

# MEETING THE NEEDS OF ROMA PEOPLE IN THE HOMELESSNESS SECTOR



FEANTSA

European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless

JANUARY 2024

This concept note has been drafted based on the presentations and debates from the webinar series organised by FEANTSA in December 2023, titled **Meeting the needs of Roma in the homelessness sector**. FEANTSA would like to express our deepest gratitude to the Roma activists, social workers, professionals, and the pro-Roma organisations who supported our webinar series to discuss the importance of developing awareness around the factors leading to housing exclusion and the high levels (and risks) of homelessness among Roma in Europe.

FEANTSA is especially grateful to the speakers who joined the webinars: Marina Csikós (Phiren Amenca and the Feminist Collective of Romani Gender Experts), Bernard Rorke (The European Roma Rights Centre), Florin Botonogu (Policy Center for Roma and Minorities Romania/ ERGO Network member), Virgil Bitu (ROTA, UK), Raluca Ioana Motei, (Kirkens Bymisjon, Norway), Marianna Prontera (Cairde, Ireland), Cristina de la Serna (Fundacion Secretariado Gitano Spain), Sabrina Ignazi (Caritas Ambrosiana, Milan, Italy - Apascial Mobile Unit), Katarína Beňová (DOM.ov project in Eastern Slovakia) and Kumar Vishwanathan, (Life Together, the Czech Republic/ERGO Network member).

AUTHOR:

Simona Barbu, Policy Officer, FEANTSA

EDITED BY:

Bryony Martin, Communications and Events Officer, FEANTSA

PHOTOGRAPHY/IMAGES:

Cover: Achisatha Khamsuwan from Getty Images

pp.4,6,10,13,22: Gwengoa from Getty Images Signature

# Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Background</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Meeting the Needs of Roma People in the Homelessness Sector: Tools and Measures</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>Webinar series: Meeting the Needs of Roma in the homelessness Sector</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>22</b>
	<b>Resources on Roma, housing and homelessness</b>	<b>25</b>

---

# 1

## Introduction



The 2019 European Commission evaluation of the situation of Roma concluded that “[e]specially due to inadequate and segregated housing, the housing situation remains difficult.”<sup>1</sup> Data from the evaluation shows that one in three (32%) Roma surveyed live in households with a leaking roof, damp walls, or rot. Significantly, 76% of Roma live in a neighbourhood where all or most residents are Roma, thus in segregation, while 30% live in dwellings with no connection to water; 36% have dwellings with no toilet, shower, or bathroom, and 78% live in overcrowded housing. Simultaneously, 43% of Roma have declared experiencing discrimination when trying to buy or rent housing.<sup>2</sup> Under the ETHOS categorisation, most of these situations amount to forms of homelessness, a conclusion confirmed by the latest research report of the European Roma Grassroots Organisation (ERGO) Network which focused on housing.<sup>3</sup>

Low rates of property ownership among Roma, explained by generational racialised poverty or anti-Roma policies, leaves people highly exposed to evictions and the demolition of property, often without housing alternatives. The pervasive and mass forced evictions targeting Roma in countries such as Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Romania, or Bulgaria, and demolitions of Roma houses without providing housing alternatives, push people into unsafe, informal, segregated settlements, often located in toxic environments. Evictions to street homelessness are also recurrent among Roma communities across Europe, continuing to cause trauma and deepen peoples’ exclusion from society. Similarly to when residing in origin countries, Roma who migrate within the European Union find themselves in situations of homelessness as they face discrimination when trying to rent on the private market, cannot access social protection, or cannot afford the high housing prices. Often, Roma mobile EU citizens are left to

inhabit informal settlements or so-called camps, such as in Italy or France, where they become targets of hate crime, hate speech, and repeated evictions.

Taking note of the high risk of homelessness among Roma, services in the homelessness sector have developed an increased awareness of the need to learn about the history of these communities. Meeting the needs of Roma people in the homelessness sector has become a preoccupation among FEANTSA’s membership which supports individuals in the origin countries as well when they travel between EU member states.

Contributing to this purpose, this concept note aims to formulate tools and measures to be developed and implemented within the homelessness sector (and by other housing stakeholders) to ensure that the housing needs of Roma people are met and that they are adequately supported to exit homelessness.

These proposals have been developed based on the discussions from the webinar series organised by FEANTSA in December 2023 titled *Meeting the needs of Roma in the homelessness sector*, in which we explored questions such as ‘Are Roma needs sufficiently met in the homelessness sector?’ and ‘What do homelessness service providers need in order to develop a better understanding of the challenges faced by unhoused Roma people and to offer better support initiatives?’

The concept note includes a summary of the discussions from the three webinars, with highlights from the presentations and descriptions of successful practices implemented in Norway, Ireland, Spain, Italy, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic to improve access to adequate housing for Roma people and/or to provide support to exit homelessness.

---

1 Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council. A Union of Equality: EU Roma strategic framework for equality, inclusion and participation, Brussels, 7.10.2020 COM(2020) 620 final.

2 [https://commission.europa.eu/publications/report-implementation-national-roma-integration-strategies-2019-roma-integration-measures\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/publications/report-implementation-national-roma-integration-strategies-2019-roma-integration-measures_en)

3 ERGO Network research report 2023 available at <https://ergonetwork.org/2023/11/research-report-on-roma-access-to-quality-and-affordable-housing/>

---

# 2

## Background



The high level of poverty and precarious living situations among many Roma in Europe today should be understood in connection to centuries of anti-Roma racism in European countries, which is still highly present in our societies. *Antigypsyism*<sup>4</sup> continues to have great negative consequences on all areas of Roma lives, pushing individuals into extreme marginalisation. The limited and restricted access to affordable, dignified, and non-segregated housing for Roma communities across Europe is closely related to this history of oppression and pervasive racism. Since the roots of these inequalities go back centuries, it is imperative to discuss and understand the impact of anti-Roma laws and policies implemented in history which aimed to exclude them from the wider society, including by denying access to adequate housing.

When reflecting on the past, the connection of some of the most oppressive anti-Roma policies with housing can be identified. Romania, the EU member with the largest Roma population, provides the most illustrative example: almost 500 years of Roma enslavement, starting in the fourteenth century. Slavery in the Romanian states of Moldova and Wallachia meant, among others, that Roma depended on their enslavers for a place to live. Following the abolishment of Roma slavery, no support was offered to the freed individuals by Romanian authorities, leaving them with no choice other than to return to their previous enslavers for accommodation and income. Furthermore, the Romanian agrarian reform of 1864 led to many peasants acquiring land excluded Roma.<sup>5</sup> This type of exclusive policy continued to have an impact after the fall of Communism in 1989 when Romanian citizens were entitled to reclaim properties they had possessed prior to WWII. However, most Roma could not benefit

from this policy since they generally did not previously own property.

In Spain, 12,000 Roma were interned, subjected to forced labour, hurt, and killed, in 1749 during 'The Great "G\*psy" Round-up,' simply for "being Roma". The preparation of this horrendous strategy also involved the implementation of control policies connected to housing: in 1717, a law updating the Pragmatica of Charles II from 1695 brought the novelty of designating 41 cities as the solely authorised places of residence for "G\*psies" and in 1746 a provision would add 34 new cities to this list. This rehousing operation was controlled by the council which knew the addresses of over 800 "G\*psy" families in the, by then, 75 towns where individuals of this category were authorised to live. The 1746 provision also stipulated how many Roma would be allowed in one locality: 'one family, that is "the husband and wife, with their children and orphaned grandchildren, if not married", for every 100 inhabitants'. The purpose of this measure was to facilitate 'supervising these families' lifestyles and activities, taking particular care to keep them separated from each other'.<sup>6</sup> Czech Parliament Law No 117 from 1927 (*On the fight against G\*psies, vagabonds, and those unwilling to work*) established that all Roma should be registered and fingerprinted while their children were taken away and put in specially created institutions. The law introduced the responsibility of local authorities to set aside a place on their territories appropriate for camping, at the same time allowing them to refuse the entry of "wandering g\*psies" to their area.<sup>7</sup>

During communism, policies of assimilation and settlement were carried out by states, such as the one in Slovakia. Despite the 1945

4 <https://www.coe.int/en/web/roma-and-travellers/antigypsyism/-/discrimination>

5 Petre Petcut, *Romii. Sclavie si libertate. Constituirea si emanciparea unei noi categorii etnice si sociale la nord de Dunare* [Roma. Slavery and Freedom. The Creation and Emancipation of a New Ethnic and Social Category North of the Danube], available in Romanian at <http://cncr.gov.ro/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Romii.-Sclavie-si-libertate.pdf> quoted in FEANTSA Homeless in Europe Magazine, 2020, Marian Mandache, A Brief Insight into the Systemic Racism Roma Face in Accessing Housing in Romania

6 <https://rm.coe.int/the-great-gypsy-round-up-in-spain-factsheets-on-romani-history/16808b1a7d>

7 <https://romea.cz/en/news/czech/ninety-years-ago-the-czechoslovak-authorities-issued-law-on-wandering-gypsies-took-fingerprints-for-gypsy-identification>

Košice Governmental Program, proclaiming the rejection of discrimination because of racial and religious reasons, state policies were said to stimulate hidden or open forms of forced assimilation. Law No. 74/1958 “on the permanent settling of nomadic persons” permanently restrained the movement of the traveling portion of the Roma population (Vlachike Roma). In the same year, the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia issued a resolution whose aim was “the consistent assimilation of the Gypsy population”.<sup>8</sup> Roma people were forced to live in blocks of flats, in housing estates, or at the edge of municipalities, i.e., in accommodation provided by the authorities. Since then, Roma ethnic groups in Slovakia have practically lived in segregated settlements, separated communities, or scattered in towns.<sup>9</sup>

Residential segregation and discrimination in accessing public housing remain two important factors that impede Roma from accessing adequate housing and which contribute to experiences or increased risks of homelessness in Roma communities. As found in the 2019 European Commission evaluation, 43% of Roma are discriminated against when trying to buy or rent housing.<sup>10</sup> The special Eurobarometer “Discrimination in the European Union” from May 2019 shows that only 64% of Europeans would feel comfortable having daily contact with a Roma colleague while 20% of Europeans have Roma friends or acquaintances. The 2019 Eurobarometer also shows that 61% of Europeans believed that discrimination against Roma is widespread in their country.<sup>11</sup>

Discrimination also takes place at the level of local authorities which sometimes deny access to social housing through measures that are directly or indirectly discriminatory against Roma.<sup>12</sup> Experiences of discrimination in accessing housing are also often faced by Roma mobile EU citizens in host countries.

At European level, the work for the inclusion of Roma has been ongoing for over a decade by adopting several initiatives to which all Member States (MS) are required to adhere, and which involve Roma civil society. While the Commission has called on MS to strengthen their work on Roma inclusion as early as the second half of the 1990s, it was only in 2011 that an EU framework for national Roma integration strategies up to 2020 was adopted. The framework aimed to tackle the socio-economic exclusion of and discrimination against Roma by promoting equal access to four key areas: education, employment, health, and housing. As the EU framework for Roma integration ended in 2020, the European Commission adopted the EU Roma strategic framework for equality, inclusion, and participation for 2020-2030 on 7 October 2020.<sup>13</sup> For the first time, the EU framework introduced measurable objectives for each of the four dimensions, including housing. It also introduced the horizontal concepts of antigypsyism, poverty, and participation (corresponding to equality, inclusion, and participation), which also have measurable targets.

These policies, together with other initiatives supporting Roma inclusion and participation,

---

8 Kollarova Z. K vývoju rómskej society na Spiši do roku 1945. [On the development of the Roma society in Spiš until 1945] In: Mann A., editor. Neznámi Rómovia. Ister Science Press; Bratislava, Slovakia: 1992. [Google Scholar]

9 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5923630/>

10 [https://commission.europa.eu/publications/report-implementation-national-roma-integration-strategies-2019-roma-integration-measures\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/publications/report-implementation-national-roma-integration-strategies-2019-roma-integration-measures_en)

11 European Commission, Special Barometer Discrimination in the EU, 2019, available at [https://data.europa.eu/euodp/en/data/dataset/S2251\\_91\\_4\\_493\\_ENG](https://data.europa.eu/euodp/en/data/dataset/S2251_91_4_493_ENG)

12 <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2016/04/roma-on-the-margins-housing-rights-denied/> and <https://www.housingrightswatch.org/content/housing-rights-violations-against-roma-community-case-alba-iulia-romania>

13 [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2021/690629/EPRS\\_BRI\(2021\)690629\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2021/690629/EPRS_BRI(2021)690629_EN.pdf)



in general and with a focus on housing,<sup>14</sup> have been transposed at national level into strategies and accompanied by available EU funds for implementation. However, the evaluation of the EU framework for national Roma integration strategies up to 2020 shows that more investment and more work remains to be done to achieve Roma inclusion and participation in society. In particular, the EC evaluation shows that housing is the area with the least successful examples of improvement for Roma in the last decade. Despite this, it is the only objective of the new EU framework for which the increase is established to a third, while for the other objectives is required to have an increase in the progress by at least half.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, researchers participating in the Roma Civil Monitor 2021-2025 project highlighted that at the national level, in terms of housing and essential services, “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.”<sup>16</sup>

---

14 [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2021/690629/EPRS\\_BRI\(2021\)690629\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2021/690629/EPRS_BRI(2021)690629_EN.pdf), pg 6-7

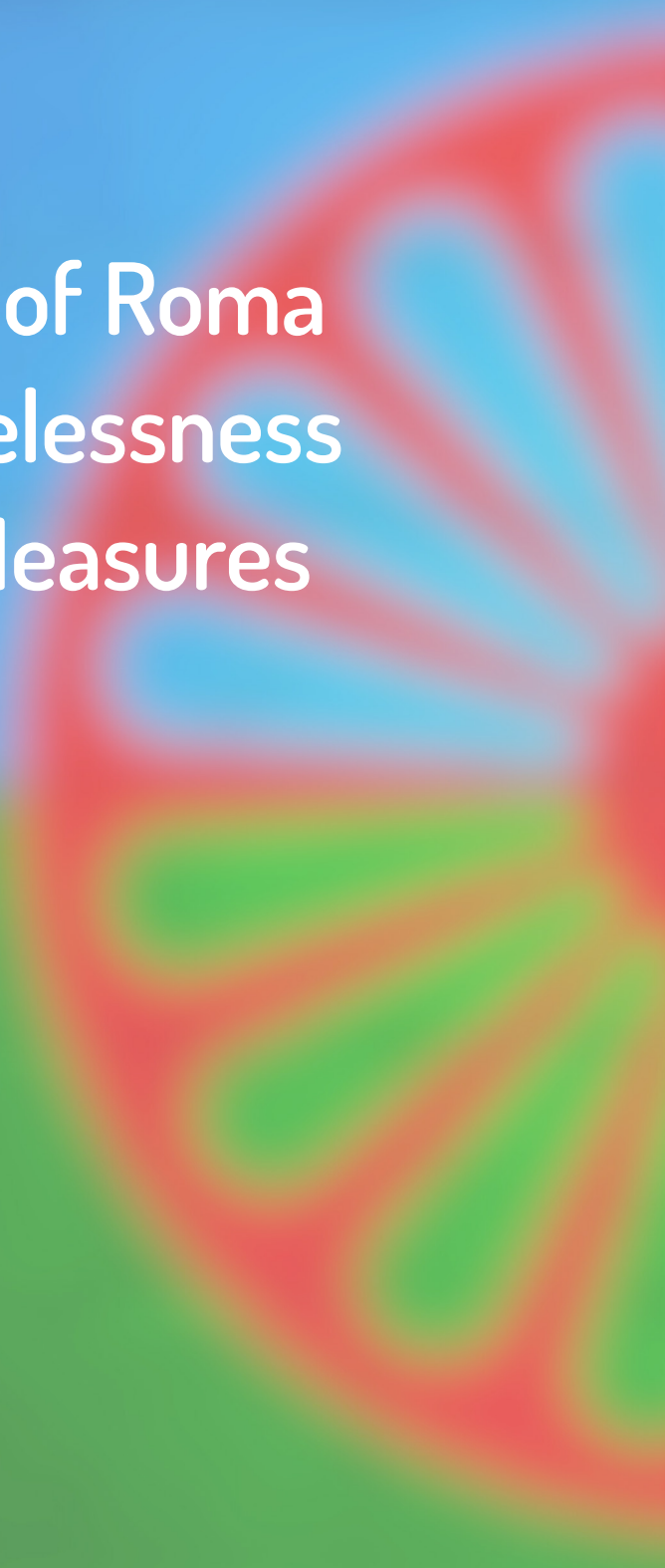
15 <https://www.feantsa.org/en/news/2020/10/26/statement-eu-roma-strategy?bcParent=27>

16 Roma Civil Monitoring 2021-2025 project, quoted in ERGO Network report 2023, pg. 57, available at <https://ergonetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Ergo-2023-access-housing-WEB-V4.pdf>

---

# 3

## Meeting the Needs of Roma People in the Homelessness Sector: Tools and Measures



Structural and social determinants have caused a high risk of homelessness among marginalised Roma individuals and families across Europe. The starting point of developing any tailored services for unhoused Roma people should be anchored in an inclusive, participatory, historically aware, and empowering approach that addresses the deep exclusion and discrimination experienced by Roma people throughout generations.

To strengthen the quality and equity of the social and housing stability services in relation to Roma individuals and families, we have formulated a series of suggestions for tools and measures, emphasising the participation of Roma people and activists as a fundamental feature:

### **1. Power balance in decision-making**

Authorities, as well as stakeholders in the homelessness and housing sectors, must ensure Roma people's access to the decision-making processes and meaningful participation in the design, implementation, and monitoring of all initiatives concerning Roma communities, not only for consultation purposes.

### **2. Anti-Roma racism/antigypsyism training**

Stakeholders must organise training activities to ensure that all staff members working in the homelessness sector and additional support services achieve an advanced level of knowledge, respect, and understanding of the Roma culture, history, and historical oppression across Europe. Such training courses should support combating stereotypes and biases while developing anti-racist attitudes and behaviours among staff in relation to their work with Roma.

### **3. Representation and participation**

Stakeholders must hire Roma individuals within the services/projects organised within the homelessness sector, including peer workers, housing and community mediators of Roma origin who can speak the Romani language and/or who come from the same community as the Roma guests.

### **4. Outreach**

More outreach needs to be conducted towards Roma individuals and families experiencing street homelessness or other types of homelessness under ETHOS, given the entrenched discrimination and exclusion experienced by the most marginalised members of these communities. Workers familiar with the Roma culture, history, and language can build trust and encourage individuals to access available services.

### **5. Collaboration with Roma civil society**

Stakeholders must engage and partner with local Roma community organisations and leaders to develop initiatives aimed at supporting Roma experiencing homelessness.

### **6. Data collection and monitoring**

Stakeholders must promote and work to collect disaggregated data on homelessness among Roma people, with a focus on sleeping rough, with the purpose of better understanding the specific situations, challenges, and needs of people and tracking progress in addressing specific challenges.

### **7. Safe spaces and awareness of diversity and specific needs**

Services should create safe spaces within the homelessness sector specifically designed to accommodate cultural preferences and traditions, alleviate the fear of racism, as well as provide gender-informed activities. These spaces should respect people's privacy and provide tailored support, for example, for couples to live together if desired. Women's only activities should be implemented while awareness of LGBT+ Roma individuals should also be maintained.

### **8. Trauma-Informed Care**

Stakeholders must recognize that some Roma individuals may have experienced trauma due to discrimination and prejudice. Implement

trauma-informed care principles to create a supportive and healing environment.

### **9. Fighting anti-Roma racism/antigypsyism (in the homelessness sector and in society)**

Stakeholders must organise public awareness campaigns to challenge stereotypes and prejudices against Roma, unveiling the oppression of Roma across centuries and fostering an inclusive, anti-racist approach to support Roma experiencing severe poverty.

### **10. Advocacy and policy changes**

Stakeholders must work closely with Roma advocacy groups to identify systemic barriers and advocate for policy changes that address the root causes of homelessness and discrimination faced by Roma. They should engage with national and local policies, such as the national strategies for Roma inclusion or local plans at the regional/municipal level which may foster cooperation and improve results at the level of communities in need of adequate housing.

### **11. Language support**

Stakeholders must ensure that essential information, forms, and materials are available in the Romani language and in easy-to-read and visual materials to facilitate communication and accessibility for Roma individuals who may not be fluent in the local language or may not know how to read or write. For Roma mobile EU citizens, materials in the language of the country of origin are also useful. One-on-one conversations should also accompany information provision through materials.

### **12. Integrated measures**

Tailored education and employment programs that consider the specific needs of Roma are important in order to ensure wrapped around support when exiting homelessness. This could include vocational training, job counselling, language courses, and support in navigating bureaucratic systems.

### **13. Prevention**

Forced evictions, insecure tenancy, and discrimination against Roma on the housing market, including when accessing social housing, are factors that may push Roma into homelessness; the homelessness sector can play a role in preventing this and eliminating these factors by engaging in discussions about such situations with Roma in their communities (for example, through outreach and community organising) and by holding authorities accountable to prevent leaving people without shelter.

### **14. Long-term housing solutions**

Adequate and affordable non-segregated housing options need to be developed to ensure that unhoused Roma individuals have equal access and to close the existing gap between Roma and non-Roma housing deprivation and risk of homelessness. Piloting such initiatives and advocating for their scaling up by authorities is very much needed.

### **15. Monitoring and reporting discrimination against Roma in housing**

Cases of discrimination against Roma individuals and families when trying to rent or buy a house must be documented and reported to relevant authorities, as there is a lack of evidence in this area, despite discrimination being one of the major reasons why Roma are denied housing in Europe today. The homelessness services have a unique position to gather this information as they may meet people as they face discrimination in the housing market.

---

Webinar series:  
Meeting the Needs of Roma in  
the Homelessness Sector  
(2023)

A blurred image of the Roma flag, featuring a red triangle at the top, a green triangle at the bottom, and a yellow triangle in the center with a red border. The flag is positioned on the left side of the page, partially overlapping the text.

## 07 DECEMBER, WEBINAR I:

# OVERVIEW OF THE SITUATION WITH HOUSING EXCLUSION AND HOMELESSNESS OF ROMA ACROSS EUROPE<sup>17</sup>

### Highlights by Marina Csikós, Phiren Amenca International Network:

- » The term Roma is an umbrella term,<sup>18</sup> however, Roma use different terms to identify themselves across Europe; the migration of Roma began from central to northern India and then to Persia, entering the Byzantine Empire and later Greece; the traces of Roma to the Indian background could be determined based on the linguistic analysis.
- » One cannot talk about the history of Roma without talking about the marginalisation experienced; the slavery of Romani people is still not sufficiently talked about in Europe, though Roma were enslaved for 500 years in Romania. Other important moments in history have to do with the Roma Internment in Spain or the forced assimilation by the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the extermination of Roma as part of the Holocaust, the assimilation policies under communism, and the forced sterilisation of Roma women.
- » The existing gap in the education of Roma is a consequence of the historical marginalisa-

tion and existing discrimination and segregation of Roma children in the educational structures. Employment as a relational factor to homelessness – the situation is still negative, more than half of the Roma population is not in paid work (FRA survey 2021),<sup>19</sup> with the rates for Roma women being even lower at 28%. This is in close relation to homelessness as it creates difficulties in being able to pay for housing costs.

- » Harassment and hate speech against Roma: it is important to talk about these acts given the high levels among Roma. Almost half of Roma and Travellers declared they say that they experienced hate-motivated harassment in the 12 months before the survey, while 7% were physically harassed because of being Roma or Travellers (FRA survey 2020).<sup>20</sup>

### Highlights by Bernard Rorke, The European Roma Rights Centre:

- » Evictions of Roma in Europe: example of municipality of Budapest putting a family out on the streets without offering alternative accommodation. The family had no debts but was refused an extension and entered into fast-track eviction proceedings. The only offer of assistance was to take their 14-year-old into state care and put the mother and older child in a homeless shelter. This highlights the issue of Roma families not having enough income to be able to pay rent in the private market as well as the very likely discrimination to be faced. This story is common across Europe among Roma who experience severe poverty. Environmental racism against Roma is clear, many are forced to live in proximity of landfills

---

17 Webinar recording available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r-xh9dr2FbQ>

18 The umbrella-term 'Roma' is commonly used in EU policy terminology. It encompasses several groups, including Roma, Sinti, Kale, Romanichels, Boyash/Rudari, Ashkali, Balkan Egyptians, Yenish, Dom, Lom, Rom and Abdal, as well as Traveller populations (gens du voyage, Gypsies, Camminanti, etc.).

19 European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2021, ROMA IN 10 EUROPEAN COUNTRIES, [https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/fra-2022-roma-survey-2021-main-results2\\_en.pdf](https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2022-roma-survey-2021-main-results2_en.pdf)

20 European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2020, ROMA AND TRAVELLERS IN SIX COUNTRIES, [https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/fra-2020-roma-travellers-six-countries\\_en.pdf](https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2020-roma-travellers-six-countries_en.pdf)

and toxic sites, often spatially segregated, living in so-called settlements, slumlands, and improvised camps. Evictions of Roma are described as Europe's silent scandal by a Former Council of Europe commissioner, who also described the appalling housing conditions of Roma as the most visible result of discrimination and social exclusion.

- » Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe Dunja Mijatović signals in her report on the Czech Republic from 2023 that there is no support for Roma on the discrimination experienced in the private housing market. The report spoke of systemic discrimination by local authorities and attempts to prevent Roma from accessing specific housing benefits by establishing 'benefit-free zones'.<sup>21</sup>
- » Council of the EU conclusions published under the Spanish presidency in September 2023<sup>22</sup> stress the existing gap in housing between Roma and the majority of the population. However, under the EU Roma framework housing is the area where MS have failed the worst as a high share of Roma continue to live with no access to basic conditions and discrimination has even increased in some countries in the housing market.
- » Highlights the need for massive investment in affordable public housing for all those who need it; non-discriminatory access to public services for Roma and other racialised communities and an immediate moratorium on forced evictions among Roma. Advocacy on these issues is currently facing hard times, and more strategic litigation is needed in the resistance. Resistance is comprised of a

coalition of international and local Roma and pro-Roma civil society organisations, civil rights anti-racists, housing activist groups, environmentalist groups, and directly affected communities.

### Highlights by Florin Botonogu, Policy Center for Roma and Minorities Romania / ERGO Network:

- » Presenting key messages from the ERGO Network report<sup>23</sup> on Roma access to quality and affordable housing, highlights how the research confirms that policies and legislation adopted so far have failed to improve the situation on the ground. Conclusion of the ERGO Network report is that, according to ETHOS, most Roma in Europe experience some type of homelessness.<sup>24</sup>
- » The key messages from the ERGO survey on housing confirm that policies and legislation adopted so far have failed to improve the situation on the ground. The ERGO report concludes that, according to ETHOS, most Roma in Europe experience some type of homelessness.<sup>25</sup>
- » Urgent and significant investment is needed to improve the structural conditions of the dwellings which most Roma inhabit. We must ensure that the role of the state in housing is to provide housing to the poor (not to the middle class). Additionally, comprehensive desegregation plans are needed, with clear targets, including the legalisation of irregular housing situations and tackling the environmental impact of unsuitable locations. Roma National Frameworks include housing as an objective, but in some (BG, HU, RO, ES) targets are vague, concrete measures are

21 Commissioner for Human Rights of The Council Of Europe Dunja Mijatović, Report Following Her Visit To The Czech Republic From 20 To 24 February 2023

22 <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-13167-2023-INIT/en/pdf>

23 <https://ergonetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Ergo-2023-access-housing-WEB-V4.pdf>

24 ETHOS Typology on Homelessness and Housing Exclusion, <https://www.feantsa.org/en/toolkit/2005/04/01/ethos-typology-on-homelessness-and-housing-exclusion>

25 ETHOS Typology on Homelessness and Housing Exclusion, <https://www.feantsa.org/en/toolkit/2005/04/01/ethos-typology-on-homelessness-and-housing-exclusion>

- lacking, and there are doubts about the political will needed for actual change.
- » Roma housing and energy poverty must be addressed through better access to income and better regulation of the housing and utilities market, while associated bureaucracy should be simplified.
  - » Anti-bias training must be compulsory for all housing actors, including local authorities, alongside strong anti-discrimination legislation; evictions should be a last resort, and must entail due notice and the provision of decent alternative housing. Work is needed to better improve the knowledge among these actors and raise awareness.
  - » Policy makers and all housing actors must cooperate with Roma stakeholders and their civil society representatives to ensure evidence-based solutions, support disaggregated data collection, foster common understanding, and bridge cultural gaps. There must be proactive outreach to the Roma and their representatives so that measures respond to actual needs.
  - » Highlights the need for housing stock and more state involvement. 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. Legislation exists but lacks important elements such as segregation or evictions, which require clarification at national level. At the EU Level there is money which comes with several conditions (one is strictly connected to segregation, though it still happened in the previous financial programming period); at the local level there needs to be more understanding of human rights for Roma communities, and funding can be a strong incentive for the local authorities to act.
- » There is a need to change the system and make it more effective and the goal should be to obtain the resources to support beneficiaries as much as possible; fighting the system is necessary because there is no direct access to the resources and to the decision-making process for people directly concerned.
  - » In the UK, when temperatures go below zero degrees special measures are set in place. In such a situation, it was previously decided that only the Roma rough sleepers were to be accommodated into churches and cult venues– the reasoning given for this was that Roma are compact communities and they sleep together, so they should be accommodated together as well. Problems arose with couples not wanting to sleep in common dorms or other issues, and the result was that people remained sleeping rough in sub-zero temperatures. This is an example of failed policies when they are adopted without real involvement of people concerned.
  - » Cultural aspects should also be taken into account, while allowing for local representation and democratic participation of Roma; concentrate on grassroots organisations that act as local mediators between the communities and services, in general.
  - » Authorities need to take Roma on board in the decision-making process and not only for consultation.
  - » Integrated measures are needed for those people who can't obtain the status in the UK to work and to bring their families with them, for whom the only solution remains to return to their country of origin (in Romania) where, most of the time, there is nothing for them. To improve the lives of Roma people we must bring together the local authorities from Romania and the ones from London at the same table and work with an integrated approach when we talk about housing. Coordination between sending and receiving countries/cities is required.

Highlights by Virgil Bitu, Roma Organisation for Training and Advocacy (ROTA), London:



## 11 DECEMBER, WEBINAR II:

### EXCLUSION FACTORS AND GOOD PRACTICES<sup>26</sup>

Marianna Prontera, Cairde, Ireland - Cairde Infoline supporting Roma in homelessness

Cairde is a community development organisation working to reduce health inequalities among minority ethnic groups. Cairde was set-up in 1985 to work on health-related issues and is now a migrant-led organisation that works from a holistic approach through the social determinants of health. Cairde has been working with Roma for about 15 years and the Roma Project involves two key programmes: The National Roma Infoline and The Roma Education Programme.

The National Roma Infoline was established to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and its disproportionate impact on Roma communities in Ireland. It provides information and advocacy on health-related issues to Roma. Two Roma operators have been hired to work full-time on the Infoline. The Roma Education Programme brings together a group of Roma to participate in online classes in English language, literacy, computers, and other relevant topics. The group is mainly made-up of Roma single mothers living in emergency accommodation.

Ireland reached a record levels of homelessness in October 2023, with more than 13,000 people living in emergency accommodation, including close to 4,000 children. Of the adults, 23% are from the EEA or the UK. In the 2022 Census, 16,059 respondents identified as Roma. There is no official data on the number of Roma living in emergency accommodation as the Department of Housing does not collect ethnic data on Roma. However, from the work of Cairde and the other NGOs in Ireland, it can be concluded that Roma are overrepresented in emergency accommodation.

Since the Infoline began functioning in March 2020, 30% of the calls received were in relation to accommodation. Cairde data shows that almost 70% of Roma who called the Infoline were homeless. The Infoline provides with information as well as conducts advocacy with services.

Raluca Ioana Motei, Kirkens Bymisjon, Norway - Working with Roma destitute mobile EU citizens in Oslo.

Anti-Roma racism in Norway is high - 38% of Norwegians would rather not have Roma as neighbours. Beneficiaries of Kirkens Bymisjon (City Mission) are diverse: Norwegian Roma who have status of national minority and EU Roma often from Romania, many coming from marginalisation and social hardship. Church City Mission in Oslo tries to cover basic needs by offering social support and improving people's situation at socio-political level. A café is open six days a week which offers coffee, tea, and warm meal, a laundry, storage space and a correspondence address. Every week an outreach team is going to the streets to find the new people in town and to share information. An emergency shelter for women is ran with 80 beds. Social counselling and specific support are offered in a wide range of cases. The City Mission makes constant efforts to understand and support Roma migrants who are visiting the shelter, the team includes Romanian social workers who speak the same language as the Roma guest, starting from the point that this kind of connection is essential as it often breaks barriers and builds trust. Constantly improving knowledge about Roma culture, history, and way of life helps the staff to better understand the background and to meet their guests as best as possible. The aim is to make the Roma guests feel understood and respected.

Beyond meeting basic needs, the City Mission centre has taken steps to foster deeper empowerment and social political engagement within the Roma community in Oslo. Focus group discussions on discrimination and racism were held to get a picture of the preoccupation among

26 Webinar recording available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VzVXgOUPUN4>

the guests about these issues – many participants said they would like to speak more and louder about these issues which affect them, and proposed publishing their experiences in newspapers/interview or organising a protest with big posters saying 'stop racism'. Support was offered for these ideas which were put into practice by publishing the Accepted racism magazine and organising a Roma culture day in November 2021. The Accepted racism is a magazine that tries to counteract discrimination by bringing attention to different Roma voices and their personal experiences (through both images and text); it was not a collection of stories, it was a collaboration and a fusion of stories echoing the reality faced by the Roma community and shedding light on the complex issue of antigypsyism. A training was organised for those involved, to learn about the process of photography.

They also organise a project for Roma women, 'Kale Balla', at the emergency shelter. Once a week a meeting was organised with the ladies to discuss subjects that can be considered sensitive; each session had a pre-established theme featuring a guest speaker invited to share insights and to initiate discussions on that particular subject (examples of topics include human rights, domestic violence, Roma history, women's struggles, antigypsyism, nutrition and physical activities). The feedback expressed a desire for more opportunities to learn, for more relaxing activities which foster community among women who come to Norway and presented an opportunity for the staff to learn as well.

### Cristina de la Serna, Fundacion Secretariado Gitano – Presentation of FSG 'Study of the characteristics and circumstances of people living in slum and substandard housing settlements in Spain' and proposed solutions

The Fundación Secretariado Gitano (FSG) is an intercultural social non-profit organisation that provides services for the development and the

defence of the Roma community in Spain and in Europe. Its activity started in the 1960s, but it was legally established in 1982. FSG's mission is to promote the access of Roma to rights, services, goods, and social resources on an equal footing with the rest of the citizenry. To this end, the FSG develops all kinds of actions that contribute to achieving the full citizenship of Roma: to improving their living conditions, to promoting equal treatment, and to preventing any form of discrimination, while promoting the recognition of the cultural identity of the Roma community. In 2023, FSG published a study documenting and analysing the profile of people living in settlements as a situation of structural discrimination, structural racism and antigypsyism.<sup>27</sup>

Summary of the FSG study: 0.05% of the total population in Spain lives in substandard dwellings in settlements (out of 23,419 people living in these conditions, 93% are Roma from Spain and only a few come from Romania and Portugal); though the number is not high, the human rights impact of living in such conditions is huge. The study found that conditions of habitability are incompatible with the right to a dignified life and 91% of those surveyed declared that they would prefer to live in other areas or neighbourhoods. Very high rates of poverty were found as well, 80%, with only 35% receiving minimum income. Serious limitations were found regarding other rights, in particular regarding women. Most of the population living in the settlements belonged to an ethnic minority (92%) with the Roma being the largest group living in such settlements (they represent 77%). According to European human rights standards, this is proof that these settlements exist because we have a situation of structural racism and structural antigypsyism, a situation that would not exist if it would affect the majority population. Children (under 16) comprise half of the population in the settlements out of which 40% are less than 6 years old. Spatial segregation and normalised discrimination in a segregated space were also found.

---

27 [https://www.gitanos.org/estudios/study\\_of\\_the\\_characteristics\\_and\\_circumstances\\_of\\_people\\_living\\_in\\_slum\\_and\\_substandard\\_housing\\_settlements\\_in\\_spain.html.en](https://www.gitanos.org/estudios/study_of_the_characteristics_and_circumstances_of_people_living_in_slum_and_substandard_housing_settlements_in_spain.html.en)

The lack of political will is highlighted which also explains why there is an underuse of the EU funding. This appears due to structural antigypsyism. In some places, the political leaders say that they do not want to offer social houses to Roma because then they would become unpopular due to racist attitudes, which would partly explain the lack of action.

### Sabrina Ignazi, Caritas Ambrosiana, Milan, Italy - Apascial Mobile Unit

In 1996, Caritas created an office for Roma people, and in 2014 it started a mobile service to meet Roma individuals and families living in irregular and unhealthy conditions. In Milan, as well as in other Italian big cities, Roma live in different housing conditions which can be regular apartments (in ownership or rented); camps built around and run by municipalities; irregular camps on pieces of land where it is forbidden to build because they are meant for agricultural purposes and people run the risk of being evicted; informal settlements in abandoned areas; and buildings and squats. Families living in irregular housing conditions, both settlements and squats, are mostly immigrants from Romania and some from former Yugoslavia who came to Italy during the 60s and 70s and did not manage to regularise their status ever since, therefore they are stateless. People tend to move around in caravans, and they move from town to town.

Since the beginning of our intervention, many Roma families who came from Romania moved from informal settlements to squats in order to achieve a more stable housing condition – this helped with regular attendance to school for children and the chance to find and keep a job for adults.

In the settlements, evictions happen on a daily basis. Discrimination is an issue in Italy as well, in the case of Roma, on the housing market, while affordable housing is a general issue at the national level. Camps have been used to accommodate Roma since back in the 70s and

have become ghettos, segregated spaces where some families have been living there for decades, excluding them from society and preventing their access to regular housing. Italy has worked to combat these situations as part of the national strategy for Roma, however the process is slow because of the difficulties in finding available housing.

The work of Caritas includes meeting Roma people who would otherwise be unable to get in touch with services; understanding their needs in order to guide them to appropriate services; and support with applying for public housing and networking with both public and private services.

How are the needs of Roma met: during the last 10 years, the municipality of Milan has been seriously addressing this issue by opening community centres for the accommodation of evicted families, both from houses and informal settlements (with social and educational support) meant as a first step to public housing. Furthermore, the municipality of Milan is implementing the European strategic framework to overcome public camps. Five years ago, the municipality of Milan started a public service specifically conceived to meet the needs of Roma.

## 13 DECEMBER 2023, WEBINAR III. EXCLUSION FACTORS AND GOOD PRACTICES<sup>28</sup>

### Katarína Beňová, DOM.ov project in Eastern Slovakia (Innovative Financial and Legal Mechanisms – Better Housing for Socially – or Space Oppressed Communities)

Project DOM.ov is an NGO that helps people change their lives through self-help house construction, where the houses are owned by the people themselves, located on legal land and can provide safe environmental conditions for families. A legal house in ownership of the

---

28 Webinar recording available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O4jKrbUnHWA>

client, i.e., a place that can be called home. The organisation assists the client on the way to achieving a legal ownership by working with the client, with the municipality and with the bank (banks provide micro-loans for the construction of the house).

The recruitment process: Meetings with Roma are organised to explain the programme, explain what self-help construction is and what it would mean for them if they would like to participate - the solution is long-term and requires hard work from people who engage with the programme. Following the recruitment process, for those who decide to enter the programme a 'savings phase' follows - in this period the clients need to save the money for buying the land where houses will be built. Intensive work with the family is conducted in this period to ensure that they are eligible for a loan from the bank and that they can re-pay the loan in the next 18 years. Social work is provided as well as various training courses, for example financial education, in which each family budget is analysed and the consequences of ownership of a legal house are explained. An important focus is placed on debt management, given that a lot of participants already have a lot of debts which can constitute a problem with the loan application at the bank. Employment consulting also occurs to ensure that people have a job when applying for a loan, a criterion of the banks to be eligible; this counselling lasts one year for savings and employment. The next phase is purchasing the land and signing the loan contract.

The land is purchased from the savings and the loan from the bank is used for the construction of the house. The construction phase takes around one year or longer, depending on the weather, during which construction coordinators and instructors support the clients to learn hard skills regarding constructions. These skills can also be used for the future job opportunities as the construction is 'self-help' style, meaning the construction is completed by the clients themselves, with guidance from instructors who make sure the housing rules are respected.

The last phase can be considered the 'owning of

the house' and 'repayment of the loan' when the family can live in their legally constructed house and enjoy benefits such as water, sewage, heating, electricity, etc. It will take 18 years to repay the loan to the bank. Project DOM.ov has mechanisms in place to support beneficiaries who may struggle to pay the loan at some point, a social worker counsels the family and tries to solve any issues that may create problems with the banks. The project's goal is to develop housing without segregation or discrimination, but it has happened that the houses built have been placed in areas with mostly Roma inhabitants.

### Kumar Vishwanathan, Life Together (The Czech Republic)/ ERGO Network - housing situation of Roma in the Czech Republic

In 1997 there was large flooding in the Czech Republic and a lot of people in Ostrava lost their homes, including many Roma who were left to live in buildings with terrible conditions. Clear antigypsyism was present at that time; both Roma and non-Roma lost their homes, but only the non-Roma received flats to relocate to. In 1997 the Roma people in Ostrava said that they wanted to build their own houses if municipalities would not provide support, and this is how the work of Life Together with the community started. Funding was provided from Caritas, until 2005.

The work on housing was initiated following 10 steps in order to meet the needs of people:

1. **Fieldwork** - you must get to know the people.
2. **Community work** - organise the people, have meetings and ask people 'what is troubling your heart'?
3. **Targeting** - if housing is an issue raised by people, focus on it.
4. **Empowering** - elected council formed by people affected by the floods to work with the municipality.

5. **Participation** – it was decided together with the Roma that the new houses will be placed where the majority of the population lived, because Roma said ‘we do not want to be living in a ghetto’.

6. **Decision making** – a council for taking all relevant decisions was set up with 2 representatives from the NGO Life Together, the community affected by the floods had three representatives and two from Caritas organisation.

7. **Capacity building support** was done in order to organise the people.

8. **Health, social and education support** was also ensured with involvement of the mothers and attention to educational segregation.

9. **Construction phase with participation of the people** (2001) - the company which won the contract had an obligation to train and hire seven men from the community and to allow all the families to participate on a smaller base in the construction.

10. **Maintenance of the houses** – ensure participation of people for maintenance later on.

---

# 4

## Conclusion



Roma communities across Europe have been historically oppressed and excluded from societies through anti-Roma laws meant to separate them from the majority of the population. Anti-gypsyism/anti-Roma racism, stigmatisation, and exclusion from all areas of public life continue to be a reality nowadays, despite multiple policies set in place to combat these issues and an increased resistance and activism from the Roma movement.

Consequently, the deep housing deprivation and the current high levels of homelessness experienced by Roma are closely connected to centuries long persecution which has prevented individuals from accessing adequate housing across generations, or the means needed to rent or buy property. Working towards improving Roma housing and preventing the homelessness of Roma people should be a priority at the level of policy makers as well as at the level of implementation of measures.

All initiatives should be developed in a human rights-based approach with awareness of the historical marginalisation and discrimination of Roma. Services should engage with inclusive, holistic, and empowering approaches when addressing homelessness among Roma communities. Housing first and housing-led solutions must also be scaled up to relieve housing precarity among Roma in Europe. As highlighted by the speakers at the FEANTSA webinar series, it is essential to involve Roma themselves in the design and implementation of any support initiative to ensure they are culturally relevant and effective. To succeed, organisations and projects must avoid 'taking care of people', as this is not what is needed. The best way to serve people is to help them serve themselves (Kumar Vishwanathan).

Additionally, collaboration with local authorities, NGOs, and other relevant stakeholders is crucial. More field work is needed towards the communities, including from homelessness services. Community engagement and involvement in discussions with the authorities should also be reinforced. The homelessness sector can also increase flexibility and design tailored services

to the different needs that Roma may have, such as safe spaces for women, for LGBT+ Roma or couples.

At EU level more action and investment are needed, including conditionality when it comes to accessing EU funds and how they are used. No EU funds should contribute to increasing the segregation of Roma. The EU and its member states must strengthen legislation and support measures to ensure that Roma have equal access to adequate housing and that homelessness situations are prevented, especially in relation to forced evictions or when Roma exercise their right of free movement within the EU.

## RESOURCES ON ROMA, HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS

- » Marina Csikós, Training modules: Learning About Europe's Biggest Ethnic Minority - The Roma. A tool for professionals working with destitute EU migrants of Roma background, 2023, FEANTSA, available at <https://www.feantsa.org/en/toolkit/2023/05/16/learning-about-europes-biggest-ethnic-minority-the-roma?bcparent=27>
- » Adrian Marsh, video Roma 101: Roma Identity, History and Historiography, ERIAC, 2020, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sPBio-ER0Fk>
- » Video, Roma Slavery: History, Legacy, Reparations, Margareta Matache, ERIAC, 2021, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ubb7dohTISA>
- » The non-legally binding working definition of antigypsyism/anti-Roma discrimination, IHRA, 2020, available at <https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/resources/working-definitions-charters/working-definition-antigypsyism-anti-roma-discrimination>
- » Video, Gy\*\*\*\*\*s' Lives in Limbo after Eviction in Romania, Wall Street Journal, 2014, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kUIZBaphe7A>
- » Amnesty International, Roma on the Margins: Housing Rights Denied, 2016, available at <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2016/04/roma-on-the-margins-housing-rights-denied/>
- » Other News. Voices Against the Tide, Conditions Faced by Roma People – from Bad to Worse, 2011, available at <https://www.other-news.info/2011/11/conditions-faced-by-roma-people-from-bad-to-worse/>
- » FEANTSA Homeless in Europe Magazine Winter 2020 - Roma Experiences Of Homelessness In Europe, available at <https://www.feantsa.org/en/newsletter/2020/12/18/homeless-in-europe-magazine-winter-2020?bcParent=27>
- » Dr Ionut Ciorta, Heriot-Watt University, Exploring the phenomenon of Roma homelessness in the UK, 2023, available at <https://www.hw.ac.uk/news/articles/2023/roma-people-living-in-the-uk-are.htm>



- » Camilla Ida Ravnbøl, University of Copenhagen, Lecture at Raoul Wallenberg Institute of Human Rights and Humanitarian Law, 'Law and Life Among Homeless Roma in Copenhagen' 2019, available at <https://youtu.be/loAa61OkKlo?si=3TQQ7UlqSyKpHPI>
- » Solvor Mjøberg Lauritzen and Maria Dumitru, 'Roma Experiencing Rough Sleeping in Westminster and Beyond: Evaluating New Approaches', 2023, available at <https://whpartnership.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Roma-Experiencing-Rough-Sleeping-23-May-2023-FINAL.pdf>
- » FEANTSA joint statement on the approval of the Resolution by the European Parliament urging the European Commission to launch an EU action plan to eradicate Roma settlements by 2030, 2022, available at <https://www.feantsa.org/en/feantsa-position/2022/10/05/?bcParent=27>
- » FEANTSA Statement on International Roma Day 2022: Addressing homelessness and poor housing among Roma communities in the post-2020 national strategies for Roma equality, inclusion, and participation – available at <https://www.feantsa.org/en/feantsa-position/2022/04/08/feantsa-statement?bcParent=27>
- » FEANTSA Position 2019: The EU Roma Framework beyond 2020. A homelessness service providers perspective, available at <https://www.feantsa.org/en/feantsa-position/2019/03/22/the-eu-roma-framework-beyond-2020-a-homelessness-service-providers-perspective?bcParent=27>
- » Pavee Point Ireland, Advocacy Paper on Traveller Homelessness <https://www.paveepoint.ie/traveller-homelessness-page/>
- » UN Human Rights, Office of the Commissioner, Addressing Forced Evictions of Roma and Travellers, available at [https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Minorities/Roma\\_and\\_forced\\_evictions.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Minorities/Roma_and_forced_evictions.pdf)



Co-funded by the European Union.  
By the EaSI strand of the ESF+ programme.

Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or ESF+. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.



**FEANTSA**

**European Federation of National Organisations  
Working with the Homeless**

194 Chaussée de Louvain, 1210 Brussels, Belgium

[www.feantsa.org](http://www.feantsa.org)

Follow us

 /FEANTSA\_ORG

Like us

 /FEANTSA

Follow us

 @FEANTSA

Connect with us

 FEANTSA