



European Platform for Roma Inclusion 2023

*Ensuring equal access to adequate desegregated housing
through better use of EU and national funds*

*Discussion Paper**

1. The housing situation of Roma in the EU and the most critical issues

Too many Roma¹ in Europe face multiple challenges related to access to adequate and desegregated housing that are rooted in antigypsyism and poverty, as well as the variable efficiency and effectiveness of relevant public policies and services.

According to the latest [FRA's 2021 Roma Survey](#), more than half (52%) of the EU Roma population face **housing deprivation** (meaning that their accommodation exhibits at least one of the following problems: leaking roof, no bath/shower, no indoor toilet, damp walls or rot in window frames, dwelling too dark or humid). Roma children under 15 and persons with health problems are particularly affected by housing deprivation, closely related to residential segregation.² While housing deprivation affects 32% of Roma living in the mainstream population, in neighbourhoods where all or the majority of inhabitants are Roma, the proportion is almost double this, at 61%. Despite improvements since the [FRA's 2016 Survey on Minorities and Discrimination in EU](#), a considerable gap with the general population remains, for whom the housing deprivation rate is significantly lower at 17%. However, no improvement has been observed in tackling the issue of **overcrowding**: 82% of Roma live in overcrowded households compared to 18% in the general population. For Roma, the overcrowding rate is almost identical in ethnic concentrations and mainstream neighbourhoods.³ In these two fields, housing deprivation and overcrowding, the [EU Roma Strategic Framework 2020-2030](#) has set quantitative targets for Member States to reach by 2030: reduce the gap in housing deprivation faced by Roma by at least one-third, cut the

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¹ Unless otherwise specified, this paper uses the term “Roma” as an umbrella term to include Roma, Sinti, Travellers, Roms, Kalé, Manouches, Camminanti, etc., as well as for the population administratively designated as Gens du Voyage, and other groups.

² “Segregation” means the physical and social separation of members of a vulnerable group from mainstream society and unequal access to mainstream, inclusive and high-quality services. “Residential segregation” does not consist only of the physical spatial separation of a vulnerable group from mainstream society (due to empty areas or barriers such as rivers, woods, industrial areas, roads, railways, or other – sometimes intentionally built to isolate the vulnerable group). It also means that diverse social groups live in different parts of the same physical space. This leads to limited or absent positive social interaction and ‘othering’.

³ The FRA Roma survey compared the situation of Roma living in neighbourhoods where “all or most are Roma” and that of Roma living in neighbourhoods where “some or none are Roma”. In this text, we use the terms “ethnic concentration” and “mainstream neighbourhood”, respectively.



overcrowding gap by at least half, and ensure by 2030 that the majority of Roma do not face housing deprivation and no longer live in overcrowded households.

Housing is an important social determinant of health, meaning poor living conditions can lead to health inequities and physical and mental health issues among the Roma.

Better housing is often unaffordable for lower-income households, including a significant proportion of the Roma, and financial support in the form of **housing benefit** in many countries does not reflect the actual cost of adequate accommodation on the market.⁴ Moreover, these benefits are sometimes inaccessible to specific groups in need (such as low-income employees, people living in informal housing/settlements, non-sedentary or intra-EU mobile populations, people without ID documents, or persons without access to information or the internet). The ineffectiveness of these benefits not only hinders people from relocating for employment opportunities but also undermines households' resilience during crises and inhibits their upward social mobility.

However, one of the most significant barriers remains **antigypsyism**. Roma encounter discrimination not only from private landlords when seeking rental housing, but [Roma Civil Monitoring](#) (RCM) has documented cases when mainstream communities have mobilised to prevent middle-class Roma from purchasing homes in their neighbourhoods. The [2021 FRA survey](#) identified that 31% of respondents were prevented from renting a private apartment/house because of their Roma background, and 21% were prevented from buying an apartment/house. Moreover, 18% had come across adverts for housing that excluded or discouraged applicants with a Roma background. Additionally, Roma sometimes face **structural and institutional antigypsyism** when local governments define rules and criteria for the allocation of public housing and social housing in a way that excludes or rejects Roma applicants or provides them with lower quality or segregated housing.⁵ The [2021 FRA survey](#) found that 11% of Roma indicated that municipalities had discriminated against them, and RCM has identified cases when municipal apartments were kept vacant rather than provided to Roma in need. It is not rare that municipalities deliberately develop social housing for Roma only in isolated/segregated or environmentally hazardous places. Among public authorities' worst manifestations of antigypsyism are **forced evictions** without substitute accommodation, making families homeless and increasing the risk of child institutionalisation. Many Member States do not have in place systems to prevent evictions (such as social services, debt management services, and legal aid) and do not provide compensatory

⁴ For example, in Slovakia, housing benefit in 2023 cannot exceed 63.90 EUR/month for a one-member household or 101.90 EUR/month for a household with more members. However, real costs significantly exceed these amounts and differ depending on the type of housing (ownership/rental) and regionally. Moreover, only the lowest-income groups are eligible for these housing benefits.

⁵ For example, in Ireland, the 41/2012 Housing Circular is indirectly impacting Roma trying to access social housing. It advises local housing authorities, when considering whether to accept an application for social housing support from a non-Irish national, to apply employment as a qualifying criterion. As the unemployment rate is extremely high among Roma communities in Ireland, many Roma do not meet this requirement and are systematically excluded from the social housing support system.



integrated support. The very phenomenon of forced evictions would require more systematic monitoring across the EU (yet only FRA's [2019 Roma and Traveller Survey](#) and [2021 Roma Survey](#) have provided some information about this).

Historical legacies (such as former anti-Roma laws), market forces, discrimination and deliberate municipal policies that disadvantage Roma, their lack of opportunities and, at times, individual housing choices (motivated by the desire to avoid mainstream society's antigypsyism and be close to solidarity networks) and demographic factors (including gentrification, "white flight", and better-off households moving out of neighbourhoods in decay) lead to the **spatial concentration and segregation** of Roma. Living in segregated neighbourhoods or settlements traps individuals and communities in a cycle of disadvantage and intergenerational poverty. The latter have significantly less access to job opportunities, education, healthcare, and quality public services (sometimes parallel services are developed). Residential segregation undermines the social and cultural capital that is crucial not only for successful integration into the job market but also for social and political participation generally. Finally, segregated neighbourhoods receive less attention and public investment for their renewal, maintenance of public spaces, security, and safety, and their inhabitants face stigmatisation and exclusion. [FRA 2021 survey data](#) demonstrate that Roma living in ethnic concentrations⁶ are significantly more vulnerable than Roma living in mainstream neighbourhoods as identified through the lower level of completion of secondary education (22% of those living in ethnic concentrations vs 36% in mainstream neighbourhoods), labour inactivity (39% of those living in ethnic concentrations vs 50% in mainstream neighbourhoods), educational segregation (63% of those living in ethnic concentrations vs 14% in mainstream neighbourhoods), and youth NEET (60% of those living in ethnic concentrations vs 50% in mainstream neighbourhoods).

In extreme cases, Roma end up in segregated **informal settlements** that lack public services, transportation, and basic infrastructure, such as sanitation services or drinking water. The [2021 FRA survey data](#) showed that only 70% of Roma households living in ethnic concentrations have tap water in their dwellings compared to 92% residing in mainstream neighbourhoods. The [EU Roma Strategic Framework](#) aims at ensuring that at least 95% of Roma have access to tap water by 2030. Moreover, the inhabitants of informal settlements face the permanent risk of forced eviction, lack security and safety, and are exposed to health risks, as such locations are often located in environmentally hazardous areas.

Non-sedentary populations lack **halting sites** in proximity to urban centres where mainstream public services are available. Existing sites often lack the necessary infrastructure or are environmentally unsuitable.⁷

Intra-EU mobile Roma and Roma from third countries are vulnerable to homelessness as they face discrimination in renting housing and do not have access to social protection

⁶ See footnote 3 *supra*.

⁷ FRA (2020). [Roma and Travellers in six countries: Roma and Travellers Survey](#).



mechanisms. This often relegates them to rough sleeping or living in informal settlements while residing abroad in host countries. The problem is aggravated further by the fact that Roma and “foreigners” are highly exposed to hate speech and hate crimes.⁸

2. Housing and EU governance

Housing policy is a competence of the EU Member States, who have committed to respect, protect, and promote the right to adequate housing as defined by international law. Namely, [General Comment No. 4](#) to the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) defines adequate housing according to the dimensions of habitability, affordability, accessibility, security of tenure, cultural adequacy, and the right to adequate housing without discrimination. The international legal framework is a powerful tool regarding both policy advice and implementation, considering that all EU Member States have adhered to it and thus are normatively bound to implement, report on implementing, and implement recommendations related to international treaties.

Although many Member States, in line with the decentralisation of public administration and the principle of subsidiarity, have entrusted the planning and implementation of housing policies, as well as the regulation of private development, to the local level, the obligation to respect, protect, and fulfil the right to adequate housing, including the duty to prevent forced evictions and provide remedy for those affected by such evictions, remains on the shoulders of central governments.

The EU has a limited mandate in the area of housing. There is no self-standing right to housing under EU law; there is no specific housing policy framework nor a specific legal basis for directly regulating housing matters (except for protection from discrimination in access to housing, as discussed below). However, the EU can indirectly influence how Member States and local governments design and implement their housing policies, for instance, through relevant EU policies, such as anti-discrimination, equality, social inclusion, regional development, and urban planning. Thus, the [European Pillar of Social Rights](#) and its associated [Action Plan](#) refer to housing and assistance for people experiencing homelessness, access to social housing or housing assistance for those in need, and the right of vulnerable people to appropriate assistance and protection against forced eviction. Additionally, the EU can promote dialogue and exchanges of best practices among Member States on housing-related issues.

The EU Race Equality Directive (2000/43/EU) prohibits discrimination based on racial or ethnic origin in accessing and supplying goods and services, including housing. The European Commission monitors the transposition and implementation of this prohibition and, in the case of infringement, can undertake the necessary legal steps.

In October 2020, the European Commission adopted the strengthened and renewed *EU Roma Strategic Framework for equality, inclusion and participation*, which defines “[i]ncreasing

⁸ FEANTSA (2020). [Roma Experiences of Homelessness in Europe](#).



effective equal access to adequate desegregated housing and essential services” as one of its four sectoral objectives. More broadly, it includes the horizontal objectives of “[r]educing poverty and social exclusion to close the socio-economic gap between Roma and the general population” and “[f]ighting and preventing antigypsyism and discrimination”. The objectives of the new EU framework have been reflected in the [Council Recommendation on Roma Equality, Inclusion and Participation](#), which constitutes part of the Union’s soft law and, therefore, has a normative and coercive effect on Member States.⁹ Moreover, in 2022, the European Parliament adopted a [resolution](#) that urges the European Commission to launch an EU action plan to eradicate Roma settlements by 2030. On 9 October 2023, the Council of the European Union adopted [Conclusions on Measures to ensure equal access for Roma to adequate and desegregated housing, and to address segregated settlements](#). The Conclusions aim to improve the housing situation of Roma and to eradicate segregation, while also underlining the importance of tackling the problem of antigypsyism, improving the use of available EU funding, and involving Roma themselves in shaping relevant policies.

3. EU funding for improving Roma access to housing and fighting segregation

The multi-annual financial framework 2021-2027 is a major tool for incentivising and supporting the development of housing at the local level, in particular through the cohesion policy funds (the European Regional Development Fund – ERDF, and the European Social Fund Plus – ESF+). Additionally, the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) provides funding for Member States to address challenges linked to the green and digital transition and improve social resilience and territorial cohesion. Some Member States have explicitly included Roma as beneficiaries of measures in their national plans, but many others have included measures from which Roma may also benefit, even if not explicitly targeted. This applies to a wide range of measures (varying across Member States), such as reforms and investments that improve the inclusiveness of education and training, housing renovation schemes, investments in improving access to essential services, digital connectivity, and territorial development projects. Beneficiaries are not always specified in the national RRFs, but measures can, in practice, target disadvantaged groups, including Roma.

Member States are key to ensuring the best possible use of EU funds to support Roma. They are called on to apply the partnership principle, involving partners from civil society organisations, Roma and pro-Roma NGOs, equality and fundamental rights bodies and experts when designing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating EU-funded interventions. Therefore, there are opportunities to shape the nature of housing-related initiatives supported by the cohesion Policy Funds.

Many local governments do not have the necessary resources or motivation to address the housing needs of Roma and residential desegregation. Under shared management with the ERDF and the ESF+ (i.e., the responsibility for funds’ implementation lies with the Member States), central governments have ample opportunity to incentivise and facilitate local

⁹ On “soft law” see Eurofound (2014). “[Soft law](#)”, In *European Industrial Relations Dictionary*.



governments' access to the cohesion Policy Funds to address the challenges of Roma to have equal access to mainstream housing, by opening respective calls for proposals and making them eligible to apply as beneficiaries.

Due to the different nature of the RRF as a performance-based instrument and its centralised governance, particular effort is needed – both through outreach by national, regional and local authorities and the active involvement of stakeholders – to ensure that Roma can actually benefit from this facility, especially in Member States with a significant Roma population. Involvement in the design of specific projects and the implementation/procurement phase is key to becoming a beneficiary and raising awareness of the instrument's potential.

The [European Regional Development Fund](#) (ERDF) provides financing for the:

- development of new/renting of non-segregated housing;
- renewal/refurbishment and reconstruction of pre-existing non-segregated housing stock;
- development of essential infrastructure, such as water supplies and sewage networks, in full compliance with the principles of desegregation and non-discrimination;
- development of transportation that connects inhabitants with job opportunities, mainstream schools, and other needed services;
- promotion of integrated approaches: investments into infrastructure, equipment and access to complementary non-segregated services in education, employment, health and social care in mainstream areas (accompanied by ESF+ type of actions);
- renewal and improvement of public spaces and green areas.

The [European Social Fund Plus](#) (ESF+) can be used for supporting interventions in many areas related to access to housing, such as:

- mapping the living conditions of Roma, including housing and residential segregation; measuring the effect of EU funds on Roma;
- ensuring the participation of Roma in designing local policies and interventions, including those related to housing;
- the legalisation of land and dwellings in informal Roma settlements;
- the empowerment of the Roma community that enables them to represent themselves in relation to local government (constituency building);
- empowerment and support for both Roma and their new mainstream neighbourhoods before and after relocation from segregated areas;
- the provision of social services, debt management and counselling to prevent loss of housing and eviction;
- protection against discrimination in the housing market;
- the operation of social rental agencies, guarantee funds and other facilities that can help Roma overcome barriers to accessing market housing.



As for tackling residential segregation, in the current programming period, the 2021-2027 [Common Provisions Regulation](#) includes two relevant thematic enabling conditions (these must be fulfilled throughout the whole programming period to enable the respective Member State to draw on the EU funding for the specific objectives). First, Member States must adopt *national strategic policy frameworks for social inclusion and poverty reduction*, including evidence-based diagnoses of poverty and social exclusion, including residential (and educational) segregation, and measures to prevent and combat this. Second, they must adopt *national Roma inclusion strategic policy frameworks*, including measures to accelerate Roma integration, and prevent and eliminate segregation. Further, there is a horizontal enabling condition requiring effective mechanisms to be in place in the Member States to ensure compliance with the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (including its Article 21 on non-discrimination). Moreover, the [EU Ombudsman's decision from 2015](#) states that the European Commission should ensure that Member States' actions funded under EU cohesion policy should respect fundamental rights in line with the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. The EU Charter guarantees protection from discrimination. Moreover, it states that "in order to combat social exclusion and poverty, the Union recognises and respects the right to social and housing assistance so as to ensure a decent existence for all those who lack sufficient resources, in accordance with the rules laid down by Union law and national laws and practices".

In the 2021-2027 programming period, EUR 19.4 billion have been allocated to inclusive growth areas, including education, employment, housing, health and social care. Some Member States have opted to include programme-specific indicators in the cohesion Policy programmes that specify support provided for fostering access for persons living in marginalised/segregated areas to mainstream non-segregated services. Examples of such indicators include: the number of persons relocated from segregated to mainstream areas, the number of non-segregated social housing units built/refurbished in mainstream areas that benefitted persons from segregated areas, etc. cohesion Policy Funds should not be aimed at building parallel services (e.g., education, health and social care, etc.) nor segregated housing only for Roma.

With regard to the enlargement region, where Roma remain the most deprived community, the European Commission's [Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance \(IPA\) III](#) supports political and economic reforms for preparing beneficiaries of enlargement (Western Balkans and Türkiye) concerning the rights and obligations associated with EU membership. In the area of improving the housing conditions of Roma people, supported activities include:

- Providing durable housing solutions to Roma refugees and internally displaced families due to the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia of the 1990s.
- Mapping informal settlements and collecting information on living conditions.
- The legalisation of informal settlements and supporting the ownership of land.
- Supporting the civil registration of Roma people.



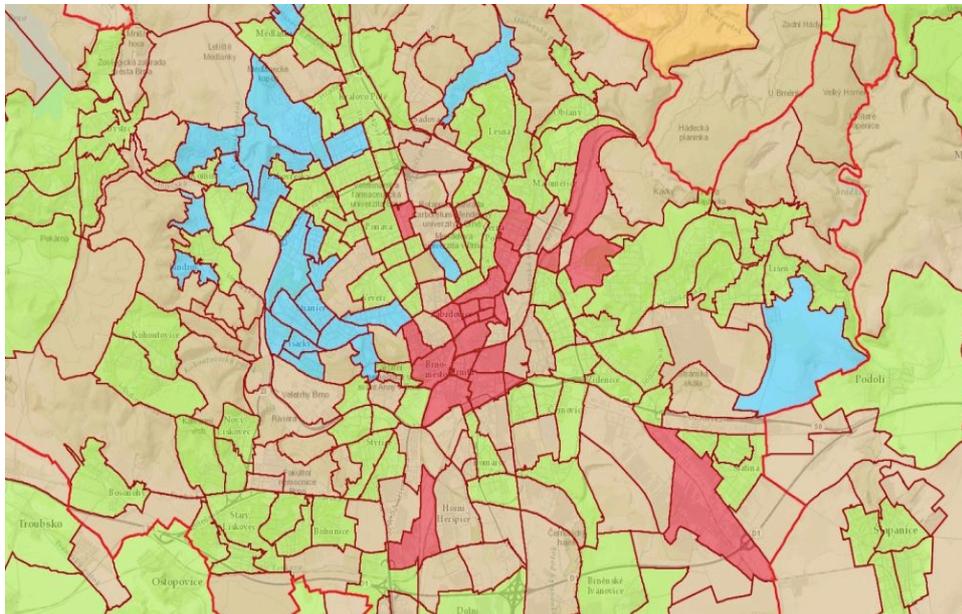
- Empowering the Roma community to increase their participation in local decision-making, including housing-related policies and reforms.

In 2015, the Commission issued [Guidance on how to use the 2014-2020 European Structural and Investment Funds \(ESIF\) for tackling segregation](#),¹⁰ which specifies a few basic principles. First, investments cannot be used to establish new segregated areas (for example, the construction of a new segregated neighbourhood) or to maintain or contribute to segregation. Second, the investments should be used for active *desegregation* or at least reducing segregation (for example, by relocating all or at least some inhabitants from segregated neighbourhoods to the mainstream community). Third, the *desegregation* scenario must always be considered the first option. Following these principles, new social housing should not be constructed in segregated areas (such as Roma neighbourhoods or settlements), but other investments (such as water supply, sewage, gas, electricity) for improving living conditions or public spaces) are possible. The rationale is not to increase the number of households living in segregated areas but to improve the quality of life of those who already live in such areas by fostering equal access to non-segregated services.

Both calls for proposals and projects targeting the *desegregation* of marginalised communities should be designed and implemented with the direct involvement of representatives of the communities at all stages of the process, which may require their empowerment, public debates, awareness-raising activities and anti-discrimination actions – all of which are eligible for EU funding. Finally, in selecting operations for funding, public authorities should assess their impact on *desegregation*.

An example of implementing this guidance from **Czechia** is available: using administrative data on the recipients of social benefits, the spatial concentration of people with a low income has been identified. EU-fund-related calls connected to housing prohibit the development of new social housing in areas of extreme concentration, while only a fraction of new social housing can be located in areas with high concentration (in line with the condition that most housing is located in areas with low concentration). Data are available from [online applications](#) that also model the territory's absorption capacity to help avoid future residential segregation by developing new social housing.

¹⁰ In the current programming period, the principles associated with the guidance are being implemented through an internal EC document that has not been made public.



The online application used in Czechia (www.segregace.cz) analyses the territory of the whole country from the perspective of the concentration of people at risk of social exclusion. Based on this, it assesses whether specific neighbourhoods are suitable for the development of new social housing. This supports integration and avoids further segregation.

Green: suitable for social housing

Red: not suitable because of concentration of socially excluded

Blue: concentration of high-status population (risk of

4. Questions for discussion

- How can spatial segregation be addressed and desegregation actively promoted while ensuring access to adequate non-segregated housing for Roma people living in deprived settlements in the EU?
- How can the use of EU and national funding be improved to enable effective and equal access to housing in mainstream areas for Roma people?