

FRA COMPARATIVE REPORT ON THE HOUSING CONDITIONS OF ROMA AND TRAVELLERS IN EU MEMBER STATES

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Fighting for Roma rights since 1996

The European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC) is an international public interest advocacy organisation engaging in a range of activities aimed at combating anti-Romani racism and human rights abuse of Roma. The approach of the ERRC involves, in particular, strategic litigation, international advocacy, research and policy development, and human rights training of Romani activists. Since its establishment in 1996, the ERRC has endeavoured to give Roma the tools necessary to combat discrimination and win equal access to government, education, employment, health care, housing and public services.

In recent years there has been growing evidence of exclusion of large Romani and Traveller communities from access to adequate housing as well as the impact of these negative trends on access of Roma and Travellers to a range of fundamental rights. The urgency of the housing situation of Roma and Travellers has been addressed in reports, policy recommendations and action plans by intergovernmental institutions such as the United Nations, various Council of Europe bodies and the OSCE.

Among EU institutions, the 2007 FRA report on Racism in the EU noted “the high levels of housing deprivation of Roma” and that “data consistently shows that the quality level of Roma settlements and housing facilities is substandard as compared with the average population”. This publication also reported that housing conditions of Roma, along with high unemployment maintain the situation of exclusion and segregation that faces Roma.

The purpose of the project, commissioned by the **European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA)** and conducted by the **European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC)** is to study the housing situation of Roma and Travellers in the EU Member States, highlighting significant initiatives that improve their living conditions in order to provide the Agency with the essential evidence that will allow it to develop conclusions and opinions to the Community institutions and Member States. It is intended that this work will assist them in developing appropriate evidence based policies and measures to improve the housing situation of Roma and Travellers.

The research and impact assessment undertaken within this project will be based on the principles of anti-discrimination and equality, including gender equality. Exposure to substandard housing conditions and other violations of the right to adequate housing in the form of forced evictions and segregation have a disproportionate impact on Romani and Traveller women and make them vulnerable to other abuses.

The ERRC is conducting this study in partnership with **Pavee Point**. Pavee Point is an organisation committed to the attainment of human rights for Irish Travellers. The organisation is comprised of Travellers and members of the majority population, based on the understanding that all people have a responsibility to address the various processes which serve to exclude Travellers from participating as equal in society. They seek real improvement in Traveller's living circumstances and social situation, through active involvement of Travellers. [www.paveepoint.ie]

The design of this project ensures genuine participation of Roma professionals with relevant expertise. The project implementation team includes Roma and Travellers, who will conduct research and analysis of the results. The ERRC and Pavee Point will rely on their networks of Romani/Traveller individuals and NGOs in a number of EU member states to ensure that Roma and Travellers have substantial input in the stage of elaboration of the thematic studies and the case studies. Furthermore, the partners will use their contacts with Romani organizations and individuals to cross-check research.

TIMELINE OF THE PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

PHASES OF THE STUDY

THEMATIC STUDIES

The thematic studies will be developed by the RAXEN National Focal Points, through national research in 24 Member States. Considering both urban and rural areas, the thematic studies will be compiled from desk research and field research, with Roma communities and government representatives. They will attempt to provide information on the legal framework relevant to housing and forced evictions, both quantitative and qualitative data about the housing situation of Roma and Travellers, information about major projects targeting the housing situation of Roma and Travellers, and an analysis of the impact of the legislation and the socio-economic environment on the housing conditions of Roma.

CASE STUDIES

The in-depth case studies will be conducted in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Ireland, Slovakia, Spain and the United Kingdom. Each one will profile a different approach to addressing the housing situation of Roma/Travellers, presenting both the successes and shortcomings of a variety of policies. Balancing typical government efforts with more innovative initiatives, the studies from the various locations will report the positive and negative aspects of the different models.

WORKING PAPER

Using the statistical survey data from the EU-MIDIS survey, the ERRC and Pavee Point will develop a working paper, to analyse the experience of Roma and Travellers with respect to housing policies. The working paper will provide country-by-country analysis and comparative European analysis in addition to analysis of factors typically associated with accommodation discrimination to offer a pan-European picture of discrimination among Roma and Travellers.

COMPREHENSIVE REPORT

The comprehensive report will be a culmination of these portions, and other research available to the ERRC and Pavee Point. It will synthesize the data to present an overview of the main obstacles facing Roma and Traveller communities in EU member states from accessing adequate housing, arising from legislation, institutional practices, and economic and social factors. Included will be a comparison providing detailed description and analysis of housing conditions and living environments across the EU. The report will present issues including quality of housing available to Roma and Travellers, access to social housing, access to private housing, encampment facilities/use of private land, informal settlements/legalisation of settlements, security of tenure and forced evictions, access to sanitary conditions and public utilities, nomadic lifestyles, and housing projects targeting Roma and Travellers. Within the report, specific and systemic discriminatory practices discussed in the working paper will be highlighted and developed. An analysis of positive practices will communicate the impact on social inclusion; offer approaches to the design and implementation of the projects; and offer models for institutional coordination and interaction with beneficiaries and civil society.

ROUND TABLE

The purpose of the round table meeting is to present the findings of the project. The ERRC will propose speakers, develop an agenda, and determine attendees. Participants from key EU and international institutions and relevant stakeholders, including members of Roma civil society will attend.

SCHEDULE

DECEMBER '08

- 1 – Contract signature
- 4 – Inception Meeting (Vienna)
- 8 – The FRA provides EC comments on RAXEN guidelines to ERRC
- 9 – ERRC submits inception report
- 12 – ERRC submits final guidelines

JANUARY '09

- 12 – Interview guidelines and Roma housing contacts provided to the FRA for use by RAXEN National Focal Points
- 30 – Meeting with the FRA and RAXEN (Vienna)

FEBRUARY-MARCH '09

- Development of working paper by Pavee Point
- Country researchers conduct investigation for case studies
- RAXEN produces thematic studies

APRIL '09

- 12 – ERRC requests revisions on RAXEN thematic studies
- 20 – ERRC submits draft case studies and working paper to the FRA
- 30 – RAXEN thematic studies revised with comments implemented

MAY '09

- 3 – The FRA returns comments on draft case studies and working papers
- 18 – ERRC finalizes and resubmits case studies and working papers

AUGUST '09

- 17 – ERRC submits draft comprehensive report to the FRA
- 26 – The FRA returns comments on draft comprehensive report

SEPTEMBER '09

- 7 – ERRC submits the thematic studies and comprehensive report to the FRA

OCTOBER '09

- Round Table (Brussels)

CASE STUDIES

The proposed case studies are based on ERRC and Pavee Point's consultations with Romani and Travellers professionals in each country. A variety of issues related to the housing of both sedentary and itinerant communities, in rural and urban areas across the EU are explored. The studies represent efforts and achievements to tackling housing deprivation of Roma and Travellers.

CZECH REPUBLIC: Integrated urban living of Roma and non-Roma. Since the loss of their homes in a flood, some Roma families in Ostrava had moved to temporary cabins which became permanent. A community-based NGO initiated the organisation of integrated housing for Roma and non-Roma, involving volunteers from both groups to develop the layout and reform town policies. This study will analyse the social and institutional environment which contributed to overcoming anti-Romani sentiment and allowed cohabitation, as a replicable example of integrated urban living and cooperation through civil society actors and local authorities cooperating to solve community housing problems.

HUNGARY: Government elimination of ghetto-like Romani settlements. Various approaches, from total elimination of ghettos and rehousing to renovation of existing housing and development of infrastructure have been employed by the government to address the settlements. The case study examines the conditions for an improved interaction between policy design and financial allocations; sustained commitment from the central government, municipal leadership and involvement of Roma stakeholders for the achievement of best results. It also explores the multifaceted approach to the social inclusion of residents in ghetto-like settlements.

IRELAND: Traveller participation in local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committees and the implementation of the Traveller Accommodation Programmes. In 1998, legislation was enacted specifically directing local authorities to assess the need for halting site accommodation in their area; adapt Traveller accommodation programmes to meet local needs; and annually report progress. Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committees were established, to partner with the Traveller community in the programme development and oversight. The case study examines the operation of these committees at local level to assess implementation and evaluate local Traveller engagement. The model demonstrates the validity of the partnership approach in local policy development and implementation.

SLOVAKIA: Elimination of Roma Ghettos

This case study will consider examples of municipalities efforts to eliminate small ghetto-like settlements in rural areas (such as Valkovna) by providing land for construction of standard housing for Roma, within the boundaries of the municipality, and with access to public facilities. These efforts offer a counterpoint to an increasing tendency in the region towards exclusion of Roma from local communities. It exemplifies positive rehousing solutions and the promotion of tolerance and inclusion in rural communities.

SPAIN: Integration of Slum Dwellers in standard housing. Shanty-towns and segregated urban settlements have grown out of traditional Roma settlements through deterioration, urbanization and migration. Several programmes supported by Autonomous Communities, city governments and NGOs have tried various forms of integration, eradication of shanty-towns, social insertion housing, rental housing in majority populated neighbourhoods, mainstream services and others. The case study will explore the results of a shanty-town eradication programme, especially the elimination of temporary housing in favour of standard housing. The analysis will focus on local leadership and national government support; forging local consensus; involvement of beneficiaries in planning and implementation; and a multifaceted approach to social inclusion.

UNITED KINGDOM: Peer training for assessment of accommodation needs: a Cambridge model of good practice. The 'Cambridge Project' was set up to explore the accommodation needs and aspirations of Gypsies and Travellers, with health, education, social inclusion and demographic findings. This case study will examine the experiences and implications of employing and training peer researchers from Traveller and Roma communities, to assess local accommodation needs. It has been widely identified as best practice in terms of partnership working, fulfilling equalities requirements, community capacity building and delivery of valid findings. Appropriate training in interview methods was provided for the interviewers.

IMPLEMENTATION TEAM

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