

FEANTSA dedicates their winter 2020 edition of the Homeless in Europe magazine to the Roma individuals and families who experience homelessness or are at risk of homelessness across the EU. The majority of the Roma people across the EU experience racialized poverty, including housing deprivation, at a much higher level than the non-Roma. Roma are also at a higher risk of becoming homeless and face more barriers in accessing support mechanisms when living in homelessness. The COVID-19 pandemic has deepened such inequalities.

People across the world have found themselves helpless and vulnerable in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, a global health, economic, and social crisis. The lives of marginalized and oppressed groups, including homeless people, have been particularly shaken, not only by the pandemic, but also by the increase of pre-existing structural inequalities.

In October 2020, in the midst of the pandemic, a new EU Roma strategic framework for equality, inclusion and participation was adopted. One of the objectives of the European Commission under this framework is to improve housing conditions for Roma people. Member States are now preparing the national strategies for Roma inclusion for the next

ten years. Despite an improved framework, the post 2020 EU Roma strategic framework is regarded by some with scepticism. One area which is driving this scepticism is related to the limited results of the last decade of Roma inclusion. Housing was one of them. Inadequate housing, forced evictions, and homelessness among Roma as well as their multiple causes have been poorly addressed. Housing is the area of action with the least registered improvement.

While policies have been created, hate speech and discrimination against Roma have also acquired new levels and dimensions this year. Militarized operations were registered in Roma communities and people were at an even higher risk of homelessness and health threats since forced evictions continued in this period. Moreover, many continued to live in homelessness during the pandemic.

At FEANTSA, we have been working to underline the increasing need of support for Roma who experience homelessness in their origin countries as well as when they travel within the EU fleeing discrimination, looking for better lives and work opportunities. Migration for economic survival has led Roma from the poorer MS in the EU to countries of the south and, after the Euro crisis, further to the west and north.

EDITORIAL



By **Simona Barbu**, FEANTSA Policy Officer

In many of these host MS, mobile EU citizens face difficulties in accessing their social rights. Housing and shelter are not available, and people end up sleeping rough or counting on the homeless service providers for temporary shelter and counsel for their rights. Discrimination remains part of the lives of Roma when they travel. In testimony to this stand the cases where Roma experienced collective expulsions, abusive deportations from and imprisonment in host MS as well as hate speech and hate crimes. Despite these dire conditions Roma still travel abroad because the chances are still better, and in the words of the Roma woman interviewed for this magazine, “we have to.”

Indeed, anti-Roma racism targets Roma in many ways in their home countries. Housing deprivation and overcrowding, forced evictions, relocation to toxic areas as well as residential segregation are common and persistent problems that Roma communities face in many MS. The [walls that separate Roma from non-Roma](#) within the same neighbourhood or the same locality have shamed Europe internationally as blatant proof of anti-Roma racism while deepening their exclusion in countries like Czech Republic, Romania, and Slovakia.

The history of Roma in Europe is defined by a continuum of racial injustice. Anti-Roma laws appeared in Europe as early as Roma arrived on the continent. In Romania, Roma have been enslaved for almost 500 years, starting with the fourteenth century. Spain interned, subjected to forced labour, hurt and killed, 12 000 Roma for simply “being Roma” in 1749 during “The Great “G*psy” Round-up. 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. During the Holocaust, an estimate of more than 500,000 Roma were murdered by the Nazi-occupation – at Auschwitz-Birkenau there was a “G*psy camp”

and people received a tattoo with a “Z” for “Zigeuner”. In Serbia, in 1941 ministerial laws prohibited access of Roma children to public education. The communist times continued the oppression of Roma: though many remember they had a job and a safe income; this period is also tainted with denial of the Roma culture and language as well as a continuous discrimination. Roma history is often unknown to larger society and, on a national level, Europeans have failed in addressing their consequences and implementing effective anti-discrimination measures and ensuring reparations. But the EU has indeed reached out to MS through the available legislation for more than a decade now in order to support the inclusion of Roma. An evaluation of these actions shows us that housing for Roma is one of the areas where continuous investment is required as “*Especially due to inadequate and segregated housing the housing situation remains difficult.*” However, Roma people continue to live in overcrowded housing, with no connection to water, with no toilet, shower or bathroom.

This winter edition of FEANTSA’s Homeless in Europe magazine speaks to these harsh realities and brings forward critical contributions from Roma and pro-Roma organisations, as well as Roma and pro-Roma rights activists and researchers. We aimed to give space to Roma voices in these pages, including Roma academics and activists. In particular, we wanted to interview a young Roma woman who has shared with us her experiences of homelessness in the streets of Europe’s capital, Brussels. Felicia [pseudonym] talks about the lack of opportunities at home in Romania “for us, Roma.” She has not heard much about the support measures that the EU framework should facilitate for Roma in MS like Romania, but her message is clear for the European Institutions: ***We need jobs, but jobs that we can work in here [in Belgium], so that we can support our families and to have a roof over our heads when we stay here. We need a place to sleep when we get here!***

The contributions in the magazine combine a European perspective with national analysis. At the national level, we started with our very own Belgium, the home of the EU institutions where Daniela Novac, outreach worker from DIOGENES, a Roma woman from Romania and a migrant herself talks to FEANTSA about the importance of a support system for mobile EU citizens in a host MS and that of an address. Moving forward, we explore the situation of Roma in Sweden for which Amnesty International's Johanna Westeson discusses the reports of hate crimes against Roma EU citizens in Sweden and their denied access to housing. Next, we look at Roma in France where Lila Cherief at the Collectif National Droits de l'Homme Romeurope condemns the lack of options that Roma face when evicted from informal settlements. In Denmark, destitute Roma couples use a patchwork economic strategy to support their families back home. Camilla Ida Ravnbøl from Copenhagen University presents the fragility of these strategies during a global health crisis. In another Scandinavian country, Norway, social workers from Kirkens Bymisjon support destitute Roma to claim their rights and Bianca Irina Cristea and Maren Stinessen raise a critical question: is society listening to Roma? Marian Mandache, Roma activist and former director of the oldest Roma NGO in Romania (Romani CRISS), gives an account of the bleak systemic racism Roma face in accessing housing in Romania. Belén Sánchez-Rubio, Carolina Fernández and Maite Andrés of the Fundación Secretariado Gitano signal the persistent and structural problems concerning the existence of slums across Spain where Roma continue to live. As Brexit unfolds, we also look at the repercussions for Roma who sleep rough – Rory Meredith and Matt Cary at the Roma Support Group discuss the future of Roma rough sleepers in the UK.

For a European perspective on the situation of Roma in homelessness and housing exclusion we invited two European Roma NGOs, the European Roma Grassroots Organisations Network (Amana Ferro and Isabela Mihalache) and the European Roma Rights Centre (Bernard Rorke) to contribute. Marius Tudor, Roma Senior Advisor within the European Parliament calls for a strategic document for the Inclusion of Romani people with a binding character for the Member States in terms of implementation.

Tens of thousands or maybe more Roma experience homelessness across the EU. Like Felicia, our interviewee, most of them maintain a hopeful attitude and tell everyone why they travel abroad from countries like Romania, Poland, Bulgaria, Slovakia or the Czech Republic, to name a few. While many passers-by wonder if it is worth it and reject people on the streets of the big European cities, Roma continue to struggle, to resist as they did in the past through the oppression they faced. Resistance and strength are not optional for oppressed peoples.

Roma and pro-Roma civil society and human rights activists have worked to raise awareness, to empower Roma communities and to realise Roma rights. It is timely that these efforts and struggles be met with concrete actions and support measures from Member States at national level in coordination with the EU. The place of Roma in society needs to be restored and for this we need reparatory and anti-racist measures.

With this issue of FEANTSA's magazine we aim at raising awareness on the particular need of quick intervention to improve living conditions for Roma and to prevent them from ending up in homelessness.

Homelessness is not a choice. Housing is a right.