




Examples of successful housing desegregation as a precondition of Roma integration

edited by Marek Hojsík

Prepared by:

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INTRODUCTION

Residential segregation constitutes both a tangible expression of antigypsyism and discrimination¹ and a barrier to the successful integration of Roma. The European Parliament, in its [‘Resolution of 5 October 2022 on the Situation of Roma People Living in Settlements in the EU’](#), states that residential segregation is “a key cause of unequal access to healthcare, early childcare and education, employment and basic services” and “it not only has physical and economic consequences, but also psychological and sociological ones, both for individuals and communities”. Segregated Roma settlements reproduce intergenerational poverty, symbolic stigmatisation and socio-spatial inequalities, including environmental injustice. The recent [‘FRA Roma Survey 2021’](#) demonstrates that residential segregation has a profound impact on the lives of Roma: Roma living in neighbourhoods where all or most are Roma are significantly more vulnerable than Roma living in mainstream neighbourhoods, as identified through the risk of poverty, lower level of completion of secondary education, labour inactivity, educational segregation, youth NEET, and housing deprivation. 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.

The [‘European Strategic Framework for Roma Equality, Inclusion and Participation for 2020-2030’](#) includes the objective of increasing Roma’s access to desegregated housing. And the [‘Council Recommendation on Roma Equality, Inclusion and Participation’](#) calls for Member States to adopt “measures to monitor, prevent and combat any spatial segregation and promote desegregation by drawing up concrete plans to tackle housing issues with the involvement of local communities and affected Roma communities”. Recently, 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’](#), which invited Member States to eradicate the residential segregation of Roma.

Many Member States, in line with the process of 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 housing development, to the local level of governance. They have access to national and EU funding for the development of housing or implementing other local policies that could improve Roma’s access to adequate desegregated housing and actively tackle residential segregation. However, in reality, local housing initiatives usually aim only at improving the housing conditions of Roma without addressing the problem of segregation, and most central governments fail to translate their commitments in the field of anti-discrimination and Roma inclusion into housing development rules and conditions for drawing on national and EU funds for housing. For example, in Greece, Slovakia and other countries, national policies for improving Roma housing systematically (re)produce new segregated Roma settlements, without adequate scrutiny of potential desegregation alternatives. Only a handful of Member States have

¹ See, for example, the decision of the district court from 2009 concerning the residential segregation of Roma from the town of Sabinov. According to the court’s decision, both the municipality that relocated Roma from the city centre to a segregated neighbourhood and the Ministry of Construction, which financed the construction of the segregated neighbourhood, violated the antidiscrimination law. The decision on the subject matter is available in English here: http://www.oad.sk/sites/default/files/downloads/Telek_rozsudok_EN.pdf

integrated effective desegregation elements into their national policies (Spain) or rules concerning the implementation of EU funds (Czechia).

The reasons are multiple and may include, among others, conscious or unconscious antigypsyism among decision-makers, fear of the political costs of the decision to desegregate, lack of knowledge about how to effectively address the problem, or a conviction that residential desegregation is not realistic or efforts to materialise it would not have positive effects that would outweigh the cost. This report aims at addressing at least the two latter barriers and demonstrates that successful desegregation housing initiatives are not the chimeric wishes of human rights activists, academics and bureaucrats detached from the reality of grassroots policy-making but instead realistic alternatives to the widespread reproduction of segregational practices that usually do not lead (or at least not in the most straightforward or fastest way) to the sustainable inclusion, equality and participation of Roma in mainstream society.

The report presents six case studies of local initiatives aimed at addressing the housing needs of local Roma populations that, at the same time, opted for solutions that would tackle their entrenched residential segregation. In most cases, they were instigated by local governments, although one study presents an innovative initiative of a Roma-led civil society organisation that proved very effective despite indifference or resistance from local governments. The presented cases vary in scope from an example of an already scaled-up approach in Spain through the courageous decisions of local politicians or municipal officers in Croatia, Italy, and Romania to tackle the issue of Roma housing in a non-customary way in the city and the country; and from the mentioned Czech non-governmental initiative of using existing market supply to satisfy Roma housing needs independent of the social housing system to a policy of a Greek municipality that involved providing Roma families with large subsidies to find ownership-based housing on their own.

None of the presented cases can be considered ideal, and their diverse elements may be the subject of legitimate questioning or even criticism. But they reflect an uneasy political and social reality laden with racism, prejudice and fear and are outcomes of the genuine courage and efforts of engaged stakeholders that deserve recognition. As real experiences, including their strengths and weaknesses, they constitute valuable inspiration and lessons for other stakeholders across Europe.

The case studies were developed by experts in diverse fields related to Roma equality, inclusion, and participation from the six EU Member States participating in the '[Roma Civil Monitor 2021-2025](#)' (RCM). In all of the latter, civil society organisations participating in the RCM have reported the residential segregation of Roma and/or Roma informal settlements as a critical or major problem. Moreover, these critical or significant problems have also been identified in several other EU Member States: Austria, Bulgaria, Cyprus, France, Germany, Hungary, Slovakia, and Slovenia.

The authors of the case studies were provided with a standard methodology and support in the development of the respective chapters, but the latter reflect their individual writing styles, experiences, values and perspectives.

The six case studies are complemented by the first chapter, which provides a summary of the academic literature concerning the mechanisms of residential segregation and its consequences for vulnerable populations and society, and a synthesis chapter with

recommendations at the end of this report. Both were developed by Marek Hojsík, who has been coordinating the Roma Civil Monitor initiatives since 2018.

ACADEMIC FINDINGS ON MECHANISMS AND CONSEQUENCES OF HOUSING SEGREGATION

Residential segregation can be defined as the uneven spatial distribution of a specific social group of people with similar characteristics – such as race (for a discussion of segregation in terms of race, colonialism and power, see Pickler 2017), ethnicity, origin, income, wealth and other features – caused by their unequal social position in relation to mainstream society, and their concentration in specific areas populated mainly by this segregated group (Sýkora 2010: 12). As such, residential segregation can be seen as a spatial expression of social inequalities.

Importantly, residential segregation does not consist of the physical spatial separation of the vulnerable group from mainstream society. However, such separation is not unusual – empty areas, natural barriers (such as rivers, woods or other features), and artificial structures (such as industrial areas, roads, and railways) may separate social or ethnic groups, and structures may even be built to isolate them. Residential segregation consists of diverse social groups living in different parts of the same physical space (*ibid*: 20). This leads to limited or absent positive social interaction and othering.

There have been discussions about the relationship between social and spatial processes and justices and for its understanding of their dynamic interplay, the concept of *socio-spatial dialectics* introduced by Soja (1980) is central. The residential segregation is “not a simple consequence of social inequality but is a product of both social and spatial differentiation” (Skifter Andersen 2019). “[S]egregation and increasing spatial inequality are mutually self-perpetuating processes because the status and cultural identity of urban areas are determined by the composition of people living there” (*ibid*).

We can approach the study of residential segregation through the lens of *space* or *place*, two concepts which, however, remain intertwined and interdependent. The “space” is a neutral and objective physical and geographical dimension of a particular location or environment. And the “place” refers to a socially and culturally produced portion of space with differentiated meaning, shaped on the one hand by people’s experiences, memories, and relationships to it and on the other by its physical and material characteristics.

By studying social inequalities in *space*, we can describe and understand the patterns and trends of the residential segregation of different socioeconomic, ethnic, racial or other groups in a given country, region or settlement (be this a city, town or village). This approach enables the measurement and comparison of residential segregation using diverse methods. Recent research by Czech human geographer L. Sýkora (2022) demonstrates that while the absolute number of the poorest in the population (i.e., those who receive the basic social aid called “allowance for living”) in Czechia has been decreasing (at least prior to the series of global crises that started with the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic), their spatial concentration has been growing in a decreasing number of segregated locations.

It is on such locations that the second approach zooms in, which studies residential segregation through the lens of *place*. The focus on “places of problem” enables an understanding of residential segregation as a dynamic process rooted and reproduced through historical patterns of discrimination, cultural attitudes, social values, and institutional practices. This perspective allows us to scrutinise “the ‘embeddedness’ of segregation in local histories and social structures [and] largely overlook[ed] the street-level dimension of

segregation and the everyday economic, spatial, and political dynamics underpinning it” (Picker 2017: 5-6). Places are created not only by *internal* social relationships, economic processes and political dynamics inside specific locations but also by *external*. The segregation of places is a process linked to the isolation, discrimination, symbolic exclusion, perception and representation that “happen” outside these places.

In the United States, residential segregation and its research have been linked to a race/ethnicity of African Americans, with roots in the country’s past of slavery and legal racial segregation. In Europe, “[o]n many occasions, class differences have taken over the role of ethnic differences, with almost identical segregation effects” (Musterd & al 1998: 14).¹ However, “the extent of segregation and ghettoization is less advanced than in North American cities” (Atkinson & McGarrigle 2009: 77). The substantive difference between American ghettos and European poor neighbourhoods Wacquant (1996) sees in the racialisation of American ghettos and the development of institutions parallel to the institutions of mainstream society or even their complete lack (“organisational desertification”) in “hyperghettos”.

However, these differences between the US and Europe on racial and class-based segregation are collapsing – on the one hand in relation to the migration-related transformations in some countries; and on the other hand, in relation to Roma. Mainly in relation to the “new” EU member states from Central and Eastern Europe, but also relevant to “old” member states with large Roma populations (like Greece or Spain),² residential segregation is often framed in ethnic/racial terms and discussed in relation to Roma exclusion/integration (Berescu & al. 2021; Teller 2020). This is why the policy agenda concerning residential segregation and desegregation often appear on or in connection with the Roma equality and inclusion agenda.

Therefore, for the study of residential segregation in Europe, and the Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) in particular, it is fundamental to think about segregation based on socioeconomic status separately (albeit in connection with and comparatively) to segregation based on race/ethnicity – specifically in relation to the Roma, who are the largest, and in the CEE the only racialised ethnic group that faces residential segregation in a form, intensity, and with consequences comparable to the residential segregation of Blacks in the US.

Mechanisms of segregation

Social inequalities are not evenly distributed geographically, creating disparities between regions, places, and communities. This distribution is, however, not accidental and different epistemologies provide different explanations and justifications for such differentiation.

People in more marginalised and vulnerable positions are ‘pushed’ into specific places by market forces, discrimination in the housing market, deliberate municipal policies of segregation, or individual housing choices and demographic factors. These mechanisms interact and reinforce each other, perpetuating patterns of segregation and exacerbating social inequalities. As the first three of these mechanisms concern the environment in which

¹ There are significant differences in the degree and patterns of segregation among European cities (Silver 2019), but overall, the socioeconomic segregation in 12 studied European cities appears to be rising (Musterd & al. 2017).

² The phenomenon of Roma residential segregation is also present and sometimes takes severe forms in countries with smaller Roma populations, such as Croatia, Cyprus, France, Italy, Portugal and Slovenia (see: Roma Civil Monitor, undated, available at: <https://cps.ceu.edu/sites/cps.ceu.edu/files/attachment/basicpage/3172/rcm-thematic-fiche-housing.pdf>).

(and by which) residential segregation is produced and can be directly addressed by housing-related local public policies and authorities' measures, we examine each mechanism in more detail. The remaining two causes – concerning individuals' (or households') preferences or behaviour – may be addressed only indirectly; therefore, they are only outlined at the end of this section.

Economic forces at the housing market play a significant role in shaping residential segregation. Economic factors include, on the one hand, the availability and prices of dwellings (supply side) and, on the other, households' resources and preferences. The price of housing is influenced by neighbourhood desirability based on its physical features, such as architecture, distance from the city centre or other attractive places, transport connections, the availability of infrastructure and services, but also symbolic status:

“Because of their marginal housing market position, declining urban neighbourhoods, shrinking settlements, and Roma settlements – more generally: segregated neighbourhoods of marginalised ethnic minorities – offer cheaper housing options ...” (Teller 2020: 17)

At the same time, neighbourhoods that face decay (physical, social and symbolic) experience a change in population: better-off households move out, while poorer households are pushed in from other areas due to the process of gentrification, leading to a rise in property values and rental costs. Areas with decreasing mainstream social control may also attract people engaged in informal or illegal activities, leading to a further decline in security (*ibid*: 48).

Among the other disadvantages of living in a segregated neighbourhood

“living in a cheaper housing market segment has an impact on the residents' social position, because people's social status also changes for the worse if they live in a cheaper dwelling, because their resources cannot grow e.g. through selling off the flat” (*ibid*: 149).

Consequently, in countries or areas (rural) where house ownership is predominant, the value gap combined with discrimination almost completely prevents people living in segregated Roma settlements or neighbourhoods from changing homes and entering the mainstream housing market.

As for the demand side of the housing market, in the case of socially vulnerable groups, the effectiveness of the welfare system plays a crucial role; its effectiveness can be seen from at least two perspectives: first, in terms of outreach – to what extent the needy groups can actually benefit from such support and whether any groups are excluded from it; and second, whether *actual* housing costs are taken into account. Arbaci (2019) argues that there is a correlation between welfare regimes and residential segregation: liberal welfare regimes tend to have higher levels of income inequality, weaker social safety nets, and less extensive social housing programmes. As a result, individuals with lower socioeconomic status may have limited access to affordable housing in well-resourced neighbourhoods, leading to concentrated poverty and residential segregation. On the other hand, social democratic welfare regimes based on principles of egalitarianism, universal social rights, and a strong welfare state tend to have lower levels of income inequality, comprehensive social safety nets, effective protection against discrimination, and greater provision of social housing, and are associated with lower levels of residential segregation.

Indeed, in CEE countries such as Slovakia and Hungary, where social protection, and in particular housing allowances, have undergone radical reform based on neo-liberal ideology and only a very limited proportion of the population can access them (while they also fail to reflect real housing costs), we have experienced the massive interregional migration of the destitute or discriminated population into the most marginalised regions with very cheap housing but very limited, if any, employment opportunities.

Discrimination within the housing market is a significant barrier to fostering equal access to housing opportunities and leads to segregation, particularly among racialised groups. It happens at both individual and institutional levels and may take direct or indirect forms (the exclusion of a specific group based on the systemic disadvantage of difference). Roma's experience with discrimination is regularly surveyed by the EU's Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA)³ and other researchers.

Individual discrimination – direct or indirect – occurs when owners do not wish to rent housing to members of an ethnic/racial (including foreigner or migrant) or other socioeconomic group (such as single parents, women, people with disabilities, or people in professions associated with low economic or symbolic status) or are ready to do so only under more disadvantageous conditions (e.g., stricter tenant-screening processes or higher rents or deposits) than to members of the mainstream/majority. Real estate agents sometimes act as gatekeepers (entry filters) when they assume that their clients-landlords would not wish to rent their dwellings to members of a minority (typically Roma). Therefore, to satisfy the anticipated preferences of their clients, they rejected such prospective tenants before landlords could even decide whether to reject or accept them. Teller (2020: 21) also includes in mechanisms of individual discrimination community action aimed at keeping Roma out of specific neighbourhoods.

Discrimination also occurs in relation to public (municipal) housing, yet usually in the form of indirect discrimination – when conditions for receiving municipal housing (even social housing) are structured in such a way that Roma typically cannot fulfil them.

The production, enforcement, and reproduction of residential segregation based on race and socioeconomic status are often outcomes of **deliberate segregational policies and practices** (or deliberate omission) at the local level, including urban planning, the development of public (social) housing and its allocation, social policy and others. These are particularly visible when it comes to Roma (whether they are indirectly labelled a “socially excluded population”, “non-adaptable citizens”, etc.).

Picker (2017) looks at residential segregation as a dynamic process that is embedded in the local context, histories and social structures and which originates, evolves and persists at both the street and institutional levels (*ibid*: 6). He has considered the segregation of Roma in contemporary Europe spatial expressions and race hierarchies, and the mechanisms for ensuring their protection. Similarly to the policies of segregation in the former colonies of European empires, the contemporary segregation of Roma is rationalised by three main

³ FRA surveys also identify the experience of discrimination in diverse areas of life, including when looking for housing and residential segregation among different groups, such as immigrants and descendants of migrants from different regions of the world. Even compared to these other groups (different minorities were surveyed in different countries), Roma face the greatest discrimination and residential segregation. See FRA. (2016). *Survey on Minorities and Discrimination in EU*. Data Explorer. Available at: <https://fra.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/data-and-maps/survey-data-explorer-second-eu-minorities-discrimination-survey>

justifications: cultural preservation, hygiene and sanitary conditions, and enforcing social order.

Picker presents four case studies of four European cities based on ethnographic research, illustrating four contemporary segregation mechanisms. *Displacement* is a consequence of forced evictions from neighbourhoods slated for renewal. If authorities provide the original (Roma) inhabitants with housing alternatives, the latter is “often inadequate and located in segregated areas, far from municipal services and access to urban resources” (*ibid*: 48). The mechanism of *omission* consists of systematic (even if not coordinated and planned) neglect of a neighbourhood/community by public authorities, sometimes presented as motivated to protect cultural identity. Because of the lack of social inclusion interventions, but also omission from official documents and public discourse, the neighbourhood, its social problems, poverty and isolation remain unaddressed or continue to grow, and the place becomes considered “risky”, “dangerous”, and “decayed”. The result of this process, social exclusion, is interpreted as the result of the failure of individuals and families living in the decayed neighbourhood, while the responsibility of society (e.g., for racism and other exclusionary mechanisms) is denied. *Containment* should “be understood as a physical enclosure in typically isolated and fenced-in housing facilities, set aside from urban life in largely precarious conditions and affected by territorial stigmatization” (*ibid*: 84), providing authorities with full control over the contained people. While the previous two mechanisms are typical in the CEE context, containment is specific to the Italian *campi nomadi* and French *villages d’insertion*. Finally, as Picker demonstrates, the concept of *cohesion* can be used for the separation and segregation of Roma. Example of this type are authorities’ efforts to solve problems related to Traveller populations through the establishment of caravan halting sites – however, segregated from mainstream society.

Despite diverse potential criticisms of this typology, it is useful as it shows the diversity of public policy mechanisms that lead to residential segregation. In practice, specific municipalities may combine different mechanisms at the same time in relation to local marginalised populations or their different subgroups (e.g., the provision of concentrated social housing for one sub-group and neglect – ‘omission’ – of another) or the neglect (omission) of a neighbourhood/community and their later displacement).

As Teller (2020) investigates in great detail, **individual housing choices** contribute to residential segregation. Such choices are initiated by a mismatch between households’ needs and financial capacities on the one hand and, on the other, their current housing situation. This may involve a need to move because of a job, school, or other services; a change in household structure/size; financial cuts; or a change in the quality of the building or the neighbourhood. In such cases, housing mobility occurs as a function of the norm-based mobility patterns of the given social and cultural group and the adjustment of household preferences and aspirations to preexisting constraints (which can be determined by the welfare system and kinship/neighbourhood resources). The result is a trade-off leading to the actual choice. Some households may choose to live in neighbourhoods with people who share similar backgrounds or characteristics. This preference for homogeneity can perpetuate segregation. The interplay between individual housing choices and the market perpetuates segregation, as affluent individuals may have more options and resources to choose desirable neighbourhoods with better schools, amenities, and job opportunities, while individuals with lower incomes face limitations accessing those same neighbourhoods.

The choice of members of oppressed minorities not to integrate into mainstream neighbourhoods may be rationally motivated and aimed at avoiding “interpersonal discrimination, racist treatment, and hostile attitudes” as well as “interracial conflict, which can, and generally does, reflect the operation of stereotypes and implicit bias but needn’t be motivated by hostility or animus” (Shelby 2016: 59). Alternatively, oppressed minorities who face discrimination and exclusion from social services may seek their replacement among their kinship; in such cases, living in segregated neighbourhoods may serve as an everyday informal survival strategy (Teller 2020: 18).

Finally, the different **demographic features** of marginalised communities and the mainstream population can lead to residential segregation at local and regional levels. In some marginalised rural regions of Slovakia, Hungary and Bulgaria, we are witnessing the emergence of areas predominantly or entirely inhabited by socially excluded Roma. This demographic trend is followed and reinforced by “White flight” from schools and entire villages.

The impacts of segregation on social (in)justice

Residential segregation has far-reaching implications for individuals, communities, and society as a whole. As discussed in the previous sections, this phenomenon is rooted in historical processes, discriminatory practices, and systemic inequalities, creating a host of challenges that undermine social cohesion, perpetuate disparities, and limit opportunities for marginalised populations.

First, residential segregation reinforces social inequalities by creating unequal **physical access to resources**: high-quality services and job opportunities. Limited access to *quality* schools perpetuates cycles of poverty and hinders social mobility for residents in segregated areas. Moreover, segregated neighbourhoods often have inadequate healthcare facilities, resulting in disparities in health outcomes and a reduced quality of life. In extreme cases, “organizations presumed to provide civic goods and services -- physical safety, legal protection, welfare, education, housing, and health care [...] have turned into instruments of surveillance, suspicion, and exclusion rather than vehicles of social integration and trust-building” (Wacquant 1998: 26). The lack of equitable access to job opportunities and transportation options in segregated areas further restricts economic mobility, reinforcing income inequality, and trapping individuals and communities in a cycle of disadvantage.

Second, residential segregation undermines inhabitants’ **social and cultural capital**, which are crucial for successful integration into the job market and social and political participation in mainstream society. Social capital is

“the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition—or in other words, to membership in a group—which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectively-owned capital, a ‘credential’ which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word” (Bourdieu 1986: 21).

Putnam (1995) differentiates between bridging and binding social capital. The former refers to connections and relationships between individuals or groups who are diverse and heterogeneous that provides access to a wide range of resources, information, and

opportunities, including those related to employment, education and others needed for social mobility; enables the functioning of matching and learning agglomeration mechanisms; as well as fosters social empathy between different social groups. Bonding social capital denotes connections and relationships within homogeneous and closely-knit groups or communities that foster a sense of belonging, solidarity, and mutual support within specific social circles. However, Wacquant warns not to romanticise conditions and relations in poor and segregated neighbourhoods (1996: 126).

Cultural capital is embodied culture, the cultivation, knowledge and acquisition of which requires personal cost – effort, money, “*lust for knowledge*” and time, but equally importantly also the norms – values and behavioural patterns – of mainstream (middle-class) society. It is “external wealth converted into an integral part of the person, into a habitus, [that] cannot be transmitted instantaneously (unlike money, property rights, or even titles of nobility) by gift or bequest, purchase or exchange” (Bourdieu 1986: 18), but instead unconsciously through socialisation and learning. Its acquisition is based on the transmission of the cultural capital embodied in whole families, but also in school, at the workplace, and in general in the community in which a person lives, interacts, and informally learns.

Third, residential segregation also contributes to **urban decay**. Skifter Andersen (2019) sees this as a “self-perpetuating process” based on local housing conditions – rent level, physical appearance and amenities – in addition to the problems of the inhabitants’ values and behaviour, the bad reputation and changes in the composition of inhabitants. Segregated neighbourhoods often suffer from disinvestment in housing development, repairs and renewals, roads and other infrastructure and facilities, and a lack of or non-maintained green spaces compared to other parts of the municipality. Moreover, because of behavioural problems, social norms, and a lack (or different rationale than in mainstream society) of social control, public areas and equipment are more commonly damaged and go without repair. This neglect may be caused by the low level of political representation of the interests of inhabitants of such neighbourhoods (Teller 2020: 48), and the former may be seen as a politically risky investment into non-deserving communities. Moreover, segregated neighbourhoods with marginalised communities are more susceptible to environmental injustices, such as being the location of polluting industries or toxic waste sites. These environmental burdens further compound the challenges faced by residents and perpetuate spatial inequalities.

Physical decay and social problems in segregated neighbourhoods lead to their bad reputation, stigmatisation, and **symbolic exclusion**. Skifter Andersen (2019) distinguishes between two types of stigmatisation. On the one hand, the external stigmatisation of a neighbourhood by institutions and society leads to discrimination against its inhabitants in access to employment, education, insurance, bank credits and other services. On the other hand, the internal (or we can rather say *internalised*) stigmatisation of the local population is produced by repeated experienced discrimination, as well as limited social and cultural capitals and leads to the perception of limited life opportunities, aspirations and low self-esteem. The social problems and stigmatisation are usually amplified or completely constructed through media representation (see picture below) or popular imagination. The stigmatisation arises more from stereotyping than objective circumstances.



Visual representation of the same place (Chánov in Czechia) – on the left by a tabloid (Blesk) and on the right by the Ministry of Local Development as ESIF managing authority that has invested in neighbourhood renewal.

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Importantly, these neighbourhoods are often racialised through selective accentuations or fictive projections, meaning that (real or imaginary) living and social conditions in segregated neighbourhoods are perceived as “typical” of a given racialised group, their culture or the very “essence” thereof.

“Cultural differences are exaggerated and turned into divergence if not hostility to dominant national norms [...] while their vulnerable class position is downplayed or ignored altogether. Incidents of deviance or violence in and around these areas are routinely sensationalized and referred back to the allegedly intrinsic sociocultural traits of the residents fit to brand them as outcasts.” (Wacquant et al. 2014: 1273)

Among the consequences of such stigmatisation are that the availability and quality of public services such as welfare, healthcare, or education are poor and intense surveillance and aggressive law enforcement take place unnoticed, while this would be completely unacceptable elsewhere (*ibid*: 1275).

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SPAIN: ERADICATION OF SETTLEMENTS AND REHOUSING OF ROMA FAMILIES IN SEGOVIA

by Raúl Pérez González, and Belén Sánchez-Rubio García

Introduction

This case aims to be an example of how housing desegregation of Roma is possible when political commitment exists, cooperation among the main stakeholders happens with a mid/long-term approach, and the project is carried out with consensus and agreement that also includes the participation of the reallocated families.

The main lessons learnt in this project include the need for political consensus from the beginning of the project, together with the active participation of Roma families and considering their own opinions and needs about the whole process. The intervention must be integral, going beyond actions related to housing and ensuring accompaniment throughout the whole process of reallocation, including consideration of the affordability of the rent to be paid by the families and the inclusion of the neighbourhood to facilitate coexistence. Slums must be immediately demolished after rehousing to encourage families to move forward; families must be reallocated and distributed throughout the municipality, avoiding concentration in a new location. Community work and social network building should facilitate the comprehensive inclusion in the new location.

The case study is based on several interviews, namely with Maite Andrés, Director of the Social Inclusion Department at Fundación Secretariado Gitano (FSG) in charge of activities related to the housing field; Mar Fresno, Castile and Leon Regional Director at FSG, directly involved in the project; and interviews conducted with families at the moment of rehousing.

The main documents reviewed for the elaboration of this case study are the documents generated during the design, implementation and communication of the project, the '*Study-Map on Housing and the Roma population*',¹ and the '*Study of the Characteristics and Circumstances of People Living in Slums and Substandard Housing Settlements in Spain*'.²

Data for the elaboration of this case study come primarily from the direct involvement of FSG in the design and implementation of the project.

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National background information

Roma in Spain are the main minority, numbering around 800,000 people, although there is no official census data. The Roma community in Spain is in a situation of disadvantage

¹ [Study-map on housing and the Roma population](#), 2015, Spanish Ministry of Health, Consumer Affairs and Social Welfare

² [Study of the characteristics and circumstances of people living in slums and substandard housing settlements in Spain](#), 2023, Spanish Ministry of Social Rights and Agenda 2030 and FSG

regarding their social and economic rights and discrimination. The already mentioned study on slums and substandard housing settlements in Spain provides specific data on the living conditions of Roma in these spaces.

The terms 'slum and substandard housing settlements' in general refer to those segregated settlements, usually informal and physically, functionally and socially isolated, where the objective conditions related to poverty, housing and other rights are significantly worse than conditions for the rest of the population. Substandard housing settlements are groups of houses with serious habitability problems, while slums are semi-temporary 'self-constructions' built with waste materials that do not have sanitation or basic supplies such as water or electricity. Slums do not comply with the conditions of habitability in an extreme way; they are the most uninhabitable type of substandard housing. It is also understood that a settlement is a group of dwellings, while a slum can refer to an isolated dwelling.

It is estimated that in Spain in 2022, there are 27 slum and substandard housing settlements in which Roma people live — with 23,419 people living in 4,584 substandard dwellings and 5,925 people living in 1,185 slum dwellings. In relative terms, this represents 2.78% of the Roma population in Spain and 0.05% of the total population of Spain.

Ninety-two per cent of people in the settlements belong to ethnic minorities, 77% of them being Roma (more than 18,000 people). In slums, the ethnic minority population is even greater, at 98%. Seventy-one per cent of people living in settlements where slum dwellings are the main form of dwelling are Roma. The predominant population group in the settlements consists of children and adolescents: 50% of those living in settlements are under 16 years of age (and 20% are under six years old), while 73% are under 30 years old.

The great majority of the population living in slum and substandard housing settlements are in a situation of poverty and social exclusion, especially children (93% of people in these settlements, including 99% of the children, are at risk of poverty). The figures related to poverty are even worse among Roma people living in these settlements: 97.2% of Roma residents are at risk of poverty, 66.8% are in extreme poverty and 87.1% in severe poverty (and 79.4% and 94.9% among Roma children).

The study detected that the material conditions of the dwellings are absolutely precarious: cracks, dampness, a lack of natural light, exposure to pollution, dirt and noise, etc. In terms of utilities, the situation is particularly serious in settlements where slum dwellings predominate, with 90% of them lacking sanitation, 75% lacking running water and 69% lacking electricity.

With regard to the right to education, 10% of the population living in settlements of over ten years of age are illiterate, 15.2% have completed compulsory secondary education, and 60% of students attend segregated schools. Regarding employment, only 24% of the population have a job, with a strong gender gap (15% of women compared to 45% of men).

Contrary to popular belief, the vast majority (91%) say they would accept better housing in other neighbourhoods. However, they cannot access decent housing alternatives because they cannot pay the rent (75%) or because they face discrimination in access to housing (25%).

Sixty per cent of households in the settlements do not receive any form of welfare assistance, mainly due to difficulties in accessing information on the existence of social benefits or how to apply for them, the digital divide, the lack of compliance with the requirements of some of them, or an inability to prove these requirements with documentary evidence. There is also

a certain feeling of helplessness that even leads to not applying for social aid, assuming that this will not be approved. Against this background of poverty in the settlements, there is room for improvement in the social protection and welfare systems. Around 40% of the households receive some kind of public monetary assistance, whether in the form of minimum income (MI) – the majority, housing and child benefit, education grants or other forms of monetary aid. As for non-monetary assistance, 13.3% say they receive public assistance to support them with administrative procedures, 7.5% receive assistance with finding employment or training, 4.9% with food and 7.6% with supporting their children in their education.

The importance of decent housing and habitat for social cohesion can easily be seen in relation to the situation of the Spanish Roma community. In Spain, between the 1950s and the 1970s, there was a strong process of migration of the population from rural to urban areas. Roma also participated in these migration movements. Massive arrivals had to be absorbed by cities, involving enlarging existing neighbourhoods or creating new ones on the periphery, but without being able to provide an adequate response to the need for housing, employment, education, health care, etc., for newly arriving families, thus creating large pockets of poverty around them. With time, some housing solutions were offered through new residential construction initiatives, some of them with public protection. However, since there was no support nor accompaniment for such a process, those social groups with high levels of social exclusion, such as Roma, remained outside these initiatives, staying in these spaces of social exclusion or moving to other similar spaces, and were later relegated to re-housing in so-called *special typology settlements*,³ which were in fact temporary segregated substandard housing settlements. In the 1970s and 1980s, the arrival of democracy and the universalisation of welfare policies (access to social protection systems, the health system and education system), including access to housing (and particularly to mainstream social public housing schemes) in ordinary/standardised urban environments, have been key elements of the improvement of living conditions and the significant progress in social inclusion experienced by Roma. Access to housing for many Roma families in those years had a positive impact on other economic, educational and social factors and was a real boost to their social advancement.

However, those families who did not benefit from these plans of accessing housing and to more ordinary/standardised urban environments or suffered the consequences of inadequate measures in this area (such as relocation to new spaces that reproduced segregation – e.g., vertical substandard housing) continue to suffer the effects of exclusion: the persistence of slums, and re-housing in substandard housing settlements (without adequate facilities). These factors have only compounded the already unfavourable conditions Roma find themselves in, making it easier for other social issues to arise. As a consequence, the negative image, social rejection and discrimination that haunts this community is perpetuated and acts as a further barrier to its advancement.

In the legislative sphere, the new Act on the Right to Housing⁴ came into force in May 2023 in Spain, recognising the social function of housing and identifying it as a good of general

³ Settlements segregated from the urban space, composed of provisional housing for Roma families, very deteriorated and lacking hygienic and sanitary conditions and access to basic resources. They normally arose from some kind of urban planning, and they were intended to be formed on a temporary basis, but it is common that they persist for decades without maintenance or a definitive solution for their inhabitants. They end up deteriorating a lot and are assimilated into “ghettos” due to their marked differentiation from the other neighbourhoods of the locality.

⁴ [Ley 12/2023, de 24 de mayo, por el derecho a la vivienda \(Law on the Right to Housing\), 2023](#)

interest. The law represents a step forward in guaranteeing the right to housing, especially for people or groups with more difficulty accessing decent, adequate and accessible housing. In particular, it recognises slums as a situation of serious residential exclusion and settlements as situations of special vulnerability and prioritises their elimination in the interventions and programmes that form part of state housing plans.

To tackle the problems of access to decent housing that affect Spanish society as a whole, but, above all, those that have a more severe impact on the most vulnerable sectors of society, priority is given in the Law to groups in situations of poverty, social exclusion or other forms of vulnerability as the main objective of the actions of public institutions in relation to housing policies. And among them, the child perspective that is incorporated throughout the law stands out, involving identifying households with dependent minors as vulnerable households, thus recognising that access to housing is a prerequisite for the enjoyment of the rest of the fundamental rights of children.

It incorporates the principle of equality and non-discrimination in housing (which was already included in previous laws,⁵ transposing the European Race Equality Directive), which recognises both direct and indirect discrimination.

The ‘Spanish Urban Agenda’⁶ is a roadmap designed to define the strategy and actions in relation to housing and urban planning to be carried out until 2030. Strategic Objective 8 of the Agenda (“Ensuring Access to Housing”) includes lines of action aimed at “Guaranteeing access to housing, especially for the most vulnerable groups”. Likewise, in the framework of its Strategic Objective 2 (“Avoiding urban sprawl and revitalising the existing city”), mention is made of the need to act as a priority in the most vulnerable neighbourhoods.⁷

One of the most relevant recent policy tools has been the approval of the ‘State Housing Plan’ 2022-2025, which includes a specific programme for supporting the eradication of degraded areas, slums and substandard housing. Although this law establishes a common state/national framework, the competences correspond to the regions, on which the implementation of measures that favour the Roma community depends. This represents, from the start, an obstacle and different degrees of application depending on the region, also because not all of them include in their housing regulations the recognition of the right to housing.

As regards other funding opportunities apart from the one provided by the ‘State Housing Plan’, ERDF at the regional level is also available (and used by some regional governments), as well as Component 2 of the ‘Recovery, Transformation and Resilience Plan’.

There is an unequal use and underuse of the funds available for the eradication of substandard housing and slums by the Spanish regions (with competences in housing).⁸ To

⁵ Law on fiscal, administrative and social measures ([Ley 62/2003, de 30 de diciembre, de medidas fiscales, administrativas y del orden social](#)) and Law on equal treatment and non-discrimination ([Ley 15/2022, de 12 de julio, integral para la igualdad de trato y la no discriminación](#)).

⁶ [Agencia Urbana Española 2019](#). Ministry of Development.

⁷ At the legislative level, there is no specific definition. The Ministry has a [website](#) (in Spanish) that includes a Catalogue of Vulnerable Neighbourhoods.

⁸ The Spanish regions have competencies in preparation of their own housing regulations and inspection of their compliance, as well as public promotion, programming, control and monitoring of subsidised housing, while the City Councils have competencies in the promotion and management of subsidised housing concerning the criteria of financial sustainability and conservation and rehabilitation of buildings.

this day, some regional governments with slums and substandard housing have applied for a very small proportion of the available funds, and others have not.

The EU Child Guarantee includes recommendations for the deinstitutionalisation of temporary housing and priority and timely access to social housing and housing assistance for vulnerable children and their families, as well as the assessment and review of national, regional and local housing policies to combat fuel poverty and prevent the risk of homelessness. In relation to these recommendations, Spain has elaborated the ‘State Action Plan for the Implementation of the European Child Guarantee’ (2022- 2030),⁹ approved and presented in July 2022. Specifically, Objective 2.12. “Eliminate substandard housing” aims to ensure that no child or adolescent lives in substandard housing in irregular settlements, setting as a target the elimination of 80% of substandard housing settlements by 2030.

In article 20.1 of the Spanish Comprehensive Law for Equal Treatment and Non-Discrimination,¹⁰ residential segregation is also mentioned as a form of discrimination: “The public administrations, within the scope of their powers, shall ensure that urban planning and housing policies respect the right to equal treatment and prevent discrimination, including residential segregation, and any form of exclusion for any of the causes provided for in this law”.

In Spain, the ‘State Housing Plan 2022-2025’¹¹ gathers different sources of funding, including EU funding. It includes a programme for the eradication of degraded areas, slums and substandard housing (Programme 12) with funding of more than 13 million EUR. And also, other financial instruments, such as ‘Next Generation’ EU funds, the ‘Multiannual ESF+’ and ‘ERDF Programming Period 2021-2027’ and ordinary national/regional programmes, have the potential to invest in reversing the residential segregation of Roma.

In recent years, several studies have been carried out to measure and understand the living conditions of residential segregation in Spain, mainly affecting migrants and Roma. These exercises have been developed within a public-private partnership of national public authorities and specialised CSOs. The most up-to-date report about residential segregation and Roma in Spain is the already mentioned study on slums and substandard housing settlements in Spain. This study is a novel piece of work since there are not many studies in the literature on informal settlements and the perception of discrimination in Spain.¹² In Spain, and based on FSG’s experience of communicating about the Roma community, the volume of media articles on housing and Roma seems to have decreased since the mid-90s, when it was a common topic. In recent years, the press has dealt with the topic sporadically, tending, with some exceptions, to reinforce a very stereotyped image of Roma by focusing on marginalised contexts associated with criminality, drugs, etc, not representing the heterogeneous reality of Roma. However, the written press tends to treat this issue in a little more in-depth and less biased way in comparison with television, which is more sensationalist and tendentious.

⁹ [Plan de Acción Estatal para la Implementación de la Garantía Infantil Europea \(2022-2030\)](#)

¹⁰ [Ley 15/2022, de 12 de julio, integral para la igualdad de trato y la no discriminación.](#)

¹¹ [Royal Decree 42/2022, of 18 January, which regulates the Youth Rental Subsidy and the State Plan for Access to Housing 2022-2025.](#)

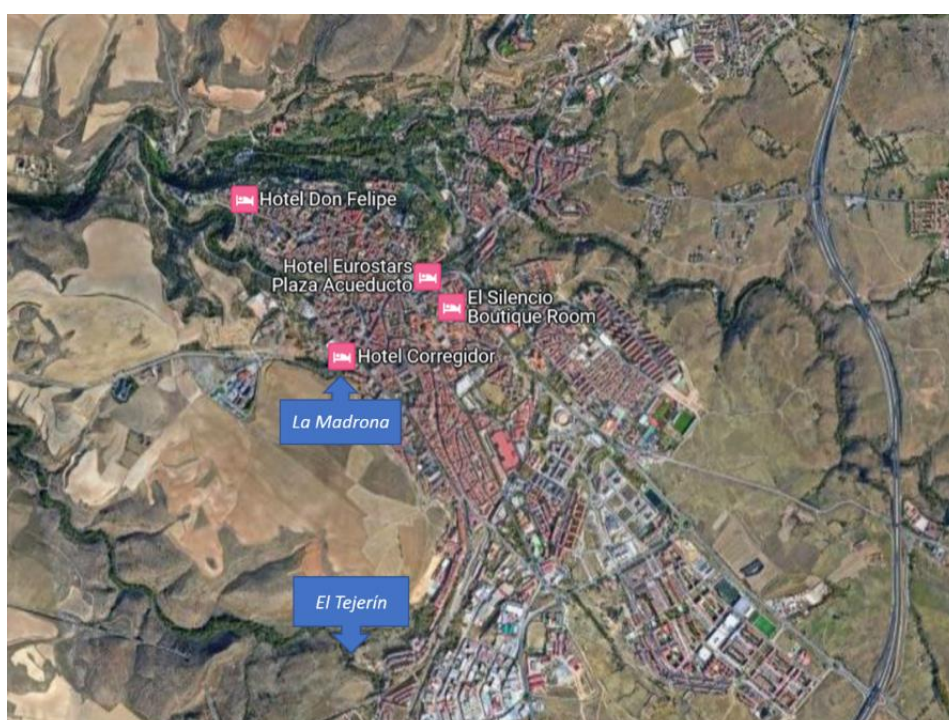
¹² Only two studies address this issue: [Racial discrimination in housing and informal settlements](#). 2022. Madrid, Ministry of Equality. and [State Map on racial and/or ethnic discrimination in housing and informal settlements in Spain](#). 2022. Cepaim Foundation & Acción Integral con Migrantes.

As regards the public political debate, discussions around settlements have been used as a weapon between parties, which have pointed the finger and used blaming discourses about the people who live in these neighbourhoods. These include cases that usually have wide media repercussions and very rarely receive a firm response from society or political parties.

Desegregation case study

The described project was developed in Segovia, a city in the region of Castile and Leon, the fifth-ranked region in Spain in terms of the number of Roma people, with approximately 27,000, being around 1% of the regional total population and 3% of the Roma in Spain.¹³ In terms of the joint consideration of the means of access to housing and the tenure regime, in Castile and León, home ownership predominates (56.81%), followed by rental housing (39.6%), free housing (27.53%) and subsidised housing (12.07%).¹⁴ In 2006, when this project was developed, Segovia had a population of approximately 55,000 inhabitants, and an economy revolving around metallurgy, agriculture, furniture, construction and, particularly, tourism.

In Segovia, two so-called *special typology settlements* were built from 1978 onwards, which were segregated from the urban space. They were made up of provisional dwellings for Roma families, which were very deteriorated and lacked the minimum hygienic and sanitary conditions and access to basic resources. The *Carretera Madrona* settlement was close to the city limits, with the dwellings sunken in a narrow strip of land between gullies and the road. On the other hand, *El Tejerín* was located in a solitary former industrial area on the side of a hill far from the city.



Map of the city of Segovia in 2023 with the location of where the settlements used to be

¹³ [Study-map on housing and the Roma population](#), 2015, Spanish Ministry of Health, Consumer Affairs and Social Welfare.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

Prefabricated dwellings were installed in *Carretera Madrona* in 1986. The land was urbanised, a sewage system and electricity supply were installed, and seven prefabricated modules of about 45 m² were installed and given to the families located there in the former slums, along with a carpentry workshop.



Carretera Madrona settlement



El Tejerín settlement

Photos © Fundación Secretariado Gitano, 2023

In *El Tejerín*, seven prefabricated housing modules were set up, with electricity, running water and waste collection. Each module contained two dwellings of 67 m² each, with a living room, two bedrooms, a bathroom and a kitchen. The seven modules are divided into 14 dwellings, 13 for housing and one for a cultural and meeting centre, chapel and storage.

In 2006, according to the census, the *Carretera Madrona* and *El Tejerín* settlements housed a total of 37 families (20 in *Carretera Madrona* and 17 in *El Tejerín*), amounting to 145 people, who, given their socioeconomic characteristics, needed a special process of rehousing to standardised dwellings. The settlements progressively suffered decline, which affected them environmentally (rubble, scrap, dirt, slum housing, shacks), culturally and educationally (absenteeism and school failure, illiteracy) and socially (illicit activities, lack of personal hygiene, conflicts).

In the settlements, there were no specific services for the inhabitants. *Carretera Madrona* was close to the city, and services were easily available. On the other hand, *El Tejerín* was at least 40 minutes from the downtown. Additionally, getting out of this settlement was not easy since it was surrounded by small hills and mud that made it difficult.

Segovia City Council decided¹⁵ to relocate the families to standardised dwellings, and to this end, it elaborated a 'Specific Rehousing Programme' in 2005 as part of the 'Social Inclusion Municipal Plan'. The plan included specific housing-related actions, as well as a personalised social accompaniment programme, both at individual and family levels, with the aim of prompting a change in the precarious way of life of the families so they could enjoy their full status as citizens and have their fundamental rights respected.

In this case, the public authorities found from the beginning that, on the one hand, the involvement of the public administrations was necessary to carry out the re-housing process.

¹⁵ The authors are not aware of any political impetus for this action. However, there was a long-term political consensus (all the parties in the City Council agreed on the need to carry out this project). No political party has used this topic as a political weapon against another (which is a relevant situation in Spanish politics).

And on the other hand, it was also necessary to include social accompaniment for families in a situation of socio-residential exclusion as part of the rehousing process in order to break the circle of exclusion in which they found themselves. This way, the collaboration between CSOs and the public administrations was a must for the success of the project.

The tasks associated with carrying out this project were distributed among the municipal social services, being in charge of the technical, social and urban design and overall responsibility of the programme; and FSG,¹⁶ the specialised CSO intervening in the project, which was to carry out the social accompaniment during the process of rehousing, designing and developing family pathways for individual and intercultural socio-educational inclusion. This task was carried out by two FSG workers specialised in intervening with vulnerable populations and intercultural mediation.

The role of intercultural mediation was essential to ensure that the Roma perspective was considered, to intermediate in case of conflicts, and to guide or facilitate the access of Roma families to mainstream services. The programme team also included a social services worker from the City Council, who supported the design of the 'Specific Rehousing Programme' on the basis of the experiences of other municipalities.

The general objectives of the initiative included eradicating the settlements, facilitating access to standardised dwellings, guaranteeing an integral family intervention, preventing the development of new settlements and guaranteeing the quality of life.

In order to achieve these objectives, the project aimed to improve the individual socio-educational situation of the people reallocated by developing their skills associated with coexisting with neighbours, increasing their personal autonomy, accompanying them in getting used to the new situation of living in an ordinary dwelling, particularly supporting Roma women with their needs, and including the participation of the Roma community in the project. The project also aimed to dismantle the substandard housing and rehabilitate the degraded spaces, making the achievements and progress visible. A programme of activities was set up to ensure the success of the initiative. These actions, elaborated jointly by the Local Authority and the CSO, were the following:

Identification of the actors involved and provision of resources. Given the scope of the action to be undertaken and their economic, political and social implications, it was clear that the City Council could not undertake this task alone, or only from one department. It was therefore essential to count on contributions and coordination from the City Council, the Department of Environment and Development and the Department of Families and Equal Opportunities. The participation of the FSG in terms of providing expertise was approved by political consensus.

Once the partnership was formally established, it jointly developed a programme with measures aimed at eradicating slums and substandard housing with broader social inclusion measures. Re-housing measures were not considered solely from an urban planning perspective but required a more integrated vision of the factors that affected the situation of

¹⁶ Fundación Secretariado Gitano (www.gitanos.org) is an intercultural social organisation that has worked for more than 40 years for the overall advancement of Roma people, with a focus on cultural diversity. It delivers projects and services to reduce social inequalities and to defend the rights of Roma people, mainly in the fields of employment, education and housing, as well as promotes more active policies for the social inclusion of the Roma population, to fight discrimination and to achieve equality of opportunity in Spain and across Europe.

the most disadvantaged families and the socioeconomic development of the neighbourhoods. The objective was not only to provide decent housing but to do so properly and in an environment that would facilitate opportunities for social integration.

To this end, housing actions were framed within a broader socio-residential intervention plan, which, based on needs assessments, addressed the main dimensions that structured the situation of socio-residential exclusion experienced by each family and as a whole. Specific and personalised pathways were defined for and with every family, involving developing both group and individual activities. For example, through group activities, such as a day at a public swimming pool or spending time in the gym, topics such as health were addressed – or through individual sessions with the family, dealing with the importance of education from an early age.

A large part of the medium and long-term success of this rehousing operation lay not only in including housing search measures and support in the rehousing of families but also in taking effective steps towards the social inclusion of the most disadvantaged people, as well as in preventing crises and possible conflicts that might arise. To this end, intensive and continuous social accompaniment of the families by FSG workers was essential in everyday tasks, in the organisation of the dwellings and the process of social, labour, health and educational incorporation. All the families involved in the programme participated in these activities.

A fundamental aspect of mediation in this housing project was the management of conflict situations. The comprehensive intervention plan considerably reduced the risks and consequences of conflicts, focusing not only on the Roma families but also on the neighbourhoods where they would be rehoused. The team accompanying the rehousing process was particularly alert to any sign of discontent or complaints by neighbours, often meeting with neighbourhood associations and communities, facilitating all the information, and therefore anticipating and solving potential problems.

In the preparation and design of the programme, it was important to start from a general, tested 'model' **based on previous rehousing experiences**. In this sense, the City Council counted on the support of FSG and its experience with previous desegregation activities in other contexts in Spain.

Reaching the consensus with the Roma community was a must in the development of the programme. It was equally important, on the one hand, to promote participation and consultation with those affected and, on the other, to promote the commitment of the families in their process of obtaining access to housing and their social inclusion. Therefore, concerning the families, there was a financial effort or commitment to finding housing appropriate to their level of income. In the new dwellings, families paid a rent of around 10% of their income to guarantee their subsistence and the payment of other expenses such as utility bills, communal fees, etc. The City Council assumed the rest of the payment in the case of private houses. A *social inclusion agreement* was established beforehand that indicated the commitment of the families and the social services or other participating services to developing an adequate social inclusion process for each beneficiary (commitments in terms of education, health, social benefits, access to employment, and community coexistence). This plan was adapted to the needs of each of the members of the coexistence unit. Although this agreement clearly specified the consequences of non-compliance with the commitments made, in practice, consequences such as evictions were never implemented. When there

were cases of failure to pay, more individual sessions were implemented to redirect the situation and look for alternative ways to restart the monthly payments.

It was also of key importance to maintain and strengthen the support of the family's immediate environment as a favourable resource for the process, as well as the link with the community and other pre-existing personal relationships within the locality and/or neighbourhood where the families were located. These activities consisted mainly of accompaniment during the process to improve the knowledge and use of public services and resources of the surroundings, as well as day care centres and other facilities.

Another key basic criterion of the programme was rehousing in standardised housing and inclusive habitats, avoiding the construction of 'special typology' neighbourhoods or areas that would end up creating spaces that deepen the conditions of social exclusion.

The new dwellings were identified through two channels: public dwellings from the Segovia City Council and the regional government of Castile and León, which, after being refurbished/reformed, were made available for the project, and private housing directly rented on the open market. Concentration in the same blocks or the same area (high-rise housing) was also avoided. A benchmark criterion was established for not exceeding a proportion of 10%, or 15% of families rehoused in the same area. It was also important to avoid the concentration of vulnerable people and groups with social, educational or employment needs in the same area, as this would lead to the displacement of other families, the 'ghettoisation' of some schools and, in short, segregated urban realities. Some families with particular needs were rehoused in dwellings outside the city, in rural areas, to help maintain their current livelihood, which was livestock farming.

Immediately after the decision to carry out the rehousing plan was taken, a census of the houses and families affected was quickly and rigorously carried out in order to know with certainty how many families and individuals would participate in the project. This census and follow-up activities facilitated a 'control' task for avoiding the arrival of new families, occupations of houses that had already been vacated, the resurgence of slum dwellings, etc.

The project was developed over approximately five years. It started in 2006 with the consensus agreements achieved at the City Council's Plenary Session, which resulted in the new 'Specific Rehousing Programme' and a cooperation agreement with FSG,¹⁷ and finished in the year 2010, when the *El Tejerín* settlement was dismantled, and the same happened to the *Carretera Madrona* settlement in 2011.

The deployment of the necessary resources started before the launch of the programme, promoted by the local authorities. Social services pointed out the degradation of the habitat where the families lived and implicated the relevant regional authorities. The Roma community was consulted about the opportunity and about the viability of the initiative.

¹⁷ This cooperation agreement included the objective of the project, the commitment to deliver the main activities, and the financial commitments.

The initiative was developed with multilateral financial assistance at both regional and local levels, as well as in the public and private spheres, creating for the project a final budget of 2,208,075 EUR:

Partner	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	TOTAL
Segovia City Council	€161,875	€163,135	€290,000	€290,700	€292,525	€1,198,235
Reg. Dep. of Environment and Development	€120,000	€120,000	€240,000	€240,000	€240,000	€960,000
Reg. Dep. of Family and Equal Opportunities	€11,875	€11,500	€11,500	€11,500	€3,465	€49,840
TOTAL BUDGET	€293,750	€294,635	€541,500	€542,200	€535,990	€2,208,075

The main outcomes have been an improvement in the social inclusion of the families, resulting in their fluent coexistence with the rest of their neighbours and, therefore, a more positive image of the Roma community.

Current housing and locations provide families with greater autonomy, privacy, more contact with non-Roma and proximity to services:

“Now I can go to the shop at a moment's notice because it's right next to my house”, said one of the persons who was reallocated, interviewed in a follow-up activity associated with the project.

Two segregated settlements have been eliminated, finally relocating 70 Roma families¹⁸ to integrated neighbourhoods, thus avoiding concentration and guaranteeing the fundamental right to decent housing, with basic household services and appropriate access to resources and services, with affordable rent in accordance with their income.

Moving to standardised dwellings has promoted social inclusion and improved education, the image of the Roma community, health conditions, household organisation, participation in the social life of the city, closeness to services, etc. After the rehousing, most families kept participating in follow-up activities and other social inclusion pathways. In terms of these activities, it was found, for example, that after the rehousing process, many more children were enrolled in early childhood education (not mandatory in Spain). The FSG team also observed an improvement in self-esteem and self-image, particularly of women.

Families were dispersed amongst different neighbourhoods, facilitating coexistence and social inclusion and giving more mobility and security to women and minors.

Social conflicts during the rehousing process were practically non-existent. From the beginning of the project, proactive communication and meetings with neighbourhood associations and communities in the areas where the families were going to be rehoused were carried out. This allowed to foresee potential problems, comprehensively explain the steps of the process, and offer the neighbours a direct contact to deal with problems that could arise during the project.

¹⁸ Initially, there were 37 families in *Carretera Madrona* and *El Tejerín*. During the process, more families from a third settlement were incorporated into this process. Also, new family units appeared due to the emancipation of young people (married couples and new children). These two circumstances elevated the final number of families reallocated to 70.

The opportunity to live in a standard house gave the families many new opportunities, especially when it came to children being included in their new neighbourhoods:

“My children bring their friends home, and before they didn’t. Now I send them to their room to study, [but] in the slum, they used to do their homework in front of the TV”.

Having a postal address in non-marginalised or segregated streets of the city has improved their chances of finding employment and their self-esteem:

“Before, we were ashamed to say that we lived in Tejerín, and we had to give the address of a relative.”

The quality of the public service response to the families’ needs has improved: there is better coordination of services and more comprehensive and normalised processes through the families’ use of the mainstream proximity services available to all citizens. Currently, the social accompaniment to the families continues in order to guarantee their personal and social development so that they achieve personal autonomy and enjoy their full status as citizens.

In 2011, both settlements were closed down, and the spaces they occupied recovered environmentally, now being green spaces open for public use. The city has improved its own image given there are no longer degraded spaces, which is coherent with its urban, touristic and cultural approach. In the area of *Carretera Madrona*, a road that was closed was fixed, and is now an open road that can be used by neighbours.

All families currently reside in standardised dwellings in neighbourhoods integrated within the urban fabric, both public and privately owned.

Pedro Arahuetes, mayor of Segovia, talking to the press at the closing of the slum *El Tejerín* stated:

“We are witnessing one of the historic moments of the city. In eight years, we have managed to put an end to a situation that was not good for the city or these families. Not so long ago, there were 70 people living here; as of today, there are no more.”¹⁹

The programme relied on the deployment of public resources to eradicate settlements and recover spaces for the city, actively involving the public services of the city. This social investment has affected the entire city, as it reduced the maintenance costs of these areas (surveillance, power grid, water leaks, animal health, fires, cleaning, rubbish, etc). It has also recovered once closed public properties (the new lodgers guarantee their conservation), put contracts in order, updated payments, and reduced the potential for social conflict, etc.

The follow-up and periodic revision of the individualised family pathways allows for the families’ objectives and progress to be matched to the support they receive and their contribution, which is dependent on income. Their access to mainstream services facilitates their social inclusion and their access to the labour market. All the families remain living in the new dwellings and, as observed in the continuous follow-up undertaken by FSG, most of them have improved their social situation (access to mainstream social services, better opportunities searching for a job and the level of education of children). Despite this progress,

¹⁹ https://www.eladelantado.com/segovia/adios_al_tejerin/

Roma families still suffer from a lower socioeconomic level and keep having difficulties related to discrimination.

Social benefits are important pillars in this type of initiative: improving reallocated participants' health, as well as the employability and education of minors; increasing family and community security and social participation; improving personal hygiene; reducing the risk of household and environmental accidents, etc.

The 'Segovia' brand has increased its touristic quality thanks to the improvement of the spaces and the positive perceptions of neighbours and visitors. The interdisciplinary coordination mechanisms will keep developing these activities thanks to their involvement at political, technical and social levels. The Coordination Board holds periodic meetings to follow-up on cases and directs them to resources and services such as education, employment and health when necessary.

Nowadays, the City Council still takes care of a large part of the rents of the families involved in this project, and it is evident that support for the achievement of autonomy of the families still needs to be provided.

The transferability of the programme was soon appreciated by many stakeholders. The programme inspired new regional initiatives: e.g., the 'Urban Renewal Plan of Castile and León 2009 (PRICYL)' includes a section on potential areas of integral rehabilitation, analysing the situation with regard to substandard housing and enabling interventions following the experience of cities such as Segovia (from 2006), which can be transferred to other municipalities.

Conclusions and recommendations

This case of the eradication of settlements and rehousing of Roma families in Segovia is considered to have obtained good results and, in fact, it received the UN HABITAT Dubai 2014 International Award for Best Practices. To better understand this success, a brief analysis of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the case follows:

From the beginning of the project, the strategy pursued the implementation of **definitive solutions**, therefore avoiding transitional measures that would have transferred the problem, postponed it in time or even aggravated it, and subsequently made the solutions costlier. In this sense, one clear focus of the project was, at the same time that families were rehoused, to recover the spaces for public use.

This involved determined **political support** and the **coordination of all the stakeholders** to ensure viable plans within specific timeframes and with an economic endowment that was adequate to the needs.

Cooperation with specialised CSOs is a key element: FSG had developed similar projects in other municipalities, so those strategies that had led to good results were incorporated into this one. When it comes to integral activities, collaborating with CSOs which specialise in working with specific groups improves the rehousing accompaniment process associated with standardised dwellings and facilitates the follow-up of the relocated families.

This case was implemented in the middle of the economic crisis, which was especially hard for Roma in Spain in all areas (reduced access to employment, evictions, increased poverty, reduction of basic incomes and social benefits, difficulties in paying for education, etc.),

“causing stagnation in some cases and a decline in many others, in [...] the progress made by the Roma community in the previous decades”.²⁰

An added difficulty was the incorporation of new family units due to the emancipation of young people (married couples and new children), reaching a total of 70 families, a bigger number of families than initially planned. The high price of private rents and the lack of sufficient public housing prolonged the process.

The main lessons learnt from carrying out this project are:

- **Political consensus.** Public authorities' and decision makers' support is key to ensuring the success of such projects and they must be on board from the beginning. It is important to clearly anticipate possible controversial issues (e.g., conflicts with neighbours who may reject the arrival of new and vulnerable neighbours or a lack of understanding of why Roma receive public funding for housing...) and to discuss them thoroughly until agreements are reached, as the best way to avoid further interruptions of the process.
- **Participation of the families in the process.** Roma families' views and inputs on their own rehousing process must be proactively identified and included in the project. Dedicated time and resources must be devoted to this to boost their participation rather than simply relying on it to happen naturally.
- **Consideration of the opinions and needs of the Roma families** during the whole process.
- **Opportunities for change.** Changes must be progressive and consolidated step by step. For this reason, it is essential to continuously work with the families in a comprehensive and integral way, taking advantage of opportunities that could arise during the process.
- **Social accompaniment is a crucial tool.** Rehousing involves a sudden and difficult change in the life of a family. The accompaniment of the supporting teams throughout the whole process of reallocation increases security, trust, self-improvement, calm, communication and closeness, all of which support the process.
- **Integral interventions** with families, involving activities related to areas such as employment, education, health and others.
- **Work with neighbours in the new dwelling** to facilitate coexistence. A supporting team can play a crucial role as an intermediary when needed (neighbours are aware of the existence of a supportive team they can refer to).
- **Demolition after rehousing.** Immediate demolition implies a cleansing effect, prompting a no-return attitude and encouraging families to move forward. This activity is a firm commitment to a long-term serious rehousing process, closing the door to going back to segregated settlements, which may be considered one of the biggest dangers in this type of project.

²⁰ [El impacto de la crisis en la comunidad gitana](#) (Impact of the crisis on the Roma community). Fundación Secretariado Gitano, 2013.

- **Sustainable rent.** A big part of the success of rehousing is determined by the family's ability to maintain the new dwelling: rent must be approximately 10% of the family income.
- **Distribution within the municipality.** One common mistake is to keep reallocated people concentrated in the new location, transferring the problem from one segregated settlement to a new space, which might be more adequate dwelling-wise but will still be segregated. To encourage families' autonomy and their further development, as well as to favour intercultural dynamics, the distribution of the reallocated people in the municipality is a must.
- **Social network building.** It is important to promote the existence of a social network for the relocated family (schools, health centres, social services centres, leisure centres, etc) to favour comprehensive inclusion in the new location.

Recommendations:

- **Maintain the social accompaniment strategy with Roma families,** who could still need it after rehousing to consolidate their pathway to autonomy and minimise the chances of going back to segregated housing.
- **Strengthen dual-approach strategies for the social inclusion of Roma,** designing explicit but not exclusive actions focused on the target population. These actions should be aimed at standardising and promoting access to ordinary resources and services, building a bridge between the needs of the Roma community and the mainstream services they are entitled to use or benefit from.
- **Address desegregation projects with an inclusive approach,** re-housing families by distributing them across the municipality. Actions that perpetuate housing segregation (such as rehousing to new concentrated neighbourhoods or creating new ghettos...) should be avoided as they have been proven to transfer the problem in time and place.
- **Ensure a long-term perspective,** look to create strategic agreements at the political level with the different parties in the municipality and the region to ensure that political changes do not affect the existence of desegregation policies.
- **Make use of the funds available for desegregation initiatives,** including in a combined manner EU Funds (both ESF+ and ERDF) with national, regional or even local funding.
- **Favour public/private cooperation** as the best way to develop efficient desegregation initiatives for Roma. Include CSO, Roma communities and other experts in the design of the activities, clearly defining the roles and tasks to be played by the different stakeholders.
- **Ensure social accompaniment during the whole project and beyond** by explicitly foreseeing the necessary budget and resources for this end.
- **Identify and map all existing slums and substandard housing settlements** across the country to understand the dimensions/characteristics of such a critical situation.
- Specifically acknowledge, from a **children's rights perspective,** the situation of Roma children being affected by a housing-deprived situation and include measures to

combat this particularly disadvantaged context of Roma children as part of National Strategies that implement the Child Guarantee in the EU.

- Recognise families who live in slums and substandard housing settlements as a **priority group in terms of access to public and social housing**.
- Guarantee an income to combat extreme poverty among families living in settlements, facilitate **access to the Minimum Income** (or equivalent instruments in the EU), extending its coverage and carrying out the adjustments necessary to ensure it is received by the most vulnerable families, and offer opportunities for the **social and labour market inclusion** of these people.
- Implement a **comprehensive, non-sectoral approach to slum and substandard segregated settlements' eradication strategies**, since it is not simply a matter of developing housing policies but of interventions which include measures to foster both the social and labour market inclusion of the settlement population and the educational success of their children.

Regarding Spanish laws and strategies, it is recommended:

- To effectively apply the **Law on the Right to Housing**, guaranteeing the right to adequate housing in an inclusive environment for all people and recognising these settlements as creating situations of particular vulnerability and therefore requiring particular attention.
- To effectively apply the **Comprehensive Law on equal treatment and non-discrimination**, prohibiting and sanctioning discrimination on the basis of ethnic or racial origin in access to housing.
- To approve a '**National 2030 strategy' for the eradication of settlements**, with full respect for legal guarantees and the basic rights of their residents, assuring the latter of adequate alternative housing and a process of social inclusion. To **prioritise actions in settlements which fall under housing plans and urban regeneration and renovation programmes** using existing funding mechanisms ('State Housing Plan 2022-2025', ESF+/ERDF programming period 2021-2027, Component 2 of the 'Recovery, Transformation and Resilience Plan', etc) and to set out the budget invested specifically in these activities as established in the Law on the Right to Housing.

ROMANIA: DESEGREGATION OF A GHETTO IN REȘIȚA – CHANGING THE STATUS-QUO OF THE ROMA

by Florin Moisă, Florin Nasture and Daniel Grebeldinger

Introduction

Romania lags in terms of having systemic measures for creating better living conditions for vulnerable groups, including Roma, whose reality concerning housing conditions remains a difficult one. The present chapter aims to present relevant information on the status of the housing desegregation of the Roma in Romania, characterised by marginalisation, poor quality of living and segregation.

There are very few examples of housing desegregation in Romania, and most of them lack a long-term perspective and a systemic and integrated approach. The case of Mociur ghetto in Reșița is a relevant one, where several positive conditions allowed local stakeholders to work together in the context of an EU-funded project according to the Community Lead Local Development (CLLD) approach, in which the desegregation process was accompanied by other hard and soft measures. The main lessons learnt from the analysed case may be synthesised as follows:

- First of all, the most important lesson is that, in order to be successful, a desegregation process requires an intense and coordinated effort and the involvement of local authorities and civil society, an allocated budget and a strong and skilled team.
- Second, the involvement of the community members in all the processes, from planning, implementation, evaluation, and monitoring and support after relocation finishes, is crucial.
- Third, desegregation is a long-term process; offering a house to a family is not so difficult, but a continuous effort to maintain the family in a decent living status is essential. Managing the cost of living seems to be equally important.

The research methodology was a qualitative one, based on desk research, interviews with members of the local community (at least ten informal interviews) and participatory observation at the local level – based on the individual experience and involvement of the researcher in the desegregation process, and a leader of the local Roma association (Nevo Parudimos Association) who was involved in the entire process. The main source of information for the presented case study was the Nevo Parudimos Association, an active Roma NGO involved in the local implementation of the local development strategy of Reșița city. The organisation was involved in all the phases of the development of the local strategy and pushed forward measures designed for the Roma communities.

Having in mind the limited scope of the present report and the complexity of the housing issue, our analysis focussed on the most relevant pieces of research and policy reports on the housing situation in Romania, as well as legislation and official European Union documents.

This chapter was developed by Florin Moisă from the Resource Center for Roma Communities, Florin Nasture from O Del Amencia Roma Cultural Center, and Daniel Grebeldinger from the Nevo Parudimos Association.

National background information

Romania has 19 officially recognised national/ethnic minorities, all decreasing in number. The 2021 Census¹ counts 596,477 persons who self-identified as Roma (3.44%), a decrease from the 2011 Census (621,573, 3.29%). Still, there are estimations that only around 40% of the Roma self-identify as Roma; therefore, estimations of the total number are between 1 and 1.4 million.

According to the *Informal Housing in Romania* report (2018), more than 60,000 Roma families (some 250,000 persons) live in segregated communities at the margins of villages or towns without legal property documents and with limited access to social services, including access to basic infrastructure and utilities.² In a study by 'URBAN-INCERC',³ 38% of municipalities reported having at least one informal settlement,⁴ while 49,338 households and 63,492 families live in informal settlements, most of them Roma families. On the other hand, according to Eurostat data, around 67% of all Roma in Romania live in ethnic concentrations, i.e., in communities where all the members or the majority of the community are Roma.⁵

The ethnic concentrations do not necessarily mean marginalisation or segregation in Romania. *The Atlas of Urban Marginalised Areas* defines a community as marginalised if it simultaneously meets three conditions: (1) a low level of human capital, (2) a low level of employment in the formal sector, and (3) poor housing conditions.

The Atlas identifies urban marginalised areas in 264 cities and in Bucharest, with around 342,933 people; out of these, 20.7% self-identify as Roma (but the actual proportion may be much higher). Of all urban people identified as Roma in the 2011 Population and Housing Census, 30.8% live in urban marginalised areas.⁶ As for rural areas, most marginalised communities are Roma communities, representing around 5 to 8 per cent of the overall population in counties such as Covasna, Mureş, Ialomiţa Sibiu, Braşov, Sălaj, Galaţi, and

¹ Census of Population and Households 2021. For more information, see: <https://www.recensamantromania.ro/rezultate-rpl-2021/rezultate-definitive-caracteristici-etno-culturale-demografice/>

² *Informal Housing in Romania* (2018). Research Report of the project "No Man's Land": Informal housing in Roma communities - recognition, responsibility and common solutions.

³ I.N.C.D. URBAN-INCERC, 2013-2014, "Analiză privind aşezările informale din România – evaluarea situaţiei actuale în vederea formulării unor reglementări şi instrumente de intervenţie. Available at: <https://locuireinformala.ro/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Phase-2-Analysis-of-the-informal-settlements-in-Romania-.pdf>

⁴ Informal settlements are residential formations regularly developed on the outskirts of urban or rural localities, where the lands are legally or illegally occupied, and the buildings are unauthorised or respect the building permits only partially, and whose main characteristics are a lack of access to the basic urban infrastructure, inappropriate etc. jeopardising the safety and health of the occupying population (Suditu & Vâlceanu, 2013).

⁵ Roma Civil Monitor (2018). *Civil society monitoring report on the implementation of the national Roma integration strategy in Romania: Focus on structural and horizontal preconditions for the successful implementation of the strategy*. Available at: <https://cps.ceu.edu/sites/cps.ceu.edu/files/attachment/basicpage/3034/rcm-civil-society-monitoring-report-1-romania-2017-eprint-fin-2.pdf>

⁶ Anton, Simona; Koo, Bryan; Man, Titus-Cristian; Moldovan, Sandu Ciprian; Stanculescu, Manuela Sofia; Swinkels, Robertus A, (2014) *The Atlas of Urban Marginalized Communities in Romania*. Available at: <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/668531468104952916/pdf/Elaboration-of-integration-strategies-for-urban-marginalized-communities-the-atlas-of-urban-marginalized-communities-in-Romania.pdf>

Bihor.⁷ The ‘Regional Roma Survey’ conducted by the United Nations Development Program, the World Bank and the European Commission mentions that the living conditions of Roma households are much poorer than those of non-Roma households.⁸ In the majority of these communities, both rural and urban, 32% of houses are unsanitary, and the share of those who complain about pollution, dirt or other ecological problems is 25%. More than 50% live in overcrowded houses, 16.5% live in buildings considered unsafe for living and 30.3% live in buildings that are visibly damaged.

The Working Group on Roma Housing in the Ministry of Development, Public Works and Housing addressed the topic of residential segregation (2007) with two projects initiated and funded by the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Administration: (1) ‘Methodology for the rehabilitation of housing in the areas affected by physical degradation and social exclusion’ (2007)⁹ and (2) ‘Analysis of the informal settlements in Romania - assessment of the current situation in order to formulate some regulations and intervention instruments’ (2013-2014).¹⁰ Nevertheless, the two country-wide mappings (urban and rural marginalisation) provide data and information for the preparation of projects financed from EU structural funds.¹¹ Another study is the one issued in 2019 by IRES (the Romanian Institute for Evaluation and Strategy) and Impreuna Agency, *Comparative Study of the Needs of Roma Communities*,¹² in the context of establishing the strategic priorities for the intervention aimed at social inclusion.

Other studies have also been published such as the ‘Pata’ study by Adi Dohotaru, Hajnalka Harbula, and Enikő Vincze,¹³ which analyses aspects of the formation of the informal settlement Pata Rât (Cluj-Napoca Municipality). It is worth mentioning the *Informal Housing in Romania* report and *No Man’s Land: Informal Housing in Roma Communities – Recognition, Responsibility and Common Solutions* report (2018).¹⁴ Also, data provided by the FRA Roma Survey 2021 show the large proportion of the Roma in Romania (79%) living in neighbourhoods where most of the inhabitants are Roma, and the fact that in such communities, 45% do not have tap water inside their dwellings.¹⁵

⁷ World Bank, the Ministry of Labor, Family, Social Protection and Elderly, Bucharest (2016). *The Atlas of Rural Marginalized Areas and Local Human Development in Romania*. Coordinators: Emil Teșliuc, Vlad Grigoraș, Manuela Sofia Stănculescu. Available at: <https://elibrary.worldbank.org/doi/abs/10.1596/24770>

⁸ UNDP/WORLD BANK/EC REGIONAL ROMA SURVEY 2011.

⁹ Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/338839779_Metodologie_de_reabilitare_a_locuirii_in_zone_afectate_de_degradare_fizica_si_excluziune_sociala

¹⁰ Available at: <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/722941468586112365/pdf/106856-WP-v1-P150147-ROMANIAN-PUBLIC-RomaniaHousingRASOutputFinalHousingAssessmentROM.pdf>

¹¹ Available at: <https://elibrary.worldbank.org/doi/abs/10.1596/24770> and <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/668531468104952916/pdf/Elaboration-of-integration-strategies-for-urban-marginalized-communities-the-atlas-of-urban-marginalized-communities-in-Romania.pdf>

¹² <https://www.agentiaimpreuna.ro/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Studiu-comparativ-al-nevoilor-comunitatilor-de-romi-in-contextul-stabilirii-prioritatilor-strategice-de-interventie-pentru-incluziunea-sociala-a-acestora.pdf>

¹³ Dohotaru A., Harbula H., Vincze E., Pata, Editura Fundației penbtru Studii Europene, 2016, available at: https://www.academia.edu/37061836/Pata_Cluj_EFES_2016

¹⁴ Available at: https://locuireinformala.ro/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/OSI_Research-report_Informal-Housing-in-Romania_EN.pdf

¹⁵ Roma Survey 2021: Headline indicators by neighborhood, Andrey Ivanov, Andrey Ivanov, Equality, Roma and Social Rights Unit, FRA, 30 November 2022

The mentioned studies show a strong correlation between the residential segregation of Roma and poor access to public services. In a study by the World Bank, it is claimed that the Roma that live in segregated communities have a 38% risk of facing poverty.¹⁶ According to another study, in these communities, there is inadequate infrastructure, overcrowding and a lack of housing security.¹⁷ The majority of the segregated communities are at risk of being evacuated by the authorities due to the lack of legal property documents, the lack of resources to pay for utilities, and the potential demolition of houses that are situated in the public or private domain.

The first segregated communities appeared after 1965 when the nomadic Roma were settled through assimilation measures, while during the 1970s and 1980s, forced 'housing systematisation' led to the demolishing of private houses and the building of large neighbourhoods with blocks of flats/apartments to accommodate the increasing migration from rural areas to newly industrial urban areas. Within this process, the Roma were moved to the poorest edges of cities and villages.

The UNECE Report from 2016 identifies five factors that created the spatial segregation of Roma:

1. Restitution and land privatisation: houses/lands taken by the communist regime were given back to the former owners, and some of the Roma were left without their housing.
2. Privatisation of the stock of socialist public housing: just a small number of Roma families benefited from this measure.
3. State withdrawal from the planning and housing sectors: private investments became the primary source of new housing at a cost that was not affordable for Roma families.
4. Changing of responsibility for providing housing: families are required to take over the responsibility for finding their own housing – the neoliberal logic became predominant.
5. Decentralisation and transfer of responsibilities for local urban development to the local government: not accompanied by adequate allocation of resources and training.¹⁸

Due to the lack of specific legislation in Romania before 2001, many communities developed in a chaotic manner without legal property documents and building permits in areas subject to the risks of flooding and contamination. It was only in 2019, under the framework of Law 151/2019 on informal settlements in Romania, that local authorities were asked by the government to register and map informal settlements,¹⁹ as well as to initiate consultation processes and participative planning at the settlement level and identify the legal and economic status of the lands, etc. In the case of a decision to totally or partially dismantle the

¹⁶ World Bank (2014). *Achieving Roma Inclusion in Romania: What Does It Take?* Available at: <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/18663>

¹⁷ UNDP/World Bank/EC regional Roma survey 2011

¹⁸ *Informal settlements in countries with economies in transition in the UNECE Region* (2016). Available at: https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/hlm/documents/Publications/Literature_Review_on_Informal_Settlements.pdf.

¹⁹ World Bank, the Ministry of Labor, Family, Social Protection and Elderly, Bucharest (2016). *The Atlas of Rural Marginalized Areas and of Local Human Development in Romania*. Coordinators: Emil Teșliuc, Vlad Grigoraș, Manuela Sofia Stănculescu. Available at: <https://elibrary.worldbank.org/doi/abs/10.1596/24770>

informal settlements, local authorities are expected to offer alternative housing solutions through social housing or support the reconstruction of houses on pieces of land that respect standards, provide information and consult the inhabitants regarding alternative solutions, obtaining their agreement, etc. Still, the law does not have compulsory provisions regarding offering financial solutions to informal settlers.²⁰

In 2008, the government started implementing a pilot program for building social housing for vulnerable Roma, funded through the state budget, implemented by the National Housing Agency and targeting around 300 apartments, quite a small number compared to the actual need for decent housing for the Roma. According to the Ministry of Development and Public Works, 197 houses for Roma were finalised in the following counties: Bihor (22), Bistrița-Năsăud (21), Mehedinți (28), Olt (28), Sibiu (28), Arad (49) and Brașov (21). According to the National Housing Agency, there are 21 more houses to be finalised in the Potlogi locality (Dâmbovită County).²¹

An initiative under the framework of the programming period of 2014-2020 is the 'LEADER' program that targets the rural level, and also the CLLD program that focuses on the development of cities which have more than 20,000 inhabitants. Both programs are addressing marginalised communities, including informal and residential segregation. Both programs were still under implementation at the time of the elaboration of the present report; results will be available only after January 2024.

One of the most important initiatives which will have both positive and negative effects for the Roma is the National Program for Cadaster and Land Registry,²² initiated by the Ministry of Public Works and Administration. Note that not all Romanian territory was associated with up-to-date cadaster documents, the most advanced being the Transylvanian region, formerly under Austro-Hungarian rule. As part of this program, funded by the National Cadaster Agency's own resources and the Regional Operational Program (312,891,115 EUR) at the end of 2022, work was ongoing in over 75% of the localities in Romania.²³ There is a negative impact of this program on the Roma living in informal settlements: the land where their houses are built will be associated with clear ownership rights, and therefore, they will be easily evicted by private or public owners.

Many of the Roma-segregated communities are a result of deliberate marginalisation and evictions by local governments. A report on the evictions in Romania presents an estimation of 23,343 forced evictions between 2001 and 2017 based on the data provided by the Ministry of Justice.²⁴ Unfortunately, data on the Roma victims of forced evictions is not available. Roma are worried about engaging in litigation against local governments because of their vulnerable position (e.g. the risk of exclusion from social welfare and other repercussions).

Nevertheless, there were cases in which mayors were fined by the National Council for Combating Discrimination (NCCD). In 2012, the mayor of Baia-Mare, Catalin Chereches, forcibly evicted 2,000 Roma and moved them into a building belonging to a former chemical

²⁰ *Locuirea in Romania, catre o Strategie Nationala in Domeniul Locuirii*, Romania Regional Developed Program, The World Bank. Armonizarea investițiilor publice, Componenta 4: RAPORT FINAL, August 2015

²¹ <https://adevarul.ro/stiri-interne/societate/ministerul-dezvoltarii-21-de-locuinte-sociale-2133401.html>

²² See: [NOTA privind activitatea ANCPi la data de 31.08.2023.pdf](https://www.ancpi.ro/ro/activitate/activitate-ancpi-la-data-de-31-08-2023.pdf)

²³ <https://partidaromilor.ro/vesti-bune-pentru-cei-care-nu-detin-acte-pentru-case-si-terenuri/>

²⁴ <https://romacenter.ro/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/ONG-Evacuari-fortate-in-Romania.pdf>

plant and then built a wall between another Roma community from Baia Mare and its Romanian neighbours. NCCD self-initiated an inquiry and fined the mayor 5,000 lei (1,000 EUR).²⁵ Another mayor, Dorin Florea from Targu Mures, was fined 6,000 lei (1,200 EUR) in 2020 for racist, Nazi-sympathizing, hateful statements.²⁶ In 2017, the town hall in Alba Iulia was fined 5,000 lei (1,000 EUR) for evicting 200 Roma, but it contested the decision. Finally, the High Court of Cassation and Justice (HCCJ) annulled the decision of the NCCD. The Legal Resources Centre, which supported the cause of the Roma evicted in 2017, considers that the HCCJ decision “will create an extremely dangerous precedent in terms of respecting the rights to housing, private life and non-discrimination of vulnerable groups, rights guaranteed by both national and international legislation”.²⁷

The ‘National Strategy and Action Plan on Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction 2022-2027’²⁸ (section 3.2.5) proposes the insertion of a definition of spatial residential segregation in future changes of housing legislation, as well as the recognition of the need for the prevention of segregation and specific measure to prevent forced evictions and offer viable housing alternatives, and prevent gentrification.

The present atlases of urban and rural marginalised communities define marginalised communities according to both socioeconomic criteria (human capital, employment and housing) and ethnic criteria (Roma) due to the fact that stigma and discrimination are factors that contribute to marginalisation and because some programs may be designed with a focus on the Roma. This approach is mentioned implicitly in Romanian guidelines for EU and EEA Grants funding, which state that projects that do not comply with the principle of non-segregation will not be financed. Also, it is mentioned that projects will be supported that promote desegregation. Alignment with these principles is usually checked during the evaluation phase and afterwards during implementation and reporting. We have not identified relevant projects that intervene in segregated areas, and this may be due to the mentioned non-/desegregation principles or because potential project promoters do not assume the risks related to the fulfilment of project indicators in an environment considered very difficult, while failure to meet the project indicators would mean financial cuts for the project promoters.

Still, we can mention the so-called Pata Cluj project,²⁹ which spent over eight million EUR (EEA Grants) in the two phases of implementation. About 70 families were moved out of the Pata-Rat garbage-filled area, with no visible effects on the long-existing community. The project was criticised by Roma civil society organisations for the presentation of the project as a model of intervention. The latter stressed the role of city hall in creating the Pata-Rat segregated area through several evictions. In fact, according to Costel Bercus, “the degrading situation in terms of housing, social and economic conditions of Roma families from Pata-Rat

²⁵ <https://evz.ro/exclusiv-evz-auschwitz-ul-de-la-baia-mare-2000-de-romi-mutati-in-uzina-mortii-de-primar-984719.html>

²⁶ <https://www.digi24.ro/stiri/actualitate/social/video-protest-in-targu-mures-fata-de-declaratiile-lui-dorin-florea-s-a-cerut-demisia-primarului-1246860>

²⁷ <https://adevarul.ro/stiri-locale/alba-iulia/cazul-blocului-locuit-de-romi-la-alba-iulia-2257585.html>

²⁸ <https://mmuncii.ro/j33/index.php/ro/minister-2019/strategii-politici-programe/6562-sn-incluziune-sociala-2022-2027>

²⁹ See: <https://eeagrants.org/news/bringing-hope-pata-rat> and <https://desegregare.ro/en/> for more details on the Pata project

is the result or the effect of exclusion and marginalisation policies adopted by the local public authority of Cluj Napoca”.³⁰

The lack of clarity in legislation, government policies and government programs regarding informal and segregated settlements makes it almost impossible for financial allocations from the EU and the government to reach these communities. In fact, in most cases, it is even illegal for mayors to make investments in these areas due to legal and procedural rules. Another issue is also increasing in importance: projects funded through CLLD that propose the rehabilitation of blocks of flats inhabited by the Roma and other vulnerable members of the community mean that the inhabitants need to temporarily be relocated, which is very difficult without alternative housing being available. The present inhabitants generally do not fulfil social housing criteria, and once they leave, they will not return.

However, in Romania, there are many Roma communities which have become segregated due to a natural spatial dynamic but are not necessarily marginalised or segregated. Living in such voluntary ethnic enclaves does not necessarily mean negative effects on the living conditions of the community members. There is no need for desegregation; instead, investments should aim at their further development. We should consider Roma settlements without no access to services, being intentionally marginalised by the authorities, as segregated communities. One could argue that good material living conditions, together with social cohesion, bridging social capital and human capital, are key ingredients for such a voluntary ethnic enclave that does not need to be considered problematic. Nevertheless, all this can be achieved only if the communities matter politically or if they have representative leaders who push authorities to take the Roma into account and ensure their access to services.

Furthermore, in mixed communities, it is much more difficult to maintain the Roma language and Roma traditions, in comparison to Roma monoethnic communities where the Roma culture and identity are still preserved. Staying together in a compact community may also avoid significant contact with mainstream society and its subtle forms of racism. Yet, the issue of choice is important, therefore the Roma should have a real choice concerning whether they want to live with other Roma in a compact community or among the mainstream population. Still, the reality is that such a choice is strongly limited due to racism, poverty, marginalisation and self-marginalisation, leaving Roma communities in a poor status quo. Also to be mentioned is that the cost of living in such communities is relatively small and manageable, but it would be almost impossible to cover the cost of living somewhere in a city (rent, electricity, heating, water, transportation, etc.).

Residents living in spatial segregation frequently appear in the public media as people who are negatively impacting society. Examples are the environmental conflicts in Baia-Mare and Cluj, the abusive occupation of some historical houses in Timisoara, the extravagant lifestyles of some Roma, and news regarding crimes committed by the residents of segregated communities. The media tend to emphasise the negative impacts these communities have on the local level rather than trying to advocate and find solutions that may improve the living

³⁰ On-line interview with Costel Bercus, Roma activist, June 12, 2023.

conditions of these residents. As a result, the media may contribute to a specific form of hate speech among the general public.³¹

Regarding politicians, some of them use narratives against the Roma to gain political capital. As we have mentioned, we found such politicians in Baia-Mare, Targu Mures, and Alba-Iulia. In Botosani, the vice-president of the Union of Saving Romania, a progressive party, declared that: “We have a solution for removing the Roma from the old downtown; we are redeveloping everything. Whatever it costs us, it is worth getting the Roma out of the old downtown.”³²

Desegregation case study

Reșița is a medium-sized municipality in the southwest of Romania, the capital of Caraș-Severin County, inhabited by 58,393 persons (2021 Census),³³ with 658 self-identified Roma (1.12% of the population). The population of Reșița has been decreasing over the last decades, in line with the wider context and the restructuring of local industries, population ageing, migration, etc. According to the Social Barometer of Reșița Municipality,³⁴ 95.5% of the population is Romanian, 1.9% Hungarian, 1.5% German, and 0.9% Roma. However, an unofficial estimate of the Nevo Parudimos Association estimates around 3,000 Roma.

Reșița is a town with strong industrial characteristics. It was formerly an important metal industry during the communist period, but today, it is more oriented towards services, construction, metal and machinery and manufacturing. In terms of social infrastructure, the municipality is well served by public institutions and social services, according to the existing institutional structure in Romania. According to Socioromap,³⁵ there are at least eight areas where Roma live in compact communities, with up to 90 households and over 170 Roma inhabitants – Secu, Cîlnic, Retova, Triaj, Delu Crucii, Mociur, Muncitoresc, and Stavila, all in rather poor condition and material deprivation. The reference study for the local development strategy identified five urban marginalised areas (UMA): Mociur, Dealu Crucii, Traian Lalescu, Moara Juracek, and Colonia Baraj, largely inhabited by the Roma, characterised by low human capital development, a low occupation rate and poor housing conditions (overcrowded, lack of facilities, etc).

The Mociur community is located in an isolated area not far away from the city centre (a 20 min. walk) and is inhabited by workers in the industrial communist companies and local mines, consisting of two buildings, a block of flats with four floors, altogether 180 flats and around 900 people (with one or two rooms each).

³¹ Gheorghe-Gavrilă Hognogi, Ana-Maria Pop and Alexandra-Camelia Marian-Potra. “Faces of Marginal Housing in Romania”. *Sustainability* 2021, 13, 3983. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13073983>

³² <https://www.rfi.ro/social-116720-lider-usr-rasism-botosani>

³³ <https://www.recensamantromania.ro/rezultate-rpl-2021/rezultate-definitive/>

³⁴ <https://bcs.com.ro/studiu/barometru-social-resita>

³⁵ Information provided by ISPMN, from Socioromap database. See more at: <https://ispmn.gov.ro/node/socioromap>

The neighbourhood was created during the 1990s when some Roma from the Târgu-Mureș area relocated to Reșița for work and were given the former workers' dormitories. Around ten years ago, the municipality purchased the two buildings from the owners, some local companies.



A view of Mociur neighbourhood

Photo © Cosmina Rosian

The area was inhabited by 157 families, altogether around 580 people, with diverse ethnic backgrounds, but a large majority of them were Roma. The two buildings were occupied in proportions of around 80%, and living standards were very poor, the flats being between 20 and 40 sqm in size with their own bathrooms or shared hallway bathrooms. The flats and the land were the property of the Municipality of Resita, and people had short-term rental contracts, paying around 5-10 EUR per month. Even so, some families had accumulated debts of up to 500-800 EUR. After 2018, the Municipality of Reșița decided not to extend the rental contracts, maintaining only short-term rental contracts (3-6 months) and new contracts were signed only with families who settled their rent payments, while the others remained illegally; the intention behind this being to dismantle this ghetto community.

Because of difficulties regarding rental contracts, few people had access to electricity, legal contracts, and identity documents with a residential address. Some others were illegally connected to the electricity network, practically “stealing” electricity or receiving it from neighbours. In the last few years, the buildings were not connected to a piped water system and the sewage system was broken; therefore, all the waste went into the basement; the roof of the two buildings was also in very bad shape, with rain regularly leaking onto the third floor.

Across the street from the two buildings, there is a school unit, administratively part of the Traian Lalescu High School, which is considered the best high school in Caraş-Severin County, with its main building in the city centre area. The building located in the Mociur area, where 80% of the pupils are from Mociur, may be considered segregated. The school premises also include a nursery school attended by 28 children in a 20 sqm space. Access to Mociur settlement is facilitated by nearby train railroads, its location 20 minutes walking distance from the centre of the city or via public transportation across a metal bridge over the train lines. Access roads to the community were not in good shape, paved with old cubic stone and no water drainage systems.

The majority of the Mociur inhabitants had a lower level of education, most of them being daily paid workers [day labourers]. They were known in the city as collectors of scrap metal. Some women were involved in prostitution, but there were also people with regular jobs employed in factories around the city or hired by the local cleaning and recycling company.

The Mociur settlement was considered the worst community in the city; the media pictured it many times in a stereotyped manner³⁶ as having the highest criminality rate, reflecting a lot of stereotypes and prejudices. The reality was that the community was very dirty, with many people throwing trash out the windows, the lack of trash bins being one of the reasons, but the lack of education being another. Except for the low living costs and the fact that people have lived there for many years, there were no other specific reasons for living there. There was no easy access to local services, except for the school and the kindergarten, all other services being situated within a maximum of 30 minutes of walking or public transportation (500 meters).

The desegregation process was driven by two main reasons:

1. One of the main objectives of the urban Local Action Group Reşiţa (LAG) was to improve the living standards of the people from the UMAs in Mociur that had the highest score in terms of exclusion criteria.
2. The urban development plans of the city foresee that near the Mociur ghetto, a new mall area will be developed, including an Aqualand and luxury housing, by a company called CEE TRUST. Unofficially, this investment cannot happen with a ghetto community nearby, and the municipality had to do something about this.

The issue of desegregation and improvement of the housing situation of the Roma from Mociur was raised in 2002 by the Nevo Parudimos Association, which tried to convince the municipality at least to repair the roofs of those two buildings and the sewage system, unfortunately without success. Starting in 2015, Nevo Parudimos initiated a project with support from the ROMACT programme based on the principles of the EU Community Lead Local Development (CLLD).

In 2018, the Local Action Group Reşiţa was created (Nevo Parudimos Association is a member), aiming to improve the living standards of the inhabitants of the Urban Marginalised Areas, as included in the local development strategy.³⁷ The desegregation process initially started with the intention to relocate the inhabitants from the Mociur area altogether and

³⁶ See, for example <https://www.digi24.ro/regional/mociur-cartierul-nimanui-709000> or <https://www.banatulazi.ro/ghetto-ul-mociur-harlem-ul-resitei-primarul-ioan-popa-are-de-gand-sa-civilizeze-aceasta-favela-resiteana/>

³⁷ See: <https://galresita.ro/strategie-de-dezvoltare-locala/> for more information about the strategy and CLLD project.

create a new ghetto community in a former military building. However, there was pressure from the local community (the non-Roma majority feared negative changes in their living conditions) living in that area of the city, and with the support of civil society, several consultation meetings were organised, and the decision was not to continue.

The municipality started a new consultation process to find a proper solution, and a task force of NGOs and public institutions was created, involving several city hall departments (social department, housing, EU Projects, maintenance, budgetary issues) and three local organisations – Nevo Parudimos Association (a Roma NGO), the Humanitas Pro Deo Association, and Kreativ Association (both pro-Roma NGOs). Even if the process was a difficult one, involving some very conflictual meetings, the discussions around the topic continued. In fact, the entire process started with the ROMACT programme intervention in 2015, which brought together the main stakeholders who are designing the future CLLD project. For the non-Roma neighbourhoods that showed reluctance regarding the proposed relocation activities, several meetings were needed for them to develop a rather neutral attitude towards the entire process.

In 2019, the desegregation process started with an in-depth analysis of the community and a set of local decisions:

- For the next two years, all available social houses, housing for young people, houses built by the National Housing Agency (ANL) and other properties which were available through the city housing department or purchased by them would be made available for the Mociur Project;
- a decision was made about securing resources from the local budget for refurbishing some of the apartments owned by the municipality and the school dormitory and for purchasing houses from the market;
- in the process of relocation, social housing legal provisions (application process, eligibility criteria, conditions for maintenance, etc.) had to be complied with in order to avoid future evictions of people from the houses they would receive;
- a team with members from all City Hall departments and civil society was created and had regular meetings that also included the mayor; this was possible in the context of previous similar activities with local action groups / task force groups that also worked on the design of the Reșița local development strategy.

The desegregation started by a community analysis. A social enquiry involving all the families that included collecting relevant data, each family being visited several times in order to build a trusting relationship. The team involved in this process contained social workers from the municipality, social workers from the civil society Asociația Nevo Parudimos and Humanitas Pro Deo Association and people from the community.

Then, a working methodology was established. It was a work-in-progress process which was always subject to adjustment according to the community's needs and to the realities found in the field. A decision was made for some people to be temporarily relocated while flats were renovated and extended in one of the buildings (the dormitory building), and others relocated to the city where available municipal housing could be found. The relocation of the people took place in several stages:

1. People who had properties in other areas of the city were asked to move out of the

flats.

2. People who had jobs and could afford to pay rent somewhere else in town were also relocated to municipal apartments.
3. People with difficulties affording a new rental house were moved to other municipal places where they could afford the living costs.
4. People having debts registered to the local municipality people evicted in the past, and those without rental contracts were relocated, but it was more difficult to settle outstanding debts – some people managed to pay their debts, but for others, it was possible to compensate the debts with work undertaken for community benefit.
5. People who are relocated temporarily to a dormitory previously renovated by the municipality will return to the Mociur building, which will be renovated/redistributed into flats of two or three rooms, this work being in the final stage at the moment of writing the present report.

During the relocation process, the specificities of each family were taken into consideration:

- the cultural background and family bonds – as much as possible, relocating extended families together, relocating siblings near to each other, and finding proper/suitable houses for large families;
- the level of income – the estimated living costs were explained to each family, especially the cost of electricity and gas/heating;
- the number of children who attend schools – families with a greater number of children were encouraged to return to the Mociur building, which will be renovated, in order to avoid school dropout.
- for disabled people, solutions were adapted to their special needs – a blind person was offered a flat on the ground floor, a disabled person a house with more rooms, etc.;
- the size of the family – offering houses with more rooms to larger families, aiming at a maximum of two people/room;
- the preferences of the families – e.g., if they had relatives in the neighbourhood;
- flexibility for those who will sign a rental contract – to include any adult from the family who fits the criteria/anyone who is eligible.

The financial resources for the process included:

- The local budget allocated around 300,000 EUR for refurbishing houses and the dormitory and around 500,000 EUR for purchasing houses.
- One million EUR for refurbishing one of the blocks of flats from Mociur (the other building was demolished) was allocated from the budget of the LAG Reșița Strategy, funded through the CLLD programme.

The other costs for the team and community development activities were supported by all the partners from their own budgets. The CLLD LAG Reșița Strategy also covered the costs for educational activities and preventing school dropouts and activities which promote tolerance (implemented by Nevo Parudimos).

The LAS Reșița Strategy also included training for employment and career guidance and funded the setting up of ten social businesses for people from the UMAs.

It is important to mention that during the entire process, there was collaboration between the public administration and the civil society organisations, with different people having roles at different stages of the project. The Reșița Municipality took the lead in the process, but civil society was always there as a watchdog and supporter at the same time.

The community members also had a very important role, as they were involved in all the decisions, and sometimes, they were supportive of the project team in the discussions we had with community members.

To support the relocation process, the Nevo Parudimos Association created a social business called Nevo Parudimos Services, which renovated 42 social houses, in many cases involving the future inhabitants refurbishing their own houses, thus contributing to a certain sense of ownership and self-esteem. Nevo Parudimos Services employed people from the community, and afterwards, some of them were directed to the big construction companies from the city, practically preparing them for the labour market. This also included a donation from Nevo Parudimos of around 10,000 EUR for refurbishing two flats – covering the cost of the materials, and the voluntary work of people from the community. This created the grounds for the municipality considering the association and their social business a partner and allowing them to compete in the procurement process to refurbish the flats from Mociur.

It was important that the community members were involved in the entire relocation process. One member of the community (Bigy Istvan) was a board member of LAG Reșița, and team meetings always included three or four people from the community who were part of the decision-making process. Also, when more important decisions were taken, extended community meetings were organised, and community decisions were made in order to avoid possible conflict. For the elaboration of the LAG Reșița Strategy, face-to-face meetings and focus groups were organised in order to make the right decisions regarding activities and budgets.

Special attention was paid to people with special needs, including persons with disabilities (adapting spaces where possible) or elderly living alone (they received one-room flats usually close to relatives), and families with more children were encouraged to accept flats in the refurbished building in order to avoid children needing to move to another school. Probably the greatest difficulties encountered were connected with specific family situations, when members had accumulated debts to the local administration budget because of unpaid taxes and fines, the resistance of the majority community, and the lack of jobs for relocated people.

In the case of debts, the Nevo Parudimos Association supported families to get jobs to be able to pay any fines and created and encouraged a system together with the municipality that allowed people to work for the community in exchange for their debts. Also, NGOs supported the payment of those debts, and the social department offered emergency aid to families in order to cover them. In order to respond to the resistance of the majority of the community, several consultation meetings were organised, and the decision was to avoid the relocation of many families to the same building and to try to reduce the resistance of the rest of the community.

Support was offered both by the NGOs involved and by the social department to find jobs and vocational training, and ten social businesses were created by community members, making

them self-employed. The newly created social business Nevo Parudimos Services also employed several members of the community. The important challenge for the entire process was ensuring the appropriate support for people after their relocation to the new houses – i.e., them having a stable job and being able to pay the costs of living. Financial education was also a priority for the Nevo Parudimos Association, which implemented a community banking program.

As a result of the intervention, 157 families (135 families located in town and 22 families living in Mociur) have access to better living conditions and the former ghetto was transformed into a regular neighbourhood. The worst neighbourhood area of Reșița changed, and the living conditions of the people from this neighbourhood improved significantly.

The desegregation process made available flats in the majority population living areas, with access to electricity, piped running water and heating, all with legal rental contracts. Most of the families have at least one employed member, and even when there were sometimes problems with employers, support was given for finding another job.

The interaction between the Roma and the new neighbours was very smooth in most cases, and no misunderstandings or conflicts appeared. In order to avoid certain negative situations, it was important to communicate with all the people who were involved, and effort was made to increase the interaction between Roma and non-Roma, and activities to promote tolerance and understanding are ongoing.

Monitoring the families is also very important in order to avoid situations in which rent and services are not paid for, and debts are created, generating difficulties. Monthly visits to the families are made, aiming at observing their interaction and relations with other inhabitants and monitoring the situation of payments for living costs (electricity, gas, common costs, water, trash, etc.). Constant support is offered by civil society and by the social department of the municipality to maintain jobs for at least one person from each family, and this has become an important sustainability element. There is more responsibility in the community; members often help each other in difficult situations. In the relocation process, support was given to families that did not have any personal furniture and goods to create a fresh start, especially through donations.

The majority population's perception may be considered neutral insofar as the desegregation stakeholders tried to avoid publicity about this process, and no concrete information on relocation was provided to the press. The desegregation actions were presented mostly as neutral, and it was not specifically mentioned that the Roma were being relocated to a specific neighbourhood; all the news sent to the press referred to the positive issue of closing the ghetto and that the relocated people would be included in the majority population.

Several teams from different municipalities in Romania, like Baia Mare, Brasov, and Cluj-Napoca, visited Reșița to collect information about the housing project implemented in Resita, but most probably, local conditions differ from one place to another.

Conclusions and recommendations

A clear distinction needs to be made between voluntary ethnic enclaves with proper access to services with social potential, and marginalised segregated settlements that are the outcome of intentional evictions and marginalisation by local authorities. Hence, programs and policies should target these latter communities, which, in most cases, face severe poverty

and marginalisation. These investments should be aimed at desegregation and not the conservation or even strengthening of segregation and poverty. The settlement of Mociur is an example of such a segregated community, and the described case illustrates the desirable desegregation solution.

The process of desegregation was part of a larger integrated approach where the municipality had a leading role, and all other stakeholders from the community were involved in the implementation of the LAG Reșița Strategy, funded through a CLLD project.

In terms of a SWOT analysis, there are several strong elements of this process:

- there was enough political will, cultivated over a longer period of cooperation and support between the stakeholders at a local level;
- the municipality made available some of the financial resources and different departments were also involved directly in the process;
- the flexibility of the local administration created the conditions for finding solutions to cover the debts of the people from the community;
- a strong local Roma civil society, committed and involved in the process was a key factor;
- respect for each individual's needs and status; no person relocated without consent.

The opportunities of this process were the following:

- the CLLD programme created the funding opportunity for the desegregation process;
- a committed civil society and the involvement of local community members;
- availability of a mix of funds for the housing projects;
- the experience developed within the ROMACT programme and skills obtained by the staff of the municipality through the training courses and expertise which were provided;
- the new development of the mall and luxury housing by CEE Trust;
- the existence of many municipality properties which were in bad condition and could be subject to renovation and new use.

The main threats to the desegregation process that were identified were:

- reluctance of local employers to hire people from the ghetto, especially Roma;
- lower level of education of community members;
- the duration of the process, low level of patience to see future status change;
- discriminatory attitudes of the majority population towards the Roma;
- increased costs of living because of high expenses for gas and electricity;
- resistance of members of the community who did not want to accept relocation;
- resistance of non-Roma who did not want to accept Roma in their areas;
- opposition of the other policymakers from the local council level;
- low level of interest of public servants to be involved in this process.

As weak points of this process, we can consider:

- limited budget allocated by the municipality for this project;
- the long process of refurbishing the flats;
- the racist approach of certain public servants who were needed to support the process;

- few civil society organisations were involved.

The described case provides many valuable lessons that can inform other desegregation plans and activities across the EU. Probably the most important lesson is that, in order to be successful, such a process requires shared effort and the involvement of local authorities and civil society organisations, a specific allocated budget, and a strong and skilled team. The involvement of the community members in all the processes, from planning, implementation and evaluation to monitoring and support after the relocation finishes, is crucial. Teamwork and individual people's innovative contributions can make such a process possible. Offering houses to people is not so difficult. Supporting them to manage the costs and to live decently after offering them the houses is the real challenge. The role of civil society is crucial for generating concrete, tangible results.

Based on the case of Mociur, we can formulate the following recommendations:

- Solving a community's problems needs an integrated approach, financial resources and the commitment of stakeholders.
- The local administration and NGOs should commit to working together for the benefit of the entire community.
- The desegregation model in Reșița applied to other communities should be adapted to the local situation.
- Solving a complex community problem sometimes requires making unpopular decisions, and politicians and decision-makers need to take responsibility for deciding on courses of action that will bring positive changes in the long term.

ITALY: FROM CONTAINER TO ADEQUATE HOUSING – A MODEL OF HOUSING INCLUSION

by Carlo Stasolla, Vanessa Lucca, and Marcus Silicani

Introduction

For more than two decades, following the presentation by the European Roma Rights Centre of the *Campland* report,¹ Italy has been referred to as ‘the country of the camps’ due to the important work of the public authorities to build ethnically based accommodation facilities within which to concentrate Roma and Sinti communities in housing emergencies. Since the beginning of the 1990s, the Italian authorities have been working on the construction of such facilities, outdoor encampments or indoor accommodation centres, and it was in 2018 that the last *campo nomadi*² was built to accommodate Roma families. In the following years, some municipalities began experimenting, with varying results, with forms of housing desegregation.³ The aim of this report is to focus on a project designed to deal with the only Roma settlement in the municipality of Collegno, in the Province of Turin, promoted by the local authorities, in order to demonstrate how feasible and sustainable a virtuous process of housing desegregation is.

This project was defined by two fundamental characteristics that mark the intervention: abandoning the ethnic approach and implementing a participative model that encourages the active involvement of beneficiary families and the various public and private actors present in the area. Founding a housing desegregation intervention on these two fundamental axes, both in Collegno and in other similar interventions,⁴ guarantees success and sustainability in the short to medium term.

For the drafting of this report, we availed ourselves of the collaboration of the Municipality of Collegno, which provided useful documentation to reconstruct the history of the settlement and the various interventions carried out to manage it. Through a study and critical analysis of the former, it was possible to reconstruct an organic and reliable picture of the various interventions. In the course of the research, the following individuals were interviewed: Elena Acciari, manager of the Social and Educational Policies Sector of the Municipality of Collegno; Marcus Silicani, referent of the San Donato Cooperative; Maurizio Imeriani, referent of the San Donato Cooperative; and M.M.,⁵ a Roma man who had left the settlement.

¹ European Roma Rights Centre, *Campland. Racial Segregation of Roma in Italy*, Budapest, 2000.

² This construction took place in the municipality of Afragola.

³ See Associazione 21 luglio, *Oltre il campo*, Rome, 2021 and ISTAT, *Abitare in transizione*, Rome, 2021, downloadable at: <https://unrar.it/portale/documents/20125/117570/Abitare-in-transizione.pdf>.

⁴ Interventions with similar approaches have been tested in other Italian municipalities such as Messina, Prato, Asti.

⁵ This person requested that his data not be made public, but only the initials of his first and last name.

A draft of this report was shared with the management of the Social and Educational Policies Sector of the Municipality of Collegno, which provided comments and feedback before validation.

This report was drafted by Carlo Stasolla, referent of the Roma Area of Associazione 21 luglio, with the support of Vanessa Lucca, referent of the Secretariat Office of the Social Policy Sector of the Municipality of Collegno, and Marcus Silicani, referent of the San Donato Cooperative.

National background information

In a report from 2008, the Council of Europe⁶ estimated the number of Roma and Sinti in Italy to be around 170 to 180 thousand, corresponding to 0.23% of the total population. In reality, as reported three years later by a report of the 'Extraordinary Commission of the Senate of the Republic for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights', Italy has "a knowledge gap related to the numeral data concerning the presence of Roma and Sinti on the territory, due in part to the impossibility of implementing censuses on an ethnic basis and also in part due to a certain reluctance to declare a strongly stigmatised identity".⁷

According to the Italian Government, a comparative analysis of the data available in 2010 showed that (a) Roma, Sinti and Caminanti of all ages correspond to 0.22-0.25% of the total Italian population; (b) the percentage of Roma, Sinti and Caminanti children under the age of 16 (45%) is three times higher than the national average (15%) for the same age group; (c) the percentage of Roma, Sinti and Caminanti over the age of 60 (0.3%) corresponds to approximately one-tenth of the national average for the same age group (25%).⁸

The Roma communities in Italy can be differentiated into three main groups in relation to citizenship, migration flow and historical permanence in the country:

- The first group consists of about 70,000 people, all of whom are Italian citizens; their presence is fairly evenly spread throughout the country;
- The second group includes approximately 90,000 people who arrived in Italy following the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia; their presence is reported throughout Italy, mainly in the vicinity of metropolitan cities;
- The third group consists of about one thousand EU citizens from Romania and Bulgaria, who are registered in the suburbs of cities such as Rome and Naples.⁹

Since the year 2000, following the publication of the *Campland* report¹⁰ by the European Roma Rights Centre, Italy has been referred to in various national and European contexts as 'the country of the camps', i.e., the nation mainly engaged, on a European scale, in the design,

⁶ Council of Europe publication, *Number of Roma and Travellers in Europe, July 2008 Update*, 2008.

⁷ Commissione Straordinaria del Senato della Repubblica per la tutela e la promozione dei diritti umani, *Rapporto conclusivo dell'indagine sulla condizione di rom, sinti e caminanti in Italia*, 2011. At: https://www.senato.it/application/xmanager/projects/leg18/file/repository/commissioni/dirittiumani16/RAPPORTO_ROM_febbraio_2011.pdf.

⁸ Ufficio Nazionale Anti Discriminazioni Razziali, *National Strategy for the Inclusion of Roma, Sinti and Caminanti (2012-2020)*, 2011.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ European Roma Rights Centre, *Campland. Racial Segregation of Roma in Italy*, 2000.

construction and management of mono-ethnic settlements known as ‘nomadic camps’. The report states:

“In Italy, hostile stereotypes of Roma are widespread. Underlying the Italian government’s actions towards the Roma is the influence that they are ‘nomads’. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, ten Italian regions formulated laws for the ‘protection of nomadic culture’ through the construction of segregated camps. This project made official the perception that all Roma and Sinti are nomads and can only live in camps isolated from the rest of Italian society. The result is that many Roma have actually been forced to live [according to] the romantic and repressive image of Italians; the Italian authorities claim that their desire to live in real homes is not genuine and relegate them to ‘nomadic camps’.”¹¹

As stated in the report, the ‘nomad camp system’ was developed due to three different drivers: the national and local authorities’ inability to offer adequate solutions to the mass flow of migrants from the Balkans, the belief that Roma culture is founded on nomadism, and finally the definition of ethnic living of which the ‘nomad camp’ represented the full architectural expression. This process was implemented and regulated by local norms and progressive regional administrations with support from Catholic authorities and NGOs, demonstrating that it was driven by a genuine desire to meet the needs of the Roma families fleeing the Balkan conflict.

Over time, these open-air settlements have become places to organise management, provide security and deliver services to Roma at great economic cost.¹²

The Roma and Sinti communities living in conventional dwellings today, in order to escape potential racist and discriminatory episodes, prefer their widespread condition of ‘invisibility’. For this reason, actual estimates of the number of Roma and Sinti present in conventional dwellings are unreliable. On the contrary, communities with available and reliable data are those living in conditions of socioeconomic precariousness, marginality and ethnic segregation in housing.

Until 2022, it was not possible to obtain reliable data on the number of Roma and Sinti in a state of housing emergency, as reliable mapping on a local and national scale had never been carried out by institutions or NGOs. In March 2022, Associazione 21 luglio presented the Senate’s Extraordinary Commission for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights with a website¹³ containing information that, until then, no one in Italy had had access to. Thanks to this tool, it is possible to know the numbers of Roma and Sinti people in a state of housing emergency and obtain essential data concerning the location and characteristics of each settlement.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² See Associazione 21 luglio, *Campi Nomadi spa*. 2014. This phenomenon has allowed criminality to infiltrate the management of ‘nomad camps’, which in 2014, in the city of Rome, led to the arrest of local authorities, NGO chairmen, managers and local officials following an investigation called ‘Mafia Capitale’.

¹³ www.ilpaesedeicampi.org.

According to data compiled by Associazione 21 Luglio,¹⁴ it is possible to identify a wide range of housing solutions related to the latter communities: formal settlements, informal settlements, so-called Roma collection centres, and mono-ethnic residential areas.

Formal settlements are designed, built and managed by public authorities. They take the form of mono-ethnic settlements that fall short of international standards in terms of both sanitation and the structural conditions of the settlements and housing units. In Italy, there are 50 formal settlements inhabited by 8,400 Roma, 66 inhabited by 4,700 Sinti, and three inhabited in mixed form by approximately 250 Roma and Sinti. Aggregating the data gives a total of 119 settlements inhabited by approximately 13,400 Roma and Sinti.¹⁵

Informal settlements are spontaneous, mono-ethnic settlements that develop in public areas. In common parlance, they are often referred to as ‘squatter camps’. They consist of precarious dwellings (caravans, tents, self-built shacks made of scrap material, sheet metal or wood), often without running water, heating, sewage systems or lighting. Due to repeated forced evictions, the number of inhabitants in the individual shantytowns has decreased¹⁶ so much so that in some cities, there are almost exclusively informal micro-settlements. Micro-settlements can be defined as small, spontaneous settlements. There are around 5,500 people living in these, almost exclusively from Romania and, to a lesser extent, Bulgaria.¹⁷

Roma collection centres are reception centres set up in an initial temporary form by public authorities for ethnically based reception involving Roma families from the Balkans or Romania. Set up on an emergency basis, they do not meet the structural and logistical requirements of national legislation, and therefore, no social inclusion projects are proposed and implemented within them. They are currently located in the municipalities of Brescia, Naples and Latina and accommodate almost 500 people.¹⁸

Mono-ethnic residential areas are neighbourhoods located in peripheral areas with a strong mono-ethnic character, sometimes involving public housing built specifically for people identified as Roma and Sinti. They are characterised by precarious access to services and critical issues in key areas such as access to employment and school drop-out. They are located in six Italian municipalities (Gioia Tauro, Cosenza, Pisa, Padova, Carmagnola, and Villafalletto) and are inhabited by 1,100 people.¹⁹

For Roma and Sinti families living in emergency housing, the following critical issues are commonly encountered, with nuances varying in terms of conditions and from city to city: insecure infrastructure; precarious, dilapidated or degraded housing units; lack of or malfunctioning essential services (water, electricity, sewerage system); lack of privacy and widespread overcrowding; difficulties registering with the national health service and accessing city services and services supporting autonomous mobility; poor or severe hygienic and environmental conditions; presence of rubbish or discarded objects and materials. These critical issues were amplified with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic with the “even more evident intersectional and stigmatising effects of marginalisation and housing isolation

¹⁴ www.ilpaesedeicampi.org.

¹⁵ www.ilpaesedeicampi.org.

¹⁶ See Annual Reports by the Associazione 21 luglio from 2015 to 2021, published at: www.21luglio.org

¹⁷ www.ilpaesedeicampi.org.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

on socio-economic hardship, access to education, and the amplification of the phenomenon of anti-Gypsyism”.²⁰

In the earlier ‘Roma, Sinti and Camminanti Inclusion Strategy (2012-2020)’, priority was given to “definitively overcom[ing] emergency logics and large mono-ethnic settlements and respect[ing] local opportunities, family unity and a strategy based on equitable displacement’ [and] introducing the concept of the need for a ‘wide range of housing solutions’.”²¹

An important decision made by a civil court in 2015 recognised, for the first time in Italy, the discriminatory nature of the decision of the Municipality of Rome to build a mono-ethnic settlement in La Barbuta. On 30 May 2015 in fact, with an order from the second section of the Civil Court of Rome, the judge recognised “the discriminatory character of an indirect nature of the overall conduct of Roma Capitale [...] that takes the form of the allocation of accommodation in the La Barbuta equipped village”, consequently ordering the Municipality of Rome “to cease the aforementioned conduct as a whole, as described in the grounds, and to remove its effects”.²²

In Italy, housing policies are organised at the local level by individual municipalities and are based almost exclusively on the allocation of public housing (ERP). The municipalities periodically publish calls for applications in which they define criteria for access and scoring. The requirements included in the notices vary from region to region and very often even between municipalities in the same region. Italian, EU and non-EU citizens with a long-term EU residence permit or a permit for at least two years are eligible for ERP housing; the latter must also prove that they are regularly employed or self-employed. In general, access criteria may include an income cap; no ownership of housing either in Italy or abroad; residence in the region for a certain number of years prior to application; and no squatting. What often prevents Roma families from submitting a regular application is the absence of a residence certificate due to the non-recognition of their settlement as a place of permanent residence.

In Italy, there are no laws concerning housing segregation even though, for Roma and Sinti living in housing emergencies, there is strong resistance to their accessing housing on the private market, mainly due to the prejudice of owners and agencies, and poor economic guarantees for accessing and maintaining rental and utility payments.

Making the transition from mono-ethnic settlements often gives rise to critical issues related to the non-acceptance of the new neighbourhood that become the subject of public narratives that often end up, by riding on politicising phenomena, jeopardising the process itself. A survey carried out by the National Institute of Statistics²³ on the subject of the housing transitions of Roma families showed that problems involving neighbourhood coexistence have characterised at least 30 projects in recent years, while episodes of contestation by citizenship have occurred in 20 projects following the allocation of ERP housing.

²⁰ Ufficio Nazionale Anti Discriminazioni Razziali, *National Strategy for Equality, Inclusion and Participation of Roma and Sinti (2021-2030)*, 2022.

²¹ Ufficio Nazionale Anti Discriminazioni Razziali, *National Strategy for the Inclusion of Roma, Sinti and Caminanti (2012-2020)*, 2011.

²² Full text of the ordinance available at: <https://www.asgi.it/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Ordinanza-La-Barbuta.pdf>.

²³ ISTAT, *Housing in Transition*, Rome, 2021, available at: <https://unar.it/portale/documents/20125/117570/Abitare-in-transizione.pdf>.

Desegregation case study

The city of Collegno covers about 18 km² and is located halfway between the capital of Piedmont and the western area of Turin. It borders the municipalities of Turin, Grugliasco, Rivoli, Alpignano, Pianezza, Druento and Venaria Reale. The city territory is divided into eight districts, each of which has a meeting centre that serves as a meeting place for all ages.

With 48,650 residents at the beginning of 2023, Collegno is the second-largest city in the Turin belt. The population includes a slight prevalence of female citizens (52.08%) over male citizens (47.92%). Foreigners make up 5.93% of all residents, totalling around 2,900 individuals. Minors make up 14.50 per cent of the population (of which 27.52 per cent belong to the 0-6 age group), while the over-65 population accounts for 27.92 per cent of the total.

As reported in the *DEF 2022 Update Note*,²⁴ after the recession of 2020 the economy recovered vigorously²⁵ even though there have been more than 200 business closures of manufacturing and commercial activities since 2019. The number of active retail businesses in 2022 amounted to 785, an increase of 117 since 2019. The largest increase concerns neighbourhood businesses and the personal care sector, while the number of public establishments has remained stable.

In 2022 in Collegno, there were approximately 550 applications for Citizenship Income.²⁶ Citizenship Income is a national policy measure related to active employment aimed at combatting poverty, inequality and social exclusion. It provides economic support to supplement family income and is associated with a process of reintegrating into work and social life.

The public residential housing (ERP) assets of the City of Collegno consist of 855 flats, all of which are assigned with the exception of 85 residual dwellings. The municipality also owns a total of four temporary accommodation units and 13 emergency housing units for people over the age of 65.²⁷

Starting in the 1970s,²⁸ a Roma community settled in Collegno, characterised as being of 'Balkan' origin, i.e., from the geographical area corresponding to the former Yugoslavia.

²⁴ Ministry of Economy and Finance - Economic and Financial Document 2022 - Update Note - Revised and Integrated Version https://www.dt.mef.gov.it/export/sites/sitodt/modules/documenti_it/analisi_programmazione/documenti_programmatici/nadef_2022/N_ADEF_2022_VERSIONE_RIVISTA_-E_-INTEGRATA_STAMPA.pdf

²⁵ In reality, however, as stated in the same note, the outlook is not favourable, as "a deterioration in business confidence and a decline in several economic indicators, including the industrial production index" are emerging due to the increase in energy prices caused by the Ukrainian conflict and the consequent rise in interest rates as a result of rising inflation.

²⁶ Figure deduced from the number of internal checks within the organisation. In 2019, there were 574 (last official INPS figure: https://servizi2.inps.it/docallegati/Mig/AllegatiNews/Reddito_Cittadinanza_per_Comune_Luglio2019.pdf).

²⁷ *Municipal Regulations for the allocation of social housing to households in housing emergency* approved by Municipal Council Resolution No. 47 of 26/06/2018: https://portale.comune.collegno.to.it/openweb/pratiche/dett_registri.php?sezione=atti&id=644&codEstr=NEXT

Municipal Regulations for the operation of the "Villa Belfiore" guided living facility approved by Municipal Council Resolution No. 121 of 25/11/2002: https://portale.comune.collegno.to.it/openweb/pratiche/dett_registri.php?sezione=atti&id=700&codEstr=NEXT

Municipal Regulations for granting temporary hospitality to family units in housing emergency and to homeless persons as well as additional assistance measures approved by Municipal Council Resolution No. 48 of 26/06/2018: https://portale.comune.collegno.to.it/openweb/pratiche/dett_registri.php?sezione=atti&id=669&codEstr=NEXT

²⁸ *The Nomad Camp in Collegno: a reality to be understood*. Degree thesis by Gianluca Treccarichi, University of Turin, academic year 2008-2009.

In the same period, the municipal administration allocated parking areas in the municipal territory of Collegno. These were taken up by families who settled spontaneously in the periphery of via Don Milani 5, building illegal shacks utilising campers and caravans. In terms of infrastructure, there was a fountain in the area.

As the years passed, however, some critical issues emerged within the settlement, mainly caused by overcrowding and precarious sanitary and hygiene situations, which made it necessary to find an alternative solution.

Law No. 26 of the Piedmont Region of 10 June 1993, 'Interventions in favour of the gypsy population',²⁹ with its related economic endowment, gave impetus to the planning of a new parking area, with the aim of improving the housing conditions of families already settled in the municipal area. The authorities at the time believed that the Roma were nomadic and thus required a parking or rest area where they could stop for a certain period of time and then leave again. The following year after the Regional Law was issued, the Collegno Municipal Council approved the project for the construction of the new open-air settlement, defining the criteria for forming a ranking list for the allocation of pitches.

The project for the new settlement, located at Strada della Berlia no. 86, envisaged the construction of 28 equipped plots, collective toilets, a building for social activities, a parking area and a children's play area. The area under intervention, which is municipal property, encompassed more than 8,000 m². It is a peripheral area of the Borgata Paradiso district, bordering the municipality of Turin and an industrial area of the city.

The criteria for drawing up the ranking list for the allocation of the plots took into account weaker groups: priority was given to older people, and the degree of integration of the families was taken into consideration, paying particular attention to the previous schooling of minors. Although school attendance was not a condition and did not increase the chance of allocation, it was considered of great importance, so a dedicated means of transport was implemented due to the camp's significant distance from city schools. The nearest schools were around four kilometres away. The families already settled in Via Don Milani and interested in staying in the new area under construction submitted a regular application, and in June 1995, the list of Roma families entitled to stay was drawn up. Initially, there were only 28 families interested in the new Strada della Berlia settlement. This number increased as the children of these families got married and began to have kids of their own, and they all stayed in the camp. Over time, 'illegal' families also began to show up who were not among the original who had paid the initial 8,000 EUR.

Before the entry of the families, it was proposed that an agreement³⁰ lasting 16 years be drawn up between the Administration and the 28 families authorised to enter. According to the agreement, the latter were called upon to contribute to the implementation costs by paying a participation fee of 16 million Italian lire (8,000 EUR) for each family. One-third of the total cost of the work would therefore be borne by the regional contribution, one-third by a capital contribution from the identified families, and another third by the Municipality of

²⁹ Regione Piemonte - L.R. n.26 of 10 June 1993, *Interventi a favore della popolazione gitana*.
<https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/atto/regioni/caricaDettaglioAtto/originario?atto.dataPubblicazioneGazzetta=1993-11-13&atto.codiceRedazionale=093R0511>

³⁰ Ibid.

Collegno. This joint investment constituted a novelty and became a salient feature of the facility compared to others in the Piedmont region.

The new settlement was completed in 1997, and in the same year, the municipal council approved the 'Regulations for the management of the new nomad camp in Strada della Berlia'³¹ with the aim of defining the rules concerning parking, temporary accommodation of persons not belonging to the family unit authorised to park, management of the area, and the obligation to pay management and maintenance expenses as well as utilities.

The management of the settlement was assigned to the San Donato Social Cooperative of Turin,³² which won the tender. On an ongoing basis until 2023, the aforementioned cooperative has maintained this management role, becoming a point of reference for Roma families over the years.

The actions pursued by the settlement management operators have from the outset had as their objective the inclusion of the families in the social fabric and the autonomy of each of them. The constant and continuous presence of educators in the settlement has, over the years, ensured the constant monitoring of the persons and families actually residing there, taking into account births and deaths.

On 25 October 1997, the new settlement was officially inaugurated with a public event attended by local authorities and the Minister of Social Solidarity, Livia Turco.

Despite the fact that the 1997 concession only provided for the parking of caravans on the sites, the families present built brick dwellings over the following years. Although this was not permitted, these dwellings were built nonetheless, and the authorities did not promptly intervene, letting this happen. Over time, the area thus lost its original purpose as an area for stopping and passing through to take on the appearance of a real 'village' for permanent parking.

The settlement, which housed more than 450 people in 1997, has seen a reduction in the number of inhabitants thanks to the results of a long emancipation process, and in 2019, there were 150 inhabitants. This reduction is due partly to families autonomously moving to different territories (such as Lombardy and South Turin), as well as to their admission into social housing since 2015.

At the end of 2022, according to the latest survey by the San Donato Cooperative,³³ the Roma community residing in the camp numbered 63 people. Of these, 25 are minors. The presence of five persons with disabilities was also recorded.

The majority hold Italian citizenship, acquired over the years by new adults. There is also a large number of Croatian and Serbian citizens.

Over time, the media's perception of the settlement changed as its conditions changed. In fact, the new settlement in Strada della Berlia was initially referred to as 'The Switzerland of

³¹ *Regulations for the management of the new nomad camp in Strada della Berlia*, approved by Municipal Council resolution no. 374 of 14.10.1997: https://portale.comune.collegno.to.it/openweb/pratiche/dett_registri.php?sezione=atti&id=648&codEstr=NEXT

³² The Cooperativa San Donato was founded in 1981 by a group of volunteers who formed an organisation to manage services and promote interventions in favour of minors in distress. Today it manages residential, territorial and school educational services for minors, young people, foreigners and disabled adults in the city of Turin and in some areas of the first belt.

³³ Project 'Beyond the Camp - Overcoming the Roma Camp in Collegno'. Report period from 1 July to 31 December 2022.

Roma',³⁴ ironically highlighting the innovativeness of the project, which envisaged a joint investment between the public and private sectors and defined some basic conditions for the concession. Over the years, the local media narrative changed and began highlighting, following the national trend, the contradictions and criticalities of life in the settlement, emphasising stereotypes and prejudices.³⁵

The dismantling overcoming of the camp in Strada della Berlia and integration of its inhabitants became necessary in light of the high level of degradation and social marginality connected to life in the settlement, involving providing a transitional period of accompaniment for the families living there who were willing to cooperate and respect the rules, with the objective of helping them find alternative housing solutions and pursuing paths of progressive autonomy.³⁶

The first concrete activities for the definitive dismantling of the camp in Strada della Berlia started at the beginning of the year 2020, with Municipal Council Resolution no. 38 of 5 February 2020,³⁷ which provided the guidelines for the relocation of the families present in the area.

Although slowed down by the COVID-19 pandemic, work also continued through the establishment of a multi-sectoral, multi-specialist working group formed by municipal employees, the Consorzio Ovest Solidale (welfare service) and the San Donato Cooperative, which met with the resident families in order to initiate joint action involving the households themselves according to their needs and the objective of redeveloping the area.

At the beginning of 2021, we proceeded with relocating the families by entrusting them to the San Donato Cooperative with the objective of increasing inclusion and autonomy through processes of social empowerment in cohesion with the provisions of the personal services provided within the social welfare consortium. These personal services range from taking charge of social workers, providing economic contributions to support income, providing volunteers to support parental tasks such as helping parents take children to school, etc. These measures were directed towards all citizens, not just Roma citizens. At the same time, the demolition of the brick dwellings on the plots abandoned by the exiled families began.

The dismantling action was given new impetus by the administrative acts of the municipality.

On the employment inclusion front, work has begun, bringing all those who meet the requirements closer to vocational training courses. Most recently, through Municipal Council Resolution no. 342 of 30 November 2022, which adheres to Invitalia's 'ACCEDERE' programme.³⁸ On the one hand, this program aims to improve the employability of people at high risk of marginality and their consequent and progressive integration into the formal economy through the use of services, resources and general goods on the basis of the principle of equal opportunities. On the other hand, it intends to equip the final recipients

³⁴ *Corso Marche, flames also on Roma*. Article published in the newspaper 'La Stampa' on 9 January 2019.

³⁵ In recent years, one incident in particular was in the news. This concerned a fire that occurred in December 2018 that destroyed a caravan and grazed the first houses in the camp, also damaging the flyover in front of it. The episode inevitably became a topic of media interest whose narrative emphasised the need to overcome the current settlement.

³⁶ Annex City Council Resolution No. 58 of 23.03.2022.

³⁷ Document on file Association 21 July.

³⁸ Document on file Association 21 July.

with knowledge and skills to foster integration processes in the territorial communities, and their orientation, empowerment and active inclusion in the labour market.³⁹

The training programme involved ten Roma citizens living in Collegno, eight of whom attended regularly and obtained a final certificate, and seven paid internships have been activated since June 2023.⁴⁰

In the context of specific target groups, it must also be pointed out that the service of accompanying minors from the settlement to the city schools has always been fulfilled by entrusting the task to a specialised agent with monitoring of attendance data in collaboration with the Consorzio Ovest Solidale. The focus on school attendance was also a contributing factor in providing families with an alternative housing solution to living in the settlement. The families with minor children were made responsible for the choice of whether to maintain school attendance in Collegno⁴¹ or to transfer to the neighbouring relocation municipality, urged to analyse the costs thereof and to cope, as far as possible, using their own resources. On the other hand, the Municipality and the Consorzio Ovest Solidale identified cases in which maintaining school attendance in Collegno was unavoidable due to the specific needs of children and activated ad hoc tools to support their attendance.

Finally, it should be pointed out that all the institutional subjects involved were consulted in relation to the dismantling stages: the Region, the Metropolitan City, the City of Turin, police forces, housing authorities and others.

Based on an agreement between the municipal council and the Consorzio Ovest Solidare, a procedure was initiated to commence the co-design and implementation of the experimental project 'Abitare sociale' (Social Housing) in the city of Collegno. This project did not refer exclusively to the Roma community but was formulated in such a way as to embrace the theme of the housing emergency in the Collegno area. This procedure identified public and 'third sector' partners who could design and implement, in a complementary manner and not as a substitute for municipal services, within the framework of a co-planning agreement, an evolution of the social housing system in the city of Collegno, starting from the current experience and the urgent needs of the territory, including the dismantling of the Strada della Berlia camp.

The co-planning working groups and the activation of third sector organisations in the area (such as cooperatives and social enterprises) that are experts in the housing placement of fragile groups made it possible to find adequate temporary housing for all the people in a rather short time. Most of the housing solutions are social housing where, by law, it is not permitted to stay for more than 18 months. Furthermore, at the moment, the Municipality

³⁹ These are the intervention lines of the programme: Intervention line A: selection of customised vocational training projects and accompaniment to work and business start-ups, aimed at fostering the socio-occupational insertion of disadvantaged subjects, with particular reference to Roma communities; intervention line B: expression of interest for the possible activation of on-the-job training with allowances, with possible use of 'recruitment' bonus in favour of the final beneficiaries, as also identified within the paths of intervention Line A.

⁴⁰ These were two internships at RSA Bosco della Stella in Rivoli; one internship at Cooperativa Atypica; two internships at Cooperativa San Donato; one internship at Carrefour Supermarket; one internship at Progetto Logos/Exar.

⁴¹ This is a school with a large share of Roma students, given that it was the closest school to the camp. It paid particular attention to their integration through scholastic support, such as providing teachers who helped them with learning which would not necessarily be guaranteed in another school.

financially shares the expenditure, and the objective is also to facilitate the autonomy of families from an economic point of view. Temporary relocation began in the summer of 2023.

At the end of the settlement, which took place in the summer of 2023, it appears that three families have been placed in public residential housing and one family in temporary hospitality accommodation. The placement depended on the respective rankings. There was no selection because the criteria are objective and tenants are chosen according to a list based on available apartments. Additionally, eight families were placed, on a temporary basis, in housing managed by third sector organisations within the 'Abitare Sociale' project. These eight families had already been assigned social services and were still present in the Strada della Berlia settlement in 2022. The accommodations are managed by different cooperatives and social enterprises, normally containing all necessary services (furniture, utilities) in order to accommodate (sometimes with a controlled rent) on a temporary basis. This service is widely used by people who find themselves in housing difficulty and by students. There is no precise timeline for the project, given that many families are waiting for a place in public housing. The accumulation of many points places them high in the ranking, and therefore, waiting time is estimated to be no more than 12 to 18 months.

Difficulties encountered were particularly with finding suitable placements in the private rental market in a city where demand for housing is very high, and landlords prefer tenants with adequate financial guarantees. Temporary placements have, in fact, been found in housing or by means of leases registered in the name of third sector organisations and not directly with families, with the conspicuous co-participation of public funds, which should gradually be exhausted with a view to increasing the autonomy of families.

During the course of the project, however, a gradual increase in the families' trust in the *case managers* attached to them was observed. This increase in trust allowed the families to seriously consider the proposed solutions, knowing that they would not be 'left alone' even if moving outside the municipality of Collegno, albeit still in a neighbouring territory.

The change in the living conditions of families relocated to different locations in the Collegno areas and the surrounding area of Turin consisted mainly of breaking away from the micro-environment of the settlement – marked both physically and relationally by marginality and exclusion – and coming into contact with new contexts, where other fruitful relationships of exchange and personal enrichment could be established.

Many of the solutions proposed at the date of the closure are not final solutions as most of the affected households have already submitted or will submit ordinary applications for access to social housing. The estimated time to receive such access is around 12 to 18 months for families with high scores, and they are therefore positioned high in the rankings in terms of being assigned social housing. Some families, although very few, have not yet been able to submit an application for public housing due to literacy issues or similar challenges. For these families, the waiting time is longer, potentially up to five years. The intention is to support these families in the search for more stable housing situations within the private rental market and the purchase of rural homes while maintaining support with looking for jobs and training opportunities. This is a further sign of the longstanding desire of the households, who have done their utmost to find alternative solutions over the years, to transition from the settlement. Other households, on the other hand, that have a history of crime or are serving sentences have longer wait times for social and housing reintegration. The same is true of those who have not already been able to submit the social housing application due to their

illiteracy. For these families, we intend to find independent housing solutions in the private market or in rural contexts.

Therefore, the 'Abitare Sociale' project, while on the one hand providing an initial response as far as possible to the needs of households, on the other requires families to continue to formulate their own individual life projects, albeit with the support of all those involved and in particular social services.

Concerning the media perception of the settlement dismantling, there have been numerous newspaper articles, particularly from March to May 2023. The media reconstructed the history of the Collegno settlement and the milestones in the process of its closure with a special focus on the relocation of families. There was no shortage of interviews with politicians to reconstruct the activities that led to this outcome and with the families directly affected to communicate their emotions, fears and uncertainties about the future. Among the recurring themes is certainly reference to the funds that made the intervention possible, with a specific emphasis on those from the PNRR. The latter is, in fact, a central issue in the national public and media debate at the moment. Overall, the local media are portraying an image of a successful and historic change, which took place after "almost 30 years" and "without shortcuts".⁴²

Conclusions and recommendations

The text provides an in-depth analysis of the situation in Collegno, Italy, particularly focusing on the transition and challenges faced in the process of desegregating the mono-ethnic settlement of Roma families in Strada della Berlia. It highlights both the strengths and weaknesses of this transformation, offering recommendations and emphasising the significance of this case study.

Strengths of the initiative include:

- Strong involvement of municipal staff in the social area despite limited political support.
- In-depth knowledge of each family due to prior social interventions.
- High professionalism of housing inclusion efforts.
- Transparent communication about the economic commitment involved.
- Engagement and collective effort from all involved parties.
- Attentive listening to the fears and needs of the beneficiary families.
- Support in emotional transition to an unfamiliar environment.
- The 'Abitare Sociale' (Social Housing) project aimed to address housing emergencies, providing valuable insights into Roma family challenges for local social workers.
- Attempts made to involve the community at every stage, yet coordination between municipal offices and associations fell short.

⁴² La Stampa, *Collegno wants to close the Roma camp. 'Soft' eviction in Strada della Berlia*, 23.03.2023.
 La Repubblica, *Collegno, after 30 years the nomad camp closes*, 30.03.2023.
 La Repubblica, *The Nomad Camp in Collegno closes. Families find a new home*, 31.03.2023.
 Corriere della Sera, *Nomad camp in Collegno, after 26 years the area closes*, 31.03.2023.

Challenges and areas that would need improvement include:

- Lack of optimal involvement from associations.
- Absence of a single coordinator recognised by both technical and political elements of the administration.
- Slippage in the timeline concerning shantytown closure, eroding trust and increasing anxiety among families.
- Difficulties demolishing vacant buildings and weak coordination between communal offices.
- Inability to expand housing solutions due to bureaucratic delays and coordination issues.
- Economic sustainability concerns for families in ERP housing and uncertainties about future transitions.

Recommendations and future considerations:

- Emphasis on maintaining civil registration for future access to ERP housing.
- Need for formal guarantees from the municipal administration for families in provisional housing.
- Promoting a complete understanding among families of the significance of transitioning away from the camp experience for sustained success.
- Encouragement of city authorities to continue efforts for social inclusion post-settlement.
- Italy can eliminate mono-ethnic settlements with determined housing inclusion efforts.
- Importance of abandoning an ethnic approach, favouring participatory processes and comprehensive support for families.
- The necessity of a wide range of housing solutions, clear communication campaigns, and sustained inclusion efforts.

The case study emphasises the importance of continuing efforts for social inclusion and breaking away from mono-ethnic settlements as a national priority, in line with the 'National Roma and Sinti Strategy (2021-2030)' and suggests employing guidelines based on experiences like those in Collegno. These guidelines might focus on antigypsyism, comprehensive social integration, network creation, fair dislocation principles, and family-focused data collection for effective analysis.

CROATIA: DESEGREGATION IS THE PERMANENT SOLUTION

by Siniša-Senad Musić

Introduction

The ‘Croatian National Plan for Roma Inclusion from 2021 to 2027’ (NRIP)¹ recognises residential segregation as a problem but does not provide any measures to fight it. In fact, the solution to housing problems that Roma face is in the hands of local municipalities. Most of them prefer investing in segregated Roma settlements to improve their living conditions² but do not tackle segregation. The same policies can be seen on national level, as many measures from the ‘National Roma Inclusion Framework’ (NRIF)³ target improving living conditions in Roma settlements but not desegregation. Such solutions can be seen as temporary, as without desegregation, effective Roma integration cannot be expected. This case study presents an alternative policy approach based on integration through desegregation, aiming for sustainability.

In the past, the City of Zagreb preferred investing in Roma settlements rather than coping with the problem of segregation.⁴ But this approach did not bring any sustainable improvement. A few years after any major investment into the segregated settlements, the situation returned to the previous state – the settlements looked the same, and access to electricity and water was limited again because of debts to electricity providers.⁵ As a result, the city government decided to change their approach and became the first – and so far, the only – city/county in Croatia to engage in the residential desegregation of Roma.

This new approach should be embedded in the ‘Action Plan of the City of Zagreb’ (2024-2025) for the implementation of the ‘National Plan for Roma Inclusion from 2021 to 2027’.⁶

¹ NRIP available at: <https://pravamanjina.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/NPUR%202021-2027/Nacionalni%20plan%20za%20uklju%C4%8Divanje%20Roma.pdf>

² Examples of media articles on the improvement of Roma settlements:

Roma settlement in Kutina: <http://www.radiomoslavina.hr/2022/12/uredenje-i-prosirenje-romskog-naselja-u-kutini/>

Roma settlement Josip Rimac in Slavonski Brod: https://plusportal.hr/politika/upravasamouprava/na_redu_je_uredenje_romskih_naselja_i_javnih_povrsina-17216

Roma settlement Piškorovec – Municipality Mala Subotica: <https://regionalni.com/nacelnik-opcine-mala-subotica-valentino-skvorcdogradnja-djecieg-vrtica-nas-je-prioritet-broj-jedan/>

Roma settlement Škarije – Municipality Podturen: <https://medjimurski.hr/najvazniji-projekti-u-opcini-podturen-su-vrtic-u-sivici-sportski-centar-podturen-i-izgradnja-rotora/>

³ Action Plan (2021-202) for the implementation of NRIP, measures 7.1, 7.3 and 7.4: available at: <https://pravamanjina.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/NPUR%202021-2027/Akcijski%20plan%20za%20provedbu%20NPUR-a%20za%202021.%20i%202022..pdf>; Operational programme for national minorities, measure 8.5 (all activities under the measure), available at: <https://pravamanjina.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/dokumenti/Operativni%20programi%20nacionalnih%20manjina%20za%20razdoblje%202021.-2024..pdf>

⁴ Investments in Roma settlement Vrtni Put confirmed by the CRNM, representatives of the City of Zagreb, witnessed by the author of this report, and also published in media: <https://zagreb.hr/gradonacelnik-u-obilasku-romskih-naselja/43790>

⁵ Information gathered through interview with the President of CRNM and witnessed by this report’s author.

⁶ Information gathered through interview with the representative of the City of Zagreb

This case study is based on interviews with:

- Ramiz Ajdin, president of the Council of Roma National Minority in Zagreb and president of the Roma association Perspektiva,
- Raman Fazlijefski, former president of the CRNM in Zagreb and president of the association Romski San,
- Tanja Horvatin, City of Zagreb, Department of Culture, International and Intercity Cooperation and Civil Society.
- A representative of the city hall who requested to remain anonymous.

These interviewees represent the main actors when it comes to the desegregation process in Zagreb. The Council of Roma National Minority of Zagreb (CRNM) on the one side and the department of the administration of the City of Zagreb on the other are responsible for Roma inclusion and development of the 'Action Plan of the City of Zagreb' for the implementation of the 'National Roma Inclusion Plan' (NRIP).

Several reports have contributed to this report, including nationwide research conducted in 2018. Two research publications relevant to this chapter have also been used.⁷ Additionally, research from 2020 entitled 'Roma Inclusion in Croatian Society: Spatial Planning, Housing and Environmental Protection'⁸ and the '2014 Atlas of Roma Settlements'⁹ provided meaningful information and data for the development of this report.

The author of this report is Siniša-Senad Musić, who is also the author of the [Roma Civil Monitoring \(RCM\) reports on Croatia](#) and who holds various elected positions. He is a member of various related working groups at local, regional and national levels.

National background information

The number of Roma in Croatia shows an increasing tendency. According to the last 2021 census, the Roma population numbers 17,980 (0.46 % of the population), making them the third biggest national minority in the country. Most of the Roma live in Međimurje County (6,954), followed by the City of Zagreb (2,167), Sisačko-moslavačka County (1,660) and Osiječko baranjska County (1,636).¹⁰ Comparing the official and unofficial numbers of Roma,

⁷ Suzana Kunac, Ksenija Klasnić, Sara Lalić. 2018. *Roma Inclusion in Croatian Society: a Baseline Data Study*, available at: <https://pravamanijina.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/dokumenti/Uključivanje%20Roma%20u%20hrvatsko%20društvo%20-%20istraživanje%20baznih%20podataka.pdf> and Danijela Lucić, Jana Lucićlva Marčetić. 2020. *Uključivanje Roma u hrvatsko društvo: Prostorno uređenje, stanovanje i zaštita okoliša [Roma Inclusion in Croatian Society: Spatial planning, housing and environmental protection]*, available at: <https://ukljucivanje-roma.com/assets/other/Uključivanje%20Roma%20u%20hrvatsko%20društvo%20-%20prostorno%20uređenje,%20stanovanje%20i%20zaštita%20okoliša.pdf>

⁸ Danijela Lucić, Jana Lucićlva Marčetić. 2020. *Uključivanje Roma u hrvatsko društvo: Prostorno uređenje, stanovanje i zaštita okoliša; [Roma Inclusion in Croatian Society: Spatial planning, housing and environmental protection]*, available at: <https://ukljucivanje-roma.com/assets/other/Uključivanje%20Roma%20u%20hrvatsko%20društvo%20-%20prostorno%20uređenje,%20stanovanje%20i%20zaštita%20okoliša.pdf>

⁹ <https://www.yumpu.com/xx/document/read/57393005/atlasromskihnaselja1>

¹⁰ Data available at: <https://phralipen.hr/2022/09/22/objavljeni-rezultati-popisa-stanovnistva-u-hrvatskoj-zivi-17980-roma-i-romkinja/>

research from 2018 estimates their number to be 25,000.¹¹ There is no information available about the number of people perceived as Roma but not self-identified accordingly.

There are Roma settlements in twelve counties disbursed among six regions.¹² Within the six regions, only 28.7% of Roma live in integrated circumstances, while the remaining 71.3% live in segregated settlements. In Međimurje County, there are twelve Roma settlements with significant populations of over 1,500 residents. In this county, only 3.6% of Roma live distributed among the mainstream population.¹³ In contrast, the largest share of Roma living in integrated circumstances is found in Zagreb (92.9%). The segregated Roma settlements vary by distance from the mainstream population and size – from small ones with below 50 inhabitants to large ones with thousands of inhabitants (Parag, Orehovica, Kuršanec, and Josip Rimac)¹⁴.

Both in bigger and smaller settlements, living conditions are problematic. For instance, in the surroundings of Delnice, Vučja Jama, and Dedinj (rural areas), families have either no shelter¹⁵ or live in shacks or very small houses with no access to utilities. Examples can even be found of rat attacks against newborn babies (Zagreb).¹⁶ On the other hand, there are examples of good housing conditions in some Roma settlements with notable Roma populations (Josip Rimac, Orehovica and Mursko Središće) with access to utilities and asphalted streets.

The '2021 EU Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) Roma Survey' presents the significant differences between segregated and non-segregated Roma, providing pivotal data to showcase the impact of residential segregation. Residential segregation largely contributes to Roma exclusion in various fields, especially in rural areas. In these locations, public transport is very rare and costly, and social services are located far away. The educational segregation of Roma is also one of the consequences of residential segregation. According to the 'FRA Roma Survey 2021', 63% of children living in Roma settlements attend segregated education, compared to 11% of Roma children who are integrated. Residential segregation further influences the educational opportunities of Roma children and youth. The same survey points out that 54% of young Roma people living in segregated settlements aged between 16 and 24 may be classified as NEET compared to 38% of young Roma in integrated circumstances. Children often interact first with non-Roma in kindergarten (where teachers are non-Roma) and where most or all the children are Roma. Additionally, residential segregation has a significant effect on economic security since 92% of Roma living in Roma settlements are at risk of poverty compared to 72% of Roma living in an integrated way. Health is also affected by living conditions, and the quality of social services in segregated areas is lower than in non-

¹¹ Suzana Kunac, Ksenija Klasnić, Sara Lalić. 2018. Roma Inclusion in Croatian Society: a Baseline Data Study, available at: <https://pravamanjina.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/dokumenti/Uključivanje%20Roma%20u%20hrvatsko%20društvo%20-%20istraživanje%20baznih%20podataka.pdf>

¹² Međimurje, Northern Croatia, Zagreb and surroundings, Central Croatia, Slavonija, Istra i Primorje.

¹³ Danijela Lucić, Jana Lucićiva Marčetić. 2020. Uključivanje Roma u hrvatsko društvo: Prostorno uređenje, stanovanje i zaštita okoliša [Roma Inclusion in Croatian Society: Spatial planning, housing and environmental protection], available at: <https://ukljucivanje-roma.com/assets/other/Uključivanje%20Roma%20u%20hrvatsko%20društvo%20-%20prostorno%20uređenje,%20stanovanje%20i%20zaštita%20okoliša.pdf>

¹⁴ Danijela Lucić, Jana Lucićiva Marčetić. 2020. Uključivanje Roma u hrvatsko društvo: Prostorno uređenje, stanovanje i zaštita okoliša [Roma Inclusion in Croatian Society: Spatial planning, housing and environmental protection], available at: <https://ukljucivanje-roma.com/assets/other/Uključivanje%20Roma%20u%20hrvatsko%20društvo%20-%20prostorno%20uređenje,%20stanovanje%20i%20zaštita%20okoliša.pdf>

¹⁵ Witnessed by the author of this report.

¹⁶ <https://slobodnadalmacija.hr/vijesti/hrvatska/horor-u-zagrebu-bebu-staru-17-dana-u-snu-izgrizli-stakori-159253> or <https://promise.hr/djeca-zivjela-okruzena-stakorima-bez-struje-vode-i-wc-a-sada-su-s-beskucnicima-u-prihvatilistu/>

Roma settlements. This means that social workers in Roma settlements have a bigger number of beneficiaries to work with, affecting the quality of services.¹⁷ Roma settlements are not only residentially and ethnically segregated but also according to status and income. Employed Roma often leave such settlements while those who depend on social benefits remain.¹⁸ Young people who leave the settlement report about the poverty, domestic violence, and discrimination there (delivery services do not enter the settlement, police have different approaches to residents of Roma settlements, Roma from the settlements are subject to collective punishment, etc.).¹⁹ Children are often surrounded by people who have dropped out of school, providing negative examples and promoting negative habits. Poverty also increases addiction to alcohol, drugs, owning guns, violence and gambling, leading to big debts to loan sharks.

As described above, residential segregation largely affects children, youth and adults, while national policies do not tackle the problem. Both political willingness and expert knowledge are lacking in terms of meaningfully addressing the issue. For instance, desegregation has not been tackled from the perspective of Roma inclusion. Instead, the desegregation process was led by the interest in city development and fears of the consequences of massive, forced evictions of Roma that could have happened. The City of Zagreb always cooperated well with Roma and the Council of Roma National Minority (CRNM). The city mayor, Milan Bandić, traditionally had strong support among Roma voters.²⁰ He aimed to avoid evictions of Roma families and negative media reports. Additionally, he built his political career on good cooperation with almost every socially vulnerable group. On the other hand, the new political leadership is committed to the matter of desegregation in a more strategic way, even including this in their political programme, the 'Action Plan for Roma Inclusion' drafted by the author of this report.²¹

Roma and non-Roma politicians generally do not work on desegregation as it is a long-term process, and its benefits will be seen in the long run. Instead, politicians tend to invest available funds allocated for housing to improve the living conditions in segregated Roma settlements.²² The effects of such investments are seen immediately, and in exchange, Roma provide electoral support to the respective politicians.²³ This political course is also reflected

¹⁷ Data collected from social workers by the author of this report.

¹⁸ This is the personal observation of the author of this report. On the one hand, it depends on the settlement. So, for example, if the Roma settlement is good, like Orehovica and Slavonski Brod, people will stay, but in most cases, they do not have enough money to move from the settlements. In very bad settlements like Kuršanec, Pribislavec, and so on, people who can afford to move from the settlement will move from it. It is common for Roma leaders who have more money to move from the settlement, and then they support the policy of investing in the settlement.

¹⁹ Members of the Roma Youth Organization of Croatia who exited the Roma settlements.

²⁰ Major Milan Bandić was several times made a godfather to Roma children, media article from 2006: <https://www.jutarnji.hr/vijesti/zagreb/bandic-kum-sinu-kasuma-cane-2847509>

²¹ Action Plan for Roma Inclusion as part of the programme of the political party Zagreb je Naš: <https://www.zagrebjenas.hr/promjena-je-pocela/>

²² Online sources; examples of investments in Roma settlements:
<https://phralipen.hr/2019/02/20/romsko-naselje-josip-rimac-dobit-ce-sportsko-igraliste/>
<https://regionalni.com/medimurje-i-ludbreski-kraj-dobili-342-000-eura-za-ulaganja-u-romska-naselja-gradit-ce-se-cesto-igralista-rasvijeta/>

²³ Author's assessment based on interviews with Roma and pro-Roma activists due to the participation of the author of this report in the civil sector.

in the Roma framework in Croatia. The NRIP recognises segregation; however, the AP-NRIP does not provide any measures for tackling it. Residential segregation has been recognised as an issue for a long time, but the Croatian government has not yet developed a desegregation plan.

It is pivotal to examine desegregation not only from political perspectives but also according to economic considerations. Conditions for successful desegregation are subject to the financial capacity and real estate of the City of Zagreb to provide Roma with alternative accommodation and political will driven by the social awareness of the city's political leadership. The richest self-governments, such as the City of Zagreb, have social housing programmes, and Roma have been included based on their socioeconomic status. Some of the Roma have not applied for social housing due to the lack of information and education needed to collect all required documents. Additionally, some Roma have big families that need to fit into units meant for social housing.²⁴ Hopefully, the new policy will reflect the needs of Roma, targeting those in Zagreb. Meanwhile, for the rest of Croatia, it is not expected that desegregation will be pursued through social policies created by local authorities.

Roma people relocated from segregated settlements have been provided with social housing in units owned by the city. This seems to be the only option for the desegregation of poor Roma, who are not able to find accommodation on the market due to poverty and discrimination. Furthermore, it is also problematic for Roma to purchase flats because of eligibility issues connected with bank loans. This is related to their lack of employment and low level of education²⁵. An additional factor that influences Roma aiming to leave their settlements is the location and size of the new accommodation. Many Roma families get their main income from selling iron, aluminium, etc. Thus, these families will not leave the settlement unless their housing circumstances allow such work to be done.

From the policy perspective, it needs to be underlined that no platform allows for a larger-scale comprehensive debate about desegregation. This is how the politicians manipulate the Roma and even get the support of Roma, who are most affected by the adverse outcomes of being segregated.²⁶ Legalisation, roads, playgrounds and community centres may positively impact Roma settlements, but all the harmful effects of segregation remain. Even though one of the worst Roma settlements (Kuršanec) in Croatia has had a playground and a community centre with a preschool programme and some other social programmes for more than ten years, decision-makers do not see or do not want to see that these investments in Roma settlements do not ensure major improvements in the living conditions in the Roma settlement and do not tackle all negative effects (as discussed above) of living in Roma settlements.

Considering the general societal approach, Roma settlements are not considered a negative outcome of discrimination against the Roma. The expression "Roma settlement" is often used in media as neutral, without the negative connotation to discrimination, and policies and is broadly accepted by people. On the other hand, Roma are neither asked for their opinions and nor are the latter considered concerning the issue of living in segregated settlements.

²⁴ Information was gathered during the interviews with the president of CRNM and a representative of the city.

²⁵ Information gathered by the author through his work with Roma from the settlements.

²⁶ Author's assessment based on interviews with Roma and pro-Roma activists due to the participation of the author of this report in the civil sector.

There is even a sign in front of the Roma settlement Orehovica in Međimurje County, 'DROM OREHOVICA', meaning in the Romani language 'Orehovica Street'.²⁷

We have observed that the attitude and reaction of Roma people regarding living in the settlements depends mainly on the quality of housing. Where conditions are inadequate with incomplete infrastructure, people tend to relocate. However, in some big Roma settlements with better conditions, people would rather stay. The most common reason is that Roma do not wish to leave their comfort zone, as they can live in the settlements as they are used to doing.²⁸ From a generational perspective, it can be stated that young and more educated Roma individuals do not aim to remain in the settlements, while the older generation considers it too late to change their current situation.²⁹ On the one hand, Roma people are given very limited opportunity to leave their settlements. On the other hand, regarding improving living conditions in settlements, Roma are incentivised to stay in these places.

There are systemic disincentives for residential desegregation, as Roma live in segregated settlements and can receive more support this way. For example, in Municipality Darda, Roma from the settlements were provided with new houses through a big EU project.³⁰ At the same time, Roma who lived outside the Roma settlement were not beneficiaries of this project.

With the new policy, Zagreb will target Roma from Roma settlements by offering them social housing, while Roma in non-segregated areas and non-Roma in difficult economic situations will not be directly targeted by this new policy.³¹

In the Roma settlement of Orehovica, there are some big houses owned by the Roma working in Germany who can financially sustain these buildings. Those Roma often say that they do not want to pay the expense of being connected to utilities, as they expect the municipality to pay for this, as it pays for all other Roma in the settlement. At the same time, Roma living in an integrated way needed to cover these kinds of expenses by themselves.³²

Moving a significant number of Roma into one neighbourhood would result in protests, such as happened in Zagreb. Protests and petitions were made on the streets against Roma settlers or against Roma and their way of life. It was relevant that even the media reported on these. Understandably, some Roma do not feel welcome in other neighbourhoods.³³

According to the latest research, 46.5% of Roma said it is extremely important to have Roma neighbours.³⁴ Such an attitude is somewhat understandable as the majority of Roma live in

²⁷ See: <https://www.portalnovosti.com/sto-se-ceka-u-orehovici>

²⁸ Author's observation and opinion from work (ten years) in the Roma civil sector.

²⁹ Author's observation and opinion from work (ten years) in the Roma civil sector.

³⁰ See: <https://www.radio-baranja.hr/dodijeljene-romske-kuce-u-dardi/>

³¹ Information gathered from an interview with the president of CRNM and a representative of the city.

³² Information gathered from Roma in Orehovica by the author of this report through his job.

³³ Media article about the protest in Zagreb against the resettling of Roma from Plinarsko naselje in the neighbourhood Sveta Klara: <https://net.hr/danas/hrvatska/burne-reakcije-na-ideju-preseljenja-zagrebackih-roma-nezadovoljni-stanovnici-ali-i-romi-zasto-nas-ne-rasprse-po-gradu-2eaa03ac-b1ce-11eb-a854-0242ac14002e>

Media article about the protest in Zagreb against the settlement of Roma from Plinarsko naselje in the neighborhood Petruševac: <https://www.vecernji.hr/zagreb/stanovnici-petrusevca-prosvjedovali-protiv-useljavanja-roma-1304231>

Media article about the protest against Roma and their way of life in Međimurje County: <https://www.novilist.hr/novosti/hrvatska/prosvjed-protiv-roma-u-medimurju-kazu-da-zele-normalan-zivot-ali-meta-njihove-propagande-su-romi/>

³⁴ Danijela Lucić, Jana LucićIva Marčetić. 2020. Uključivanje Roma u hrvatsko društvo: Prostorno uređenje, stanovanje I zaštita okoliša; [Roma Inclusion in Croatian Society: Spatial planning, housing and environmental protection], Available at:

Roma settlements, and non-Roma do not want to have Roma as neighbours.³⁵ We have already mentioned protests and petitions against Roma groups or Roma in general, but there have also been cases of protests, bribes, and illegal action by non-Roma targeted at specific Roma families who moved to some of the localities where the majority lives.³⁶ Such attitudes are also a big obstacle to the desegregation and inclusion of Roma.

Most of the non-Roma in Croatia do not have direct personal experience with Roma settlements. Thus, they are not aware of the actual situation and challenges.

Presentations of Roma settlements in the media always have a negative connotation. If a Roma settlement is mentioned in a newspaper, non-Roma tend to comment on it very negatively, denigrating the Roma and their way of life, calling them primates, animals, and criminals. Even if the article includes a positive story, comments from non-Roma will still be negative.

Desegregation case study

Zagreb is the capital of Croatia, located in continental central Croatia. According to the last Census from 2021, Zagreb is the territorial unit with the most inhabitants; around 770,000 people live there, or 20% of all the inhabitants of Croatia. The City of Zagreb currently manages 7,504 apartments, only about 2% of the total number of residential units in the city.³⁷ Zagreb has been taken over by a new political party, which is trying to put social housing and the use of housing units owned by the city in order, as well as the policy of using these units. Chaos still reigns in that sector at the moment. Some people's social housing contracts expired several years ago. Waiting lists for social housing are long. At the same time, there are vacant housing units owned by the city that are not used. In some cases, Roma break into them and settle there. As a result, the city starts a process of legalising such acts or evicting these Roma families. All of this leads to a situation in which the city authorities do not even exactly know which housing units are free and which are not. Thus, authorities cannot adequately identify which houses are dedicated to the social housing program and which are for the affordable housing or youth housing programmes.

Original segregated settlements

The City of Zagreb had three Roma settlements: Plinarsko naselje, Struge, and Vrtni Put. The first two have been desegregated and demolished, while the Roma settlement of Vrtni Put still exists.

Plinarsko naselje was located on a piece of land owned by the municipality. There was one house and several insecure shacks where approximately 50 inhabitants (all Roma) lived, including children (however, the number of inhabitants of this settlement and the two others

<https://ukljucivanjeroma.com/assets/other/Uključivanje%20Roma%20u%20hrvatsko%20društvo%20-%20prostorno%20uređenje,%20stanovanje%20i%20zaštita%20okoliša.pdf>, page 222.

³⁵ Suzana Kunac, Ksenija Klasnić, Sara Lalić. 2018. *Roma Inclusion in Croatian Society: a Baseline Data Study*, available at: <https://pravamanjina.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/dokumenti/Uključivanje%20Roma%20u%20hrvatsko%20društvo%20-%20istraživanje%20baznih%20podataka.pdf>, page 222.

³⁶ One of many media articles about how local inhabitants bribed a Roma family to sell their new house and made threats to the same family, available at: https://www.reddit.com/r/croatia/comments/1670xe9/mje%C5%A1tani_%C4%87e_prosvjedovati_pred_ku%C4%87om_roma_romska/?dt=58595. And there is more such of examples...

³⁷ Source: <https://www.zagrebjenas.hr/stanovanje/>

changed over time³⁸). There were no utilities, and electricity was shared from one house to the other shacks.³⁹ There was a water pump in the middle of the settlement. Most of the residents had low levels of education, and their income was derived from collecting iron and other materials and receiving social benefits. The civil sector did not work in this settlement since it was close to the centre of the city, and the general living conditions in the settlement were better than in two other Roma settlements.



Houses in Plinarsko naselje

Photo © Portal Udar, 2019

Struge was settled very close to the industrial part of town. Approximately 50 inhabitants lived in the settlement, including children in problematic socioeconomic circumstances. The land was owned by a private company, while in the past, the City of Zagreb invested in the settlement (asphalt roads, water supply, garbage collection, sanitation container, and Toi Toi [mobile] WCs). Within a few years, the inhabitants had destroyed everything, and some tension had arisen between the Roma and non-Roma. The settlement was far from main roads and public transportation; neither did the living conditions meet basic needs (e.g., the limited number of toilets). Civil society was present, working especially with young Roma and children. A legal process took place between the private company and the city regarding the ownership of the land where the settlement was built.⁴⁰ The company won the legal process, and Roma were immediately evicted.⁴¹

Around 120 people live in **Vrtni Put**. Some of the residents do not have Croatian identity documents or health insurance. As a result, babies are often delivered at home. The settlement is located on abandoned land, with one entrance/exit. It is surrounded by warehouses on one side and some pipelines on the other. The city has also invested in this settlement. Containers have been brought in for hygienic and educational purposes. A small park was built for children, but it was demolished, and the containers were inhabited by Roma. Electricity was provided by Mayor Milan Bandić, but there was no sustainable documentation that would allow the city to cover the monthly consumption of all Roma

³⁸ Data were collected from an interview with the president of CRNM.

³⁹ Data were collected from the former president of CRNM.

⁴⁰ Information gathered through the author's work in the civil sector.

⁴¹ Information gathered from the President of CRNM

residents.⁴² At the moment, Roma steal electricity from electricity poles, which risks accidents, even resulting in fires in the settlement. The electricity has now been disconnected since the city did not cover the bills. Living conditions are inadequate due to the lack of electricity and other services. The building structure in the settlement mainly consists of shacks, small mobile camping trailers, and one legal house owned by a Roma family. Families' main source of income derives from collecting/selling iron and other metals. The number of employed inhabitants and educational level is very low. Due to the extremely unhygienic situation (lack of garbage collection and other factors), rats have even attacked newborn babies.

Desegregation process

Plinarsko Naselje was desegregated in 2019. The city decided to remove Roma from the area because of the need to put a road through the settlement. In this process, CRNM was contacted as a legitimate representative of the Roma in Zagreb.⁴³

Meetings were organised between Roma residents, CRNM and different representatives of the city to find a solution for moving Roma to social houses or flats. Eviction could also have been a solution on the mayor's side. However, he had good cooperation with CRNM, a positive reputation among the Roma, and political relations with the community as described above. Thus, the trigger for desegregation was not the objective of tackling Roma segregation but to meet the somewhat bigger interests of the city, which were to connect one of the main streets, thereby connecting the east with the centre of the city.

The mayor did not have the legal grounds to provide social housing since some Roma were not on the list of candidates. However, the mayor generally demonstrated a quite motivated approach to achieving his goals. He has previously faced several lawsuits and was even imprisoned while he still managed to lead the city for over a decade. It clearly indicates his influence that Roma were granted social housing even though they were not registered on the waiting list.

The first solution that was considered was to move Roma to Sveta Klara (a middle-class neighbourhood of Zagreb), where the city had built social flats. After local residents were informed about this option, protests were organised and reported in the media.⁴⁴ As a result, Roma were unwilling to move to Sveta Klara; thus, the city needed to find another solution. As a second option, the city offered social housing to one part (approximately 30%) of the Roma in different areas in Zagreb. In contrast, the other part (the 70% that did not meet the social housing criteria)⁴⁵ were offered housing in a building in Petruševac. This is a middle-class residential neighbourhood with Roma representing approximately 5% of the population, built originally for offices. Local inhabitants similarly acted and organised a protest against the move. Interestingly, even the local Roma from Petruševac complained about the Roma being

⁴² Information gathered from a representative of the Roma settlement Vrtni Put and the representative of the city.

⁴³ The Council of Roma National Minority has its legitimacy from the Constitution Act of the Republic of Croatia. According to the same Act, every four years, there shall be elections for the Council of Roma, the National Minority of the city of Zagreb, and only Roma who have an address in Zagreb and are declared as Roma can vote in that election and only Roma with an address in Zagreb and who are declared as Roma can be candidates in this political process. The same goes for each national minority in Croatia. The CRNM has 25 members who have the legitimacy to represent the interests of Roma in Zagreb.

⁴⁴ Online sources: <https://www.civilnodrustvo.hr/stanovnici-svete-klare-se-bune-zbog-moguceg-doseljavanja-roma/> and <https://www.vecernji.hr/zagreb/stanovnici-petrusevca-prosvjedovali-protiv-useljavanja-roma-1304231>

⁴⁵ Figures were provided by the president of the CRNM during an interview.

moved since the relationship between those families was not good. At the time, all stakeholders were especially motivated to resolve the situation because of time constraints. The main role of resolving problems regarding the Roma was assigned to CRNM while the city tried to resolve the situation with non-Roma residents in Petruševac.

The stakeholders who were involved successfully convinced both groups of Roma to move and the inhabitants of Petruševac to accept the newcomers by organising meetings. The mayor, Mr. Milan Bandić, was directly involved in those meetings, facilitating the entire process. Considering the legal perspectives, neither Roma nor non-Roma had the power or legal grounds to fight against the resettlement and none of the involved parties had interest to make the protest too visible.

After moving to their new accommodations, Roma complained about the lack of space and visible moisture in the building. However, the living circumstances are much better compared to those of the Roma settlements.

In 2022, the city elected a new government with a green political direction, and a new mayor, Tomislav Tomašević, came to power. This political party has a special programme for Roma inclusion, which the author of this report drew up.⁴⁶

The Roma settlement **Struge** was desegregated in 2023. The trigger for the desegregation of the settlement was not the will to integrate Roma. Instead, a private company, INA DD, after a legal process, became the owner of the land and aimed to evict Roma. In principle, the city's new political power opposes eviction due to its social values, and did not desire to face a challenge during their first period of office. In other words, the city administration was motivated by various aspects to avoid eviction. The city initiated negotiations with CRNM and residents of Struge involving a pro-Roma association (the Ambi Dexter Club) working in this settlement. Negotiations were done quickly as the landowner was a private company that wanted to exercise its rights as soon as possible.

The city of Zagreb was hit by a big earthquake in 2020; thus, the City built accommodation for families that had experienced significant damage to their property. Those two units of accommodation were financed by the city budget. One was Hostel Arena, and the other was Hostel Kosnice. As there was accommodation available in both hostels, half of the Roma were offered to move from the settlement into Hostel Arena and the other to Hostel Kosnice. It was meant to be a temporary solution until permanent accommodation was found. The city even provided three meals per day to each beneficiary of the hostels Arena and Kosnice free of charge. However, this was a temporary solution, intended for six to eight months. Local authorities still have not found a solution regarding fitting accommodation for the Roma in these two hotels, so the city is offering to sign a new contract with them that will enable them to prolong their stay in those hostels. At the same time, many Roma are not satisfied with this situation. However, the living conditions are significantly better than in the Roma settlement of Struge. Additionally, the Roma are provided with free meals.⁴⁷

A permanent solution has not been found yet because the new policies for social housing are in the process of development. The new policy should also have an impact on the 'Action Plan

⁴⁶ Online source, page 32: <https://zagreb.mozemo.hr/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Mozemo-ZJN-Program-za-Zagreb.pdf>

⁴⁷ Data collected through the work of the author of this report as a member of the Council of Roma National Minority of the City of Zagreb and interviews with the representatives of the Council of Roma National Minority of the City of Zagreb and representative of the City of Zagreb.

of Zagreb (2024-2025)' for the implementation of NRIP, which is in the process of development. The author of this report is one of the developers of this document.

At the same time, the third Roma settlement has remained, and for now, there is no fear that Roma will be evicted.

At the moment, Zagreb is creating its 'Action Plan (2024-2025)' to implement the NRIP, and they plan to integrate it within this document and the new policy for social housing. This is the main process which should provide a solution for segregated Roma in Vrtni Put and for those living in the hostels Kosnice and Arena. If it is successful, this process will be the first planned desegregation process in Croatia. It will be made at the local/regional level (Zagreb has the status of both county and city) by local authorities with the coordination of civil society and legitimate representatives of Roma in Zagreb (CRNM).

Results of the desegregation

All Roma who were moved from the Roma settlements Struge and Plinarsko naselje have better living conditions. They have access to all utilities, are not surrounded by garbage, and the households are safe to live in. Many of them were afraid to move, to exit their comfort zone, and they were concerned about anti-Roma protests.

It is important to say that Roma children from the settlement did not have problems with public transportation, segregation in education, access to public institutions or social content as they were already living within the city. So, the resettlement of these Roma did not have any effect (positive or negative) in this sense.

Among the positive outcomes, it can be reported that they respect each other, and they have adapted to living among non-Roma. (No loud music, loud arguing, or bad habits).

The main problem is the income of the families. Roma people working with iron and other metals do not have a place to keep the materials, leading to a decrease in their monthly income. At the same time, Zagreb missed the opportunity to provide social mediators that could have increased the employability of Roma, better adapted them to life in integrated surroundings, and helped to enrol children in preschool education. Roma have better opportunities and conditions, but we believe this effect will be seen in subsequent generations. The outcome of these actions should lead to a level of integration similar to that of Roma who already live in an integrated way in Zagreb. Roma living in Zagreb in an integrated environment have almost the same challenges as non-Roma in the city. The differences between integrated Roma and non-Roma in some cases still exist:

- Roma people face discrimination, while non-Roma do not.
- Education is not a high priority for many Roma families while for many non-Roma families this is a high priority.

For the Roma from Struge who have settled in the hostels Kosnica and Arena, the city did not find a permanent solution concerning their housing. Some of them are not satisfied with this solution, but generally, they live better than in the Roma settlement.

Roma people who are poor receive additional income from the City of Zagreb for the payment of utilities, as with all other people in this position.

The Roma who have moved to Petruševac complained about moisture in the building, and the city has not resolved this problem.

These examples show that segregation can be resolved if there is political will and interest. The permanent solution is desegregation, not investment in Roma settlements. The benefits of desegregation are recognised by city authorities so that the third settlement will also be desegregated.

Conclusions and recommendations

It is essential to point out, as a closing remark, that even if there are investments in settlements (roads, playgrounds, community centres, preschool programmes), the main negative effects of segregation remain with the Roma. Additionally, such developments do not ensure significant improvements in living conditions.

The strength of the above-discussed case is that all relevant stakeholders were involved in the process of desegregation. Roma were not just moved, but their voices were heard. The participation of CRNM was also needed since some Roma had additional special requests (e.g., picking the neighbourhood). CRNM has had the role of mediating between the city and Roma from the settlement. However, there is a lack of dedicated platforms that would guarantee meaningful debate about desegregation among all interested stakeholders.

A weak part of the resettlement process was the lack of involvement of social mediators who could have worked with Roma families before and after desegregation to ensure that all Roma could benefit from all the measures of the social department of the city and state to increase their motivation for education and their employability – especially those whose work is collecting metal.

Another weak point of these actions is the main source of motivation. Desegregation was in the interest of the city. Thus, desegregation was done as an ad hoc activity, not a planned process. This is why a permanent solution for Roma from the Roma settlement, Struge, has still not been found.

An additional element to consider is the reaction of non-Roma communities to desegregation. Protests and petitions were organised against moving Roma into non-Roma neighbourhoods. This also affected or demotivated Roma from leaving their settlements.⁴⁸ However, a good practice may be mentioned concerning how well-coordinated action can avoid protests. In the process of desegregation, stakeholders found the best path. This was a process undertaken for at least some of the people from the Roma settlement Plinarsko naselje who were eligible for social housing and got apartments in the different neighbourhoods in the city. This process successfully avoided the protests of Roma and non-Roma. Even though the data show that Roma would rather have Roma for their neighbours, we can see that their adaptation proceeds better if they live surrounded by non-Roma. Roma people now living in

⁴⁸ Media article about the protest in Zagreb against the resettlement of Roma from Plinarsko naselje in the neighborhood Sveta Klara: <https://net.hr/danas/hrvatska/burne-reakcije-na-ideju-preseljenja-zagrebackih-roma-nezadovoljni-stanovnici-ali-i-romi-zasto-nas-ne-rasprse-po-gradu-2eaa03ac-b1ce-11eb-a854-0242ac14002e>

Media article about the protest in Zagreb against the resettlement of Roma from Plinarsko naselje in the neighborhood Petruševac: <https://www.vecernji.hr/zagreb/stanovnici-petrusevca-prosvjedovali-protiv-useljavanja-roma-1304231>

Media article about the protest against Roma and their way of life in Međimurje County: <https://www.novolist.hr/novosti/hrvatska/prosvjed-protiv-roma-u-medimurju-kazu-da-zele-normalan-zivot-ali-meta-njihove-propagande-su-romi/>

an integrated way have more possibilities, and their children have more opportunities to achieve a normal standard of life.

There is also an opportunity for social workers to work with the families and to provide them with more attention and chances to achieve the standards of normal life and to be integrated and included in society; the task of the Roma civil sector and CRNM is to empower them to keep their Roma identity and not to be assimilated into the majority.

This desegregation action is final and sustainable. People are in social housing, and eviction has been successfully avoided. The city provides additional money for all beneficiaries of social housing to pay their utilities. Demolishing the Roma settlements and occupying the original land is also good practice, not allowing other Roma to live there.

These examples demonstrate that political will and interest largely contribute to desegregation. The permanent solution is desegregation and not investment in Roma settlements. The benefits of desegregation were recognised by city authorities, further motivating them to make efforts to desegregate the third Roma settlement.

The most common answer to desegregation is social housing, but social housing is the responsibility of local and regional governments. While this can be the solution for bigger cities like Zagreb or Rijeka, for the small local authorities with Roma settlements, the situation is totally different. For social housing, local governments need to have money or real estate under their ownership, which they do not have, and they need the political will to invest in social housing and make it a tool for desegregation. The approach to desegregation thus needs to come from the national level, but it seems there is a lack of political will to focus their attention on this. Instead, they are now making a supportive environment for investments in Roma settlements. These two examples clearly show the outcomes of investing in Roma settlements and the desegregation approach to the problem.

It is pivotal to change the approach to residential segregation. The topic is the responsibility of the housing sector and should be dealt with as a horizontal one. Residential segregation is discrimination, but discrimination does not have any consequences for the national government. If we change course and look at segregation as a form of discrimination and horizontal topic, then we can start to cope with it at the national level, which will then ensure the implementation of desegregation in Croatia. The topic is presently left with local and regional authorities who do not have the means to desegregate the settlements and sometimes do not have the will.

Recommendations to the European Commission:

- To see residential segregation as a problem of equal treatment rather than a sectoral housing problem. Consequently, if Member States fail to combat residential segregation actively, this should be seen as a failure to effectively protect the inhabitants from discrimination.
- To request Member States where residential segregation is a problem to build at least a plan for desegregation at the national level by the end of 2027 that includes specific targets and indicators to measure progress with implementation.
- The Member States need to be asked how much money they invest in Roma settlements and how much money they invest in desegregation – with regard to defining which goal is considered more important.

Recommendations to national governments:

- Make a plan for desegregation at the national level.
- Make partnerships with local and regional governments to fight segregation.

Recommendations to municipalities in general and the City of Zagreb specifically:

- Include desegregation in action plans to implement national strategic frameworks for Roma equality, inclusion, and participation and harmonise them with municipal social housing policies.
- Evaluate earlier desegregation processes and actively present their outcomes to the national government and local and regional self-governments.
- Open channels for financing the Roma civil sector to raise awareness among Roma people about the need to respect the obligations in contracts for social housing to avoid the eviction of Roma from social housing programs.
- the City of Zagreb needs to make a plan for desegregating the Roma settlement of Vrtni Put and plan a permanent solution for Roma people who have been resettled from the Roma settlement of Struge.

Recommendations to Roma civil society:

- Actively participate in the development of municipal housing policies.
- Educate other Roma and raise awareness of the Roma regarding social housing.

CZECHIA: A SOCIAL RENTAL AGENCY AS A DESEGREGATION ACTOR

by Eva Nedomová and Ester Lomová

Introduction

It is alarming how many resources must be activated for Roma living in social exclusion to live in standard desegregated housing and how many barriers such Roma face – barriers that are mostly unsurmountable without support. Through this case study, we would like to demonstrate that the government can effectively promote desegregation through subsidy policy, specifically through EU funds programming.

The presented case study is an example of the outcome of a small public policy step, i.e., the condition of residential desegregation as a prerequisite of EU financing. We find it interesting because it involves a relatively simple measure which has had a positive impact on the people concerned based on the data (the *Map of Residential Segregation*).

For the development of this chapter, ten interviews were conducted with people from the Roma minority and five interviews with social workers from three different NGOs that help Roma get better housing. Additionally, an interview with two representatives of the City of Ostrava was conducted to understand better the general situation regarding segregation. All interviewees were guaranteed anonymity; hence, names, names of the organisations and the exact job positions that could lead to their identification are not mentioned. Information from interviews and desk research is complemented by the personal experience of the authors. The described case study involved project activity; data on beneficiaries and interventions are gathered regularly and are used for the internal evaluation of the programme and project documentation and further analyses by the donor (ESIF).

The case study was written by Eva Nedomová, who has participated in the design, implementation and evaluation of the analysed intervention, and Ester Lomova – both from the NGO Romodrom.

National background information

Based on qualified estimates,¹ there are approximately 250,000 Roma living in the Czech Republic. One-third to one-half of the Romani population is burdened with cumulative problems and lives in social exclusion.

During World War II, Roma citizens were victims of genocide, and after its end, their number decreased to approximately 1,000 people. Subsequently, Roma immigrated to the Czech Republic, and their number gradually increased. In the 1950s and 1960s, a new assimilation policy was introduced, and the 'Law on the Permanent Settlement of Travellers' came into

¹ The Czech government publishes annual 'Reports on the State of the Romani Minority in the Czech Republic'. Information on the number of Roma in the country in these reports is based on estimations by public authorities' representatives (local and regional administrations), which are often subjective and must be treated with caution.

force. Since the 1970s, the narrative on assimilation was replaced by the narrative on integration, but the general message of these policies has persisted, i.e., the Roma being treated as a group in need of becoming similar to the majority population.

The fall of communism in 1989 found a large proportion of the Czech Roma population in low-skilled jobs and with low education. Moreover, Roma were often the first to lose their jobs during the economic transition in the 1990s, as a lot of them immigrated from Slovakia during the communist era to the north-eastern and north-western parts of the country. These regions were the ones most marked by communist industrialisation and, subsequently, those most stricken by problems related to transformation. On top of this, the 1990s saw a strong surge of racism and discrimination directed towards the Roma minority. Moreover, Roma with Slovak origins living in the Czech Republic after the split of Czechoslovakia in 1993 faced prolonged challenges with the determination and granting of Czech citizenship.²

Czech public policy uses the concept of “socially excluded localities” to describe the (mostly urban) spatial concentration of socially excluded populations, including many Roma. This term is formally non-ethnic but largely overlaps with Roma ethnic concentrations. Information on the number of socially excluded localities varies depending on the methodology used and source. According to a 2020 governmental report, the number of socially excluded localities had increased from about 850 to about 940 compared to the previous year. On the other hand, analysis based on data on the spatial localisation of recipients of social benefits shows a decreasing trend in the number of socially excluded localities, yet with an increase in the number of inhabitants of such localities.³ Moreover, excluded localities are concentrated in a few historically disadvantaged regions. According to the 2021 report on social exclusion, the regions most burdened by social exclusion include the Ústí nad Labem, Moravian-Silesian and Karlovy Vary regions. The same is true in the case of foreclosures, with the Ústí nad Labem and Moravian-Silesian regions also identified as home to the largest proportion of people undergoing foreclosure proceedings.⁴

Major mapping initiatives concerning the living conditions of socially excluded Roma include two ‘*Analyses of Socially Excluded Localities*’ prepared for the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and co-financed by the ESF. The first analysis relied on field research in 2006 and focused on “socially excluded Roma localities”.⁵ The second analysis from 2014 changed the narrative and focused on “socially excluded localities”, though it took account of the ethnic context as well.⁶ The change between the focal areas of the 2006 and 2014 analyses was part of a larger discursive turn in public policy aimed at the “de-ethnisation” of social exclusion.⁷

² For details see: <https://www.vlada.cz/cz/ppov/zalezitosti-romske-komunity/dopady-pravnich-predpisu-5753/>

³ Vališová, H. 2023. *Vývoj sociálně vyloučených lokalitv ČR v letech 2015-2020 s využitím dat o hmotné nouzi [Development of socially excluded localities in the Czech Republic in 2015-2020 using data on material need]*. Available at: https://www.socialni-zaclenovani.cz/wp-content/uploads/INISZ_duben2023.pdf

⁴ See: https://www.socialni-zaclenovani.cz/wp-content/uploads/Rozsah_SV_v_CR_2021_fin.pdf

⁵ GAC. 2006. *Analýza sociálně vyloučených romských lokalit a absorpční kapacity subjektů působících v této oblasti [Analysis of socially excluded Roma localities and absorption capacity of entities operating in this area]*. Available at: https://www.gac.cz/documents/nase_prace_vystupy/GAC_MAPA_analyza_SVL_aAK_CJ.pdf

⁶ Čada, K. et al. 2015. *Analýza sociálně vyloučených lokalit v ČR [Analysis of socially excluded localities in the Czech Republic]*. Available at: <http://www.esfcr.cz/file/9089/>

⁷ The Roma civil society discussed the puzzles the RCM1/Y1 report, see: Roma Civil Monitor. 2017. *Civil society monitoring report on the implementation of the national Roma integration strategies in Czech Republic: Focusing on structural and horizontal preconditions for successful implementation of the strategy*. Available at: <http://www.romacivilmonitoring.eu/pdf/rcm-civil-society-monitoring-report-1-czech-republic-2017-eprint-fin.pdf>

The 2014 analysis identified 606 socially excluded localities in which somewhere between 95 to 115 thousand people were living; 75% of those localities consisted of a predominantly Roma population.⁸ According to the 2020 governmental report, almost 80% of the population of socially excluded localities are of Roma origin.⁹

The *Map of Residential Segregation* (www.segregace.cz)¹⁰ uses data on the spatial concentration of people in poverty (beneficiaries of basic financial support in material need). In December 2020, there were 408 localities in which 133,574 people living in or threatened by social exclusion were concentrated. The number of localities with an extreme concentration of social exclusion was 41 at that time, with a population of 14.6 thousand.¹¹

There are significant differences when comparing the demographic data of residents of segregated localities and the general population of the Czech Republic.¹² One of the characteristics of people living in socially excluded localities is a low level of education¹³ and a high level of debt or over-indebtedness.¹⁴ In terms of expenditure, people in socially excluded localities spend the highest amounts on housing.

The 2020 *State of the Roma Minority Report* points out that local authorities often do not have an overview of the number of families with children in housing need because municipalities do not collect and evaluate the necessary data. More than two-thirds of the cities surveyed do not allocate any social housing.¹⁵

Housing benefits¹⁶ are provided to all without adequate means for housing, including low-income workers and pensioners (currently, more than 260,000 households receive housing allowance),¹⁷ and the amount reflects regionally differentiated housing costs. However, there is currently no comprehensive legislation in the Czech Republic that provides rules concerning support in access to housing and social housing, which are thus currently provided by municipalities and based on their own rules, as it is within the municipalities' competence to take care of the housing needs of its citizens.¹⁸ The Ministry of Regional Development is

⁸ Čáda, K. et al. 2015. *Analýza sociálně vyloučených lokalit v ČR*. Available at: <http://www.esfcr.cz/file/9089/>

⁹ Office of the Government of the Czech Republic. 2020. *Zpráva o stavu romské menšiny v České republice za rok 2019 [Report on the Situation of the Roma Minority in the Czech Republic in 2019]*. Available at: <http://www.vlada.cz/assets/ppov/zalezitosti-romske-komunity/aktuality/Zprava-o-stavu-romske-mensiny-2019.pdf>

¹⁰ The Map of Residential Segregation is an outcome of wider academic activities of the Centre for Research on Cities and Regions, which operates within the Department of Social Geography and Regional Development at the Faculty of Science, Charles University.

¹¹ Sýkora, L. 2022. *Sociální vyloučení, segregace a sociální bydlení v Česku*. Available at: <https://web.natur.cuni.cz/~sykora/pdf/seg/Sykora%202022%20Socialni%20vyloucen%20segregace%20socialni%20bydleni%20UUR%20Mesto%20dobro%20pro%20zivot.pdf>

¹² Toušek et al. 2018. *Sociálně vyloučené lokality z pohledu sociodemografických ukazatelů* in *Demography, a review of research on population development*, pp. 24-26. Available at: <https://www.czso.cz/documents/10180/61449042/tousek.pdf/33fe0341-4e3c-4bd1-911e-731f04d7be08?version=1.0>

¹³ Idem.

¹⁴ According to data from the Czech National Bank, as of 31 December 2021, the total debt of Czech consumers had increased by a record 365 billion CZK (14.93 billion EUR). As a result of this growth, the total debt registered in the Banking and Non-Banking Register of Customer Information as of 31 December 2021 was 2.97 trillion CZK (121.5 billion EUR).

¹⁵ The 2020 Report on the State of the Roma Minority is available at: <https://www.vlada.cz/cz/ppov/zalezitosti-romske-komunity/aktuality/zprava-o-stavu-romske-mensiny-v-ceske-republice-za-rok-2020-192596/>.

¹⁶ Act No. 110/2006 Coll., 117/1995 Coll., on State Social Support, as amended (housing allowance) and Act No. 108/2006 Coll., on Social Services.

¹⁷ <https://www.mpsv.cz/socialni-davky-v-cislech>

¹⁸ Act No. 128/2000 Coll., on Municipalities (Municipal Establishment) regulates the municipality's competence in the area of housing.

currently developing a law on social or affordable housing. According to its representatives, the law should be approved within two years.

It should be said that state support in the form of financial support for projects aimed at addressing housing needs has increased over the past few years.¹⁹ The initial pilot testing of the ‘housing-first’ concept in the Czech Republic has already been successful, moving many people in housing need into standard housing and allowing them to stay in housing for the long term while at the same time saving money from the public budget.²⁰

The *Map of Residential Segregation* (see above) is used in relation to ESF calls on social housing. The descriptions of calls nos. 107 and 101 include the conditions of non-segregation and non-concentration of housing used in the projects and specify limits on housing in localities based on the segregation dimensions of the map.²¹ Conditions of the call on social housing development under the ERDF state that social housing cannot be built in localities that would lead to segregation of the target group. New social housing cannot be constructed in localities with greater dimensions of residential segregation according to the *Map of Residential Segregation*.²²

In 2013, a lawsuit was filed at the district court in Litoměřice, alleging discriminatory treatment in access to housing. The defendant was a real estate agent who turned down a prospective tenant for an apartment because of her Roma ethnicity (this case was identified through discrimination testing). The court found the defendant guilty of direct discriminatory conduct.²³

Based on an amendment to the law on State Social Support, around 100 municipalities and towns issued between 2017 and 2021 general ordinances defining areas with an increased incidence of “socially undesirable phenomena”. This meant that no housing supplements were disbursed with new or renewed rental contracts in these areas. In late 2017, a constitutional complaint was filed by senators seeking the repeal of the provision, considered a violation of the Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms, specifically the freedom to choose one’s residence, and further stating that this approach does not solve the problem but exacerbates it. The repeal of the two articles of the law on which the ordinances declaring the “benefits-free zones” were based was published on 31 September 2021.²⁴

The Constitutional Court recently judged a case on the right to housing and the failure of a non-named city to take steps to desegregate an excluded locality or, more precisely, the municipal housing policy leading to the maintenance of the complainants’ social exclusion

¹⁹ For example, 150 million CZK (16.4 million EUR) were allocated for the support of Housing First projects through the ESF in 2019. The 13 supported projects provided assistance to 274 households, or 705 persons, for relocating into standard housing. In 2022, 580 million CZK (23.73 million EUR) was already allocated for this purpose (numbers about beneficiaries have not been published yet).

²⁰ Ripka, Š., Černá, E., Kubala, P. 2018. *Pilotní testování rychlého zabydlení rodin s dětmi (Rapid Re-Housing)*. Available at: https://socialnibydeni.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/RRH_Zaverecná-evaluacní-zpráva_web.pdf

²¹

https://www.esfcr.cz/documents/21802/18431469/P%C5%99%C3%ADloha+%C4%8D.1_Popis+aktivit+%28dopl%C4%9Bn%C3%AD+vodu+4.1+v%C3%BDzvy%29/01059aba-633d-44b5-a618-4f9b3ab9ebba

²² For further details, see the specific rules for applicants, call no. SC R.S2: https://irop.mmr.cz/getmedia/3a6db30e-f2ef-49f5-a385-3c00523d9fc0/Specifická-pravidla_Socialni-bydeni_final_podepsano.pdf.aspx?ext=.pdf

²³ https://www.ochrance.cz/uploads-import/ESO/112-2012-DIS-VP-rozsudek_OS_Litomerice.pdf

²⁴ https://www.usoud.cz/fileadmin/user_upload/Tiskova_mluvcí/Publikovane_nalezky/2021/Pl._US_40_17_na_web.pdf

For an analysis of the impacts of the declared “benefits-free zones”, see: https://www.socialni-zaclenovani.cz/wp-content/uploads/ChomutovOOPBZ_finalni.pdf

and segregation. With the constitutional complaint, the complainants, who were Roma and thought their ethnicity significant to the case, sought the annulment of the decisions of the ordinary courts. Although the Constitutional Court rejected the applicants' claim, it pointed out in its conclusion critical shortcomings in Czech housing legislation, which has, according to the Court, wider social consequences:

*"The present case [...] pointed to the unfortunate fact that the Czech Republic has not yet adopted adequate legal regulation of social housing.[...] The provision of social housing benefits alone cannot be considered sufficient steps, as the state must also guarantee effective and efficient access to decent housing [...] Vulnerable people cannot be left in the care of charities, volunteers or non-profit organisations alone; such an approach runs counter to our international obligations under Article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and Article 16 of the European Social Charter."*²⁵

The Roma are one of the most vulnerable groups in the housing market. This is due to long-term exclusion leading to a life of poverty for a large part of the Roma, in combination with prevailing discrimination based both on ethnicity and socioeconomic status. Roma living in poverty largely take up offers in the least attractive locations. As a rule, this involves rental housing of very low quality, often below the standard acceptable to the majority society. Extreme forms of this are represented by houses without amenities, hostels and various types of temporary shelters offering sub-standard living conditions.

Factors influencing staying in segregated or socially excluded localities are linked to the inhabitants of these localities themselves (internal factors) and structural (external factors). Within the framework of the implementation of various projects, we have conducted several interviews with Roma people living in segregated/socially excluded localities. From these interviews, we have identified that the most common reasons for living in segregated localities are family and friendship ties, a feeling of neighbourhood togetherness, the schools their children are used to and a certain sense of security. As some reported, they are afraid to leave the locality because of fear of not being accepted in a new neighbourhood, especially if it is a neighbourhood where most people are from the majority population. External factors include the lack of finances to cover the costs associated with moving (to pay the security deposit, real estate agent commissions, fees to housing associations and the first rent instalment). Another important factor is the reluctance of private landlords to rent apartments to Roma. Reasons stated by landlords are the fear of tenants destroying apartments, not paying the rent, behaving problematically in the neighbourhood and that more people will stay in an apartment than should be the case according to the lease agreement.

Socially excluded/segregated localities are generally not presented in a positive spirit in the media. The negative aspects of these localities, such as lower hygiene standards, bedbugs, poverty, crime, and addiction, are mainly mentioned in the media. Newspaper articles are usually accompanied by illustrative photographs showing houses in poor technical condition,

²⁵ https://www.usoud.cz/fileadmin/user_upload/Tiskova_mluvci/Publikovane_nalezky/2023/2-2533-20_AN.pdf

dilapidated houses, and rubbish in the neighbourhood. If there are people in the photographs, they are usually people of Roma nationality, including children.²⁶

Desegregation case study

The NGO Romodrom is the largest Roma NGO in Czechia, providing social services in many towns in the country. One of the most frequent challenges that its clients face is housing, and therefore, the NGO's social workers have needed to address this problem. For this purpose, the NGO established a social rental agency in 2018. The described project is part of these long-term activities of Romodrom.

Between 2019 and 2022, Romodrom, in cooperation with the NGO Nová možnost ('New possibility'), implemented the EU-funded '*Housing First Project*' (HF Project) in four towns of the Moravian-Silesian region: Ostrava, Havířov, Karviná and Opava. Each of the localities has its own specifics determined by the area, size and number of inhabitants, the degree of spatial exclusion, the condition of houses and flats, the form of their ownership, and other factors.

Each of the municipalities has its own tools and ways of dealing with housing needs in its territory, but all of them have housing as one of their priority areas in their strategic documents. Similarly, the Moravian-Silesian Region has housing, especially for people at risk of social exclusion, as one of its priorities.

1. **Ostrava** is the regional capital of the Moravian-Silesian Region and the third-largest city in Czechia in terms of area and population. The population as of 1 January 2021 was 283,320. The city of Ostrava consists of 23 municipal districts which have independent jurisdiction. It is impossible to say with certainty how many persons of Roma ethnicity live in Ostrava. According to qualified estimates, the number is around 30,000, of which approximately up to 10,000 Roma live in socially excluded localities²⁷ and social hotels.²⁸ As part of the preparation of the '*Concept of Social Housing of the Statutory City of Ostrava*', residential hotels in the city were mapped in 2017. According to this document, there were, at that time, a total of 42 hostels in the city with approved operating rules and a total capacity of 7,241 beds. Some of the hostels serve students, and some of the hostels are used by foreign workers. Yet, most of the hostels operated as long-term housing for people unable to find adequate housing elsewhere. The quality of the hostels varies, ranging from hostels with separate housing units with their own sanitary facilities and kitchens or kitchenettes to hostels with shared kitchens and sanitary facilities. These hostels are characterised by lower standards of hygiene, mould, dampness and bedbugs. Accommodation contracts are usually short-term, one to three months. This type of housing is not a form of standard

²⁶ See, e.g.: <https://moravskoslezsky.denik.cz/zpravy-z-ceska/tahle-mista-znaji-vsichni-bydlet-byste-tu-ale-nechteli-21220211.html>; <https://www.blesk.cz/clanek/zpravy-udalosti/607419/bida-vsi-a-spina-socialni-pracovnice-priblizily-vyloucene-lokality-ceska.html>; <https://video.aktualne.cz/karvina-sidliste-brana/r~298109b6efb711e7984d0cc47ab5f122/>; https://www.tyden.cz/rubriky/domaci/ghetto-v-ghettu-v-karvine-vyrostla-nova-maticni-ulice_453892.html

²⁷ See the Strategy for Supporting the Development of Roma Communities in the Moravian-Silesian Region for the Period 2021-2027. Available at: https://www.msk.cz/assets/temata/strategicke_dokumenty/strategie-rom-komunit-msk-2021_2027.pdf. The 2017 Report on the State of the Roma Minority in the Moravian-Silesian Region states that approximately 12,400 to 12,900 Roma live in socially excluded localities in Ostrava. Ostrava includes 13 socially excluded localities.

²⁸ Mass accommodation, usually in poor condition, with shared bathroom and kitchen facilities, where rent is paid per 'bed'. Leases are usually short-term, usually for a month.

and secure housing. These hostels are usually, but not always, located in socially excluded areas.

2. In **Karviná**, there are approximately 50,000 inhabitants, of which, according to expert estimates, Roma make up approximately 2,700, of whom approximately 75% live in socially excluded localities. In the last two years, a large number of houses on streets located in previously identified socially excluded localities were torn down. And the Mašinka hostel, which was considered one of the socially excluded localities, has been closed. However, the city's 'Strategic Plan' still refers to several socially excluded localities. One is in Karviná-Nové Město, covers 0.7 km², and has about 11,500 inhabitants (i.e., about 19% of the total population of the city). It is an urban area with older brick houses, the majority owner of which is a private company. Another excluded locality is found in the Karviná-Fryštát. Accommodation is available here for those social groups who cannot afford other types of accommodation – from older people to the poor, mostly Roma families. Approximately 2,100 Roma live there. As far as hostels are concerned, there are currently two hostels in Karviná: the Kaktus hostel, with a capacity of 75 beds and the Majáček hostel, with a capacity of 40 beds.
3. In **Havířov**, out of a total population of 70,000, there are 3,172 Roma inhabitants, and, according to estimates, 75.6% of the Roma population live in socially excluded localities.²⁹ Within the town of Havířov, the areas with the worst quality of housing, according to the citizens of the town themselves, are the Havířov-Město and Havířov-Šumbark districts.³⁰ These are localities where the majority owner of the flats is a private company (the same that owns the apartments in the socially excluded locality in Karviná). There is a higher concentration of socially excluded persons or persons at risk of social exclusion, most of whom are Roma.
4. In **Opava**, the total population of 55,000 includes approximately 2,500 Roma, 75% of whom are described as living in socially excluded localities. The number of identified socially excluded localities in Opava varies from two to five, according to different sources.³¹ The 'Community Plan for the Development of Social and Related Services of the Statutory City of Opava' for the period 2022-2026 draws attention to the lack of housing for persons at risk of social exclusion. One of the planned activities within the framework of this plan is identifying suitable housing and negotiations with private entities.³²

The unemployment rate in the Moravian-Silesian Region as of 31 December 2022 reached 5.12%, the second highest value after the Ústí nad Labem Region (5.54%). Within the locality of Karviná, the unemployment rate was 10.37%, in Ostrava 5.19%, in Opava 3.4% and in Havířov 9.01%. However, these are total figures independent of ethnicity, and ethnicity is not recorded in the statistics.

²⁹ Strategy for Supporting the Development of Roma Communities in the Moravian-Silesian Region for the Period 2021-2027.

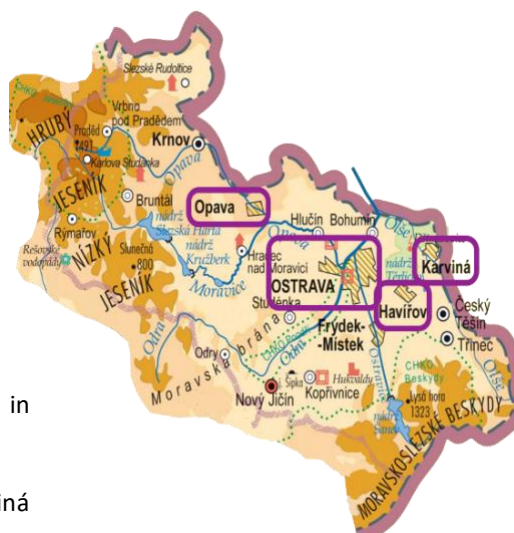
³⁰ Havířov's updated Community Plan for the Development of Social Services.

³¹ Analyses for the Strategy for the Integration of the Roma Community of the Moravian-Silesian Region for the period 2015-2020 and Local Inclusion Plan of the City of Opava 2020-2022.

³² Opava Community Plan, p. 13-14.



Location of the Moravian-Silesian Region in Czechia (above)



Location of the four towns (Ostrava, Karviná and Havířov) in the region (right)

Karviná, especially the part of the city called *Nové město*, is often described negatively in the media and is often referred to as Karviná's "Bronx". Negative aspects such as theft, noise and disorder are particularly emphasised and are directly linked to the composition of the population. This image is reinforced in social media by representatives of Karviná, including the mayor himself and the director of the city police. A recent article posted on social media by the director of the municipal police that discussed the extensive inspection of tenants with the participation of an NGO, the municipal police, the state police, and television cameras provoked a stormy negative reaction from citizens, politicians, journalists, and even the ombudsman commented on the situation. Although the article was subsequently removed from social media, the entire activity is still being dealt with by the relevant authorities, and a criminal complaint is being considered to determine whether the inspection was in accordance with the law.³³ As far as the presentation of socially excluded localities in Ostrava, Havířov and Opava is concerned, the articles tend to focus on the problems in the locality and their impact on people's lives without denigrating the residents themselves. Even city officials are neutral rather than explicitly negative in their social media descriptions of the localities.

The target group of the described HF Project are people living in social exclusion. A specific part of this target group are the Roma, who, according to qualified estimates by programme employees, make up 90% of the population of socially excluded localities in the relevant towns. The HF project focused mainly on people living rough (living in the streets, in publicly accessible spaces), people living in emergency accommodation and in accommodation for people experiencing homelessness, in women's shelters (at risk of domestic violence), people living in insecure accommodation (temporarily with family/friends, no legal (sub)tenancy), people living under threat of eviction, and people living under threat of violence and in unfit housing (dwellings unfit for habitation). The only criteria for participation in the project are proven housing needs and the need for long-term support as defined by social workers.

This group of tenants is often perceived by housing providers (both private owners and municipalities) as risky, often because of prejudice – Roma are associated with bad behaviour, criminal activity, alcohol or other substance abuse, gambling, etc. In consequence, they have

³³ <https://a2larm.cz/2023/06/mesto-karvina-spolu-s-vlastnikem-bytu-okd-dlouhodobě-sikanuji-romy/>; <https://zprav.aktualne.cz/domaci/policie-primator-karvina/r~206dd47211ca11eea9eeac1f6b220ee8/>; https://www.irozhlaz.cz/zprav-domov/karvina-bourani-domu-residomo_1904100620_tec

no alternative for housing other than social hostels (very expensive but of very low quality, usually in segregated areas), which often become their permanent type of housing.

The HF Project had two objectives. The primary objective was to obtain and permanently maintain standard housing for the most vulnerable people; the secondary objective was to improve the overall situation of the supported target group in all other key areas of their lives (e.g., employment, financial situation, family relations, etc.). The aim was to make clients as independent as possible and to help them maintain their new housing even after the end of their participation in the project. Thanks to the project and the cooperation with private landlords, the HF project found housing for our Roma clients, who often do not meet the conditions for the allocation of municipal flats or do not have enough money to find adequate housing.

The project included several activities, such as searching for apartments and approaching private landlords, establishing cooperation with landlords, reaching out to the target group, establishing a trusting relationship with clients, assisting with moving to new housing and providing broad support after the move. Emphasis was placed on a partnership approach with the client, support, and motivation. In our cooperation, we emphasised the principles of housing first.

Even before the project started, Romodrom had already secured several flats, and others were being sought on the housing market. Offers of available apartments were sought within the private sector, with the main search method being public advertisements either directly placed by owners or through the proxy of real estate agents. The process started when the NGO checked whether the apartment offer was still applicable. Then, by phone or in a personal meeting, the rental social agency worker explained to the owner/real estate agent who the NGO is and for what purpose they desire to rent the housing, i.e., for whom the NGO is looking for an apartment, briefly introducing the project and introducing the target group. If the owner/real estate worker was still willing to communicate with us, we asked at that point about the specific conditions of the lease. To increase the willingness of landlords to make apartments available to Roma, the NGO offered various guarantees, such as comprehensive apartment management (preparation of lease agreements, finding tenants, communication with the housing cooperative/owners' association, insurance for tenants in the event of damage, regular inspection and maintenance of the apartment, etc.) and a contractual guarantee of rent payment provided by the NGO. During the meeting with the owner, the NGO negotiated the price of the rent, which should not be higher than the usual rent in the area. In the standard market for apartments, landlords usually ask for a security deposit of three months' rent, but thanks to the rent guarantee, the NGO was usually able to reduce this deposit to the amount of one month's rental payment. This deposit was not given to the owner but remained on the NGO's internal account. If the tenant decided to move out and did not owe rent, the security deposit was paid to them.

When necessary, any repairs were carried out in the flat before the implementation phase started to ensure that the flat met the minimum standard of living. The apartments were scattered throughout the town outside socially excluded localities, and the NGO always offered a maximum of one housing unit in an apartment building at a single address to avoid the concentration of people in housing need. All apartments are regularly managed and maintained (preventive pest control, regular inspections, etc).

The key worker conducted an initial structured interview with the programme participant. In this interview, they focused particularly on the participant's overall situation, and together, they developed a Housing Plan. The key worker then ascertained the participant's specific ideas about the new apartment by completing a questionnaire that maps housing requirements in collaboration with the participant (apartment size, space arrangement, and the number of people who would live there). Mapping housing history is particularly important for effectively preventing possible problems with sustaining the housing arrangement (extent of debts and their structure, past relations with neighbours). Determining the client's perceptions of the apartment is particularly important for matching the client with an appropriate apartment.

Prevention was a key element throughout the entire period of cooperation with the project participant, from mapping the participant's history and current situation in the pre-move-in phase to assessing and, if necessary, tailoring solutions to the participant's financial situation (e.g., use of guarantee and crisis funds, setting up benefits, support for actively increasing income, etc.), to focusing on keeping the client in the new housing (creating long-lasting relationships with neighbours, addressing any acute problems, etc.). The NGO motivated participants to create a good first impression on neighbours – for example, to introduce themselves, ask about the house customs, offer help with cleaning, etc. If there were any complaints from neighbours, it was essential to respond as quickly as possible. The NGO usually visited the neighbours, asked what happened and offered to meet the tenant for coffee and if the complaint was valid, motivated the client to apologise and remedy the situation.

As part of relapse prevention efforts, project staff approached each participant individually and created solutions to their situation that were both relevant to their needs and as effective as possible. For example, if the client were addicted to alcohol/drugs, the NGO contacted the addiction centre; if they needed psychiatric/psychological care, the NGO mediated contact with a doctor; if they had debts, the NGO offered cooperation with debt counselling advisors, etc.

After identifying the client's housing requirements and determining the risks that may be treated and monitored as part of the prevention process, the worker introduced the client to the portfolio of housing that was already available. They told the participant where the appropriate apartment is located based on the participant's needs, the cost of rent, utilities available, and any fees, that is, the total amount they would have to pay on a regular basis, and they showed photographs of the apartment and scheduled a house tour. If a client did not have enough money to pay the rent, they could apply for social benefits that cover almost three-quarters of the rent. However, the client will always have to pay part of the rent out of their own income. The client always has the right to refuse the offered apartment without the threat of any sanction (e.g., exclusion from the project). If the client was interested, a lease agreement was signed.

After signing the lease agreement, the participant moved and settled in. The NGO worker and the client planned the logistics of the move together, i.e., the moving plan, which included, in particular, the date when the move would take place, who would help with the move, and the transport arrangements. If the client did not have the necessary basic equipment for the apartment, the worker and the client created a plan to provide this (e.g., to use support networks called a "furniture bank" or apply for emergency benefits). The moving costs were paid by the client, but if the client did not have enough money, a loan could be given from the

guarantee fund, and the client was required to pay it back in small instalments. It was also important to encourage the participants to take the initiative to find furniture themselves, to encourage them to save for furniture or to apply for an emergency benefit to purchase furniture. If necessary, the NGO could purchase furniture from the guarantee fund.

One of the most common barriers to accessing housing, apart from discrimination, is the financial situation, i.e., it is very difficult for low-income households to access housing that would be adequate for their needs. The deposit required when renting a new apartment is usually equivalent to between two and three months of rent. However, this amount does not include the first month's rent and other fees. The total cost of moving can, therefore, be between 25,000 CZK (1,021 EUR) and 45,000 CZK (1,840 EUR), depending on the location, rent and size of the apartment. This situation is complicated by another significant factor: the financial instability of people living in poverty, especially if their income depends on social benefits, family members are unemployed, and the family has debts. Moreover, the timing of social benefit payments is often unpredictable (labour offices are understaffed and overwhelmed), which makes it virtually impossible to manage and adhere to a budget plan. This limits individuals who remain without sufficient finances to cover basic needs after paying rent and utility bills. This situation was considered in the implementation phase of the project by creating a guarantee fund, which, among other things, was used to pay the security deposits, which were then gradually repaid by the client. The security deposit was usually limited to one month's rent or 10,000 CZK (410 EUR). If the project participant decided to move out during the project, the security deposit was disbursed to them.

The risk of losing housing was significantly reduced by the guarantee fund, which could be used to pay/contribute to the costs of project clients in the form of a refundable security deposit to cover damages and rent in the case of fluctuations in payments by the project participant (e.g., because of a delay in benefit payments, or sudden loss of income due to loss of a job or serious injury).

Social support focused primarily on identifying hidden risks that may threaten housing (e.g. domestic violence, addictions, mental or other health problems), working on managing the family budget (e.g. the social worker taught participants how to take regular readings of the gas meter, electricity meter, and water meter in order to identify real consumption and adjust advance payments accordingly, etc.), assistance in dealing with relations with neighbours (including dealing with complaints) and other topics that the participant came up with, such as finding a job, dealing with debt, etc. Thus, individual plans were added to the Housing Plans when needed, focusing on non-housing contracts.

If necessary, ad hoc support based on the needs of individual clients was provided (e.g., contacting a crisis centre in case of domestic violence and providing follow-up care; assistance in securing aids for people with disabilities; contacts and accompaniment to organisations that provide specific services – addiction counselling, counselling for those in financial distress, organisations focusing on domestic violence or victims of crime, etc.).

Rent was collected or monitored by the payment management officer. This staff member also contacted the landlord at least once a month to ask for their opinion of the tenant's compliance with the provisions of the lease agreement and the proper use of the apartment (when the participant pays the rent directly to the landlord, whether they have paid the rent on time, and whether there have been any problems, etc.), verifies the payment of the rent on the date specified in the lease agreement and other related charges (municipal waste,

television, radio, if not already included in the service charge), including their due date. If the participant had a payment plan, the payment management officer checked compliance with this.

The project budget was 15 million CZK (610,000 EUR) for three years. In line with the call's conditions, 60% was used for staff salaries and 40% for indirect costs, such as guarantee funds, travel, office supplies, etc. The project allocated 20% (3 million CZK, or 120,000 EUR) of the total budget to the guarantee fund. This was used to pay for missing rent, necessary repairs, security deposits and furniture when needed.

Over the course of three years of the project implementation, a total of 45 households participated in the project: 28 from Karviná, 11 from Ostrava and six from Havířov. These households included 134 adults and 65 children. Within the relocated households, 90% were households of Roma ethnicity that had previously lived in substandard conditions or directly on the street.

Of these, 32 retained their housing after two years. Thirteen households left their apartments prematurely, of which 11 households at their own request (involving moving outside the project localities mainly for work and family reasons). Only in two cases was the lease agreement terminated due to repeated violations (mainly non-payment of rent, repeated complaints from neighbours about noise disturbance at night and repeated calls to the police).

All households have moved to standard housing with an emphasis on desegregation. All flats offered to the project participants were outside socially excluded localities, with a good availability of services (schools, kindergartens, post offices, public transport, shopping centres, parks and playgrounds). At the time of the project, the *Map of Residential Segregation*³⁴ was not accessible; however, after its launch and retrospective check, 95% of the apartments were located in the low level of segregation zone ("green zones" suitable for social housing without risk of creating segregation) and 5% in the zone of medium segregation.

The implementation of the project had both immediate, medium, and long-term impacts in terms of changing the lives of the individual households. Thanks to the implementation of the project, six children who were removed from their parents to foster care (mainly in an institutional form) were returned to their families. These children were taken from their families mainly due to inadequate housing conditions (even though this reason is not a legal justification for the removal of a child), and another seven children from three families were not removed due to the provision of suitable housing conditions. This has had positive effects on the lives of the children and, consequently, whole families. As the results of project implementation have shown, more than 90% of the households reported that their quality of housing had improved. Quality of living improvements included factors such as sufficient privacy and the quality of the locality where they live (especially in terms of amenities such as shops, transport services, parks and playgrounds for children). The change in the quality of housing and environment was also reflected in households' overall satisfaction with their lives, with households reporting that they were much happier, problems with sleep had declined, and they felt more secure.

³⁴ <https://web.natur.cuni.cz/segregace/>

It should be noted that moving to standard desegregated housing not only has positive impacts in terms of a change of quality but also positive socioeconomic impacts, not only for the families but also, as a result, on the whole of society. Considering the cost of institutional care for children, by enabling the return of the children to their families, public money has been saved to the amount of 210,000 to 270,000 CZK (8,590 to 11,050 EUR) per month.³⁵ Also, about 20% of members of the resettled households found legal employment. Three households have legalised their employment thanks to stable housing and the support of a social/key worker.³⁶

The interaction of Roma project participants with their new neighbours was idiosyncratic, determined by the personalities and characteristics of each person involved, the overall composition of the house and the neighbourhood and by the habits and customs in each house. In a few cases, problems arose, but these generally had an objective basis (e.g., the tenant flooded their neighbours or excessive noise) rather than being caused solely by the ethnicity of the tenants. However, this happened in one case when complaints addressed ordinary things that would have been accepted with a non-Roma tenant. In this case, we consider that the basis of the complaints was the ethnicity of the tenant.

The project was perceived very positively by the professional public, as evidenced by the 'Award for Ending Homelessness 3rd Edition 2021', which the implementers received from Feantsa. Similarly, the project has been presented and positively received at various meetings, conferences and workshops organised by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and other NGOs. There have been no negative responses to this project from the general public.

However, the project has been received unfavourably by some politicians – for example, the mayor of Karviná, who has also long supported a policy of 'zero tolerance',³⁷ the introduction of no-benefits zones (see above), and has generally been negative about social housing.

Conclusions and recommendations

The piloting of the social rental agency model in a few towns of this marginalised Czech region has proved successful. Despite the fact that one town faced animosity from the local government, it provided vulnerable Roma families with help that led to the sustainable improvement of living conditions and successful integration. As the model relies on private owners and available housing opportunities on the market rather than municipal housing, it is an example of a solution for municipalities where the local government is not active at helping Roma and other marginalised groups to get better housing. However, this model can only work under the condition that a strong civil society organisation (or other stakeholder that organises the social rental agency) is present in the municipalities and that the housing

³⁵ The cost of keeping one child in institutional care, depending on their age, ranges from 35,000 to 45,000 CZK (1,430 to 1,840 EUR) per month.

³⁶ The evaluation report of this project will be published at the end of 2023.

³⁷ So-called Czech "zero-tolerance policy" (falsely referring to New York security policy) combines elements of security and social policy and subordinates them to a single logic according to which the causes of problems are reduced to the behaviour of the socially vulnerable inhabitants of a particular locality, often Roma, who are labelled "inadaptable". The solution to the problem is seen not as prevention and social work but as punishment.

benefit system in place is effective enough to provide the target group with financial resources to pay rent at the level or market price (or close to this).

The model was based on the 'housing-first' approach, which in the context of Czechia is innovative. In the Moravian-Silesian region, housing problems are usually addressed mainly through traditional housing-ready programmes that require that the person in need first prove their readiness for housing. Such approaches have proven to be desperately ineffective.

The presented project was part of a wider initiative to promote the housing-first approach in Czechia, which is based on the idea that the improvement and stabilisation of the housing situation of a family is a precondition for improvement in other areas and successful social integration. The project's outcomes proved that this assumption and approach are more effective than the traditional approach and can contribute to residential desegregation.

Unlike traditional approaches that provide vulnerable populations with accommodation concentrated in one place, thus conserving pre-existing residential segregation or even creating new segregated neighbourhoods, the described project consciously focused on desegregation. This was a condition of the ESF call that introduced an obligation to settle people in housing need outside segregated localities identified by the *Map of Residential Segregation* based on available and updated administrative data on the localisation and spatial concentration of beneficiaries of social aid.³⁸

Among the main strengths of the project was that it proactively worked with the prejudice and racism that mainstream society has. To provide adequate support for the participants, an adequate network of cooperating entities was created for each client individually, according to their needs. In the course of project implementation, the NGO established cooperation with various social and psychological services, municipalities, schools and prisons.

It should be said that the HF project focused mainly on providing individual-level assistance to individuals and families, i.e., it was not a systemic solution to segregation, the latter which needs to be tackled by governmental policies that address the entirety of segregated localities in the context of the wider territory.

Recommendations for the successful replication of the social rental agency model:

- Housing programmes should be delivered together with other support, such as social counselling, debt management and financial counselling, psychological help and support (important for addressing issues such as loneliness, domestic violence, and mental illness).
- The roles of 'social worker' and 'real estate agent' or 'housing manager' should be separated and exercised by different persons. The role of social workers should be, in first place, supportive, and they should enjoy the full trust of their clients. Housing managers must enforce the contractual conditions of the tenancy, including rent collection, supervision, and, in extreme cases, sanctions.
- The social rental agency must work not only with clients-tenants but with the whole house (neighbours and management) that the client moves to. If there is any problem

³⁸ Available at: <https://web.natur.cuni.cz/segregace/>

(raised or created by clients or neighbours), it should be solved with the involvement of all parties, including neighbours.

- The implementing organisation should gain the trust of neighbours so they are motivated to come to it in the case of problems rather than escalate them. With this aim, the organisation should provide support, in particular, if the problem is connected with the client.³⁹
- The social rental agency should not rely on the supply of municipal dwellings but use housing available on the market.
- Guarantees for housing owners should be both financial (in the case of the tenant's failure to properly pay the rent, this should be covered by the guarantee fund) and non-financial (if there is a problem related to the client, the social rental agency will solve it; undertaking all management and technical maintenance of the apartment for the owner, etc.).
- It is important to appropriately match clients and apartments, taking into account the composition of households and the needs of their members.⁴⁰
- The concentration of several families of lower socioeconomic status or a single ethnicity in one house should be avoided. The reason is that a concentration of stigmatised households may lead to backlash in neighbourhoods or stigmatise the house.
- The collection of rent should be done by the real estate agent or the housing manager in person and should be synced with the household's income flow. The housing manager should regularly visit the apartment.
- Cooperation with landlords who are not reliable or simply seek to maximise their profit should be avoided.

Recommendations to public authorities responsible for housing and social inclusion agendas:

- Authorities should secure stable financing for housing programmes in order to develop pilot projects into long-term schemes that are available throughout the state.
- National authorities should put in place methodologies for the identification of segregated areas and avoid the placement of social housing in such areas, as this does not support participants' integration.
- National authorities should secure regular updates of the housing price map to be aware of the cost of housing in different regions of the country and adjust their level of assistance to the reality of the housing market.
- Authorities should regularly map discrimination on the housing market (through mystery shopping and analyses of lease conditions) and proactively fight

³⁹ For example, if there is water leakage from the client's apartment, the organisation should help the flooded neighbour and communicate with the insurance company and provide handymen who will fix the apartment (or provide material if the neighbour wants to fix it on their own).

⁴⁰ For example, clients with children (who may be noisy) should not be moved into houses where mainly older adults live (they may be used to a calm environment), and vice versa, to prevent potential conflict. Also, people with disabilities, and those who are older or have physical limitations should not be moved to apartments on higher floors. Additionally, the size of the apartment should match the needs of the family (number of members, their age, etc.)

discrimination in housing (by both private providers and real estate agencies, but also municipalities that manage a significant share of the housing in the country).

- National authorities should use clear procedures for reviewing rules concerning the allocation of municipal housing to avoid discrimination and segregation.
- All municipalities should apply transparent, unambiguous, non-discriminatory conditions when allocating municipal housing.
- Authorities responsible for planning social service provisions should secure the adequate provision of social services related to housing.

GREECE: UNCLEAR DESEGREGATION EFFECT OF CHALANDRI'S DISMANTLEMENT OF A ROMA SETTLEMENT

by Georgios Tsiakalos

Introduction

This chapter will delve into the policy of the Municipality of Chalandri that was aimed at the dismantlement of a segregated Roma settlement, Nomismatokopio. The purpose of this chapter is not to present a definitive example of successful integration through residential segregation, as the policy has dismantled the settlement by providing its inhabitants with grants for moving out of the settlement, but their further fate has not been monitored. Rather, the chapter provides a critical analysis of the policy adopted by Chalandri and the lessons that can be derived from it. Further research and information are required to ascertain whether this case has genuinely contributed to successful desegregation and inclusion or, conversely, perpetuated socio-spatial exclusion and segregation in the places. This is particularly pertinent given the involvement of voluntary relocations, as individual circumstances can vary significantly, and concerns are raised regarding the location of places of relocation, the reaction of other municipalities where relocations take place, and the sufficiency of accompanying measures aiming at fostering inclusion, equality, and participation.

Having said this, this chapter aims to elucidate the actions taken by the Municipality of Chalandri in implementing a housing policy that diverges significantly from formal state policies. It seeks to shed light on the rationale behind the inception and execution of this policy while also presenting past and present housing policies for Roma residing in segregated and impoverished settlements in Greece. Furthermore, this discussion serves to raise awareness among relevant stakeholders.

Considering that this policy is an ongoing endeavour, it possesses the potential to refine and enhance its approach over time, ultimately advancing the objective of achieving desegregation, a *conditio sine qua non* for promoting inclusion, equality, and participation.

The selection of Chalandri as a case study was guided by a multitude of considerations. Among these factors, the prominent role of strategic litigation for human rights emerges as a pivotal catalyst for the initiation of housing initiatives for the Roma population, regardless of their ultimate success and as a heavy counterweight to forced evictions without alternative housing provision. Furthermore, the choice of Chalandri serves as an illustrative example of the necessity of more comprehensive and tailored approaches while highlighting the limitations inherent in employing an overly simplistic 'one-size-fits-all' approach within this intricate context. We will investigate the reasons behind the municipality's decision not to adhere to official state policy, which is the use of Article 159 of the law no. 4483/2017 entitled 'Temporary Relocation for Special Social Groups' but to opt for its own approach, formulating a policy that never existed before.

A comprehensive understanding of the specific issues, historical context, and future prospects of similar endeavours to the Chalandri case was facilitated through interviews with key

stakeholders. Significant sources of first-hand information were Mr. Konstantinos Efthymiou, Deputy Mayor for Social Solidarity, Environment and Civil Protection, and Ms. Eleni Desiotou, Roma Mediator of the Roma Branch of the Chalandri Community Centre, whose insights shed light on the multifaceted aspects of the case. Furthermore, a beneficiary of this initiative, who is also employed by one of the social enterprises established with the support of the municipality for the purposes of this endeavour, provided valuable firsthand perspectives, deepening our understanding of the impact of the intervention in Chalandri and helping explore potential future directions.

The case review involved a comprehensive analysis of municipal and regional decisions, domestic and international court rulings, and news articles. To gain a broader understanding of housing policies in Greece, historical information on Roma community housing policies, the 'National Roma Strategy Framework' (NRSF) for 2021-2030, and reports from international bodies such as the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), and the European Committee of Social Rights (ECSR) were also examined. These varied sources offered valuable insights into the legal, administrative, and historical dimensions of Roma housing policies in Greece.

The chapter was drafted by Mr. Georgios Tsiakalos, a human rights lawyer specialising in strategic legal advocacy and litigation for Roma rights. He is a scholar of law, political science & public administration, forensics, criminology, and bioethics and law in medicine. Tsiakalos has served as an Expert/Consultant for the Council of Europe, including JUSTROM, and has held various positions related to Roma rights, including coordinator for the CoE Roma Political Schools and advocacy/programme manager for the Roma Women Association of Dendropotamos. He is currently the National Coordinator for the Roma Civil Monitor Coalitions in Greece and Cyprus, led by the Roma Women Association of Dendropotamos and serves as a Special Advisor to the EEA/Norway Grants Task Force on Roma Inclusion & Empowerment. Tsiakalos was recently selected as the National Coordinator for Greece for the European Union/Council of Europe Joint Programme Equality and Freedom from Discrimination for Roma (EQUIROM).

National background information

The Council of Europe estimates that there are approximately 265,000 Roma living in Greece.¹ These figures indicate that the Roma population constitutes approximately 2.47% of the total population of Greece. As the 'Civil Society Monitoring Report on the Implementation of the National Roma Integration Strategy in Greece' estimates, the population of Greek Roma is approximately 250,000,² and it can be concluded that almost 45% of the Greek Roma live in housing conditions that are distinct from and worse than those of the rest of the Greek population, while the remaining about 55% (about 140,000) of Greek Roma live in housing conditions similar to the average member of the general population. This analysis potentially elucidates the varying estimates of the Roma population.

¹ https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/combating-discrimination/roma-eu/roma-equality-inclusion-and-participation-eu-country/greece_en

² Roma Civil Monitor (2018). *Civil society monitoring report on implementation of the national Roma integration strategy in Greece Assessing the progress in four key policy areas of the strategy*, p. 10

The Greek Roma community, as voiced by the majority of representatives, strongly identify as Greek Gypsies (*Έλληνες Τσιγγάνοι*). They vehemently reject the term ‘minority’ and prioritise their Greek identity above all other affiliations.

While Greek Roma form the vast majority of the Roma population in Greece, the Roma population overall is characterised by its rich tapestry of diverse groups, each with unique circumstances and challenges. Within this heterogeneous community, several main groups can be identified.³ As categorised by the OSCE, these groups can be identified⁴ as follows:

The Roma population in Greece is diverse, encompassing domestic nomadic Roma (a), long-established settled Roma communities facing poverty and exclusion (b), and long-established settled Roma communities with varying challenges (c). Additionally, there are recent Roma migrants, including non-European Union nationals from Albania, Kosovo, and North Macedonia (d), and those from the new EU Member States, mainly Bulgarian and Romanian Roma (e). Some Roma individuals are completely integrated or assimilated into broader society (f). Moreover, there are Roma Muslims in Thrace who benefit from minority protections established under the Lausanne Treaty between Greece and Turkey (g). The remaining individuals and communities are not specifically classified within the aforementioned groups (h).

In addition, within the Greek Roma, there are various distinct Roma tribes, including the Arlia Roma, Horahane Roma, Fitsiria and Chalkidei, who are the focus of the case study in this chapter.

Many Roma live in isolation from the rest of the Greek population. There are a few areas where Roma are more successfully mixed with the general population, such as St Barbara, Aigaleo and Ilion in Attica, Saint Athanasius, and other areas in the city of Serres in Central Macedonia.⁵

The General Secretariat of Social Solidarity and Fight Against Poverty (National Roma Contact Point) published in 2022 the *Registration of Settlements and Roma Population at the National Level*.⁶ This report, based on a questionnaire completed by municipalities with the assistance of Roma mediators, demonstrates that approximately 117,495 Roma resided in Greece in 2022, accounting for approximately 1.13% of the total population.⁷ These population groups reside in various environments, ranging from segregated settlements characterised by severe deprivation (with 77 such encampments identified) to mixed neighbourhoods primarily inhabited by Roma.

Concerning their living conditions, these vary according to the typology of the settlement where they live. These can be categorised into the following three types:

³ ECRI REPORT ON GREECE (sixth monitoring cycle), p. 23.

⁴ OSCE, Recent Migration of Roma in Europe, 2nd Edition, October 2010, p. 43.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ https://egroma.gov.gr/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/%CE%95%CE%98%CE%9D%CE%99%CE%9A%CE%97-%CE%9A%CE%91%CE%A4%CE%91%CE%93%CE%A1%CE%91%CE%A6%CE%97-%CE%A0%CE%9B%CE%97%CE%98%CE%A5%CE%A3%CE%9C%CE%9F%CE%A5-%CE%A1%CE%9F%CE%9C%CE%91-2021_FINAL_compressed.pdf

⁷ Previous national surveys provide additional data on the Roma population in discrete and identifiable settlements. In 1998, the population was estimated to be 60,000, which had increased to 65,000 by 2008. By 2017, there were 104,210 Roma residents living in 354 settlements or camps.

- **Type I:** self-made huts or shacks lacking basic infrastructure facilities, including tap water, electricity, a sewage system, as well as access to garbage disposal and public transport services. Usually, these are in isolated and/or environmentally hazardous areas, such as next to industrial toxic waste or waste dumps.
- **Type II:** mixed housing (shacks and prefabricated houses) with partial basic infrastructure facilities, including tap water, electricity, and a sewage system, which are often used on a permanent basis, usually in the vicinity of a built-up area.
- **Type III:** often impoverished neighbourhoods of the urban fabric with houses, apartments, and prefabricated houses.

Number of areas and Roma inhabitants based on the typology of Roma settlements:

Typology of Roma settlements	Areas	Roma Inhabitants (%)
Type I (shacks): 'Degraded settlements'	77	12,216 (13)
Type II (shacks and houses): 'Mixed areas'	122	46,838 (50)
Type III (houses): 'Neighbourhoods'	67	34,741 (37)
Total	266	93,795 (100)

*Source: General Secretariat for Social Solidarity and Fight against Poverty (NRCP), 2021
Registration of Settlements and Roma Population at the national level*

The 2021 'National Roma Registration' reveals key infrastructure statistics for Greek Roma settlements. Of the 266 recorded, 83% have drinking water access, 71% have water supply networks, 66% have electricity, 48% have a sewerage system, 55% have asphalted transport networks, and 84% have waste bins. Public transport serves 56% of settlements.

The 2016 FRA survey notes that 11% lack electricity and 9% lack drinking water among the Roma population, with improvements since 2011. 'Type I' settlements face challenges due to their proximity to unsuitable areas. Environmental problems affect both residential areas and broader regions where 28% of Greek Roma reside. Some in Type II and III settlements struggle with amenity access due to unpaid bills or inadequate infrastructure.

Spatial segregation is officially recognised as a significant concern, and the NRSF 2021-2030 explicitly acknowledges the imperative of addressing it. This includes enhancing living conditions, rehabilitating housing, and facilitating access to essential social amenities.⁸

Forced evictions without the provision of alternative accommodation, as well as discrimination in access to housing, have been the subject of two collective complaints filed with the European Committee of Social Rights (ECSR) under the European Social Charter,^{9,10} as well as two decisions by the United Nations Human Rights Committee,¹¹ all of which concluded that the evictions of Roma violated established standards. Currently, there is an ongoing case before the European Court for Human Rights, represented by the author of this

⁸ NRSF 2021-2020, p. 5.

⁹ Greece has been convicted six times for violations of Roma rights: four from the European Court of Human Rights, one from the European Committee of Social Rights of the Council of Europe, and one from the United Nations Commission on Human Rights. In particular, Greece has been found in violation of three aspects of Article 16 of the European Social Charter by the European Committee of Social Rights, as a result of inadequate housing conditions prevailing among Roma in Greece.

¹⁰ *European Roma Rights Centre v. Greece*, complaint No. 15/2003, 8 December 2004. *International Centre for the Legal Protection of Human Rights (INTERIGHTS) v. Greece*, complaint No. 49/2008 Available at: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/european-social-charter/processed-complaints>

¹¹ *Georgopoulos and others v. Greece*, communication No. 1799/2008, Views adopted on 29 July 2010. *Kalamiotis v. Greece*, *Katsaris v. Greece* and *'I Elpida' – The Cultural Association of Greek Gypsies from Halandri and Suburbs, and Stylianos Kalamiotis v. Greece*.

chapter, where the court has issued an interim measure indefinitely suspending the eviction of Roma residents due to the municipality's insistence on eviction without providing alternative accommodation.¹² This measure is rather uncommon, indicating the exceptional circumstances surrounding the case.

Moreover, landlords demonstrate a reluctance to rent flats to Roma individuals due to discriminatory attitudes. According to the 2021 FRA survey, Greek Roma participants reported experiencing ethnic discrimination in house-seeking, with 57% of respondents encountering such discrimination within the past five years – the second largest proportion among the ten countries covered in the study.

Deteriorated living conditions persist in proximity to settlements, exposing residents to various risks such as flooding, landslides, pollution hotspots, open sewers, landfills, polluted air, and limited infrastructure, including inadequate road networks and public lighting. Access to essential services like water, electricity, and sewerage networks also remains insufficient, with little improvement observed over the years.

The Hellenic Constitution mandates local and regional administrations for local affairs, and the Code of Municipalities and Communities (Law 3563/2006) underscores that these authorities are responsible for managing local matters in line with the principles of subsidiarity and proximity to improve the local community's well-being.

Roma-targeted housing measures

Despite the longstanding policy concern surrounding the housing conditions of Roma in Greece for decades, there remains a dearth of reliable data for evaluating the efficacy of implemented housing programmes.

From 2004 to 2008, the Greek state provided 60,000 EUR housing loans per household to benefit Greek Roma in settlements lacking basic permanent residence requirements. Despite aiming to address the housing needs of Roma in dire conditions, the loan criteria did not align with this goal, excluding those without a permanent residence or facing pending municipal issues, such as lacking ID or inclusion on the register of births, contrary to the aim of rehabilitating Roma communities.

These loans, resembling social policies, were allocated based on specific criteria like low annual household income (3,000 to 12,000 EUR), single-parent households, and multi-member families. Instances of fraud were documented, implicating both loan recipients and representatives involved in loan disbursement.

Unfortunately, individuals who successfully purchased or built homes through these loans now face the risk of property confiscation, eviction, and homelessness due to repayment challenges. On a positive note, the loans required applicants to register in municipal records, submit family status certificates, and provide identity cards and tax statements, prompting Roma to address pending administrative matters.

While the loan mechanism yielded visible outcomes for the Roma population, it became the sole funding mechanism for securing permanent residence. However, the programme's

¹² Zereliga and others v. Greece n. 7311/22 (ECTHR).

limited initial allocation proved insufficient to meet the demand, creating unforeseen expectations beyond the programme's original scope.¹³

Today, the prevailing policy targeted at Roma housing is the 'Temporary Relocation for Special Social Groups' provision,¹⁴ which involves temporarily relocating specific social groups living in inadequate or irregular housing to designated areas provided by the state, local government organisations, public legal entities, or private individuals. These areas comprise integrated complexes of social housing units equipped with necessary facilities, infrastructure, and essential amenities to ensure a safe and healthy living environment. The aim of this provision is to foster social inclusion and improve the living conditions of the relocated individuals.

This policy, however, has faced criticism since its logic is relocating entire settlements to other areas, which has been argued to perpetuate the underlying causes of social exclusion, segregation, and the creation of ghettoised communities. Furthermore, this scheme has not demonstrated almost any effectiveness in practice.¹⁵

In February 2023, the Greek government launched a housing initiative, investing 15 million EUR to improve the living conditions of Roma communities, with a focus on Article 159. Implemented as part of the new NSRF, the initiative, jointly led by the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, emphasises two primary actions. The first centres on enacting Article 159 for Temporary Housing, while the second aims to enhance infrastructure networks in existing Roma settlements, including sewage, rainwater, electricity, and transportation systems. The objective is to create better living conditions within current settlements, incorporating temporary or mobile hygiene units where space limitations hinder relocation.

New social housing policy

Greece has recently introduced social housing policies to tackle housing challenges, potentially paving the way for a comprehensive social housing scheme. While designed as mainstream policies, considering the specific needs of Roma communities could yield fruitful results, although statistical data on Roma involvement is lacking.

These policies include the 'Housing Benefit Programme' for providing rent assistance to low-income households, the 'Housing and Employment Programme' that aids homeless individuals with rent subsidies and employment support, the 'My Home' programme that offers low-interest loans for first-home acquisition, the 'Coverage' programme for leasing homes to young beneficiaries of a minimum guaranteed income, the 'Renovate – Rent' programme that supports private home renovations for subsequent rental, and the 'Social

¹³ European Commission, Peer Review Integrated Programme for the Social Inclusion of Roma, Greece, The Greek Roma issue. Spatial and social exclusion and integration policies. Host Country Report, 27-28 May 2009, Available at: file:///C:/Users/userb/Downloads/host_country_report_GR09-1.pdf

¹⁴ Article 159 of the law no. 4483/2017

¹⁵ Excerpt from speech of Georgios Stamatis, former Secretary General for Social Solidarity and Fight Against Poverty cited in Roma Civil Monitor (2022) *Civil society monitoring report on the quality of the national strategic framework for Roma equality, inclusion, and participation in Greece*, footnote 64: "Greece has not achieved even one relocation. Not one. The only one that has secured funding and will be achieved by 30 April 2024 is in the Municipality of Katerini, an EEA/Norway Grants Programme together with the Hellenic Government as a pilot model of social housing for the relocation of Roma that together with accompanying services, will be the model included in the NRSF for the rest of municipalities..."

Compensation' programme, which aims to provide affordable rental opportunities through state property utilisation.

Desegregation case study

Chalandri, situated approximately 12 kilometres north of the centre of Athens, corresponds to the ancient deme (borough) of Phlya. With an area of 10,805 km², Chalandri was once a small village but experienced rapid expansion during the 1960s and 1970s. Today, it is connected to the adjacent suburbs of Filothei, Marousi, Vrilissia, Agia Paraskevi, Cholargos, Neo Psychiko, and Psychiko, forming a contiguous built-up area. Despite its urbanisation, Chalandri still boasts a significant amount of open green space per resident compared to other areas within Attica.

Before the policies that will be discussed were launched, there were two settlements occupying private lands belonging to more than 60 private owners.¹⁶ According to the competent deputy mayor in a recent documentary, the owners have claimed more than 7 million EUR in damages, and the municipality has already paid approximately 250,000 EUR.

The smaller one, the Patima settlement, used to be made up of one house and 5-6 makeshift shacks and included approximately 45 inhabitants. The Patima settlement, part of which was included in the Urban Planning Zone, dictated that certain plots of land should be returned to the owners and a road network should be opened.

The Patima settlement was dismantled back in 2018.¹⁷ The Municipality implemented a rent subsidy scheme, utilising municipal funds to relocate families into the mainstream population by subsidising their rent and utilities. The process included monitoring and accompanying measures to assess inclusion effectiveness. According to the deputy mayor, this successful policy led to the gradual relocation of families and the eventual elimination of the Patima settlement. It is noteworthy that later, most families successfully desegregated into mainstream society received a one-time payment (voluntary departure scheme, discussed later) to purchase land elsewhere and move out from Chalandri.

Based on the experience with the Patima settlement, the Municipality of Chalandri decided to also relocate the larger Nomismatokopio settlement that was made up of 65 makeshift shacks, including approximately 300 inhabitants. The present study focuses on this case.

The Nomismatokopio settlement is situated next to Mesogeion Avenue and is one of the oldest and largest Roma settlements in Attica. The Roma residents belong to the Chalkidei tribe.¹⁸ The shacks are very close to the Nomismatokopio metro station. The residents of the settlement live in shacks and are deprived of basic goods. Roma families have been living in

¹⁶ 'The end of a settlement' - Report on ERT about the Roma settlement at Nomismatokopio. Available (in Greek) at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GKLyL90ELAE&t=1s>

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ <https://vrilissianews.gr/voreia-proastia/katedafistike-o-kataylismos-roma-sto-patima-chalandrioy/>

¹⁸ Chalkidei live in other parts of the country, including Zefyri, Attica, Kalamata and the Dio Aorakia settlement in Heraklion, Crete, and it is said that their name stems from their origin in Evia, whose capital is Chalkida: https://www.neakriti.gr/kriti/irakleio/1565813_mia-mera-ston-kataylismo-ton-tsigganon-zoi-sto-perithorio-epilogi-i

this settlement since 1971, and some even before 1970. Their main occupation is the itinerant trade of garlic and flowers, as well as scrap metal collecting.¹⁹

Around 500 people were living in the settlement in 2014,²⁰ whereas other estimates, such as the registration of 2015, put the population to 82 families (315 residents),²¹ while a 2021 estimate of the Municipality was reduced to 257 residents,²² which is a result of the policy that is discussed in this chapter.

A long history of forced evictions

The history of forced evictions in the Nomismatokopio Roma settlement is rooted in pressures for its dismantlement due to its location in a development-intensive area, recently entered into the Urban Planning Zone. Residents, represented by the Greek Helsinki Monitor, did not oppose relocation, seeking a process that ensures families, especially children, do not end up without accommodation.

The UN Human Rights Committee report, communication No. 2242/2013, details the involvement of Elpida and Stylianos Kalamiotis in advocating for the settlement's residents. Since 1995, the settlement faced threats of demolition, postponed to 1999 due to the lack of suitable housing alternatives. Despite efforts, a committee formed by the Greek Ombudsman in 1999 did not secure alternative housing for 65 families.

In 2011, the Athens Administrative Court mandated compensation for landowners, holding the State and Municipality accountable. Legal orders halted demolitions in 2012, with affected individuals arguing limited access to enforcement measures concerning relocation decisions. The Committee in its decision on the aforementioned communication emphasised lawful, non-arbitrary evictions, stressing the need for appropriate replacement housing. Greece was urged not to proceed with evictions until suitable housing was provided, aligning with residents' rights under the Covenant.

Voluntary departure and compensation scheme

What precisely does this local initiative entail – the one acknowledged by the Mayor of Chalandri as the sole successful policy in Greece, the source of feuds by political parties and ideologies and which has generated dispute between the Municipality of Chalandri and the Attica Region, attracting substantial media attention and even prompting the creation of a documentary by Green National Television?

Following the paradigm of the Patima settlement, the Municipality initially opted for a combination of the rent subsidy scheme, similar to that used with the Patima settlement and a one-off payment policy (later to be developed as the 'Voluntary Departure Scheme'). In order to proceed with the much larger Nomismatokopio settlement, the Municipality sought access to EU funding.

¹⁹ Information provided by Eleni Desiotou, mediator of the Roma Branch of the Municipality of Chalandri in the documentary 'The end of a settlement', a report on ERT about the Roma settlement at Nomismatokopio Available (in Greek) at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GKLyl90ELAE&t=1s>

²⁰ <https://www.athensmagazine.gr/article/news/98635-feygei-o-kataylismos-apo-to-nomismatokopeio-poy-tha-metaferthei-photos>

²¹ <https://www.mou.gr/el/pages/ChalandriPlan.aspx>

²² https://www.avgi.gr/koinonia/384721_shedio-gia-tin-oikeiotheli-metegkatastasi-ton-roma-toy-nomismatokopeioy

Hence, the process of dismantling the Nomismatokopio settlement began on 29 March 2019, when the Municipality was invited by the Attica Region to apply for the ‘Pilot Project for the social integration of the Roma in the Municipality of Chalandri’, which would be supported by EU funds. The plan was labelled a pilot project, and the funding sought was set at 850,000 EUR. This plan was designed on the basis of the rent subsidy scheme and provided, among other elements, rent and utility subsidies to 40 families for three years (with the possibility of extension) in the municipality of Chalandri and neighbouring municipalities, as well as actions to achieve the social integration of families, without access to what these actions would entail. The integration activities already implemented, as presented by the mayor, included: access to the municipality’s social grocery store, which the inhabitants were previously excluded from; healthcare provided by the Social Clinic and the Centre for Preventive Medicine; more Roma children attending school and participating in remedial teaching programmes; a Roma community centre offering cultural initiatives and museum visits; two mediators from the centre providing daily support to the Roma population; assistance with access to ID documents for stateless persons; second-chance school for adults to learn basic skills and obtain school-leaving certificates; and employment on fixed-term contracts with the municipality (cleaning teams).^{23,24}

It should be noted that, according to the Municipality, 40 individuals from the Patima settlement had already received rent subsidies before applying for this funding. Regarding the Patima settlement, the families (45 residents) were first relocated into the urban fabric and then almost all of them were given a one-off payment (the ‘Voluntary Departure Scheme’) to purchase land elsewhere. Additionally, nine families, comprising approximately 70 people, relocated from the Nomismatokopio settlement and were also granted rent subsidies.²⁵

However, it should be noted that the proposal submitted by the Municipality of Chalandri entailed more policies, which included land acquisition, housing purchase and installation by the Municipality, rent subsidies, and support for founding social enterprises. But, according to the Municipality, only the ‘Rent Subsidy’ measure was adopted.²⁶

The relocation measures included:

1. Rent Subsidy: The Municipality would allocate resources to provide rent subsidies to families previously supported, expanded beyond the initial limit of 40 families.
2. Financial Assistance: Families opting to move from Chalandri were offered a one-time payment based on family size, anticipated square footage, rental rates, and utility costs for two years. An additional amount to cover one year of utility costs was included, with an extra payment of 1,500 EUR suggested for beneficiaries refusing social support. Compensation ranged from 6,438 EUR (one-member household) to 21,636 EUR (seven and more-member households).
3. Personalised Assistance: The Municipality provided specialised assistance, recommended by social services, for cases requiring increased social and mental support, particularly for elderly

²³ https://www.avgi.gr/arheio/308771_s-royssos-apomakrynetai-o-kataylismos-roma-toy-nomismatokopeioy-850000-gia-tin?amp

²⁴ https://www.avgi.gr/koinonia/384721_shedio-gia-tin-oikeiotheli-metegkatastasi-ton-roma-toy-nomismatokopeioy

²⁵ https://www.avgi.gr/arheio/308771_s-royssos-apomakrynetai-o-kataylismos-roma-toy-nomismatokopeioy-850000-gia-tin?amp

²⁶ Interview with the deputy mayor conducted for the purposes of this paper.

individuals, persons with disabilities lacking family care, or those facing severe urban challenges.

The relocation of the entire settlement faced challenges due to land availability and the reluctance of neighbouring municipalities. Challenges finding suitable housing within Chalandri and neighbouring areas were acknowledged, with stereotypes and biases against the Roma community being obstacles.

Eventually, the EU grant for the rent subsidy for 40 families was not provided by the Attica Region (for reasons that are not fully clear, as each side offers a different explanation), and the plan never came to fruition. This is likely the primary factor behind the adoption of the 'Voluntary Departure Scheme' from the municipality as an alternative solution.

According to municipal representatives, despite this significant limitation, the Municipality persisted in implementing a rent subsidy scheme using its own funds, even though it eventually proved to be financially unsustainable for the municipality, as highlighted in the documentary. Municipal representatives indicated that the Municipality had a clear vision but lacked the required financial resources.

In addition, the 'Rent Subsidy Scheme' encountered many obstacles in its implementation. According to a Roma resident who was one of the first beneficiaries of the scheme that was implemented for the Patima settlement:

"With significant effort – personal and from the Municipality – we were looking for a flat to rent, but we could not find it. It was very difficult for Chalandri since they [others] do not want Roma in their neighbourhoods..."

The widespread opposition of local residents was also confirmed in the interview with the deputy mayor, who labelled it the major obstacle to the implementation of the rent subsidy scheme.

Additionally, the disadvantages of the 'Rent Subsidy Scheme' were the high rental costs in the affluent northern suburbs of Attica, where the Municipality of Chalandri is located, and the Roma community's preference for detached housing over apartments.

The decision to implement the 'Voluntary Departure Scheme' resulted from a convergence of factors and a commitment to dismantle the settlement. Importantly, this approach was not a response to the non-approval of the fund but was originally outlined in Municipal Decision 45/2020 as a primary strategy for addressing the settlement's deconstruction and housing needs. The shift occurred when this policy became the sole method for replacing the rent subsidy scheme. By 2021, only four out of the 15 families that initially benefitted from the 'Rent Subsidy Scheme' remained, as they were also compensated to purchase their own homes.

The concept of the 'Voluntary Departure Scheme', as described by the Deputy Mayor, "is not based on the relocation of the settlement to another settlement - even in better conditions - but on the dismantlement of the settlement and the spread of the residents into the urban fabric."

Ultimately, a municipal decision set in motion the implementation of the voluntary departure programme, which, as indicated by the Chalandri Roma Branch mediator, is the favoured option for the majority of residents.

Advantages and progress of the ‘Voluntary Departure Scheme’

It is apparent that the municipality considers this scheme to be a very successful one. Only recently, it applied for the OTA Awards (awards for local governments) 2023 regarding the scheme, entitling it ‘Roma resettlement program in the residential fabric’.²⁷

Today, the Municipality claims that the majority of Roma residents in the area have expressed their willingness to participate in the voluntary departure programme, which also entails the demolition of their temporary shelters. According to the mayor, as of December 2022, more than 110 residents have departed from the settlement to various municipalities.²⁸

According to the Municipality, the ‘Voluntary Departure Scheme’ expresses the Roma community’s preference for detached housing over apartments.

The deputy mayor estimates that around 90% of these families have successfully integrated into society. The majority of them are involved in the ‘Social Cooperative Enterprise’ initiatives, transitioning from a logic of social welfare to seeking employment. School attendance has also significantly increased.

In this context, it is worth mentioning that Prasinotechniki, founded in 2019 by the Municipality of Chalandri and the Roma community, aimed to provide jobs for Roma individuals. Their initial contract in 2020 was for cleaning in Chalandri, with a 20,000-euro budget and five employees. Over time, they expanded to other municipalities, employing 55 people by 2023 and with a significant budget. Their success lies in a collaborative approach and inclusive hiring, making them a sought-after service provider in the region.

The relocation of families from a densely populated settlement, despite its favourable geographic positioning, is viewed positively within the policy environment. However, questions arise about the positioning and living conditions of the relocation sites. The concern is particularly focused on the potential for secondary segregation if the new locations are not in proximity to the urban fabric of the respective municipalities.

The deputy mayor reported on a survey conducted to understand residents’ preferences, desired relocation areas, and expectations regarding assistance. Some beneficiaries sought property loans and supplemented resources with personal funds in addition to the Municipality’s financial support. The requested amounts for property acquisition varied, with a median range of around 40,000 EUR, surpassing the financial capacity of the Municipality of Chalandri. Despite financial challenges, the deputy mayor argues that the benefits of relocation outweigh the financial aspects, emphasising the settlement’s proximity to Athens’ city centre and the significant health risks associated with previous living conditions.

Critical review of the ‘Voluntary Departure Scheme’

The estimates of the Municipality regarding the success of the scheme are not based on external assessment but are the estimates of the Municipality itself. However, these claims and estimated results have not been substantiated, as no evaluation is available. Further

²⁷ The description of the suggested nomination states that, “With the actions and resources of the Municipality, the voluntary departure of the Roma from the Patimas settlement - which has already been dissolved - and the Nomismatokopio settlement- as well as financial support to deal with the lack of housing and the relocation of families in homes compatible with decent housing conditions. A total of 122 people has left. Proposals for funding from central resources have already been tabled from 2021 to provide a definitive solution.”

²⁸ <https://www.aftodioikisi.gr/ota/kontra-p-attikis-d-chalandrioy-gia-toys-roma-sto-nomismatokopeio/>

research is required to assess the effects of this scheme, including, *inter alia*, inspections of the new locations where the former residents were relocated must be conducted. The majority of relocated beneficiaries have settled in Gerakas, Pallini, and Spata. Importantly, the majority of these homes have been constructed on land situated beyond the confines of urban planning, which gives rise to pertinent inquiries and considerations.

However, it is essential to note the absence of a structured mechanism for evaluating the processes of inclusion, participation, and equality for the relocated residents or assessing and mitigating potential instances of further segregation. Moreover, there appears to be significant resistance from other municipalities to the relocation of Roma communities.

A recent incident transpired between the Municipality of Chalandri and the Municipality of Spata-Artemidon. This involved the placement of six prefabricated houses near an existing Roma settlement in the Kiafa area that, according to the Municipality of Spata-Artemidon, were provided by the Municipality of Chalandri. The Municipality of Spata-Artemidon has raised concerns about the legality and disruptive nature of these activities, as they call them, within their jurisdiction. They express fear that their area will be transformed into a large ghetto, citing security concerns and resource constraints. They are determined to take legal action to prevent such developments and stress the importance of each municipality addressing its own challenges within its defined administrative boundaries.²⁹



Prefabricated houses being moved by vehicles of the Municipality of Chalandri to the plot of land in the Municipality of Spata-Artemidon

Photo © IRAFINA.GR, 2023

Foremost, it is important to highlight the absence of available data pertaining to the particulars of the relocation process, particularly in relation to the existence of socio-spatial segregation within the newly established residences. In the absence of concrete information, one might conjecture that considering the inadequacy of the compensation offered and the

²⁹ https://www.irafina.gr/spata-tin-paranomi-egkatastasi-oikiskon-ston-katavlimo-roma-stin-kiafa-katangellei-o-dimos-ti-echei-symveji/?fbclid=IwAR2VS-slstQsD1xr1T_C4RJ6VAD83hGY4TlSIV5iZibumb8HLFI-77uhtY

location of land parcels outside the purview of urban planning, there arises legitimate concern regarding the possibility of reproducing segregation.

The scheme primarily aims to dismantle the settlement, with the municipality monitoring the population through its Roma branch. Population growth, excluding births, has been stagnant since 2015, but the deputy mayor notes the potential for dramatic increases over time. Insufficient funds hinder Roma residents from securing suitable housing, with desired properties exceeding 40,000 to 50,000 EUR.

Former residents, facing fines of at least 80,000 EUR for unlawful occupation, struggle with repayment. These fines serve as indirect eviction efforts, posing significant obstacles to relocation. Debts of such magnitude preclude loan eligibility and, when surpassing 100,000 EUR, lead to criminal charges. Additionally, 35 residents lack essential documents, including ID papers, and 28 face various registration-related issues, rendering them ineligible for municipal assistance or any other policy-related benefits, according to a mediator.

Consequently, the Municipality of Chalandri proceeded using their own funds, stressing the consent of the residents and several families who were relocated.^{30,31} Nevertheless, it is imperative to scrutinise the notion of consent in this context, particularly when we consider the situation of families living in precarious conditions, facing substantial fines for their unauthorised occupation, and being presented with financial incentives in pursuit of a better future.

According to the municipality, the main challenge is securing resources for the relocation process. A funding proposal was submitted to the NRCP in 2020 with the aim of relocating the remaining families and dismantling the settlement, which, according to the municipality, poses ongoing challenges for the Roma community and the broader local population. The municipality emphasises that the settlement encroaches on landowners' properties, compounding challenges for all stakeholders.

As noted at the time, the implementation of the project was the result of an effort launched at a pilot level by the Municipality of Chalandri in 2015, according to the Municipality, aimed at ending the 'triple hostage' situation of residents, Roma and property owners, not with the usual tactic of expelling and transferring the ghetto somewhere else but with the restoration of trust and communication and the final social integration of Roma, i.e. "population transfer from the shacks of the settlements to houses, in an effort to no longer reproduce the model of ghettoisation of the Roma in their shantytowns."³²

³⁰ https://www.avgi.gr/koinonia/384721_shedio-gia-tin-oikeiotheli-metegkatakastasi-ton-roma-toy-nomismatokopeioy

³¹ The Mayor of Chalandri stated: "Although it is not the responsibility of the municipality, however, because we want this problem to be solved once and for all, we are taking the relevant initiatives. We have relocated 81 people from the Nomismatokoipio settlement and all of 24 people in total, from the Patimas settlement, which was finally dismantled and now these people live in houses within the urban fabric. But the means at our disposal are not enough, the State must also take on the burden of its responsibility. We request that the disbursement of the amount approved by the Region and [...] emergency aid from the Ministry of the Interior of one million euros proceeds. In the meeting I recently had with the Deputy Minister for Self-Government Mr. Petsas, I fully informed him so that he could thoroughly examine the whole issue. It is impossible for this camp to exist today, just 9 km from the centre of Athens, let alone in the midst of a pandemic, which makes the health issue quite dangerous."

³² <https://www.news247.gr/koinonia/entaxi-ton-roma-pos-to-chalandri-anoigei-dromoyis.9866723.html>

*Dispute between the Municipality of Chalandri and the Attica Region*³³

A political dispute has arisen between Chalandri Municipality and Attica Region, with the Region criticising the municipality's approach as partisan. The region claims jurisdiction over social inclusion, not relocation. In addition, the Region claims that citizen complaints about Roma relocation through rent subsidies led to EU intervention, resulting in the withholding of rent subsidy grants for 40 families. The Chalandri Municipality disputes this, stating that the Region failed to explore alternative funding like the ERDF. The reasons for funding cancellation are unclear, but both parties acknowledge its impact on the voluntary departure.

The exact reasons for the funding cancellation remain unclear, with each party offering their own interpretation. Nevertheless, it is evident that the discontinuation of funding has had a discernible impact on the voluntary departure programme's prevalence.

Conclusions and recommendations

Access to suitable and desegregated housing plays a crucial role in breaking the intergenerational cycle of poverty and socio-spatial exclusion within Roma communities, serving as a prerequisite for upholding human dignity and ensuring the realisation of human rights.

In line with the principle of subsidiarity, Member States are responsible for formulating and executing desegregated housing policies. In Greece, this involves the central government crafting overarching policies, the Hellenic Parliament enacting corresponding legislation, and regional governments overseeing the allocation of EU funding. Municipalities, in turn, are entrusted with implementing these policies and adapting them to their distinctive contexts.

In this case, the rejection of the official policy to relocate residents from informal settlements is based on perceived infeasibility and historical shortcomings. Transferring entire settlements to segregated areas contradicts the objective of promoting desegregation. A bottom-up, evidence-driven approach is crucial, requiring improved coordination between EU funding mechanisms (ESF+ and ERDF) and intended beneficiaries, namely municipalities and the Roma communities.

Chalandri Municipality's approach underscores the significance of local solutions to housing challenges and broader inclusion efforts, emphasising the intricacies and uncertainties inherent in such endeavours, but further research and evaluation are paramount for gauging the programme's long-term impacts and its potential as a model for addressing analogous issues in other regions.

While empowering local governments to design tailored policies is commendable, these policies must adhere to rigorous standards throughout their conception and evaluation processes. Housing initiatives should prioritise combating segregation and promoting environmental justice, extending their focus beyond housing itself to encompass complementary measures following a holistic approach of inclusion, equality and participation.

In addition, the dismantling of overcrowded settlements with dire living conditions is undeniably crucial. However, equal importance must be placed on the choice of relocation

³³ <https://www.aftodioikisi.gr/ota/kontra-p-attikis-d-chalandrioy-gia-toys-roma-sto-nomismatokopeio/>

destinations and the provision of adequate social protection and accompanying measures. These initiatives should be executed meticulously, underpinned by robust monitoring mechanisms.

Last, this case study sadly underscores the fact of the frequent exploitation of Roma-related issues for political gain. To safeguard the success of policies and interventions, there is an urgent need for stringent regulations aimed at curtailing such undue influence. These regulations are indispensable not only for securing positive outcomes but also for upholding principles of sound governance and social cohesion.

Having delved into this case study, the following set of specific recommendations is formulated:

- Advocate for localised, evidence-driven housing policies tailored to each Roma community, involving local municipalities, Roma representatives, and experts.
- Strengthen coordination between EU funding mechanisms and local municipalities, ensuring active Roma community involvement in designing and executing housing solutions.
- Prioritise comprehensive housing initiatives, addressing desegregation, environmental justice, and holistic inclusion efforts, including equality, education, employment, and social participation measures.
- Make informed decisions when relocating residents, prioritising individual needs, eliminating conditions leading to secondary segregation, and providing social protection measures during transitions. Focus on resolving documentation-related issues for settlement residents.
- Establish robust monitoring mechanisms to assess housing policy effectiveness, allowing for periodic evaluations and adjustments as needed.
- Implement stringent regulations to safeguard housing policies from undue political influence, ensuring policies genuinely benefit Roma communities.
- Promote interagency collaboration among central authorities, regional governments, and municipalities for successful housing policy implementation.
- Actively involve Roma communities in decision-making, seeking their input and incorporating their perspectives into policy design and implementation.
- Commit to ongoing research and evaluation of housing initiatives similar to Chalandri Municipality's programme to assess the long-term impact.

SYNTHESIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

by Marek Hojsík and Sinisa-Senad Musić

All six countries covered by the case studies face critical or significant problems concerning the residential segregation of Roma or informal Roma settlements,¹ according to the civil society organisations and experts participating in the [Roma Civil Monitor 2021-2025](#) (RCM) initiative.² Their respective post-2020 ‘National Roma Strategic Frameworks’ (NRSFs) all recognise the existence of the problem.³ However, planned measures for tackling it were assessed as appropriate only in Czechia; in other countries, they were assessed as present but insufficient, while in Croatia, they were absent.

In addition to a **general lack of national-level desegregation policies**, the decentralisation of policymaking to varying degrees means that addressing the housing needs of Roma communities largely falls under the purview of local governments, which often do not prioritise the residential desegregation of Roma communities. Instead, they focus on improving living conditions within already segregated Roma communities by investing in housing, public services, and basic amenities in these areas. In some cases, new segregated settlements are developed with the financial support of central governments, as the [RCM reports](#) demonstrate.

However, the case studies within this report highlight **efforts to promote housing desegregation** taken by some municipalities. These municipalities have chosen to break the cycle of socio-spatial marginalisation and provide (at least some) residents of segregated settlements with the opportunity to relocate to mainstream neighbourhoods.

The **Greek** case, however, may appear controversial because it involved providing considerable financial grants to Roma families living in informal settlements with substandard housing conditions. The **grants are aimed at purchasing or renting new housing** outside the municipality. It seems that the primary objective of the local government’s activity was not to support the Roma’s social integration but instead to relocate them elsewhere. As the authors of the study note, the impact of the intervention has not been evaluated. Consequently, we do not know if the considerable financial support actually helped the participating families to find adequate housing that would support their further social integration or whether some of them ended up in marginalised regions with affordable housing but minimal employment opportunities that even reduce their integration prospects. This pessimistic scenario is reminiscent of what was observed in many Central and Eastern European countries during the post-communist transition. Many economically vulnerable and discriminated populations, in particular Roma, were pushed into underdeveloped regions where they ended

¹ Other countries where residential segregation or informal Roma settlements have been reported as a problem include Austria, Bulgaria, Cyprus, France, Germany, Hungary, Slovakia, and Slovenia.

² For an assessment of the post-2020 national Roma strategies, see the Roma Civil Monitor’s 2022 country reports at: <https://romacivilmonitoring.eu/monitoring-reports/>

³ However, the quality of the analysis varies: in Czechia and Croatia, the CSOs assessed it as sufficient; in Greece and Romania, with limitations; and in Italy and Spain, as only mentioned but without proper analysis.

up in a trap of transgenerational double marginalisation (being a marginalised minority in a marginalised region).

The situation in **Spain** contrasts with most other countries in which pilot initiatives are presented. It illustrates a **deliberate, systematic effort** towards the deconcentration and desegregation of Roma communities that has been **scaled up**. Roma from segregated neighbourhoods, built in the past to accommodate Roma – an approach that still prevails in many other European countries – or slums are systematically relocated to mainstream neighbourhoods. The case study exemplifies this approach, which prevents the development of new concentrations of vulnerable or stigmatised inhabitants and, therefore, creates the preconditions for social integration.

Czechia has no Roma-targeted housing policy, and the general national social housing policy is in a late stage of development. Roma are among the target groups⁴ of diverse, often EU-funded, initiatives aimed at developing municipal social housing systems or improving vulnerable groups' **access to the existing housing market**. These initiatives are the result of collaborative efforts between the central government, local governments, regions, and civil society organisations. The latter often formulate and pilot innovative solutions that are then replicated by diverse local stakeholders. These initiatives include pioneering models such as the 'housing first' approach and social rental agencies. The case study in this report provides an example of the implementation of this latter model. It has enabled Roma families to secure housing on the open market in mainstream neighbourhoods and was implemented by a civil society organisation in several towns. Notably, in one of these towns, the initiative encountered resistance from the local government. Despite this obstacle, the initiative has proven successful.

The Czech study demonstrates that a successful housing intervention can be achieved even without the direct involvement of the local government. However, it is important to note that the presented case depended on two key structural factors additional to the presence of a robust civil society organisation (or other organisation) capable of delivering such a complex intervention. On the one hand, it relied on a relatively effective and inclusive housing benefits system that could provide even the very low-income population with the necessary financial resources to rent housing. On the other hand, it required a local housing market with enough available housing to accommodate tenants considered risky or otherwise unattractive to landlords.

Nevertheless, in general, the **role and the responsibility of local governments** remain pivotal in addressing housing issues as part of the social integration and Roma inclusion agendas. Most of the cases examined in this report underscore the critical role of municipal leadership in achieving desegregation. This often hinges on political will, which can be nurtured through extensive collaboration between municipal administrations and civil society, as exemplified by the Romanian and Spanish examples. The same effect has also the commitment of

⁴ At least in theory, as there are no safeguards that ensure that Roma benefit from mainstreaming measures, as criticised by Roma and pro-Roma civil society organisations, see Roma Civil Monitor (2018) [Civil society monitoring report on implementation of the national Roma integration strategies in Czech Republic: Focusing on structural and horizontal preconditions for successful implementation of the strategy](#). As a result of civil society's advocacy efforts, in the current programming period 2021-2027, at least the mainstreaming interventions supported by EU funds should also be monitored from the perspective of Roma outreach.

municipal officials who strongly uphold the values of equality and inclusion, a phenomenon highlighted in the Italian study. It is evident that a supportive political environment and a political consensus on the value of inclusiveness and equality, such as in the Spanish case, greatly facilitates the implementation of desegregation solutions.

Interestingly, the **Croatian** and **Romanian** cases show that the primary motivation for desegregation does not necessarily need to be Roma inclusion but instead other urban development objectives that necessitate addressing the problem of segregated settlements. Such momentum should be utilised to find sustainable solutions leading to desegregation. Additionally, local politicians should also consider the value of maintaining political support among Roma voters, as seen in the Croatian case, or demonstrating a different and more progressive political approach compared to previous leaderships that did not make significant progress in the Roma inclusion agenda.

Most of the discussed approaches rely on public (social) housing. However, the radical **housing marketisation transformations** in the last two decades in some countries (mainly in Central and Eastern Europe and Southern Europe) have limited the available public housing stock with severe consequences for the most vulnerable groups in society. This shift does not necessarily rule out the possibility of implementing housing desegregation through public policies, but it introduces different challenges and opportunities compared to a scenario with a robust public housing sector.

Therefore, some of the cases that are described involved partial reliance on market-based housing due to the scarcity of municipal-owned housing. In the case of Czechia, the reliance on market-based housing was complete. Working with private housing stock emerges as a viable alternative in such contexts, although it demands substantial effort to combat prejudice, fears, and racism among property owners. To make this approach work, it is essential to provide these property owners with guarantees of payments and assurances against property damage, essentially serving as ‘supplements’ to offset real or perceived risks associated with the participants of the intervention. As discussed above, the feasibility of such solutions depends on the welfare regime – and, in particular, on the presence of an effective housing benefit system capable of covering market-level housing costs.

The case studies highlight the critical importance of **involving the Roma community** in every phase of the intervention, starting from the design stage. The success of rehousing initiatives depends on actively seeking the views and input of Roma families. The Spanish study emphasises that it is a mistake to assume that participation will occur spontaneously. Instead, it necessitates dedicated effort, time, and other resources right from the project’s inception.

Engaging representatives of the community to be relocated serves a dual purpose. It not only helps convey the needs, viewpoints, and suggestions of the intervention’s target group but also aids authorities in communicating with participating Roma families and the broader community.

In Romania, the vital participation of Roma community representatives and a broader network of relevant institutions across the entire initiative, from planning and implementation to evaluation and monitoring, as well as post-relocation support, was facilitated through the community-led local development (CLLD) tool introduced as part of EU funds implementation. Input and support from the Roma community played a crucial role in the initiative’s success.

The described cases underscore the necessity and effectiveness of taking an **individual and individualised approach**, in contrast to the community-focused approach applied in traditional mass relocations of entire communities to new locations, which inadvertently perpetuate segregation. The individual approach considers specific needs and is more effective at achieving meaningful outcomes.

All the cases highlight the importance of recognising that a successful housing intervention goes beyond merely providing accommodation or addressing housing-related issues. If social accompaniment is not provided, the relocation of Roma families may fail even if infrastructure investments are made. Therefore, housing interventions should encompass a **comprehensive array of support services**. These services may include social counselling, psychological support, assistance in securing and retaining employment, and others. Moreover, sometimes, even direct financial support is necessary. This financial aid may enable individuals to relocate, pay a deposit to the landlord, adapt new housing to the family's specific requirements, address technical challenges, or, finally, manage the ongoing costs of housing, which can often be a significant burden on household budgets. Long-term social work has been instrumental in gaining a deep understanding of the individual needs of each family. The accompanying support teams play a vital role in instilling a sense of security, trust, self-improvement, calm, communication, and closeness, all of which are crucial for the success of such a process.

Adequate support for participants requires a **network of cooperating entities** tailored to each client individually, taking into account their specific needs. This collaborative approach, involving a diverse range of stakeholders – such as schools, social services, psychological services, social enterprises and other (potential) employers, even prisons and others – will undergird the success of housing interventions. Collaboration with civil society organisations active in Roma communities (or their political representation, as exists in Croatia) facilitates communication and the whole process of relocation and adaptation to a new environment.

Successful desegregation models are rooted in the **'housing first' principle**, which involves avoiding transitional forms of accommodation that merely shift or postpone the problem and may ultimately increase the cost of finding sustainable solutions. In this regard, a key aspect of these initiatives was not only rehousing families but also providing them and their new neighbourhoods with ongoing support. These successful initiatives are based on the fundamental belief that enhancing and stabilising a family's housing situation is a prerequisite for generating improvements in other aspects of life and, in turn, their successful social integration. The projects' outcomes have underscored the effectiveness of this approach, which diverges from the traditional method and can contribute significantly to residential desegregation.

For the success of a desegregation initiative, working with the Roma to be relocated and the **receiving neighbourhoods** is equally important. The case studies have demonstrated the necessity of proactively addressing the fears, prejudices, and racism within mainstream society. In both Czechia and Spain, the residents of neighbourhoods where Roma families were relocated were informed about the presence of support teams. These teams served as intermediaries for preventing potential misunderstandings with neighbours, dealing with common accidents, such as water leakages, and facilitating the resolution of conflicts that could have jeopardised coexistence and inclusion. Promoting the existence of a social network for relocated families encompassing schools, health centres, social service centres,

neighbourhood associations, leisure centres, and more is essential for facilitating comprehensive inclusion in the new location.

Furthermore, resistance from mainstream neighbourhoods to accepting people relocated from segregated settlements can be managed through the organisation of community consultation meetings. The case studies have also shown the importance of keeping desegregation actions low-profile, avoiding excessive attention, and refraining from framing them in ethnic terms. This can help prevent backlash fuelled by antigypsyism and residents' fears.

Based on the experience from the systematic desegregation of Roma into mainstream neighbourhoods in Spain and the insights from pilot initiatives described in other case studies, it is essential to plan relocations strategically and **prevent the concentration** of a large number of households from the segregated settlement in one place – i.e., it is crucial to distribute them throughout the municipality rather than clustering them in a single location. Building social networks and engaging in community life is vital for facilitating comprehensive inclusion in the new location. Moreover, it is essential to avoid the sudden influx of numerous households into a single neighbourhood. It is important to plan relocations considering the features of the municipality and the neighbourhood (some case studies say that ideally, a maximum of one family should be relocated into one block of apartments).

The authors of the chapters on Croatia, Italy, and Spain also emphasise the importance of demolishing the original segregated slum settlement. This prevents the accommodation of other people in housing need in substandard housing, which would otherwise lead to the re-creation of a segregated settlement.

Czech authorities have integrated⁵ into their schemes for supporting the EU-funded housing interventions (both soft and hard) a mechanism for preventing the development of new segregation. Using up-to-date administrative data, the spatial distribution of people dependent on basic social aid is mapped, and in areas of high concentration, the development of social housing is excluded or limited. EU-fund-related calls connected to housing prohibit the development of new social housing in areas with an extreme concentration of such populations, while only a fraction of new social housing can be located in areas with a high concentration (in line with the condition that most housing is located in areas with low concentration). Moreover, creating social housing in areas with households with the highest socioeconomic status is to be undertaken with caution, as this may not lead to positive interactions between inhabitants because of the extreme socioeconomic gap. Data are available from [online applications](#) that also model a territory's absorption capacity, helping avoid future residential segregation through the appropriate spatial development of new social housing.

Noteworthy, it should be stressed here that the **terms “segregation” and “desegregation” are not unambiguous**. In some countries, these terms (or similar ones that are generally viewed positively today, such as “social integration”) were formerly misused by totalitarian political regimes to describe policies of forced assimilation or the oppression of Roma communities. Consequently, terms like “desegregation” may have unintended connotations.

⁵ Following the EC's [guidance on how to use the ESIF for tackling segregation](#).

Furthermore, as the Romanian chapter of this report rightly points out, not every Roma neighbourhood necessarily represents a social problem, with residents impacted by poverty and social marginalisation. However, due to the pervasive presence of antigypsyism, the former are likely to encounter some degree of stigmatisation. The authors of the case study and academic literature identify several advantages Roma individuals may consider when choosing to reside in an ethnic enclave. These advantages include the preservation of minority culture, protection against racism, and improved opportunities for social and political organisation.

On the other hand, living in a mono-ethnic enclave involves the risk of limited social contact with mainstream society, limiting the inhabitants' bridging social capital and middle-class cultural capital, both necessary for success in society, access to information, jobs, etc. The ratio of these advantages and disadvantages may vary depending on the socioeconomic status of the Roma neighbourhood. In cases of middle-class Roma neighbourhoods,⁶ where residents have connections with mainstream society, the benefits of living in an ethnic enclave may outweigh the disadvantages. Ultimately, what remains crucial is whether individuals have a genuine choice in deciding to live in an ethnic concentration or within the mainstream population.

Finally, the concept of desegregation is more complex, if feasible at all, in special socio-spatial configurations such as rural regions with smaller villages, whole marginalised regions, or villages where the majority or all inhabitants are Roma. In such cases, desegregation in the sense of relocations and ethnic and social mixing is not possible simply for numerical reasons. Investments into improving living conditions (such as the development of the water supply and sewage networks, improvements in housing, and others) are still necessary but will not lead to sustainable results if they are not accompanied by other interventions – such as transportation to integrated schools, improved healthcare, and other services and jobs. Notwithstanding this, addressing the challenges associated with these types of settlements should be part and parcel of Roma equality policy.

Recommendations:

To all stakeholders:

- The issue of residential segregation should not be narrowly framed and addressed solely as a housing matter; instead, it should be recognised as a matter of legality, firmly integrated into the anti-discrimination agenda. Given its multifaceted nature, it should be approached as a cross-cutting issue intimately connected to housing, education, employment, and other sectoral policies.
- There is a pressing need to acknowledge and prioritise, especially from a children's rights perspective, the dire situation faced by Roma children affected by housing deprivation. Measures for addressing this particularly disadvantaged context of Roma

⁶ Although it is to be noted that middle-class Roma neighbourhoods exist only in some areas (countries or regions) with a larger share of Roma population. In contrast, in others, all monoethnic neighbourhoods are associated with poverty and social exclusion.

children should be incorporated into the ‘National Strategies’ for implementing the Child Guarantee in the EU.

To the European Commission:

- The European Commission should update – based on an open expert discussion involving Roma – its [2015 Guidance for Member States on the Use of EU funds in Tackling Educational and Spatial Segregation](#) with the provisions of the 2021-2027 programming period, and ensure that the Member States follow the principles therein.
- The European Commission should make sure that Member States do not finance from EU funds any activities that would perpetuate or deepen pre-existing segregation or even create new forms by requiring the more comprehensive application of the partnership principle (in the development of calls, evaluation and selection criteria and selection of projects with the involvement of experts and Roma) and by including desegregation principles into the audits of operations by Member States.
- The European Commission should continue facilitating the exchange of knowledge and scaling up good practices related to residential desegregation.
- The European Commission should consider taking legal steps against Member States that fail to protect Roma (or other groups) from residential segregation as a form of illegal segregation and, in this way, fail to implement the EU Race Equality Directive properly.

To Member States:

- Member States should actively incorporate the concept of residential de/segregation into their policies and ensure that they are effectively translated into lower levels of governance (regional and municipal). This is a fundamental prerequisite for systematically mapping and identifying all segregated settlements and neighbourhoods within a country, leading to a comprehensive understanding of the specific challenges that require attention and resolution.⁷
- Authorities should regularly map discrimination in the housing market (through mystery shopping and analyses of lease conditions) and proactively fight discrimination in housing (by private providers, real estate agencies, and municipalities that manage a notable share of the housing in the respective country).
- Member States should support the piloting of innovative approaches aimed at improving the housing conditions of marginalised and socially excluded Roma that primarily promote desegregation, i.e., the latter’s relocation into the mainstream population, and support the scaling up of models that have proven to be effective.
- Financing schemes managed by Member States, including those co-financed from EU funds, should include safeguards that prevent public funding from perpetuating or deepening pre-existing segregation or even creating new forms of it.

⁷ The ‘Council Conclusions on Measures to Ensure Equal Access for Roma to Adequate and Desegregated Housing and to Address Segregated Settlements’, developed in October 2023 under the Spanish presidency, provide a joint definition of “segregated settlements” that can serve as a reference for identifying, planning and investing in eradicating them.

- In Member States where the residential segregation of Roma is a persistent problem, municipalities' access to EU funds and other financial resources should be conditioned on the existence of desegregation plans developed in cooperation with the local Roma community, relevant stakeholders and experts. The implementation of such desegregation plans should be enforced.
- Desegregation should include not only relocation but also comprehensive support for the Roma to be relocated *and* the designated neighbourhoods into which they will move, which requires a long-term perspective. This support should include, for example, school integration, social work, mediation, community activities, and others. Relocation should be designed sustainably, as moving from informal to formal housing may significantly increase living costs. Relocation, thus, must be accompanied by employability-related measures such as assistance in finding and maintaining employment that will ensure a regular and sufficient income necessary for maintaining housing, and other counselling, depending on the needs of the family members.
- When designing and implementing desegregation activities, the active and meaningful involvement of Roma is indispensable, including granting them a meaningful role in shaping policies that directly impact their lives. Seeking their input, listening to their concerns, and incorporating their perspectives into policy design and implementation will increase the effectiveness and sustainability of interventions.

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