and indeed exacerbate poor mental and physical health. In 2019, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) strongly recommended that Ireland, “step up efforts to meet the accommodation needs of Travellers, including by **improving existing halting sites** to meet decent and safe living standards, and by providing adequate accessible, suitable and culturally-appropriate accommodation.”

The Ombudsman for Children’s Office (OCO) presented “No End in Site – An investigation into the living conditions of children living on a local authority site” in May 2021. Some quotes from the report include:

“It’s very bad there. There is no heating in the trailer, and you have to walk about 100ft out to a shed to go to the toilet.”

“It’s like an abandoned place that people forgot about, it’s like we’re forgotten, we feel like garbage.”

Ireland



Benchmarking with Western Balkans and Türkiye

Most **Roma communities in these countries are settled**, however, much like in other countries, **some Roma temporarily relocate for work**, particularly during the summer, to engage in seasonal or agricultural tasks. However, none of this amounts to pursuing a nomadic lifestyle.

Social housing and the housing market

While **social housing holds great potential** to improve Roma access to quality and affordable housing, it has failed to deliver on this potential in the six countries, for numerous reasons.

On the one hand, the supply is low, insufficient to meet general needs, not just those of the Roma. Additionally, the stock is old and badly maintained, featuring small units and poor living conditions, while the offers are often situated in excluded, segregated, disadvantaged localities.

Social housing is also inaccessible to many Roma because of **strict conditionality and requirements** that they cannot comply with, as well as **unaffordable costs** for rent, deposit, and utilities. Last but not least, the Roma once again face **rampant antigypsyism**, on behalf of local authorities who discriminate them in access to social housing, but also from other beneficiaries, who refuse to have the Roma as neighbours. Unfortunately, even despite all these obstacles, **social housing remains the most accessible and sustainable way** for Roma to access quality and affordable housing, as the **private market is prohibitive**, and current trends such as **gentrification** and the increased power of **private property developers** further shrink Roma opportunities.

The **EU Council Recommendation on Roma Equality, Participation, and Inclusion** urges Member States to put forward “measures to support and strengthen the public authorities generally responsible for housing, essential services and environmental standards, as well as other relevant actors in those fields, for example by providing them with the necessary mandate and resources to map housing needs, monitor segregation and implement comprehensive regulatory or support measures where necessary”, as well as “measures to support integrated housing schemes targeting marginalised Roma people through measures such as combining micro-loans for building and maintaining housing with financial literacy and saving schemes, construction trainings and activation measures.”



In **Bulgaria**, social housing could be an option, but most Roma cannot comply with strict eligibility requirements and many cannot afford the associated costs, but a significant aspect is also the rejection – or downright hostility – on behalf of non-Roma beneficiaries. Any social housing measures that do not take these elements

into account will fail to make a difference in improving Roma access to housing. The regular housing market has seen a significant increase in prices in recent years, as well as in rentals and construction / renovation fees, making it impossible for those on low incomes – including the Roma – to acquire housing.

A pilot programme with EU funding was aimed at providing housing for vulnerable families, including construction/renovation of the existing housing stock, settling and accommodating families in need, and providing them with social assistance down the line. Unfortunately, in some municipalities such as Burgas and Varna, a sudden rise in pressure from both the general population and various nationalist organizations caused them to suddenly refuse to participate in the programme. Where the programme did get implemented, the majority of the Roma families were offered accommodation which was not culturally appropriate and which was too costly for their budget. In the town of Devnya, once financial assistance from the programme stopped, over 80 families, mainly Roma, gradually began leaving due to their inability to cover costs.

Bulgaria

In the **Czech Republic**, the Roma struggle to meet the conditions for accessing social housing – valid documents, proof of being debt-free, employment contract.

Accommodation proposed to them in these frameworks is usually segregated, in already excluded localities.

Rent and a deposit are asked in advance, which most Roma cannot cover. The current offer is largely insufficient to meet needs. On the open housing market, developers have a very strong lobby which affords them a lot of cheap land to build expensive housing, inaccessible to Roma and others.

In **Hungary**, as 90% of the population own their homes, the social housing stock has been drastically reduced, so those who do not own have very few options on the housing market. Low-income groups, including the Roma, are placed in substandard housing in segregated neighbourhoods, with stigmatising attitudes. The private housing market is driven by investors who are not interested in catering to low-income families. The Government's initiative to set up a state-run housing company failed to reach any Roma, as it targeted more the middle class.

In **Romania**, the social housing stock significantly lags behind demand (28 000 – 29 000 units available to a need of over 67 000). Additionally, the conditionality is unclear, costs for rent and utilities are unaffordable, and allocation practices are discriminatory against the Roma. Providing Roma with funds or materials to renovate their own homes is tricky due to insecurity of tenure, or the dilapidated state of the dwellings. The Roma are unable to access the free housing market, and the financialisation of housing by private developers is a serious issue.

In **Slovakia**, there is not enough social housing to cover what is needed, but there is also an attitude that individuals are responsible for their housing, not the State. The Roma that do live in social housing find themselves trapped in poor living conditions, in segregated and underdeveloped neighbourhoods.

Low-income households are unable to secure adequate housing on the open market, where housing is a pricey commodity and not a right.

The Government is trying to implement a vision that would see an increase in both quality and affordability of housing by 2030, including improving the existing housing stock.

In **Spain**, only 2.5% of the entire housing stock is social housing – compared to the EU average of 9.3%.

The lack of access to social housing, coupled with antigypsyism, are the two main factors determining the housing exclusion situation of Roma in the country.

General reductions in purchasing power and rise in costs makes housing on the private market inaccessible to many Spaniards, with the Roma even worse hit. Private developers and multinationals buy large amounts of both land and housing supply, creating bubbles and further distorting accessibility.

Benchmarking with Ireland

The housing sector was severely impacted by the 2008 global financial crisis and the country has struggled with a **housing and homelessness crisis** since. There has been a shift from the provision of public housing to an **over-reliance on the free market**, as 85% of social housing is now provided through private rentals through schemes such as the Housing Assistance Payment, which leaves tenants in **insecure accommodation at the mercy of private landlords**. For the **Roma**, applying for social housing is a **lengthy and difficult process**, with regulatory barriers, the digital divide and lack of language supports forming significant challenges.



Benchmarking with Western Balkans and Türkiye

In most countries, social housing has not helped the situation of the Roma. In **Albania**, this is due to various reasons which mirror those identified in the six EU Member States above, ranging from **insufficient stock**, restrictive **eligibility criteria**, **subpar living conditions**, and being situated in already **marginalised, deprived neighbourhoods**. In **Kosovo**, municipalities lack the funds to make social housing work. In **Bosnia and Herzegovina** and **Türkiye**, the Government has taken steps to improve access to social housing, with

more success in the former than the latter – in Bosnia, 782 residential buildings for Roma have been constructed or reconstructed, providing housing for 4 000 Roma, or 15% of the Roma population in the country. Some countries (AL, KO, TR) express concerns that gentrification has paved the way for **the better-off to occupy prime real estate**, while the disadvantaged are pushed at the margins, and **private developers are only interested in profit**, which distorts local development and housing plans and further reduces housing possibilities for low-income groups such as the Roma.

Urban renewal has emerged as a prominent policy focus in recent times, which has also led to the displacement of neighbourhoods. A famous example is Sulukule in Istanbul. Presently, the neighbourhoods inhabited by the Roma community have garnered increased attention due to the evolving urban landscape, making them attractive and valuable locations. This heightened desirability brings forth the looming challenge of gentrification.

Housing in the National Roma Strategic Frameworks

In 2021, the European Union adopted a **Roma Strategic Framework for Equality, Inclusion, and Participation**, where one of the four sectoral objectives explicitly states “Increase effective equal access to **adequate desegregated housing and essential services**”, with three sub-targets: to reduce the gap in **housing deprivation** by at least one third, to cut the gap in **overcrowding** by at least half, and to ensure that at least 95% of Roma have **access to tap water**, all by 2030. Through the 2019 **Declaration on Roma integration in the EU enlargement process**, Western Balkans countries equally committed to the implementation of the Strategy, including to **mapping and improving Roma housing**. Governments were hence invited to address this policy area in their National Roma Strategic Frameworks (NRSFs). Additionally, the **Council Recommendation on Roma equality, inclusion and participation** calls on Member States to improve Roma access to **adequate desegregated housing and essential services** through a large number of detailed provisions, which have been separately reviewed in the previous sections of this report.

On 9 January 2023, the **European Commission** released a **comprehensive evaluation package** of the National Roma Strategic Frameworks, consisting of an **overarching Communication** and a Staff Working Document in two parts, comprising individual **country fiches** for Member States and candidate countries, with **detailed national assessments** on their compliance with the objectives of the EU Roma Strategic Framework and the Council Recommendation. In what concerns measures aimed at improving Roma access to housing, **the picture is not encouraging**:

Several Member States include measures to improve access to essential services [...] and, to some extent, measures to prevent and eradicate spatial segregation. Few NRSFs include [...] measures to facilitate access to social housing, while several NRSFs propose measures to carry out official procedures for urban and residential upgrading, encourage home ownership, and invest in infrastructure such as electricity, gas, running water, sewage and waste management, roads and access to transport. The important aspect of combatting discrimination and antigypsyism, as obstacles to accessing housing, is only acknowledged by a few Member States and this is reflected even less in terms of concrete measures. Most NRSFs address insufficiently issues such as forced evictions, the lack of possibility for Roma to become property owners or to afford sustainable renting, or reducing household overcrowding gap.

European Commission

The National Roma Strategic Frameworks are also being **evaluated by civil society**, as part of the [Roma Civil Monitoring 2021-2025 project](#), funded by the European Commission and implemented by a consortium comprised of the Democracy Institute of the Central European University (CEU), Fundación Secretariado Gitano (FSG), the European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC), and ERGO Network. The **assessment reports for all countries**, including all the EU Member States covered by this report, have been published in November 2022 and are available on the [project website](#), and **each report also features a section on housing**, essential services, and environmental justice.

“Eliminating residential segregation in isolated rural settlements or urban ghettos is a conditio sine qua non for Roma inclusion in quite a few EU Member States. Despite the gravity of this problem, only a few countries have decided to tackle this actively (like Czechia or France). Most of the affected countries opt for mapping and analysis of segregation, or in some cases improving living conditions in segregated communities, although it could be perceived that some interventions contribute to increasing the number of Roma living in segregation.”

Marek Hojsík, Coordinator of the Roma Civil Monitoring

These findings are **echoed by the submissions of the national researchers** in the countries within the scope of the present report. While **Roma access to housing and essential services is included as an objective** in the National Roma Strategic Frameworks of the six main countries reviewed in this report, an assessment of the **quality and suitability** of the proposed measures reveals a **mixed picture**. While the goals which are included are deemed adequate, researchers feel that several **objectives are too vague**, sometimes concrete **measures are lacking or are insufficient**, there are doubts about the **political will of local authorities** as well as the **reduced national funding** to implement the proposals, and a number of important areas are **not addressed at all**.

In **Bulgaria**, the National Roma Strategic Framework includes a section dedicated to the housing conditions of Roma communities, identifying key issues such as mapping segregation and its impacts – but no specific measures are foreseen to tackle them. There are only few references to irregular dwellings or forced evictions. While the operational goal is to improve access to infrastructure and services and provide more social housing, there are no specific goals and no measures aimed at better living conditions. Given the very complex issues that each community is facing, separate needs assessments must be conducted in each of them, with the full involvement of the Roma residents, to identify comprehensive solutions.

In the **Czech Republic**, ensuring equal access of Roma to quality housing is an explicit objective of the National Roma Strategic Framework, which also stresses the key role of third sector housing providers. Measures include monitoring of homelessness, better access to housing for Roma, tackling segregation, the adequacy of housing benefits and improving affordability, and social housing. While all the measures proposed are considered adequate, they are also ambitious and there are doubts about the political will and the administrative and financial capacity to implement them. Partnerships with local communities and the civil society organisations representing them are deemed essential to success.

In **Hungary**, the National Roma Strategic Framework identifies improving Roma housing as a priority, but a clear commitment – with a target, timeframe and budget – to eradicate segregation is missing. While the document correctly identifies the different challenges that Roma face, it does not place them in a causal relationship and underestimates the role of slums in perpetuating these challenges. The cross-cutting principles of the Strategy are broadly agreeable, but they have been around for 13 years with no discernible impact, so there is little reason to believe that, without a radical change in the political environment, more substantive actions will be seen that actually have an impact on the ground.

In **Romania**, it is felt that Roma housing aspects are very well documented in the National Roma Strategic Framework, with up-to-date information and statistics. Measures envisaged concern prioritizing Roma in social housing programmes, improving access to utilities and local infrastructure, identifying solutions for families at risk of eviction, cadastre measures, and better protection for Roma from natural disasters. However, there are doubts regarding implementation at the local level, where the Roma actually live, while monitoring of mainstreaming Roma concerns in general programmes is difficult without data collection that includes ethnic background. Additionally, some important dimensions (environmental justice, informal communities, unlawful evictions, and segregation) are missing from the document.

In **Slovakia**, the National Roma Strategic Framework has the global goal of eliminating housing inequalities between Roma and non-Roma, and combating antigypsyism in access to housing, including eliminating residential segregation, reducing the number of illegal dwellings, and improving infrastructure. However, doubts are expressed about over-reliance on EU funds and about the Government's (including local authorities') commitment to implementation. In other cases – such as providing more rental housing (including social housing), tackling homelessness, upgrading housing benefits, improving housing security, tackling energy poverty and promoting environmental justice, and waste management – the measures are deemed insufficient or even absent.

In **Spain**, there are four housing-specific objectives in the National Roma Strategic Framework, namely the eradication of shantytowns and substandard housing, reducing segregation and residential concentration, guaranteeing access to essential services and improving quality of housing, and reducing discrimination in access to housing. While these are very welcome, segregation could be monitored through better indicators (capturing also migrant Roma), and the measures against antigypsyism in housing are modest. While the gender equality perspective of housing is included, nothing is said about combatting homelessness. It is also felt that the dimension of the housing crisis in the country is too broad to be tackled by this document alone.

Benchmarking with Ireland

The National Roma Strategic Framework contains six housing-related activities, primarily focused on **improving the implementation of Traveller-specific accommodation programmes** through local authorities. It contains **no foreseen measures to address the accommodation needs of Roma**, which is a missed opportunity. The next iteration of the document must tackle this, including through specific action to review the application of Circular 41/2012 which is preventing Roma access to social housing and homeless accommodation services and support. Other measures that are currently not covered by the document include **preventing and addressing homelessness and overcrowding of Travellers and Roma**, committing local authorities to ensuring Traveller inclusion in **standard social housing**, cutting the number of Travellers and Roma **sleeping rough** and using emergency accommodation in half by 2030, cutting the **overcrowding** of Travellers in half by 2030, ensuring that 95% of Travellers have **access to tap water** in their dwellings by 2030, and reducing Traveller **accommodation deprivation** by one-third by 2030.

Benchmarking with Western Balkans and Türkiye

According to our members providing input for this report, **the inclusion of housing concerns** in their countries National Roma Strategic Frameworks was done **in a satisfactory way**, additionally **ensuring policy coherence** with other national and international documents (AL), putting forward clear and **ambitious objectives** with corresponding **financial resources** (BiH), and providing **comprehensive approaches** which cover regularising Roma settlements, provision of desegregated housing, improving access to infrastructure, and combatting environmental hazards (MK).



CONCLUSIONS

In all countries, the Roma mostly inhabit **precarious dwellings**, with very **poor living conditions**, facing exposure to **environmental hazards**, in **segregated neighbourhoods** which often also constitute **illegal settlements**. The precariousness of tenure is reflected in **the constant threat of being evicted** even from these substandard abodes.

Historically, the Roma have been pushed to the margins of both localities and society, and even today politicians, local authorities, landlords, and neighbours do not want the Roma in their midst.

Pervasive **antigypsyism in access to housing** is further compounded by **high housing and living costs**, as well as very **cumbersome administrative processes**. More and better targeted interventions and **pro-active support and outreach are needed**, as well as the necessary **political will**, to make a real change in Roma access to quality and affordable housing.

In **Bulgaria**, poor housing conditions and the lack of basic services and infrastructure in segregated Roma neighbourhoods lead to problems related to health, education, employment and social participation. Irregular housing in these neighbourhoods makes them unsafe to live in, as they entail risks of epidemics, fires, and the inability to access assistance. The right to housing is not yet explicitly mentioned in normative documents, and a comprehensive national housing policy for the most impoverished and vulnerable communities is lacking. Inadequate housing conditions require measures aimed at overcoming social inequalities and improving the standard of living of vulnerable population groups. Such an approach towards Roma housing would benefit the entire Bulgarian society.

In the **Czech Republic**, the research conducted in the framework of the case study confirmed that the majority of Roma lived in unsatisfactory conditions in socially excluded localities, where they got evicted to from lucrative places after the Velvet Revolution. Those well-off bought, the poor now pay exorbitant rents for dilapidated housing that are never maintained or repaired. Sometimes, two or three families share an apartment unit with shared kitchen and bathroom, but each of them pays a full rent. Exploited Roma tenants do not dare speak up, as they risk losing the roof over their heads. Despite promises from politicians, the situation never changes, perpetuating intergenerational poverty, exclusion, and resignation among the Roma.

In **Hungary**, the worsening economic situation of the country, including that of the Roma, and social policies that focus specifically on the middle class, mean that Roma families are increasingly less able to afford to move into integrated areas. The situation is made more difficult by antigypsyism and prejudice against Roma, which is very difficult to prove by direct researches. These factors, among many others, have the effect of increasing the proportion of Roma living in marginalised and segregated housing, and the number of segregated settlements, despite a number of EU-funded projects. Segregated living situations give rise to a number of secondary social and educational (and many other) problems, which are almost impossible to overcome.

In **Romania**, it is felt by the author of the case study that Roma inclusion cannot be achieved without first guaranteeing housing inclusion, as this has a direct influence on the state of health, on educational outcomes, on the ability to find and keep employment, etc. The first steps must be to desegregate Roma communities and to solve the legal situation of the land and the dwellings on it. Improving Roma housing is also a pre-requisite for building better relations between the Roma communities and the majority population.

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. Segregated environments limit opportunities for health, education, and employment, and deepen poverty and social exclusion. Even if housing conditions in segregated communities improved, the residents of these communities would still be discriminated. The Roma already face antigypsyism in housing, and if there is a negative narrative about Roma in society, it will be impossible to propose positive policies in housing. Local authorities are largely responsible for the creation of these Roma ghettos, so it is also up to them to begin reversing this historical injustice.

In **Spain**, the overall lack of public housing, the tight requirements (financial and otherwise) to access the private housing market, and antigypsyism in both cases are the main barriers the Roma face when trying to access housing. Roma organisations can play a key role in supporting local and regional authorities provide better, affordable, desegregated housing for the Roma.

The Federation of Roma Associations in Catalonia (FAGiC) has an agreement with the Housing Agency of the Government of Catalonia, as they work together to re-house the residents of slums and shantytowns where the Roma live. Interventions are under way in Riu Sec, Lleida, Santa Perpétua de Mogoda, Abrera and other places. It is a long process, but with political will it can be done.

Catalonia, Spain



NATIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

BULGARIA



→ **Prepare comprehensive analyses of the issues in each segregated settlement**

and plan for targeted measures that respond to each set of needs, in close cooperation with all interested parties - local government, local institutions, with the mandatory participation of representatives of the vulnerable local communities.



→ **Regulate and improve living conditions in Roma neighbourhoods,**

as well as expand the possibilities for families to build their own homes and provide the necessary resources and expert support they might need.



→ **Make social housing available for vulnerable Roma families,**

such as those experiencing extreme poverty, have many children, a poor state of health, etc.



→ **Local authorities have a key role to play in Roma housing inclusion,**

which is why they need access to the necessary resources and assistance to carry out this role, including by attracting investors to support local entrepreneurship in Roma communities.



→ **Combat antigypsyism in majority settings,**

via interventions in non-Roma settlements to increase sensitivity towards and acceptance of Roma residents.



→ **Promote comprehensive approaches,**

by combining housing support with access to other services, such as social and psychological counselling or pathways to employment or entrepreneurship.

CZECH REPUBLIC



→ **Provide a clear legal and administrative framework,** including clearly defining the roles and responsibilities of entities involved in housing, defining social housing and its target groups, and clarifying the role of local authorities in the field.



→ **Ensure coherence of state intervention,** so that measures proposed for Roma housing inclusion are effective and interconnected. A prerequisite is the regular evaluation of the impact of the support provided.



→ **End owners' exploitation of Roma,** particularly those who operate hostels or apartment rentals taking advantage of vulnerable groups living in poverty and social exclusion. Strengthen the rights of tenants to be protected from unjustified dismissal and unjustified rent increases and to be informed of their rights and obligations. Carry out checks on rental contracts.



→ **Reduce the number of ghettos and excluded localities,** which would also improve the labour market participation of residents.



→ **Invest in social housing,** by increasing the number of new social housing units, by modernising the existing social housing stock, and by providing incentives for this construction, including through the use of EU funds.



→ **Support the creation of community housing initiatives,** such as co-operatives and owner-occupiers that allow people to share resources and housing costs.



→ **Increase housing affordability,** provide financial support and rent for people with low incomes, support young families to get their first home, offer low interest rates on mortgages or low downpayments or entry fees.



→ **Support better living conditions,** carry out regular inspections and sanction irresponsible owners, require administrators to work together with tenants and owners to find solutions, ensure infrastructure investment in disadvantaged areas, and make housing accessible to people with disabilities and the elderly.



→ **Foster transparency on the housing market,** with additional support for the construction and renovation of houses, reducing red tape and simplifying permits, fostering public-private partnerships as well as partnerships with and financial aid to NGOs who help people access housing.

HUNGARY



Implement comprehensive, coherent housing approaches across sectors,

as recent evaluation studies have all concluded that the lack of coordination between the different social policy systems and sectors leads to the ineffectiveness of programmes. Infrastructural and soft development is not supported by local social policy instruments, but neither is public education supportive of desegregation, and the lack of local jobs or health infrastructure works against anti-segregation programmes.



Tackle segregation through simultaneous hard and soft measures,

namely by investing in infrastructure (through ERDF) and support to families (through ESF) at the same time, rather than relocating families without the appropriate social mediation, which would only lead to failed integration and the perpetuation of stereotypes.



Reduce red tape surrounding EU programmes and funds,

as these are often based on rigid, pre-defined indicators which do not adequately reflect realities. A reasonable, flexible and transparent monitoring system should be designed and run parallel with supportive counselling for local implementers who have no administrative capacity.

**It is proposed that these programmes be implemented in phases.**

As a first step, the future beneficiary municipalities should be prepared to implement an anti-segregation project on a larger scale. This means on the one hand preparing and involving local policy makers and on the other hand gaining the support of the majority of society for a real anti-segregation initiative.

**Prepare individual plans for each segregated settlement,**

as there are significant differences between the local segregated settlements, including in terms of size (from 5-10 houses to thousands of families); additionally, there are differences related to infrastructural and socio-economic circumstances, the local community, the neighbourhood, and the conditions for the integration.

**Participation of Roma communities.**

Expertise has to be secured at all levels of desegregation or housing projects, development and training opportunities have to be provided to really involve the Roma actors in the development programmes and projects to avoid tokenism (when the participation is merely symbolic).

**Run communication activities**

to convince the non-Roma population to become supportive of Roma inclusion at all levels of the process and sub-sectors of the society. It has to be taken into consideration that the Roma society – as other sub-groups of the society – is not unified. Various opinions and ideas have to be heard regardless that some of those are not friendly with the ruling government.

ROMANIA



→ **Improve the housing legislation,** as it is very outdated; among others, criteria for social housing allocation should be improved, and potential beneficiaries more clearly defined.



→ **Invest in administrative capacity,** as the governmental office dealing with housing strategies is very small; at county and local level, there is a lack of expertise in housing for vulnerable groups, responsibilities are not very clear, and legal provisions referring to poor housing should not be optional.



→ **Capitalise on the existing expertise,** by closely associating NGOs and other stakeholders at the local level, including Roma communities.



→ **Combat institutional antigypsyism,** by addressing prejudice and discrimination among public servants dealing with Roma poor housing.



→ **End segregation of Roma communities,** through clear legislation, better monitoring of the use of EU funds in existing segregated communities, and offering incentives to local authorities.



→ **Regularise the status of informal communities,** through supportive legislation and clear responsibilities (with attached sanctions) for reluctant local authorities refusing to do so.



→ **Support a housing-first approach,** instead of the current philosophy that housing is the last thing to be provided, after employment and other necessary requirements are met.



→ **Improve access to social housing,** including by increased funding to build more stock.



→ **Perform emergency interventions** in existing situations that put in danger the life of the inhabitants, such as insecure housing, environmental and other natural hazards, etc.

SLOVAKIA



→ **Evaluate the housing pilot projects from the National Roma Strategic Framework,**

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.



→ **End segregated Roma localities,**

by amending housing legislation to take account of the historical causes of the creation of these localities and to support action so that they are primarily non-segregated.



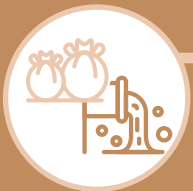
→ **Reform the housing allowance to make it more accessible,**

by decoupling it from the need to provide legal documents from the dwelling, because this is precisely the measure that does not reflect the historical origins of the excluded Roma communities.



→ **Reduce antigypsyism in housing**

and strengthen the coexistence of different groups, including by regulating rental housing or house building so as not to be exclusionary.



→ **Lift the environmental toll on Roma communities,**

by addressing the threatening factors that reduce the quality of housing and endanger the health of the population.

SPAIN



→ **Comprehensive studies and research on Roma housing** are needed in order to have a real picture of the situation, involving Roma organisations in order to create the right policies or measures to tackle the problem.



→ **Link the National Roma Strategic Framework with mainstream policies on housing,** to ensure that mainstream measures reflect and target the situation of the Roma in Spain.



→ **Include migrant Roma in all policies. Improve communication between the judiciary and social services,** to ensure effective communication and guarantee rapid response to people in vulnerable situations.



→ **Suspend evictions** and provide housing solutions for those affected, using conciliation or mediation procedures.



→ **Increase the supply of affordable housing,** prevent tensions in the rental market, and support young people and vulnerable groups in accessing housing.

**Combat antigypsyism in housing,**

by penalising, through the law on equal treatment and non-discrimination, all situations of discrimination in housing.

**Strengthen civil society organisations,**

by providing them with adequate resources to continue supporting the most vulnerable families.

**Support public-private partnerships in housing,**

to promote affordable living solutions, ensuring that landlords request the lowest possible rent.

**Provide real alternatives and decent conditions for the relocation of families,**

within certain proximity to the educational institution for minors, taking into account the gender issue and the type of accommodation they need to avoid situations of re-victimisation, etc.

ADDITIONAL NATIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS:

Ireland

- Apply and implement in policy, and practice, the ETHOS definition which has been accepted as the standard tool of definition and measurement across almost all European countries.
- Inclusion of accommodation actions in the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy (NTRIS) to address the Roma accommodation and homeless crisis in line with targets identified in the EU Roma Strategic Framework 2020-30.
- Ensure full implementation of recommendations by the Expert Group on Traveller accommodation, including overhauling legislation and policies which negatively impact on accommodation provision for Travellers.
- Review the impact of the regulatory barriers, which prevent many Roma from accessing social housing supports and emergency accommodation.
- Ensure adequate funding allocated to Local Authorities to meet their targets in Local Traveller Accommodation Plans and a proportionate amount of the allocated Traveller accommodation budget to the development of new Traveller-specific accommodation.
- Implement ethnic equality monitoring, including the introduction of a standardised ethnic identifier in line with human rights standards, across all statutory and voluntary housing and homeless datasets under their remit. This includes datasets for social housing and accommodation, allocations of social housing and accommodation and on homelessness.

Albania

- Implement targeted social housing programmes that prioritise the Roma in municipalities where they don't already exist and increase the number of social houses available for the Roma community in municipalities where they do.
- Develop and implement policies to upgrade informal Roma settlements with improved infrastructure, access to basic services, and housing conditions.
- Engage Roma communities in participatory processes to identify their housing needs, preferences, and solutions, ensuring their voices are heard in decision-making.
- Strengthen and enforce antigypsyism actions to prevent housing-related discrimination against Roma communities.
- Foster collaboration between relevant government ministries, local authorities, NGOs, and international organizations to ensure a coordinated approach to housing initiatives.
- Regarding forced evictions, rigorously follow the steps and procedures stated at article 6, of Social Houses Law no 22/2018 and the decision of Council of Minister no 361, date 29.05.2019.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

- Conduct local, bottom-up assessments of the housing needs of Roma communities, with the direct involvement of those communities and fostering a comprehensive approach and partnerships among all relevant stakeholders.
- Address the pressing unresolved issue of property rights, particularly for illegally built dwellings.
- Secure additional financial resources to effectively address Roma access to housing.
- Establish a monitoring and tracking system to ensure that allocated housing units are not destroyed or misused and to provide proper care to the beneficiaries.

Kosovo

- Prepare sustainable housing policies, based on existing housing standards and norms.
- Carry out community assessments to identify their needs and requirements.

North Macedonia

- Improve housing, education and economic opportunities for Roma and citizens living in deep poverty by improving their housing conditions and access to services based in the community.
- Implementation of infrastructure activities in Roma settlements (construction of roads and local streets, atmospheric and faecal sewage / according to the priorities of the community and the municipality).
- Resolve the unresolved issue of property rights, especially for wildly built dwellings.
- Adopt a General Urban Plan (GUP) and Detailed Urban Plans (DUP) in places where the Roma community lives.
- Fund programs that will provide financial assistance for the reconstruction, extension and improvement of the dwellings of the Roma community.
- Provide technical and financial support to NGOs and local governments (municipalities) to improve the living standards of Roma communities.
- Implement training programs and joint cooperation of NGOs, municipalities and the community, for joint cooperation and mutual contribution to improve living standards (housing).
- Carry out an assessment between the Municipalities and the community, about their benefits and priorities and needs.
- Fund programs for the inclusion of unemployed young Roma in the field of construction, together with NGOs and municipalities will contribute to the construction or reconstruction of the households of the community.

Türkiye

- Establish and fund housing improvement programmes that provide financial assistance and resources for the renovation and repair of Roma households' living spaces.
- Promote community engagement in the design and implementation of these programmes to ensure they meet the specific needs of the Roma population.
- Encourage in-situ urban renewal approaches that allow Roma communities to remain in their existing neighbourhoods while improving housing conditions and infrastructure.
- Provide technical and financial support to municipalities adopting this approach and share best practices.
- Develop affordable housing initiatives that target low-income Roma households, providing them with access to safe, decent, and affordable housing.
- Offer subsidies, or low-interest loans to make housing more affordable for Roma families.
- Encourage active involvement of the Roma community in shaping and executing affordable housing programmes to make certain that these initiatives align closely with their unique requirements and aspirations.
- Implement assistance programmes that provide subsidies or direct financial aid to low-income Roma households to help cover the costs of clean water and electricity bills.
- Improve infrastructure in Roma neighbourhoods to ensure reliable access to these essential utilities.
- Offer vocational training and education programs that empower Roma individuals with construction and maintenance skills, enabling them to contribute to housing improvements in their communities.
- Collaborate with NGOs and vocational institutions to provide relevant training.
- Provide cultural competency training to housing professionals and policymakers to ensure that housing initiatives are culturally sensitive and inclusive of Roma traditions and lifestyles.
- Implement financial support schemes for the Roma with low income and low education levels to repair their houses to achieve appropriate living conditions.

