

THE SITUATION OF ROMA IN EUROPE

ERGO NETWORK SNAPSHOT OF

Housing and Assistance for the Homeless



One in three Roma (32%) live in households with a leaking roof, damp walls, or rot.



41% of Roma felt discriminated when looking for housing.



76% of Roma live in a neighbourhood where all or most residents are Roma.



78% of Roma live in overcrowded households.



Up to 10% of caravan dwellers and Roma were evicted at least once in the past five years in Belgium and France.



26% of Roma and Travellers live in housing with bad conditions.



Travellers in Ireland are especially affected by bad housing conditions such as leaking roofs, mould and damp walls.



One in five Roma (20%) live in dwellings that are too dark.

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.), as defined by the [European Commission](#).

Europe is facing a deep housing crisis ever since the last financial recession ten years ago, if not before. Accommodation is scarce, and costs are prohibitive, with housing expenses representing an ever-increasing share of household disposable incomes. In this context, Roma communities are particularly hard hit, as they are frequently unable to meet housing costs, a situation which often results in evictions and entire families ending up homeless.

Not being able to legally prove ownership of a family abode that has been used for generations is another common factor that leads to forced evictions.

Last but not least, the Roma are 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.

In Ireland, Travellers are significantly over-represented in the homeless population, however one third of all local authorities in 2018 consistently failed to utilise their ring-fenced Traveller accommodation budgets. Two state-commissioned reports show that the key reason was opposition to proposed Traveller-specific planning applications by members of the public and elected representatives.



Banished at the margins, many Roma end up living in informal settlements and segregated neighbourhoods in inadequate dwellings, without access to utilities' infrastructure, and in unsanitary conditions. Many communities are disproportionately exposed to environmental degradation and pollution stemming from waste dumps and landfills, contaminated sites, or dirty industries. Around half of Romanian Roma live close to waste dumps.

The Covid-19 pandemic has evidenced that poor housing conditions represent a systemic risk for the public health system, placing a disproportionate burden on Roma inhabitants and requiring a longer-term government response to build resilience.

Europe should honour its commitments and deliver on adequate housing for the Roma, one of the four sectoral priorities of the EU Strategic Framework for Roma Equality, Inclusion and Participation, supported also in the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals (11).

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Recommendations



- Regulate and implement in practice the concept of “adequate housing” for all, including Roma, as defined by the United Nations: “Adequate shelter means more than a roof over one's head. It also means adequate privacy; adequate space; physical accessibility; adequate security; security of tenure; structural stability and durability; adequate lighting, heating and ventilation; adequate basic infrastructure, such as water-supply, sanitation and waste-management facilities, suitable environmental quality and health-related factors; and adequate and accessible location with regard to work and basic facilities: all of which should be available at an affordable cost”.
- Recovery efforts must include temporary suspension of mortgage payments and utility bills, a suspension of forced closing of utility services and evictions for families at risk as a result of the pandemic, particularly those already experiencing difficulties, such as the Roma.
- Establish a legal framework to provide effective protection against unlawful evictions, in line with international human rights standards. Support the legalisation of informal settlements and property rights for dwellings where Roma live.
- Provide for permanent, decent, affordable, environmentally safe, desegregated housing for Roma in the case of lawful evictions, which must be strictly defined by legislation enshrining a human rights approach. This should include consultations with the community, reasonable notice, provision of information, effective legal remedies and free legal assistance.
- Invest in long-term solutions to address inadequate, overcrowded housing conditions and lack of access to basic utilities in Roma communities, by delivering quality social housing which is accessible to the Roma, and by capping rents and property prices for family dwellings.
- Define segregation as illegal in housing, in conformity with the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination (ICERD).

- Undertake a systematic review of housing legislation, policies and practices in Member States and remove all provisions and procedures that result in direct or indirect discrimination against Roma. Establish adequate mechanisms to ensure compliance with anti-discrimination laws and allow for participation of Roma representatives and NGOs at all stages of monitoring.
- Affirm and ensure the right of people to pursue a nomadic lifestyle and provide the necessary quality infrastructure (camping sites etc) for such lifestyles to be pursued. Invest in creative alternatives to by-pass the need for a fixed address to access services and income.
- Integrate a new policy focus on environmental justice, in particular regarding the disproportionate exposure of Roma to environmental degradation, pollution and natural hazards, the denial of environmental services, and forced evictions – as well as the relationship between environmental degradation in segregated settlements and poor health outcomes.
- Establish appropriate monitoring mechanisms to ensure the implementation of housing policies and practices for Roma, involving Roma representatives through the process.
- Ensure targeted EU funding for addressing Roma housing exclusion, through better quality housing and living conditions for Roma. Substantial resources must be made available in national programming for inclusive housing projects accessible to Roma in the framework of multi-fund programmes combining the ERDF and ESF.
- The EU should continue and further initiate infringement proceedings against Member States in cases where EU law has been breached and follow up on the proceedings, including in cases of forced evictions.

Sources

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- European Commission, Report on the implementation of national Roma integration strategies, 2019
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- Department of Housing Planning and Local Government, Review of Funding for Traveller Specific Accommodation Programmes, The Housing Agency Dublin, July 2019.
- Paragraph 60 of the United Nations Habitat Agenda, and General Comments Nos. 4 and 7 of the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR)



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This snapshot is an excerpt from ERGO Network’s position paper [How to ensure that the European Pillar of Social Rights delivers on Roma equality, inclusion, and participation?](#), October 2020.