

## 16<sup>th</sup> European Platform for Roma Inclusion

Organised by the Spanish Presidency of the Council of the European Union and the European Commission

30 November 2023

Madrid Fine Arts Building (CBA). Calle Alcalá 42  
Madrid, Spain

### Summary

The 16<sup>th</sup> meeting of the European Platform for Roma Inclusion was jointly organised by the European Commission and the Spanish Presidency of the Council of the European Union and was attended by 180 participants. The event addressed the topic of “*Ensuring equal access to adequate desegregated housing through better use of EU and national funds*”. It also offered a forum to present the [Council Conclusions on Measures to ensure equal access for Roma to adequate and desegregated housing, and to address segregated settlements](#).

### Main messages:

- It is not acceptable that many Roma in the EU have no equal access to adequate housing and that many Roma live in segregated and excluded settlements with no access to essential services.
- The lack of political willingness at all levels and the capacity of municipalities to deal with residential desegregation must be addressed.
- Antigypsyism in access to housing but also other areas must be also effectively addressed.
- Participation of Roma in the design, and coordination of programmes based on the real needs of Roma, including Roma participation in monitoring committees and designing and implementing the local action plans, must be ensured.
- Economic and living conditions in the excluded and segregated settlements/shanty towns should be improved through putting in place an integrated approach with a long-term goal of residential desegregation and full Roma inclusion in the society.
- Desegregation processes must include awareness-raising activities among reallocated Roma and receiving communities.
- Mapping and legalization of informal or illegal settlements must be implemented.
- ERDF support should be more aligned with the issue of Roma equal access to housing and the national Roma strategic frameworks.
- Conditionality of Roma equality and inclusion for municipalities with a certain percentage of deprived Roma population should be introduced in EU funds programmes.
- Access to EU funds should be simplified to make it accessible for more stakeholders.
- Promising practices such as the Housing and Empowerment of Roma (HERO) pilot project of the EU implemented in SK, RO, and BG, as well as the Working Group on Housing (consisting of Roma NGOs) as a formal structure cooperating with the ES Ministry of Housing on Roma housing issues, could be replicated elsewhere in Europe.

## 1. Opening of the 16th European Platform for Roma Inclusion

The event was opened by Mr Pablo Bustinduy Amador, Spanish Minister for Social Rights, Consumer Affairs and Agenda 2030, and Ms Helena Dalli, European Commissioner for Equality.

The newly appointed Minister for Social Rights opened the event expressing **appreciation to Spanish Roma for their contribution to social, artistic, and cultural affairs**. He stressed that access to decent housing is key for Roma inclusion and it is essential for the enjoyment of other rights. Spain has been intensively working for the last decades to eradicate segregated settlements and shantytowns. Since 2018 Spain has in place a **State Roma Council**, which is a formal consultative body for Roma equality, inclusion and participation. He reminded the Member States of their commitment under the recently adopted Council Conclusions and reassured his ministry's commitment to Roma equality and inclusion.

Commissioner Dalli stressed that the EU cannot speak about equality for all if a significant proportion of its largest ethnic minority to live in substandard conditions, often in excluded and segregated areas with limited access to drinking water and basic amenities. She spoke about her experience visiting Roma settlements and the hearings with the Roma NGOs from Bulgaria, Czechia, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia which she organised together with Vice-President Jourova on how to make more efficient use of available funding to achieve meaningful and measurable progress in Roma equality and inclusion.

She confirmed a **strong political will within the Commission to address this matter**. She called on national, regional and local authorities, and the civil society to stand with the Commission and to work together to break down discrimination and antigypsyism, to ensure equal access to housing and deliver collectively on the objectives of the EU Roma strategic framework.

## 2. Presentation of the Council Conclusions on Measures to ensure equal access for Roma to adequate and desegregated housing

- *Ms Patricia Bezunartea Barrio, General Director for Family Diversity and Social Services, Spain*

Ms Bezunartea Barrio elaborated on the Council's Conclusions as an important framework to guide the actions of the Commission and the Member States when developing housing policies. She emphasised that these Conclusions provide for instance a **common definition of segregated settlements**. They call on the Member States to take **measures against segregation** with the use of **financial resources at regional, national and EU level**. They also call on the **participation of Roma** living in the settlements in this process.

## 3. High-level discussion on Concrete steps towards ensuring equal access to adequate and desegregated housing for Roma

- *Mr Peter Pollak, Member of the European Parliament.*
- *Ms Ana Gallego Torres, Director-General for Justice and Consumers, European Commission.*
- *Ms Carmen Santiago Reyes. Second Vice-President of the Spanish National Roma Council, Spain.*

Mr Pollak highlighted that these discussions took place 20 years ago, thus today we should not be speaking about the issues concerning access of Roma to housing but what we already achieved. He introduced the **HERO pilot project** funded by the EU which is addressing housing segregation through bank loans provided to Roma to build their own houses. This initiative has been implemented in SK, RO and BG and could serve as a **promising example** for other Member States. He also pointed out a **lack of political will and capacity at the local level** to address the housing situation of Roma.

Ms Gallego elaborated on the **importance of local Roma participation in decision making processes** that affect them. She encouraged Member States to support local municipalities to use available funds for providing equal access to housing for Roma.

Ms Santiago Reyes announced that **Spain has moved forward in addressing the issue of segregation and exclusion** in the last 30-40 years (from 31% Roma with access to housing in 1991 to 88% in 2007), today the Roma population in shanty towns is 2.8%. However, equality is still an issue. She stressed the importance of **tackling antigypsyism, solutions based on evidence and simplifying the access to EU funds** in order to make them accessible for more stakeholders.

#### 4. Workshops

Participants were split into 5 participatory workshops as following:

- 2 workshops (1 EN, 1 ES) on the topic: “*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?*”.
- 3 workshops (2 EN, 1 ES) on the topic: “*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?*”.

All workshops were delivered by professional facilitators.

#### 5. Thematic panels

##### **Thematic panel 1: The way forward in tackling spatial segregation and ensuring equal access of Roma to adequate and desegregated housing**

- *Mr Gyorgy Sumeghy, Associate Director, Europe and the Middle East, Habitat for Humanity International, rapporteur for workshop 1 (EN).*
- *Mr Fabián Sánchez, Presencia Gitana, Member of the Spanish National Roma Council, rapporteur workshop 2 (ES).*
- *Ms Lívía Járóka, Member of the European Parliament.*
- *Mr Szabolcs Schmidt, Head of Unit, Non Discrimination: Anti-Racism and Roma Coordination, DG Justice and Consumers, European Commission.*
- *Mr Manuel Demougeot, Head of Cabinet, Inter-ministerial Delegation for Housing and Access to Housing, National Roma Contact Point, France.*
- *Ms Sara Giménez, President, Fundación Secretariado Gitano, Spain.*

In this panel, the rapporteurs presented the following **action points from workshop 1 and 2.**

- Ensure effective policies concerning antigypsyism including sanctions (also in public administration) awareness raising and), simplified reporting;
- Ensure political support for desegregation actions;
- Improve economic and living condition in places where Roma live through putting in place integrated approach (short term), facilitating entrepreneurship (mid-term), better urbanisation (long-term);
- Block EU funding which is perpetuating segregation where desegregation is possible;
- Create special housing programmes through mapping empty public housing, refurbishing, making it sustainable, and regularly monitor it;
- Desegregation processes must include awareness raising activities among Roma to be reallocated and receiving communities.

Ms Jaróka spoke in her intervention about the importance of **structural changes and urban planning**. For instance, in Hungary the government introduced significant mortgage subsidies for families with more than 3 children, compulsory kindergarten from the age of 3 and tax exemption for women with 4 children.

Mr Schmidt flagged that the Roma Survey 2021 published by FRA clearly shows **that more than half of Roma in the EU live in housing deprivation**, thus they cannot enjoy their human rights. He emphasized that all the action points listed by rapporteurs must be accompanied by **measures fighting against antigypsyism**, which is also one of the stand-alone and cross-cutting objectives of the EU Roma strategic framework. He also highlighted that the **long-term vision for access to adequate and housing should be always desegregation**. Whatever is done in the short- or mid-term should not perpetuate segregation but rather prepare the ground for desegregation. He also drew the attention of the participants to the EU level targets expected to be collectively achieved by 2030 by the EU and the Member States..

Mr Demougeot highlighted the **diversity among the situations of Roma** across Europe. In France there are travellers or semi-travellers who are French citizens, and EU citizens mainly from BG and RO who live in camps. Ten years ago, there were around 20.000 Roma living in the camps, and these days it is around 11.000. From 2018 France relocated Roma from these camps to regular housing and provided them with additional support. He also explained that this process included 3 main challenges: scarce housing market, people unwilling to move away from camps, difficult inclusion process in the mainstream society.

Important housing policy developments in Spain were mentioned by Ms Giménez. She also stressed the violation of rights of Roma children living in the settlements. She called on the Commission to force Member States to take effective measures because they are obliged to act in this matter. Mr Schmidt reacted saying that the **EU has limited competencies in this regard, but it provides Member States with guidance through the EU policy, structures, and funding to take action**.

Mr Fabián Sánchez presented the **Working Group on Housing**, which is a part of the Roma State Council, cooperating with the Housing Ministry of Spain as a **promising example of CSOs cooperation with government**. This formal structure contributes to the implementation of the Roma framework 2030 and its work also include mapping of segregated localities in Spain and working on their eradication.

During the Q&A session a **statement from the Coalition of Roma NGOs of Ukraine** was delivered by Ms Taiia Avram addressing the housing needs of internally displaced Roma. She called on the EU to ensure sustainability of shelters and to adopt a separate humanitarian response plan adjusted to the needs of Roma as well as including the needs of Roma in Ukrainian RRP and social housing programmes.

## **Thematic panel 2: Towards efficient use of EU and national funds to enable Roma access to adequate and desegregated housing**

- *Mr László Ulicska, National Roma Contact Point, Hungary, rapporteur for workshop 3 (EN),*
- *Mr Ismael Cortés, Member of the Advisory Board of the European Roma Institute of Arts and Culture, Spain, rapporteur for workshop 4 (ES).*
- *Mr Florin Botonogu, Policy centre for Roma and minorities, Romania, rapporteur for workshop 5 (EN).*
- *Ms Ruth Paserman, Director, Investment, DG Employment and Social Affairs, European Commission*
- *Mr Angel García Frontelo, Managing Unit, Representative of the Spanish national authorities.*
- *Mr Angel García Frontelo, Managing Unit, Representative of the Spanish national authorities.*

In this panel, the rapporteurs presented the following **action points from workshop 3, 4 and 5** (some of them overlap with the actions from workshop 1 and 2).

- Ensure Roma participation in design and coordination of programmes based on their real needs, including Roma participation in the local action plans;
- Implementation of programmes focused on access to housing should include measures fighting antigypsyism, awareness raising among the whole population, and measures facilitating access to other rights and services;
- Implement mapping and legalization of informal or illegal settlements;
- Ensure combination of EU funds – ERDF, ESF+ and European Agricultural Fund;
- Ensure that conditionality of Roma equality and inclusion is included in the EU funds, particularly for municipalities with certain percentage of deprived Roma population;
- Simplify access to the EU funds so more entities can access them, and ensure more information and visibility of the funds;
- Facilitate access to EU funds for Roma entities;
- Enable low-income Roma to access social housing, ensuring that criteria take account of their challenges;
- Develop and implement larger scale and longer term housing programmes for Roma;
- Create platforms for mapping, monitoring and discussing housing issues faced by Roma;
- Make direct investments in communal development, infrastructure and housing by 2030;
- Ensure long-term local education programmes involving Roma and non-Roma in the process of desegregation;
- Align ERDF with Roma equal access to housing and national Roma strategic frameworks;
- Strengthen cooperation between public administration and Roma NGOs;
- Improve the legal framework and building capacities of all stakeholders on housing by 2025.

Ms Paserman underlined that ERDF support between 2021-2027 is 19.6 billion, out of which **1 billion is allocated to social housing**. She mentioned that InvestEU and the RRP of some Member States also invest in social housing, ESF+ which supports ERDF is 2.2 billion including MS contribution. There are **15 Member States that invest into the inclusion of Roma**, which is also one of the objectives of ESF+. The **ESF+ also supports capacity of CSOs**. She also pointed out the **Partnership principle** which applies to ERDF and ESF+ and includes the importance of participation of CSOs in the programming, monitoring and evaluation of various projects, particularly participation in the monitoring committees. She stressed that the EU already simplified access to EU funds by reducing administrative burden on all sides.

Mr Garcia Frontelo elaborated that housing comes first but access to other sectoral areas must also be guaranteed. He announced that for the first time in Spain the authorities are developing **a specific employment programme for Roma**.

## 5. Political conclusions

- *Mr Nicolas Schmit, European Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights (video-message).*
- *Ms Ana Gallego Torres, Director-General for Justice and Consumers, European Commission.*
- *Ms Mónica Silvana González, Member of the European Parliament.*
- *Ms Isabela Mihalache, ERGO Network.*

Commissioner Schmit in his video-message reminded that Roma are a young population with a high percentage of under-20-year-olds. **Thus ESF+ and ERDF play an important role for the access to non-segregated housing for young Roma in need**. Fifteen Member States have already planned investments for measures targeting the Roma population for access to education, training and employment, access to services including health care and housing and capacity building.

With the available tools and EU funds there is a tremendous opportunity to match the shared ambition with investments.

Ms Gallego encouraged the representatives of the Member States **to make use of the shared perspectives and insights during this event** to improve the implementation of the national strategic frameworks and maximise their impact. The Commission will publish its report on the implementation of the NRSFs in spring 2024. She complimented the work carried out by Artemisa Network and FSG, working on the Roma women empowerment. Community driven projects are a successful example to show that Roma are not only beneficiaries of funding but serve as role models and multipliers.

Ms Mihalache emphasized that due to mass forced evictions and the lack of alternative housing Roma segregation is deepening. She called on the Member States and the governments in the enlargement areas to invest in developing and implementing residential programmes, put in place integrated approaches and **use EU funds and the technical support instrument** for this matter. She also stressed the importance of **Roma CSOs participation in decision making processes**.

Ms Silvana Gonzalez underlined that the **EU funding which is already in place needs to be strategically aligned to create more opportunities**, without leaving anyone behind. It is important that Roma are put in the centre of actions and initiatives, so that political plans are not only made about them, but with them. In this context she stressed the importance of representation of Roma in all political spheres of the EU institutions. She also addressed the issues concerning Roma in the enlargement region.