



European  
Commission

## 12<sup>th</sup> meeting of the European Platform for Roma inclusion

8-9<sup>th</sup> October 2018, Brussels



### How improving Roma Health and Housing can contribute to the Future of Europe • Background paper developed by Civil Society

The European Platform for Roma inclusion is acknowledged to be a great opportunity for stakeholders to come together, share experiences and take action to improve the situation of Roma people in Europe. The 11<sup>th</sup> European Platform for Roma Inclusion, organized last year, focused on education and employment, two of the four key priorities of the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies. This offered an opportunity for CSOs, experts, governments and EC officials to have focused discussions and decide on key recommendations to address the issue of “transition from education to employment”. In the light of preparation for the post-2020 EU Roma Framework, the next logical step is to address the remaining priorities of housing and health, as topics for the 12<sup>th</sup> European Platform for Roma Inclusion.

Despite ambitious initiatives, Roma in the European Union (EU) and in the accession countries continue to face a profoundly troubling situation regarding their fundamental rights, as well as barriers to improvement of their life chances and living conditions. For example, the persisting phenomenon of antigypsyism<sup>1</sup> has proven to be a strong obstacle preventing Roma’s fair and equitable access to housing and health services. Addressing the barriers, enabling many Roma to access health services and improving their poor housing conditions could strengthen the social and economic development of Europe.

### Why focus on Roma health and housing?

Poor Roma health and housing conditions are both an outcome and a driver of social exclusion. According to the latest data, homelessness has been increasing across the EU.<sup>2</sup> Thanks to historical disregard of this topic, for many Roma communities in the EU (and also in the Balkans) substandard living conditions and lack of basic facilities are a daily reality. The situation represents a housing emergency: living in informal and irregular settlements, at high risk of being forcibly evicted, with limited or non-existent access to public services, and subject to residential segregation. A third of the Roma live in housing with no running water; 38 % do not have an inside toilet, shower or bathroom<sup>3</sup> – in stark contrast to the general population average recorded by Eurostat<sup>4</sup>. Inadequate housing also leads to daily obstacles in achieving Roma inclusion, reducing significantly employment opportunities and lead to the rejection or segregation of Roma children in school. In some Roma communities (often referred to Roma ghettos) the living conditions are miserable, which is not only an effect of

1 Alliance against Antigypsyism (2017), Antigypsyism - a reference paper, available at [http://antigypsyism.eu/?page\\_id=17](http://antigypsyism.eu/?page_id=17), last access May 5, 2018.

2 Third Overview of Housing Exclusion in Europe  
<http://www.feantsa.org/download/full-report-en1029873431323901915.pdf>

3 European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, A persisting concern: anti-Gypsyism as a barrier to Roma inclusion (2018), <http://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2018/roma-inclusion>

4 [http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Housing\\_statistics](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Housing_statistics)

the failure in social services provision that has to be remedied, but also a result of a basic violation of human rights that must be prevented.

Poor quality housing significantly affects Roma health<sup>5</sup>, which is also much worse than the European average<sup>6</sup>, resulting in reductions in life expectancy by up to 10 years compared to non-Roma.<sup>7</sup> The Roma Health report<sup>8</sup> published by the European Commission in August 2014 shows one-third of Roma respondents aged 35 to 54 reported health problems which limited their daily activities, approximately 20% were not covered by medical insurance or did not know if they were covered. Two-thirds of Roma could not afford prescription drugs compared to 29% of the rest of the population, and 15% of Roma children under the age of 14 are not vaccinated compared to 4% of children from non-Roma households.

More support and coordination between the European Commission, national, regional and local authorities in terms of policy design, implementation of funds and human rights approach is needed to achieve concrete results.

Improving health and housing status for Roma are preconditions for full participation in social life and the labour market. Addressing the combination of various factors, such as squalid housing, segregation and forced evictions, and barriers and discrimination in access to and provision of quality health services, is a social and economic imperative.

Given the complexity of both topics, EU funds and national health and housing programmes could play a major role in solving these issues and act as an incentive for Member States to invest in Roma inclusion and to reverse this trend. For that to happen there is a need for the relevant officials responsible on the EU funds from the European Commission and Member States to attend both proposed thematic workshops.

### **The discussions at the next Platform should address these topics within two parallel thematic workshops as follows:**

The first workshop will discuss the health perspective: How can the Roma health and life expectancy gap be measured, monitored and closed; The environmental and socio-economic determinants of health; Various manifestations of antigypsyism such as discrimination and human rights violations in access to and provision of healthcare services; Universal health coverage, early childhood development and care; Immunisation uptake; Access to and use of health services and preventive programmes; Health factors related to the role of women and girls in Roma communities; The changing narrative on Roma in healthcare settings; The role of health mediators in Roma communities; Promoting Roma participation in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of strategies, programmes and/or activities to improve the health of the population; How to create accountability for political commitment and demonstrate sustainable use of EU funds.

The second workshop will focus on the housing challenges Roma face, in particular on: Revision of national housing policies – do they address homelessness of Roma?; Roma ghettos – urban regeneration of deprived areas; Roma Housing and the link with the Urban Poverty Partnership, Legal status of Roma houses; Forced evictions; Litigation; Social housing alternatives; Access to public utilities and basic housing amenities; Quality of housing and the surrounding environment; Segregation; Antigypsyism in access to social and decent housing; Positive practices on improving access to decent housing; Roma participation in decision making processes building on the European Code of Conduct on Partnership; EU funds and political commitment.

The workshop's discussions will be followed by the political debate in presence of various stakeholders, including decision makers from both, EU and Member States.

5 Five key recommendations for Roma Health <https://epha.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Roma-position-paper-2017-18.pdf>

6 EEA/JRC (2013), Environment and human health, EEA Report No 5/2013, European Environment Agency and the European Commission's Joint Research Centre.

7 <http://www.stat.gov.mk/Publikacii/2.4.13.12.pdf>

8 [http://eige.europa.eu/resources/2014\\_roma\\_health\\_report\\_en.pdf](http://eige.europa.eu/resources/2014_roma_health_report_en.pdf)