



12th meeting of the European Platform for Roma inclusion 8-9th October 2018, Brussels



WORKSHOP FOCUSING ON HOUSING INEQUALITIES ENDURED BY ROMA **Rapporteur's summary** by Jelena Jovanovic

The workshop focused on identifying challenges and solutions as concerns the situation of Roma in the field of housing. The workshop participants acknowledged that the housing issue has been the most ethnicized issue in Europe, which was reflected in the participants understanding the problem as 'the Roma right'. However, the 'social dimension' was also an important framework of the discussions and many participants pointed out that 'housing is a social issue that must go beyond building a house for a Roma family'. The participants expressed four essential issues for the EU stakeholders, member states and other relevant structures and actors to consider in improving the access to housing and the situation of housing for Roma in general:

1. (Lack of) *political will*, especially of local authorities/municipalities
2. (Lack of) *meaningful Roma participation* at all levels;
3. (Lack of) *understanding of the problems* and consequently improper responses, including investment
4. (Lack of) *integrated/comprehensive and contextual approach*.

Furthermore, they have been pointing out more specific challenges that have to be overcome:

1. **Poor data** – Mapping of the situation of Roma in housing is a precondition for evidence-based advocacy. People themselves, researchers and civil society have to be invested in so they can provide useful and up-to-date information about the conditions and needs. It is very important, for example, in case of forced evictions to know how many people need protection. However, demolitions are often ongoing and nobody knows how many people are affected by the situation.

2. **Antigypsyism** – Antigypsyism manifest itself in this field and takes different shapes. For example, forced evictions are understood as a very manifestation of structural antigypsyism, as well as residential segregation or the lack of legislation to forbid forced evictions (even though a silent manifestation). In addition, discrimination at the housing market, e.g. rejecting a Roma tenant just because s-he is Rom, is also understood as a manifestation of antigypsyism.
3. **Unequal treatment of housing issues** - Diversity of context was as well pointed out as very important to avoid exclusion of certain issues from the political and policy agendas. This means that, for example, if we talk about housing and Roma, we must not forget about the lack of access to sites for Travellers. A participant from Belgium said that there is only one camping site occupied by Travellers, while these are accessible for tourists.
4. **Harmful initiatives/bed investments** – Moving Roma from one bad housing condition to another was as well a result of improper actions of the responsible authorities. It happens that Roma people are placed in a new house, but with no infrastructure and then the municipality does not have further resources to invest. Solutions to the housing issues, as could be concluded from this case, have to go far beyond ‘building a house’. Political will has to be increased and the knowledge of the responsible actors improved.
5. **Lack of awareness of the ‘mainstream’ measures** – Relevant policies have not been implemented, the participants stated, neither Roma-specific not relevant mainstream policies. One of the needs identified during the workshop is raising awareness of the European Pillar of Social Rights and specifically of the Principle 19 (that includes three relevant issues – social housing, forced evictions and homelessness).¹

In conclusion, there is a need for more investments and a consensus related to the question of the use of funding, including the EU funds. Some of the main directions of the discussions followed the paths of meaningful Roma participation at all levels of decision-making, targeted, but also comprehensive approach, integrated approach, as well as contextual approach that could define what participants call ‘avoiding one-size-fits-all understanding of ‘the issue’’. These were some of the most important principles that must be respected in order to avoid unsuccessful projects and limited policy frameworks. Finally, there were many other challenges mentioned and argumentations developed by the participants, such as irregular settlements (non-legalized); living at constant risk of evictions; reduced education and employment opportunities; school segregation as closely related to residential segregation; rejection of access to school; being exposed to environmental hazards; lack of coordination among the policy actors; urbanization plan not responding the needs of people; a strong appeal for mobilization of civil society to advocate towards authorities to apply existing legislation; recognizing housing as a fundamental rights issue in the post2020 policies etc.

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/priorities/deeper-and-fairer-economic-and-monetary-union/european-pillar-social-rights/european-pillar-social-rights-20-principles_en

Annex:

The list of specific topics discussed at the round tables:

- 1.** Forced evictions
- 2.** European Pillar of Social Rights
- 3.** Desegregation
- 4.** Sites for Travellers
- 5.** Informal settlements
- 6.** Housing and employment-integrated approach
- 7.** Property acts
- 8.** Social housing
- 9.** Role of authorities
- 10.** Destitute EU mobile citizens