



Event report

Roma in Europe's Housing and Energy Agenda

22 April 2026 | 15:00–17:30

European Economic and Social Committee (EESC)
Rue Van Maerlant 2, Brussels, room VMA22

Co-organised by UN-Habitat, FEANTSA, and ERGO Network

Introduction

On 22 April 2026, UN-Habitat, FEANTSA and ERGO Network co-organised the event “Roma in Europe’s Housing and Energy Agenda”, as part of Roma Week 2026 at the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) in Brussels. Bringing together representatives of European institutions, international organisations, financial institutions, Roma civil society organisations and practitioners, the event explored how Roma communities can be meaningfully included within emerging European housing and energy policies.

The discussion took place at a critical moment, as the European Union develops major policy initiatives, including the Affordable Housing Plan, the Affordable Energy Action Plan, Building Renovation Plans and Social Climate Plans. Participants examined how these frameworks can address the persistent housing exclusion experienced by Roma communities, characterised by overcrowding, inadequate access to basic services, energy poverty, segregation and discrimination.

The event aimed to identify structural and long-term solutions capable of moving beyond isolated projects towards sustainable, rights-based housing and energy policies that contribute to equality, inclusion and social justice.

Opening Remarks

The event opened with contributions from **Anacláudia Rossbach**, Executive Director of UN-Habitat, and **Maria Ohisalo MEP**, member of the Special Committee on the Housing Crisis in the European Parliament

Anacláudia Rossbach situated the discussion within the context of the global housing crisis, noting that nearly three billion people worldwide lacked adequate housing. Reaffirming UN-Habitat's position that housing is a fundamental human right, she stressed that adequate housing extended beyond physical shelter and included security of tenure, affordability, accessibility, access to basic services, cultural adequacy and proximity to opportunities. She highlighted that many Roma communities continued to experience systemic discrimination, spatial segregation and exclusion from essential services.

Importantly, Ms Rossbach argued that the housing challenges faced by Roma communities were not merely housing problems, but manifestations of deeper structural inequalities embedded in policies, planning systems, and social attitudes. She described spatial segregation as a poverty trap that limits social mobility and reinforces exclusion across generations. Drawing on the New Urban Agenda, she stressed that inclusive cities do not emerge by chance but require deliberate planning, financing and governance. She further highlighted the importance of participatory upgrading, land tenure regularisation and inclusive urban regeneration as practical tools for tackling segregation and improving living conditions.

Maria Ohisalo MEP focused on the European dimension of the housing crisis and the persistent exclusion faced by Roma communities. Referring to FRA data, she highlighted continuing disparities in housing conditions, overcrowding, housing deprivation, and impaired access to basic services. While welcoming the increasing political attention to housing at European level, she expressed concern that Roma issues remained insufficiently reflected in mainstream housing policies. She noted that the Affordable Housing Plan and subsequent political debates have not adequately addressed discrimination, segregation and minority-specific barriers to housing.

Ms Ohisalo argued that housing should be understood as a human right and a matter of dignity, rather than simply a market issue. She also stressed the growing interconnection between housing exclusion and energy poverty, warning that vulnerable communities were often excluded from both housing and energy transition measures.

Both speakers converged around a common message: access to adequate housing and energy supply is a prerequisite for equality, social inclusion, and participation in society.

Affordable Housing for Roma – From Promises to Funding

The first panel focused on structural barriers preventing Roma communities from accessing adequate housing and explored how European and national policy frameworks can better support inclusive housing solutions.

Dyfed Aubrey, Head of the UN Habitat's Office for the European Union, emphasised that housing should be understood as an entry point for broader social inclusion. Presenting examples from UN-Habitat's work, he highlighted the importance of secure tenure, integrated urban planning, desegregation, and community participation. He stressed that access to housing was closely linked to access to education, healthcare, employment, and public services, and underlined the importance of building trust between Roma communities and institutions, noting that successful interventions required cooperation between local authorities, residents, civil society organisations, and financial actors. He further highlighted the need to move beyond isolated projects towards systemic approaches, stressing that successful housing interventions required supportive policy environments, sustainable financing mechanisms, and opportunities for stakeholders to exchange good practices. He advocated for stronger cooperation between governments, municipalities, financial institutions, civil society, and affected communities, to scale up successful housing solutions.

Florin Botonogu, Director of ERGO Network's Romanian member the Policy Center for Roma and Minorities, presented the findings from ERGO Network's research report on [Roma access to quality and affordable housing](#) (2023). He highlighted the persistence of inadequate housing conditions, informal settlements, environmental hazards, forced evictions, and segregation across Europe. While acknowledging the growing political attention to housing issues, he argued that many existing measures failed to sufficiently address the structural dimensions of antigypsyism. Particular concerns were raised regarding the Affordable Housing Plan, which, despite recognising Roma as a vulnerable group, does not fully address issues such as segregation, discrimination and safeguards against exclusionary housing investments.

Matthew Baldwin, Head of the Housing Task Force at the European Commission, situated the discussion within the broader European housing agenda. He stressed that housing was increasingly recognised as a European concern, and described the Affordable Housing Plan as an important first step towards a coordinated European response to the housing crisis. Mr Baldwin reiterated that housing should be understood as a cornerstone of social cohesion, equality, and human dignity, rather than merely a commodity. While acknowledging calls for stronger action, he argued that the growing political attention to housing provided opportunities to address longstanding forms of exclusion, including those affecting Roma communities.

Daniela Mormile, representing the Roma and Antidiscrimination Unit in the European Commission, presented recent developments under the EU Roma Strategic Framework for Equality, Inclusion and Participation 2020–2030. She outlined key policy developments, including the Council Recommendation on Roma Equality, Inclusion and Participation, the European Parliament Resolution on the Situation of Roma Living in Settlements in the EU and the Council Conclusions on Equal Access to Adequate and Desegregated Housing. While these initiatives demonstrate growing recognition of housing as a central component of Roma inclusion, she acknowledged that implementation remained uneven across Member States.

The financing dimension was addressed by **Daniela Aydin** from the Council of Europe Development Bank (CEB), who presented the Bank's work supporting vulnerable populations through investments in social housing, settlement upgrading, infrastructure and community development. Ms Aydin stressed that financing mechanisms already existed, and that international financial institutions were increasingly willing to support inclusive housing initiatives. However, she also highlighted that successful implementation depended on strong local partnerships, political commitment and the capacity of public authorities to develop inclusive projects.

There was consensus throughout the panel was that Europe increasingly possessed the policy frameworks, financial instruments, and technical expertise needed to address Roma housing and energy exclusion. The principal challenge lies in implementation, political will, and ensuring that available resources effectively reach the communities most affected by housing deprivation and segregation.

Exchange with the Audience

The discussion with participants reinforced concerns regarding the gap between policy commitments and implementation on the ground. Attendants raised questions about safeguards against segregation, sustainability of housing investments, trust between Roma communities and institutions, and the role of local authorities in implementing housing programmes. Several interventions highlighted the risk that public investments may inadvertently reinforce segregation, if inclusion and desegregation are not explicitly built into project design and monitoring.

The discussion also emphasised the importance of participation and trust-building. Participants noted that many Roma communities have experienced repeated exclusion, discrimination and unfulfilled promises, creating a significant trust deficit between communities and public institutions, which must be addressed as a prerequisite for successful housing interventions. Another recurring theme concerned the need to scale up successful practices. While numerous local projects demonstrate positive results, sustainable change requires systemic solutions, stronger institutional coordination, and greater political commitment, including through adequate funding.

Sustainable Energy Solutions for Roma Communities

The second panel focused on the intersection between housing exclusion, energy poverty and the green transition.

Anna Bajomi from FEANTSA highlighted how energy poverty disproportionately affected vulnerable communities, including Roma, as many energy-efficiency and renovation programmes unintentionally excluded low-income households due to complex eligibility criteria, administrative burdens, and prohibitive financing requirements. As a result, communities most in need of support often remain unable to benefit from public investment.

Ms Bajomi further noted that Roma perspectives remained largely absent from broader energy-transition debates. She argued that social and anti-poverty objectives were often insufficiently integrated into energy policies, and warned that the green transition risks reproducing existing inequalities, if vulnerable communities were not explicitly included. Particular concern was expressed regarding the limited attention paid to issues such as solid-fuel heating, poor housing quality, and energy insecurity in Roma settlements.

The discussion was complemented by presentations from **Mihály Orsós** and **Károly Búza** of the Lightbringers Foundation (Fényhozók Alapítvány) in Hungary – a grassroots, citizen-led initiative fighting energy poverty, particularly within marginalized Roma communities, particularly in Southern Hungary. The speakers shared practical examples of community-led renewable energy initiatives in segregated Roma communities. Their experience demonstrated how solar-powered solutions can reduce household energy costs, improve living conditions, and contribute to community resilience.

At the same time, Mr Orsós and Mr Búza highlighted persistent barriers faced by Roma households in accessing national and European funding programmes, which include restrictive eligibility criteria, stringent requirements for pre-financing, administrative complexity, and inadequate targeting. These frequently exclude grassroots and community organisations and those who need support most. The speakers warned that, unless these barriers were addressed, the benefits of the green transition would continue to bypass many Roma communities in Europe.

A central conclusion of the panel was that energy poverty must be understood as both a social justice and equality issue. Participants stressed that energy transition policies must be designed in ways that ensure equitable access to sustainable energy solutions for all, including low-income households, as they should contribute to reducing, rather than deepening, existing inequalities.

Closing Remarks

Closing reflections were delivered by **Ivona Batali**, National Roma Contact Point at the Romanian Ministry of Investments and European Projects, and **Benedetta Scuderi** MEP, member of the Committees on Industry, Research and Energy (ITRE) in the European Parliament.

Ivona Batali stressed that access to housing and energy was a daily reality, not a technical issue, for many Roma communities. She presented Romania's approach through the National Roma Contact Point, the National Roma Agency, the Roma enabling condition under Cohesion Policy, and the National Roma Inclusion Strategy, which includes housing, utilities, desegregation, and integrated interventions. She also highlighted Romania's intention to keep Roma inclusion in the next EU funding period, with simpler and more effective financing for local needs. Ms Batali equally pointed to key instruments such as ESF+ programmes, the Social Climate Fund, the Modernisation Fund, the National Housing Strategy, the Affordable Housing Plan, and the Affordable Energy Action Plan as opportunities to address Roma housing exclusion and energy poverty. Her core message was that Europe cannot achieve affordable housing and energy if Roma are left behind, and that progress depended on EU funds, institutional coordination, local partnerships, data, and real community participation.

In her video message, **Benedetta Scuderi MEP** highlighted the continued underrepresentation of Roma concerns within mainstream housing debates. Referring to recent housing policy discussions at European level, she argued that housing, energy, education, and employment must be approached as interconnected rights. She also stressed that housing deprivation and energy poverty were closely linked and disproportionately affect Roma communities. Ms Scuderi called for stronger inclusion of Roma perspectives in the ongoing development of the Affordable Housing Plan, Affordable Energy Action Plan, Building Renovation Plans and Social Climate Plans. She argued that meaningful inclusion requires more than symbolic recognition and stressed that Roma communities must be actively involved in shaping the policies, budgets and decisions that affect their lives.

The closing interventions reaffirmed the importance of ensuring that future housing and energy policies contribute to equality, dignity, and social justice, while addressing the structural barriers that continue to exclude Roma communities from adequate housing and essential services.

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The event demonstrated broad consensus that housing exclusion remains one of the clearest manifestations of structural antigypsyism in Europe. Participants consistently stressed that housing should be understood not merely as an infrastructure issue, but as a matter of human rights, dignity and social justice.

The discussions highlighted that Europe increasingly possesses the policy frameworks, financial instruments, and technical expertise required to address housing and energy exclusion. However, implementation remains uneven, and many existing measures fail to adequately reach those most affected by segregation, discrimination, and poverty.

A recurring message throughout the event was the need to move from isolated projects towards systemic solutions. This requires stronger political commitment, meaningful participation of Roma communities, improved coordination between institutions, and greater attention to the links between housing, energy, anti-discrimination, and social inclusion policies.

As the European Union advances new housing and energy initiatives, participants called for explicit safeguards to ensure that Roma communities are not left behind, and that future investments contribute to desegregation, equality, and long-term inclusion for Europe's Roma.

*For more information about this event,
contact [Amana Ferro](#) in the ERGO Network staff.*

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THROUGH UNITY, JUSTICE & PARTICIPATION



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