

EUROPEAN ROMA GRASSROOTS ORGANISATIONS (ERGO) NETWORK

“Roma access to quality and affordable housing in Hungary”

Introduction

The case study was written by Tibor Béres (beres.tibor@autonomia.hu) and Miklós Kóródi (korodim@autonomia.hu).

The Autonomia Foundation is an independent, private foundation established in 1990 to strengthen civil society, support excluded groups and, above all, promote Roma integration. Its aim is to promote the development of civil society in Hungary, including Roma integration. It does this primarily by supporting civil initiatives in which people mobilize local resources to achieve their goals. Since its establishment, the Foundation has supported and implemented hundreds of Roma inclusion programs, participated in numerous research projects and has an extensive network of contacts. Detailed information on the Foundation's activities is available at www.autonomia.hu.

Our case study summarises the housing situation of the Roma in Hungary, based on the given guide. To prepare the study, we conducted a desk research, collected and summarised the publications and research results published on the topic in the past period.

The work was preceded by the R-Home Programme, which carried out research and policy recommendations on the housing situation of Roma in five countries (Bulgaria, Romania, Italy, France and Hungary). This project included a number of interviews and analyses. The Autonomia Foundation has also participated in or initiated several local housing programmes in Hungary. The writing of this study was facilitated by the Foundation's direct experience in a number of previous programmes.

Socio-economic situation of the Roma in Hungary

The Roma population, which accounts for around 6-8% of the Hungarian population, is the poorest, most excluded and most vulnerable group in society. The gap between the Roma and the majority of society has been growing since the change of regime, mainly due to residential segregation and segregation in other segments of society, especially in education. Moreover, the educational and labour market position of Roma remains weak, leading to a persistent and deepening poverty. This is often coupled with a negative, often hostile, climate surrounding Roma, which is reflected in prejudice and discrimination from the majority of society (Bernáth, 2014).

A significant proportion of the Roma population in Hungary live in segregated settlements, where housing and living conditions are significantly worse than the national average and also than those of non-Roma living in the immediate neighbourhood.

According to the results of the EU-MIDIS II survey ([European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2017](#)), 75% of Roma in Hungary live below the poverty line. At the time of the survey, the share of early school leavers among young people aged 18-24 was 68%, and a quarter of Roma aged 45 and over had not completed any level of formal education. Income poverty rates were closely correlated with the concentration of Roma in settlements: the proportion of Roma living below the poverty line was highest in areas where respondents perceived that Roma residents lived 'exclusively' or 'predominantly' in segregated conditions.

Roma access to quality and affordable housing in Hungary

Where do most Roma in your country live?

One of the characteristics of the spatial distribution of Roma in Hungary is their concentration in smaller settlements, which also represents a significant spatial disadvantage for them. With the dynamic growth of the Roma population in recent decades, the proportion of Roma has continued to increase in smaller settlements (especially in villages with less than 2,000 inhabitants), while at the same time there is an increasing number of Roma living in the capital and in cities with more than 50,000 inhabitants. The spatial distribution has shifted somewhat over the last decades, but the share of Roma in the total population is still highest in villages. This is reinforced by the significant out-migration of the non-Roma population from smaller settlements and natural attrition, while the proportion of young Roma is increasing at a higher rate.

38 percent of the Roma population live in small villages, 33 percent in small towns, 15 percent in big cities and county capitals and 14 percent in the capital. Almost all Roma in villages and small towns live in houses. In Budapest and to a lesser extent in the county capitals, Roma families live in flats.

Renting is mainly concentrated in larger cities, with Roma families typically living in rented municipal or social housing. In smaller settlements, very few municipal rental apartments are available, and Roma families tend to live in their own houses. However, it is very common, especially in segregated settlements, that ownership is unclear.

Roma exposure to homelessness

Despite the fact that the Roma population was one of the most vulnerable groups in Hungary after the regime change, the Roma hardly appeared among the mass homeless in the 1990s. However, the situation has changed significantly since the 2000s, with more and more Roma appearing among the homeless (Győri 2017).

According to data from a homeless survey repeated annually since 1999, 19% of homeless people identified themselves as Roma in 2004. According to the same survey, in 2016, a third of homeless people (based on the definition of ETHOS: houseless and roofless) were Roma, a much higher proportion than the Roma in the total population.

Roma homeless people are relatively younger and much less educated than non-Roma homeless people, come from a more disadvantaged situation and their current livelihoods are below those of other homeless people. The educational situation and livelihood opportunities of Roma women are even further behind those of homeless people in general. An important difference between Roma and non-Roma homeless people is that more Roma enter homelessness from prison or state care and significantly more of them live by begging or littering.

We do not have any data on the nationality of Roma homeless people, but it is safe to say that very few of them are nationals of other countries.

What are the living conditions of Roma?

The housing conditions of Roma in Europe are generally characterised by low comfort and overcrowding, and Hungary is no exception. According to the FRA 2022 report, in the ten EU Member States with a significant Roma population, more than half (52%) of Roma households live in housing poverty. In Hungary, the proportion is slightly lower (37%) and is improving, but still much worse than the overall population (24%). The report reveals that 91% of Roma in Hungary live in overcrowded housing, compared to a slightly higher proportion (82%) in the other countries surveyed. The proportion of Roma households without piped drinking water in Hungary is steadily decreasing (17%), but is still very high compared to the overall population (2%).

The proportion of households supplied with electricity does not differ from the non-Roma households significantly (96-98%) but the number (proportion) of properties disconnected by the authorities from electricity supply due to utility debts is much higher in Roma settlements. Unfortunately, no data on this phenomenon was found, but field experience certainly confirms this. (Supply with piped gas cannot be used as a variable of the development or living-condition because the price of the gas has increased significantly recent years and almost everybody try to avoid the use of gas.)

The general experience of research on the subject is that segregated settlements have much worse housing conditions than the average, and the living conditions of people in general. The lack of infrastructure and the dilapidated built environment are fundamental determinants of the situation of the people living there. As a result of outdated heating systems, uninsulated houses and poor-quality fuels, air pollution levels in the larger settlements are well above average.

Spatial segregation and informal settlements

In Hungary, the majority of Roma living in housing poverty live in geographically segregated settlements. According to the data of the first representative Roma survey conducted in 1971 (Kemény 1976), two thirds of Roma lived in segregated conditions, mostly on the outskirts of

villages or in traditional settlements outside villages. The socialist-era Roma settlement abolition programmes eliminated a large part of the traditional settlements, while state-subsidised housing programmes rebuilt segregated settlements.

Exact and up-to-date data are not available, but several surveys of people living in segregated living conditions have been carried out in the past. The 2011 census data identified 1,384 settlements in 709 municipalities with a total of 276,000 people. The results of another national coverage survey, based on a different methodology, showed that in 2010 there were at least 1 633 segregated settlements in the country, with around 300 000 people living in them, representing 3 % of the country's population. According to the same survey, 26,000 people were living in absolute poverty in peri-urban poor and Roma settlements that were partially or totally deprived of minimum infrastructure.

At the time of the survey, around 60 percent of the segregated settlements were in small villages, 30 percent in towns and less than 10 percent in large cities and the capital. The spatial concentration of poor and Roma settlements has not changed over the past decades, with the vast majority of segregated areas located in the north-eastern and south-western regions of the country. The Roma settlements identified in 2010 can be divided into four main categories according to their type: (1) one third (33%) of the settlements were built in the 1960s-1970s, most of the houses were built during the public housing construction programmes, in very poor quality and with low comfort. (2) a fifth of the settlements (18%) were built using housing subsidies in the 1990s, most of them also of very poor quality; (3) 12% were urban slums and (4) 8% were "old type" (suburban wastelands, shacks, old farm areas).

In recent years and decades, the Hungarian state, largely funded by the EU, has announced four rounds of desegregation programmes. Independent analyses show that these settlement programmes have not contributed to any significant reduction in the number of settlements or to social desegregation, but have at most led to some local housing improvements.

Affordability of adequate housing

From 2022, housing became an increasing problem for the whole of Hungarian society, with the situation of Roma becoming even worse. There are two reasons why this statement is difficult to back up with data. One is that no or only indirect data on the Roma population can be obtained, as the Roma background is not included in the various demographic and economic data, so the statistics can only be treated with reservations.

The other reason is the accelerated inflation in the Hungarian economy in 2022 (25.6%, the highest in the EU in May 2023) and the change in the forint exchange rate (which is also partly the reason). In 2023, by the time of the study, the inflation rate in food prices will have reached 40%, while for energy prices, the price increase for the population is difficult to quantify, as it depends largely on household consumption and the fuel used. This has also had a significant impact on rents, which have risen by at least 25% in the last year for private rented property.

The biggest change in the housing market in recent years, from 2018 onwards, has been the Family Home Building Allowance (CSOK as it is called in Hungary), a combination of subsidised loans and non-repayable grants. This subsidy, although almost exclusively available to those in the middle class or better off, has helped to build many new houses, increasing supply and could in principle have provided mobility for families from lower middle-class backgrounds, if the properties of lower middle class families moving out were available to them. However, this could not be achieved in a large part of the settlements, as these properties were not available for Roma families to buy (see below: housing discrimination).

Overall, the availability of subsidy schemes makes it impossible to buy new property, the scarcity of rental housing (around 1.5% of the total housing stock, which is particularly true in small settlements) makes it impossible to use social rental housing, while market renting is often not an option due to discriminatory landlord behaviour. All these effects not only perpetuate the approximately 1,300-1,600 Roma slums, but also contribute to the creation of new ones.

Housing costs, as well as food expenses, are much more burdensome for lower income households, especially Roma households, than for higher income households. According to 2016 Hungarian Central Statistical Office data, the average monthly per capita housing cost for households in the lower income decile was HUF 27 200 (EUR 72), which was 36% of family income. For the top income decile: monthly housing maintenance of 52 000 HUF (EUR 139), which represented 13.3% of family income. These ratios have most certainly worsened in low-income households compared to 2016, even though we do not have more recent data here (the 2022 Hungarian Central Statistical Office data are currently being processed), as real wage growth has not kept pace with the increase in housing-related expenditure and inflation.

The so-called "act on the enforcement of utility cost reduction" introduced by the Hungarian government in 2013, before the elections, resulted in a 10-25% drop in household energy prices. However, this has only partially made a positive difference for people living in low-income and energy inefficient housing. On the one hand, as shown above, the share of this type of expenditure in their consumption basket is much higher than for higher income households, who are equally likely to benefit from the government measure. There are a number of critics of social measures that are poorly targeted or not targeted at all.

The next problem with the so-called "utilities reduction" is that it is most felt on the price of electricity and gas, and least on the more obsolete wood and coal heating, a solution that affects the vast majority of the Roma population (the social firewood subsidy has not only failed to help these households because of the insignificant amount per household, but has even worsened the air quality in these settlements due to the wet, poor quality fuel).

Finally, the expected negative impact of this programme of overheads cuts after the phasing out should be mentioned, and this is something to be feared. Since the Hungarian government does nothing to develop and operate a targeted social system specifically supporting low-income households, it is feared that the end of the subsidy will soon place an abrupt and unmanageable burden on Roma households.

Only a minority of Roma families, mainly in small settlements, have modern, energy-efficient heating systems. In most cases, they burn the wood they have access to in low-efficiency stoves (often unsuitable for heating and causing significant air-pollution). By 2023, the price of quality firewood has increased by 2-300% compared to three years ago. However, this price increase only slightly affects directly - but to a large extent indirectly - low-income Roma households, as they could not afford to buy good quality forest firewood before, and this firewood has become a scarce commodity, with delivery times of more than a year.

At the same time, Roma households are trapped in a situation where, in addition to poor heating efficiency, the energy efficiency and insulation of the property is perhaps even worse, so the lower the social status of the household, the more they have to spend on fuel, which is already unaffordable. A state-run energy efficiency programme could change this, but these schemes do not reach these families because of the bureaucratic conditions and the subsidy schemes linked to regular income and regular property status. (It should be noted that the Hungarian government has also been criticised for the way it has run residential energy efficiency programmes for households that are not of low status.)

Roma families also face problems in settling their electricity bills in many cases, and accumulate significant arrears. A partial solution to this problem is the so-called prepaid (rechargeable) electricity meter, which cannot be generally introduced without adequate administrative and social work support.

The Ministry of Interior has been providing social firewood grants to municipalities for several years. The municipalities distribute it to families in need on the basis of a decree they have drawn up themselves. However, the 1-2 cubicmeters of firewood per household per season, which is insignificant, is often waterlogged and not or only very poorly suitable for heating. In several cases we have heard of the phenomenon of families in small villages who are in the worst financial situation but benefit from the social firewood programme selling the firewood they have received to families with a better income at a significantly low price, because they can wait until the wood dries out and is suitable for heating in the next heating season.

Housing-associated bureaucracy and red tape

There are many complaints about obtaining housing benefit. But first of all, it should be mentioned that the Hungarian state abolished in 2015 the normative housing subsidy, which had been in place since 1993. It has left the provision of this form of support to the discretion of the municipalities, without providing any subsidies from 2015 onwards. As a significant proportion of Roma households live in disadvantaged settlements, these municipalities have little or no capacity to provide assistance to families facing housing problems. (It should be noted that discretionary nature has also become a disciplinary tool in the hands of some municipalities, so that the granting of subsidies can easily be linked to 'appropriate political behaviour'.)

The abolition of the housing subsidy deprived some 300 000 people overnight of the subsidy, albeit at a level which had by then almost completely evaporated. It is highly likely that a significant proportion of this group were Roma families.

In 2015, the government introduced the Family Home Ownership Allowance (CSOK), which provides significant support for higher-income families with many children (where parents have a job *and* savings). The reduction in the VAT on new housing and the VAT refund subsidy for housing construction were introduced at the same time as the CSOK. It is almost impossible for Roma families living in small settlements to qualify for these schemes for a number of reasons: either they do not have a legal job for a sufficient period of time, they cannot provide the necessary self-financing, or they cannot claim these benefits for properties in settlements - which are in poor condition.

Furthermore, the ownership of the properties to be purchased or renovated is often unclear, and professional help is not available to sort it out, as well as to administer the subsidies, which are the more disadvantaged a settlement is, because, among many other problems, the dismantling of the social services system is a trend that affects these households. (As a counter-example of how it is possible to use this support, but how extensive, energy- and time-consuming - and therefore generally, nationally not realistically achievable - social development and mentoring is required, a video shows a successful case carried out by the Autonomia Foundation through the Bagázs Association.)

A family with three children living in a small urban segregation wanted to apply for the state housing subsidy for families, and asked our local staff for help, as they did not understand the administrative conditions of the subsidy and could not complete the necessary paperwork due to functional illiteracy (they were moving from the city to a nearby village, where, unlike other surrounding villages, there are no barriers to Roma moving in. Accordingly, however, the Roma population in this village has increased significantly, resulting in an exodus of non-Roma residents. Accordingly, the segregation and ghettoisation of this village has accelerated significantly in recent years, with all the side effects that are typical of segregated areas.)

We managed to find a volunteer lawyer to help the family, who, after preparing them for the problems they could expect, indicating that they would not be successful in the bank's procedures, accompanied the family to the bank, where they were informed of the conditions for applying for the subsidy (which is made of 50% subsidised loan and 50% grant). Here they were told that, because of their accumulated utility arrears and because they did not have the necessary own contribution, they would not be able to claim the subsidy unless these obstacles were removed. The wife of the head of the family became very angry and got into a loud argument with the bank manager, who said he refused to negotiate with the family any further. The volunteer lawyer indicated that he could not help the process either, because the family was not cooperating in settling the terms (debt settlement, early payment).

Antigypsyism in housing

Access to housing for Roma is particularly difficult in integrated housing (non-segregated housing) because of discrimination by landlords. The same is true for the extremely low number of municipal rental housing, where we often hear allegations of corruption, but where there is no factual evidence of such allegations.

However, discrimination in the private housing market has been confirmed in several cases using the so-called *mystery shopping* method. In an internationally collaborative project (MISMIE, MISRECOGNISING MINORITIES IN EUROPE) at ELTE University, young Roma people visited landlords and agencies where discrimination on the grounds of origin was clearly confirmed. The videos were produced in collaboration with CEU.

The Roma magazine 'Telepjáró' (Youtube), which has since been closed down, largely for political reasons, also addressed this issue. The Roma and professionals interviewed in the programme left no doubt that discrimination is also present in the housing market, making Roma integration impossible.

Unfortunately, prejudice, far from decreasing, has actually increased over the last decades, as the World Values Survey database shows. At the same time, it is also a fact that the non-Roma population has now 'learned' to conceal their prejudices, despite the fact that they are a fundamental factor in their decisions, and that it is therefore difficult or impossible to detect them using traditional measurement and research methods.

Forced evictions

There is no data or survey on the extent to which evictions affect Roma families, but there are several documented cases of evictions. Since evictions most often occur because families living in the property have accumulated utility or rent arrears, it is clear that Roma are more likely to be affected because of their lower family income.

It should be noted, however, that the Hungarian government has been applying a moratorium on evictions since 2005, which is sometimes paused and then reintroduced, either because of COVID or the current poor economic situation. Of course, the beneficiaries of these measures are also Roma families, so that they are only targeted when the moratorium is suspended. However, despite the moratorium, mass evictions will still take place, mainly at the initiative of municipalities, as happened for example in Miskolc in the so-called Numbered Streets neighbourhood or in Budapest in the Illatos Street housing estate. In these segregations, mainly Roma families lived, and their eviction was justified mainly on the grounds of property development. The case of Miskolc - where several human rights advocacy organisations have tried to help the families - is particularly serious because the evicted families were moved to an unserved area in the suburbs of the city, where they could not even obtain a registered address due to a lack of property registration, and thus effectively disappeared from the sight of public authorities, making them ineligible for public services in the newly created huge segregated area.

Environmental implications of Roma housing

In Hungary, we are not aware of any segregated area that has been specifically created near a landfill site. This is also due to the fact that small municipal landfills have disappeared in the last 10 years, replaced by large regional landfills.

The Roma settlements are mostly located on the outskirts of settlements, in areas of lower value. This goes hand in hand with a partial or total lack of infrastructure and its degradation. Public transport is also more difficult to access from these settlements.

With a few exceptions, these areas are characterised by dilapidated housing and unkempt gardens, often because they are not fenced, making farming impossible due to frequent theft and damage.

In recent years, the system of waste collection in Hungary has changed several times, with the former municipal-owned companies being taken over by a state controlled market player after several changes in between. It can be said that in many cases the residents of the settlements do not pay the waste fees, which are then used as utility debts, and are passed onto the property as a mortgage, which also constitutes an obstacle to the mobility of the residents of the settlement. In addition, rubbish accumulates on the property and in public areas. The accumulation of rubbish on the outskirts of segregated areas is a common sight, and represents an insurmountable burden for municipalities, whose resources have been significantly reduced in recent years as a result of government measures.

In addition to the objective problems of waste management, there is also the subjective aspect of it. Households living on the site take care of waste disposal on their own property at most, but dumping rubbish on public land is not generally considered a reprehensible act. In many cases, the sight of the settlements determines the image of the people living there, which, through generalisation, contributes to the reluctance of the majority of society to let in families from the integrated housing area, fearing that the same littering situation will be the case in the new environment.

In our experience, selective waste collection, which is now more or less accepted and functioning nationally, is unknown in the segregated areas, which is also due to the lack of organisation of selective collection and the lack of knowledge about selective waste recycling. As a result, the rubbish accumulated in segregated areas often contains particularly hazardous waste (asbestos-containing materials, plastics, animal carcasses), of which the inhabitants are unaware.

In recent years, the severity of the phenomenon has decreased, but black smoke from the incineration of mixed waste, mainly containing plastic, is often seen rising from the settlements. A common cause is 'cable burning', which involves burning the plastic sheathing of electrical cables, most of which are illegally collected. This is a way of obtaining non-ferrous metals that can be sold at high prices, a significant source of income for many people.

In one city centre, we have seen that instead of organising the removal of hazardous or mixed waste (which is not taken away by the regular garbage collection service), non-Roma residents hire Roma "contractors" to take it away, repeatedly promising to dispose of it properly. Despite this, they take it to a nearby settlement in a segregated area, where they either dump it on public land on the outskirts of the village or burn it on their own front lawns.

In most cases, the 'contractors' are aware of this, but as they are not responsible, in their misguided belief, they continue this very harmful practice.

Nomadic lifestyle and Travellers

There are no Roma communities living in nomadic lifestyle in Hungary, nor Travellers.

Implications of lacking a legal address

In many cases, the ownership of properties in segregated areas is unclear. In the land registration, people who no longer live in the settlement are listed as owners, and there is no address or telephone number for them. The situation is similar for inheritances: the fact of inheritance is not recorded in the land registration. The transfer of property is usually based on verbal agreement, and contracts cannot be used to clarify ownership.

As a result, the property cannot be renovated using state or EU funds, and the tenants cannot access loans or subsidies (it should be noted that the market value of the property would not allow for mortgage loans anyway, given its condition).

Nevertheless, registration of the address in the property is usually achieved, since even access to public education, health care or social assistance is conditional on having a registered address in the municipality. In Hungary, the ID does not require a fixed/permanent address.

Housing market – what can be done?

In Hungary, the vast majority of people (around 90%) live in owner-occupied housing. The main reason for this is that after the fall of communism, public rental housing was available at very low prices, and subsequent housing policies and cheap bank loans encouraged home ownership. The number of rental apartments owned by municipalities has been drastically reduced, so that those who do not have access to their own home in Hungary today have very few options on the housing market. As the number of rented housing units has fallen, the number of social rented housing units has also been steadily decreasing. Municipalities target social rented housing mainly at low-income groups, the current system mostly allocates people to bad housing in segregated neighbourhoods and is often stigmatising.

As it can be experienced in other countries, housing market is driven by private investors who prefer the better-off houses because of the higher and more reliable profit. Low income families cannot afford buying these new houses. The government took efforts to intervene in the housing sector (defending the 'victims of the foreign currency loans' belonging to the lower-middle class than to the Roma community) establishing a state run company for the housing stock of these people. The impact of these initiatives is invisible in the Roma society.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The **National Roma Strategic Framework** identifies improving Roma housing as a priority, among many other important goals. However, neither this strategy document nor any other policy document contains a clear and quantified commitment to eradicate, or at least consolidate, Roma segregation. The quantified and therefore accountable commitments refer only to a single programme or project. These stand-alone indicators, as the evaluations of the individual programmes show, even if met, have no meaningful impact on the segregated population.

While the National Roma Strategic Framework identifies more or less precisely the social, educational, housing, etc. it does not place them in a causal relationship and does not conclude that the existence of ethnically segregated and severely materially deprived slums re-enforces and reproduces the social disadvantages that hinder Roma integration. Ultimately, without the elimination of slums (which cannot be equated with a series of unconnected programmes that do not substantially improve the quality of life in the segregated areas, failing to reach a significant number of people), the real integration of the Roma population cannot be expected.

Of course, it would be illusory to expect that the 1,300-1,600 Roma settlements, where about 3% of Hungarian society (about 300,000 people, about half of the Roma population) live, can be eradicated in a few years without having to face the resistance of the majority society. At the same time, a clear target should be set with a foreseeable timeframe and budget that can realistically be expected to eradicate housing (and all other resulting) segregation. At present, however, there is neither a public database on the infrastructure of settlements (the last such survey was carried out in 2010, which is no longer suitable for a thorough planning) nor a clear political will to implement a programme of this scale.

The National Roma Strategic Framework summarises in 14 points the principles (principles of the strategy, horizontal aspects) that should guide planning and implementation. These principles are broadly agreeable, but this is perhaps where the strategy text is most out of touch with reality. Just a few of these principles are mentioned here:

"5. Complexity and concentration: coordinated, complementary programmes are needed, with strong central and local coordination, to underpin the potential for system improvements"

In all the sites where there was a measurable infrastructure intervention in the four settlement eradication tender rounds, it was reported that the so-called "infrastructure interventions" were not only "inadequate" but also "inefficient". In each case, it was reported that the soft intervention elements (which are socially indispensable complements and conditions for infrastructure development) were able to start completely late, after the end of the infrastructure intervention, due to administrative errors. In practice, we do not know of any project that has received EU and state funding on time.

"6. Innovation and sustainability: successful innovations in project-based developments should become part of welfare systems."

The civil sector would not be the sole but important actor of innovation. A key role for civil society organisations could be the piloting and mainstreaming of new solutions. Yet since 2014, the Hungarian government has effectively cut off independent organisations, often with many years of field experience, from EU (and especially state) funding, leaving a monopoly on integration funding for organisations with a church background and unconditional loyalty to the government. The second claim of the principle relates to welfare systems. Unfortunately, even if there were significant innovations in this area, the deliberate erosion of welfare services has meant that the state care system has neither the capacity nor the resources to play a real role in housing integration, and even the provision of basic services is least effective in those municipalities with large Roma populations.

"11. Gradually eliminate discrimination and segregation, avoid duplication of services."

This principle is in total contradiction with the "FETE" (Sustainable Settlements) Programme run by the Hungarian Maltese Charity, which is favoured by the government. The programme, which is largely funded by the EU and is planned to involve 300 settlements, is not controlled by civil society, nor by professionals, nor indeed by the EU. The selection of the local implementing organisations involved is completely opaque, and those organisations that are not loyal to the government or its social policy, however experienced they may be in this field, cannot expect to play an active role.

In practice, what is happening under this programme is precisely a duplication of the local care system, the harmful effects of which are barely visible today, since the current social care system is barely able to cope with local problems. Instead of developing local government-state capacity, a project-like, opaque development programme has been launched, the details of which are very poorly known.

"13. Sound planning, regular measurement of effectiveness: meaningful and measurable information on the situation of the target group, the number of people targeted and the results achieved is needed on an ongoing basis."

Although the National Roma Strategic Framework contains a more or less accurate assessment of the situation and the individual Operational Programmes could even be capable of meaningful intervention, there are very serious planning and administrative failings on both the programming and implementation sides. Moreover, these development programmes often seem to be more 'resource-driven', i.e. they are launched when and with the content that is influenced by bureaucratic will rather than by local needs and realities. Ultimately, these programmes are not interlinked, are not mutually reinforcing and do not achieve any long-term development impact.

Of course, it would be unfair to criticise a strategy document for the period up to 2030 in advance. Unfortunately, this criticism seems justified, however, when we consider that these principles have been in existence for thirteen years with no impact on implementation. This is confirmed by the Strategy itself: 'The principles of the MNTFS 2030, which are largely in line with the policy principles of the strategy adopted in 2011.'

If these principles have had no impact on practice in the past, there is no hope that the situation will be any different in the future, with a political leadership that is even more closed to cooperation and substantive actions.

The worsening economic situation of the country, including the Roma, and social policies that focus specifically on the middle class, mean that Roma families can increasingly less afford to move to integrated areas. The situation is made more difficult by the antigypsism and prejudice against Roma in the majority society, which is increasingly difficult to prove by direct researches.

These factors, among many others, have the effect of increasing, rather than decreasing, the proportion of Roma living in marginalised and segregated housing. The number of segregated settlements has not decreased in recent years, despite a number of EU-funded projects.

Segregated living situations give rise to a number of secondary social and educational (and many other) problems, which make it almost impossible to overcome the problems of segregated housing.

Recommendations

- I. Recent evaluation studies have all concluded that the lack of coordination between the different social policy systems and sectors leads to the ineffectiveness of programmes. Infrastructural and soft development is not supported by local social policy instruments, but neither is public education supportive of desegregation, and the lack of local jobs or health infrastructure works against anti-segregation programmes. **These programmes can only be effective if they can be implemented in a coordinated way across sectors.**

- II. Almost all desegregation programmes have two parts: an infrastructure (ERDF) and a soft (ESF) component. The logic is that the "soft" activities support families to move out (even if not from the segregated area, but) into a new house. It cannot be stressed enough how important the synchronicity of the two parts: If a family because of the lack of the appropriate social work fails the integration in the new living environment, it not only just means that the fund spent to the infrastructural investment will be used inefficiently but these cases confirm the stereotypes against the Roma that “they cannot live in integrated environments because of their culture”. **It is crucial to manage these programmes much more efficiently avoiding the usual situations - which was typical for all rounds of the anti-segregation programmes - that because of administrative and programming problems the soft and infrastructural parts of the measures were implemented with serious timing delay and soft programme part was over when the families could move into the new houses and they could not receive any social support.** This situation is annoying because this management problem was caused by the managing authority (and stakeholders by the funding side) but the responsibility must have been born by the local municipality as implementer of the project. Deterring rogue actors prone to frauds and, at the same time, helping local implementation (which is not the same as a series of on-the-spot checks)
- III. The EU programmes are run in a rather bureaucratic way, almost exclusively based on predefined indicators that may not give an accurate picture of the reality. The only indicator is often the number of people attending a workshop (checked on the basis of attendance sheets during on-the-spot checks by auditors), but what exactly happens there, what kind of development they are involved in and, above all, what impact this development has on them, is not really known. **A reasonable, flexible and transparent monitoring system should be designed and run parallel with supportive counselling for local implementers who have no administrative capacity.**
- IV. **It is proposed that these programmes be implemented in phases.** As a first step, the future beneficiary municipalities should be prepared to implement an antisegregation project on a larger scale. This means on the one hand preparing and involving local policy makers and on the other hand gaining the support of the majority of society for a real antisegregation initiative.
- V. There are significant differences between the local segregated settlements. The most important difference is the size of them: There are segregated areas with 5-10 houses and settlements with thousands of families. These settlements cannot be targeted in the same scheme. We recommend **designing a segmentation logic taking into account the size**, the state (even infrastructural and socio-economic circumstances), the local community, the neighborhood and the conditions for the integration. Development programmes can be planned exclusively based on this segmentation (with just a few categories).

- VI. **Participation of Roma communities, experts has to be secured at all levels of desegregation or housing projects**, development and training opportunities have to be provided to really involve the Roma actors in the development programmes and projects to avoid the tokenism (when the participation is merely symbolic).
- VII. **Run communication activities to convince the non-Roma population to become supportive with the inclusion at all levels of the process and sub-sectors of the society**, planning these activities positive but harmful image of the Roma must be avoided. Talking about the Roma society must not be done without the Roma. It has to be taken into consideration that the Roma society – as other sub-groups of the society – is not unified. Various opinions and ideas have to be heard regardless that some of those are not friendly with the ruling government.

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