



# EUROPEAN ROMA GRASSROOTS ORGANISATIONS (ERGO) NETWORK

## *Implementing the EU Roma Strategic Framework Roma access to quality and affordable housing*

28 November 2023  
10:00 – 13:00

### *Conference Report*



## Conference Programme

### 10h Opening Remarks

- *Dr. Zuzana Havírová*, ERGO Network Vice-Chair (Roma Advocacy and Research Center, Slovakia)
- *Annelisa Cotone*, Cabinet of Helena Dalli, European Commissioner for Equality
- *Hon. Peter Pollák MEP* (EPP, Slovakia)

### 10h20 PANEL 1: Roma access to quality and affordable housing: Launch of the research report and recommendations

**Moderator:** *Edit Lakatos*, Housing Europe

- *Florin Botonogu*, Policy Center for Roma and Minorities (Romania) / ERGO Network
- *Simona Barbu*, FEANTSA
- *Claudia Singer*, Eurocities
- Exchange with the audience

### 11h20 Comfort break

### 11h35 PANEL 2: The status of implementation of the National Roma Strategic Frameworks in the area of housing and environmental justice

**Moderator:** *Isabela Mihalache*, ERGO Network

- *Marek Hojsík*, Central European University / Roma Civil Monitoring project coordinator
- *Diego Marin*, European Environmental Bureau
- *Bianca Galusca*, FAGiC (Spain) / ERGO Network
- *Dragan Joković*, OTAHARIN (Bosnia and Herzegovina) / ERGO Network
- Exchange with the audience

### 12h45 Closing Session

- *Alejandro Gil* – Presentation of a summary of the day through graphic recording
- *Paul Divakar Namala*, Global Forum of Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent
- *Jamen Gabriela Hrabaňová*, ERGO Network Director

### 13h Lunch (for on-site participants)



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**On 28 November, ERGO Network held its annual Policy Conference, dedicated to Roma access to quality and affordable housing and to taking stock of the implementation of the European and National Roma Strategic Frameworks, with a focus on housing and environmental justice**



Many Roma still live in informal settlements and segregated neighbourhoods, in inadequate dwellings and disastrous living conditions. Unable to meet ever-rising housing costs or to prove legal ownership of their home, they endure forced evictions, homelessness, and antigypsyism from local authorities, landlords, and neighbours. The event launched ERGO Network’s research report on “[Roma access to quality and affordable housing](#)”, based on six national case studies carried out in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, and Spain, with benchmarking evidence from six additional countries. The second part of the event assessed the state of play of the National Roma Strategic Frameworks in EU and enlargement countries and their alignment with the EU Roma Strategic Framework and linked Council Recommendation, with a particular focus on the areas of housing and environmental issues.

The event was well attended with over 60 participants on site and online, and it brought together ERGO Network national members from the grassroots level, as well as other national practitioners, European civil society organisations, policymakers from the European institutions and national governments, and other relevant stakeholders.

You can read a summary of the proceedings below, as well as access the recording ([part 1](#), [part 2](#)), check out the [photo album](#), and read our website [news article](#) about the conference.



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## OPENING REMARKS

### Dr Zuzana Havírová

ERGO Network Vice-Chair of the Board, Roma Advocacy and Research Center, Slovakia

Dr Havírová welcomed participants and spoke about the situation of Roma living in Europe, particularly housing conditions, stressing ERGO Network's commitment to combatting antigypsyism and Roma poverty, while strengthening (pro-)Roma civil society participation in decision-making at all levels. She outlined the structure of the event and encouraged participants and guests to join the debate for a better Europe for Roma. Dr Havírová also thanked speakers, moderators, and guests, and wished all attendants a fruitful morning of discussion.

🔗 [Access the full intervention here.](#)



### Annelisa Cotone

Cabinet of Helena Dalli, European Commissioner for Equality

Ms Cotone began her intervention by reminding participants that, unfortunately, as many as half of all Roma in Europe still lived in poor and inadequate dwellings. She highlighted the importance of not leaving anyone behind, and the commitment of the European Commission to make it a reality. Ms Cotone told participants that the current decade should be dedicated to achieving Roma inclusion. She concluded her opening remarks by reaffirming the European Commission's ability and willingness to provide both financial support as well as guidance to Member States, in order to ensure that Roma inclusion overall, including access to quality and affordable housing and to environmental justice, was prioritised, not least in the context of the implementation of the EU Roma Strategic Framework.



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## Hon. Peter Pollák MEP European Parliament, EPP Group, Slovakia

Mr Peter Pollák highlighted that housing was a priority of his mandate, and that poverty, segregation, and stigmatisation had no place in the EU. However, he emphasised, the state of Roma housing and living conditions continued to be very bad, homelessness was on the rise, housing costs represented a significant obstacle, and social housing was not fit for purpose. Mr Pollák further gave the example of his own country, Slovakia, where the living conditions of the Roma from marginalised communities were deemed a disgrace and a scandal during a recent visit by Members of the European Parliament. He referenced the pilot project [Housing and Empowerment of Roma \(HERO\)](#), initiated by himself and Tomáš Zdechovský MEP (EPP Group, Czech Republic). Mr Pollák concluded by calling on Member States to step up efforts to remedy the situation, including by using EU funds, while he also stressed the key role of civil society and grassroots actors to keep the pressure on.

👉 [Watch the full video intervention here.](#)



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## PANEL 1

### Roma access to quality and affordable housing



### Florin Botonogu

Policy Center for Roma and Minorities (Romania) / ERGO Network

Mr Botonogu presented the ERGO Network 2023 research report on Roma access to quality and affordable housing, based on case studies carried out in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, and Spain, with additional benchmarking evidence from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ireland, Kosovo, North Macedonia, and Türkiye. The key messages of the report:

1. *Roma living conditions are significantly worse than those of the majority, while most Roma experience de facto homelessness.*
2. *Most Roma live in segregated communities and / or informal settlements, and many are exposed to environmental hazards.*
3. *High costs of housing and overcomplex administrative procedures further reduce Roma access to housing.*
4. *The Roma continue to face antigypsyism and forced evictions.*
5. *Social housing holds great potential for Roma housing, but it is currently under-utilised.*
6. *Roma communities and their civil society organisations must be involved, in order to co-create sustainable ways forward.*

☞ **Access the full PowerPoint presentation [here](#), and the research report [here](#).**



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## Simona Barbu FEANTSA

Ms Barbu recalled the staggering finding of the report that most Roma covered by the research experienced homelessness according to the FEANTSA-developed [ETHOS](#) typology. She then provided a brief overview of homelessness in Europe, which is on the rise. Ms Barbu highlighted that disaggregated data on homelessness and housing deprivation were badly needed, not least in order to capture the specific situation of Roma across Europe. She concluded by recalling some of the relevant EU policy instruments, including the EU Roma Framework and its housing objective – unfortunately, the one where the least progress was recorded – as well as others, such as the recent European Parliament resolution on Roma living in settlements.

☞ [Access the full PowerPoint here](#), and the [FEANTSA Magazine on Roma homelessness here](#).

## Claudia Singer Eurocities

Ms Singer congratulated ERGO Network on the report and pointed out that its key messages mirrored Eurocities' own mapping of the Roma situation across Europe, including difficult access to quality housing due to discrimination, unaffordability, lack of housing supply, language barriers, and complex administrative procedures. Ms Singer highlighted that cities had learned many lessons, some of them the hard way, about how to tackle the situation, but not all attempts were sufficient or successful. She stressed that housing-first initiatives were paramount, and that many European cities were embracing this approach. Ms Singer concluded by underlining the importance of integrated service provision and comprehensive support, covering also access to employment, education, healthcare, social care, clean energy, and other services.

☞ [Access Eurocities' Roma City Guidelines here](#), and their [open letter on housing for all here](#).



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## Exchange with the audience

Moderated by Edit Lakatos, Housing Europe

Ms Lakatos invited the audience to join in a brief “talk to your neighbour” exercise. Participants were encouraged to spend a few minutes talking to the people sat around them and debate what they thought would be the most effective way to improve the Roma housing situation. Some of the solutions put forward by the audience were political will to address the situation, (social) participation, legalising informal settlements, more public funding for social housing, better legislation regulating social housing, strong Roma civil society which is able to push for legal changes, and disaggregated housing data collection to capture the situation of the Roma.



Ms Lakatos then thanked the speakers and the participants and invited everyone to continue the lively exchange over the comfort break, with refreshments served outside the conference room.



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## SECOND PANEL

### The implementation of the EU and National Roma Strategic Frameworks



**Isabela Mihalache** (*moderator*)

European Roma Grassroots Organisations (ERGO) Network

Ms Mihalache reminded participants that access to desegregated housing, basic services, and environmental justice were covered by the EU Roma Strategic Framework (where access to housing is one of the 4 thematic objectives, with 3 sub-targets), by the European Commission guidance to Member States (including on environmental justice), by the FRA portfolio of indicators (covering also health impacts of environmentally hazardous living conditions), and by the recent Roma-related Council Conclusions (though these fail to make the link to the environmental dimension). She then asked participants to engage through sli.do and contribute what environmental justice meant to each of them.

### What does environmental justice mean to you?



### Marek Hojsík

Central European University / Coordinator of the Roma Civil Monitoring project

Mr Hojsík briefly introduced the work of the Roma Civil Monitoring project on housing. He explained how this work informed the Discussion Paper prepared by the Central European University at the request of the European Commission, as a basis for the work of the 16<sup>th</sup> European Platform for Roma Integration, to take place that week. Mr Hojsík then presented the Discussion Paper, focussing particularly on the topic of housing desegregation.

🔗 [Access the full PowerPoint presentation here and see more about the RCM project here.](#)



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## Diego Marin

European Environmental Bureau

Mr Marin provided an overview of the concept of environmental justice, explaining that it sought to see who in society received environmental benefits and who carried the environmental burdens, which had racial implications but also class ones. He recalled the work that ERGO Network and the EEB have carried out together over the past years, for example through the joint 2019 report on environmental racism [Pushed to the Wastelands](#), or the recent [conference on Roma environmental justice](#) in Cluj. He indicated that this work produced a series of common principles, which will be released soon. Mr Marin concluded by stating that linking environmental justice to Roma rights was a way to give a voice to those previously invisibilised in conversations.



## Bianca Galusca

Federation of Roma Organisations in Catalunya (Spain) / ERGO Network

Ms Galusca spoke of the socio-economic difficulties Roma in Spain face, including regarding their access to housing. She mentioned a number of elements to the latter, such as Roma homelessness, poor living conditions, proliferation of segregated and informal settlements, exposure to environmental hazards, housing-related administrative exclusion, unaffordability of housing, and widespread antigypsyism. Ms Galusca also highlighted the main housing-relevant provisions of the Spanish Roma Strategic Framework. She concluded by putting forward several policy recommendations and some best practices in the field.

🔗 [Access the full PowerPoint presentation here.](#)



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## Dragan Joković

OTAHARIN (Bosnia and Herzegovina) / ERGO Network

Mr Joković provided an overview of the status of implementation of the National Roma Strategic Framework in the area of housing and environmental justice Bosnia and Herzegovina. His presentation covered the main relevant provisions included in the national strategy, including the types of housing care support, and the detailed procedure applicants must follow to access it. Mr Joković showcased three concrete best practices Roma access to housing from his town, Bijeljina, in Bosnia and Herzegovina. He also compared the advantages and disadvantages of various solutions, such as building new social housing units versus repairing the existing stock. Mr Joković also reviewed some environmental justice measures that have been implemented in his country and concluded with a number of concrete recommendations for the future.

☞ [Access the full PowerPoint presentation here](#) and [watch one of the good practices here](#).



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## CLOSING SESSION

### Alejandro Gil

Ale Listens and Draws – graphic facilitation

Alejandro Gil, the graphic facilitator of the conference, provided a visual journey through the morning's proceedings, reminding participants of the important discussions held. The graphic illustrations, prepared in real time during the conference, have been incorporated throughout this report.



### Paul Divakar Namala

Convenor of the Global Forum of Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent

Mr Divakar intervened via video message in the closing of the conference to take the opportunity and present to the audience the finalised regional report *Status of Roma in Europe*, which would be launched in a few days at the 16th session of the UN Forum on Minority Issues, in Geneva. He explained how the report relied mainly on the work of ERGO Network experts Simona Torotcoi and Annamária Pšenková. Mr Divakar concluded by inviting the audience to read the research work, which aimed to shed light on the troubling issues faced by Roma, discriminated on Work and Descent, and the challenges that contributed to the perpetuation of this discrimination.

👉 [Watch the full video intervention here](#) and [access the regional report here](#).



### Jamen Gabriela Hrahaňová

Director, ERGO Network

Ms Hrahaňová thanked all the speakers, the moderators, participants, national members, staff, and all those who took the time to join the event. She reaffirmed ERGO Network's commitment to work together with the European institutions and all stakeholders to ensure that Roma rights and inclusion become a reality also at the grassroots level.



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*This report was compiled by **Amana Ferro**, Senior Policy Adviser  
with the ERGO Network staff team in Brussels.*

*Photographs by **Ana Rozanova**, Communications Officer  
with the ERGO Network staff team in Brussels*

*Graphic recording provided by [Ale Listens and Draws](#).*

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*To find out more about this event, or about ERGO Network's work,  
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