Access to Land and Legal Rights on Land and the Housing Aspects of the Greek Roma

Chryssy POTSIOU
chryssyp@survey.ntua.gr

Efi DIMOPOULOU
efi@survey.ntua.gr
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- UN and EU policies to improve the legality of land tenure and infrastructure of Roma settlements
- The Greek Roma: general statistics, legislation & policies
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Roma within Europe

Roma came to Europe from India through the Ottoman Empire & the Balkans since the beginning of the 13th century:

- Carefree nomads; no significant worries; freedom loving and easy going; living in tents and informal settlements and dancing around campfires every night!
- This very romantic picture of Roma life is far from reality: only 20% of the European Roma population today is still nomadic.

Nomadism was not always a free choice but a result of persecution and continuous expulsion:

- Wallachia + Moldavia for centuries in slavery up to 1855
- Spain in 1749
- Austro-Hungarian Empire during the 18th century
- Italy in 1926
- Romania in 1942
- Germany in 1930 and 1940s
Increasing intolerance and violence against Roma settlements in Europe

10-12M population in Europe
70% in central + eastern Europe + ex-Soviet

During communism Roma were forced to move in one-room social housing apartments
- Break-out of former Yugoslavia and former Czechoslovakia
- Kosovo conflict → Serbia, Bosnia, Herzegovina, Montenegro, FY Republic of Macedonia, even Italy, Greece, …
- EU membership of Romania and Bulgaria

Many Roma have fallen victims to new eviction measures (Slovakia, France, Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovenia, …)

Germany, Austria, Sweden and Switzerland now spend considerable funds to enable the return of the Roma to their countries of origin. Many plan to come back
How open the EU’s “open borders” are (or can be)?

Discrimination based on ethnic origin is seen by 62% of respondents to be the most widespread form of discrimination in the European Union.

Respect for equality in diversity is a central premise for building democratic and inclusive societies.

“Notwithstanding the type of tenure, all persons should possess a degree of security of tenure which guarantees legal protection against forced eviction, harassment and other threats. States parties should consequently take immediate measures aimed at conferring legal security of tenure upon those persons and households currently lacking such protection, in genuine consultation with affected persons and groups”… “adequate housing” should have sustainable access to natural and common resources, clean drinking water, energy for cooking, heating and lighting, sanitation and washing facilities, food storage facilities, refuse disposal, site drainage and emergency services. …should be made affordable and habitable.
Typology of land tenure can be still noted in the various European countries

- Roma who legally own the house and the land, or the apartment they live in
- Roma who legally own plots of land but are not allowed either to build their houses (or they have build illegally without a permit), or to park their caravan and be connected to the public facilities networks
- Roma who live on plots of land that belong to private individuals
- Roma squatting on municipal or state owned land
- Roma squatting on private land (usually rural land) causing problems to the land owners
- Roma squatting on state or private land that present special health considerations (e.g., industrial areas, landfills, etc)
- Roma who still ascribe to a nomadic lifestyle.
Any examples of good practice?

The municipalities of France have expanded their Urban Plans to include and upgrade Roma settlements and to provide special planning zones where the Roma can station their caravans.

The Spanish Housing Program for Social Integration (HPSI) in 2008, which promoted home-ownership through state-subsidies in preference to the provision of rented social housing.

The municipalities of Gorica in Sarajevo, of Kraljevo in Serbia and in Gjilan in Kosovo where Roma were included in social housing programs funded by foreign agencies.
The Greek Roma

- 15th century, 1922, Greek citizen enjoying equal rights, Orthodox Christians, occupied in “roving trade”
- 40% is employed in the informal market; 77% health insurance
- Recognized Muslim Roma minority which settled the Anatolian and East Thracian regions in 1923
- Roma newcomers: Albania & Former Yugoslavia, still at the first steps of their urbanization process; Greek Roma community discourage the newcomers to settle permanently as they create environmental damage and increased criminality

The Greek Roma are faced with a triple social problem:
(a) the conflict with the main body of the Greek society as their legal job abilities are mainly restricted to roving trade,
(b) there is an inner-neighbourhood conflict with the other poor and marginalised minorities, and
(c) there is conflict with the Roma newcomers.
Legal & Social aspects & adopted policies

Legislative Decree 3370/1955: Greek nationality

1996: the “Frame of National Policy for the Greek Roma”

2005 Greece has harmonised its legislation in terms of equal treatment of citizen

No social housing

MD (GG 412/B/29.03.2000) provision of individual housing

loans to the Greek Roma for purchase or construction of new housing

~9,000 housing loans (for first residence) of 60,000 Euros each through national funds and with the guarantee of the Greek state, 22 years duration

Questionable ability to repay the loans and to maintain the real estate
Legal & Social aspects & adopted policies

Micro-financing policy has also been implemented for the period 2007-2013.

- 5.5% not registered in the registry office
- 10% no identity card or any other certificate
- 25% no voting booklet
- 50% not registered in the municipality records

The “housing-loans” project was a good motive for the registration of the Roma in the registry municipal offices.

Emphasis on education & medical treatment:

- 2,500 travelling Roma students were provided with special student cards for state schools.
- Students who drop out was decreased from 75% in 1997 to 24% in 2010.
Greek Roma Access to Land and Property Rights

General Statistics

- 66% legally own the land, building without a permit (no compensation in case of land takings)
- 45% live in privately owned land
- 21% land plot has been conceded by the municipality or the prefecture
- 11% land plot has been conceded by relatives
- Only those who have legal titles on the plot they are accepted to register to the Hellenic Cadastre (flexibility in the deadlines is tolerated)

The case of Zefyri

Population: 3,500 Roma inhabitants (1/3 of the total) (2010)
1960-1974: Roma were evicted by the police and resettled again
1975 -1977: urban regeneration project (local planners); 1986 sewerage system
1995: infrastructure improvements

Tenure: Low-interest housing loans, they bought the occupied land & built; “adverse possession”

Housing: live in self-owned modern, 1or 2 story houses of good construction
2004 Athens Olympics Closing Ceremony
Housing Aspects

DEPOS research (1999):
“genuine” settlements where all living quarters are makeshift (48.6% of the total),
“mixed” settlements containing both makeshift dwellings and permanent houses (18.8%),
“neighbourhoods” which are part of a city or a village (22.5%) and
houses within the urban tissue (10.1%).
Evolution of residential types of Greek Roma between 1999-2006 (source: Pavlou et al./HLHR/i-RED, 2009)

- Settlements - makeshift dwellings: DEPOS 1999 = 48.6, Rom Network 2000 = 22.1, GHM/COHRE 2006 = 39.4
- City/village 'neighborhoods': DEPOS 1999 = 22.5, Rom Network 2000 = 31.1, GHM/COHRE 2006 = 34.6
Types of Roma Settlements in Greece

**pure settlements** with makeshift shells at permanent sites or at sites that move within a broader region,

**mixed settlements** consisting of both houses and makeshift constructs,

**neighbourhoods** with houses for permanent use in deteriorated districts,

**conventional residences** or **apartments** within the urban web,

**prefab hamlets** ceded by the Ministry for the Environment, Physical Planning & the Environment within the framework of the Integrated Action Plan,

**organised construction** (at Sofades, constructed by the Workers’ Housing Organisation) and

**mixed prefab reservations** with both small prefabricated houses and makeshift constructions.
- neighbourhoods contain almost half of the established families (49%) and 60% of seasonal families,
- mixed reservations contain approximately 25% of established families,
- pure reservations at a permanent site contain 9% of established families and 6% of the seasonal ones
- interspersed residences throughout the urban web contain approximately 7% of established families
- each of the remaining types contains less than 1% of established families

Distribution of established families living in the various residential types of the Greek Roma settlements
Region of Attica: Roma Residential Areas

A relatively new Roma settlement in *Aspropyrgos* outside the city plan, comprising tents and shacks between industrial buildings and undeveloped parcels south of Attiki Odos, forming small residential cores. The types of shells range from one-storey houses, shoddy construction, and shacks, live under substandard conditions in an area designated as an industrial zone and highly degraded. A redevelopment plan has been decided for requiring the relocation of Roma to another site. The same type of residences is found in *Nomismatiokopio*, a settlement dating from the late 1970s by arbitrary land-seizure of Roma population, accounting today more than 200 people.

In the settlement of *Votanikos*, over 500 Roma immigrants from Balkan countries, mainly Albania, and some Greek-Roma as well, live under substandard conditions in an area designated as an industrial zone and highly degraded. A redevelopment plan has been decided for requiring the relocation of Roma to another site. In the Roma camp of *Nea Zoi* at *Aspropyrgos*, shells are scattered between industrial buildings and undeveloped parcels south of Attiki Odos, forming small residential cores. The types of shells range from one-storey houses, shoddy construction, and shacks, live under substandard conditions in an area designated as an industrial zone and highly degraded. A redevelopment plan has been decided for requiring the relocation of Roma to another site.
Study Area:
Municipality of Megara – Vlyhos Settlement

- Formerly rural area with small-sized land parcels (300 sq.m.)
- Establishment of Roma population started in the early 1960s’

54 ha of land
Municipality of Megara – Vlyhos Settlement

- Today: entirely inhabited by Roma (92%)
- Land acquisition:
  - preliminary contracts
  - illegal seizure of land
- Degradation / abandonment
- Roma: 1323
- Non Roma: 111
1991: Incorporation of the new City Plan

source: HEMCO, 2001 & Municipality of Megara
Residential Types

- 306 registered houses:
  - 258 inhabited by Roma people
  - 36 by non Roma

- 11 two-storey houses (4%),
- 87 one-storey houses (32%),
- 4 prefabs (1%),
- 5 homes served by auxiliary spaces and extensions in the form of "shacks" (2%),
- 5 mixed structures of low quality (2%),
- 5 houses under construction (2%),
- 9 houses with tiled roofs (3%),
- 53% houses made of tin and asbestos-cement or shanties
Land Use of Vlyhos Settlement

- residential (86%),
- constructions are used for storing and trading engine spare parts, cars and machinery components (8%),
- no data provided by the Municipality's records (6%).

Access to Public Utilities and Infrastructure

- the Roma settlement of Vlyhos lacks basic facilities and public utilities,
- half shells are connected to the power grid, 30% of them illegally drawing electricity,
- half of the Roma shells have no water supply and part of the rest are unofficially connected,
- half shells have no toilet or other sanitary facilities,
- the area lacks sewage system.
- purchased land
- preliminary contract
- concessed or rent land
- illegally seized
- no data

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<th>Inside the City Plan</th>
<th>Outside the City Plan</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<td>7%</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>100%</td>
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345 applications were submitted,
50% of them could not provide evidence of their municipal status,
some 67 loans were finally approved,
demonstrating their deficiency in accessing the government’s housing policy.

Even purchased land is often not legally entitled to be improved by a housing loan, or it is not included into the city plan.
As a result, the Roma create temporary constructions and shacks, violating the building rules.

50% of them could not provide evidence
The major problem of the Greek Roma is their weak land tenure:

- the majority of them lacks legal titles on land,
- those that do have legal titles on land, they have made illegal constructions,
- those who were offered the home-ownership loans, are not qualified to cope with their responsibilities as house owners and borrowers.

CONCLUSIONS – PROPOSALS

- New tools and major reforms need to be invented by the Greek State, in order to solve the Roma housing problem efficiently.
- Strengthening weak land tenure and adopting affordable planning regulations and procedures, seem to be the only solutions to the problem.

Thank you for your attention