# POLICY REPORT:

## Between Circularity, Environmental Justice & Slow Violence: The Case of Roma Informal Recycler Communities in North-Macedonia

EEB
European Environmental Bureau

Federal Ministry
Republic of Austria
Social Affairs, Health, Care
and Consumer Protection

**We are Europe's largest network of environmental citizens' organisations. We bring together over 160 civil society organisations from more than 35 European countries. Together, we work for a better future where people and nature thrive together.**

# Contents

# Introduction

There is a growing recognition that ethnic minorities and low-income groups are exposed to higher levels of various environmental pollutants, evidenced by a wealth of research about environmental racism and environmental injustice. Environmental racism is defined by Benjamin Chavis, who first used the term in 1982, as *"racial discrimination in environmental policymaking, the enforcement of regulations and laws, the deliberate targeting of communities of colour for toxic waste facilities...and the history of excluding of people of colour from the leadership of the ecology movements"* (quoted in Mohai, Pellow, & Roberts, 2009). With this growing recognition, the environmental justice movement emerged first in the United States in the 1960s by people of colour, who demanded equal environmental protection of their communities and gained visibility in the 1970s and '80s. The environmental justice movement fused several interrelated causes, including anti-racism, human and minority rights, social justice, public health and environmental sustainability (Pellow, 2018).

The movement gained international attention and grew in scope, driven by the objective of assuring a clean and healthy environment for everyone, regardless of race or other characteristics. The environmental movement can be seen as an analytical tool both from an academic perspective, which analyses which communities or people are impacted by environmental burdens[1] as well as a grassroots movement, which mobilises from the bottom up to address environmental injustices affecting particular communities through legislation, the court system, advocacy, political organising, etc. Relatively recently, a report by the European Environmental Agency published in 2020 stressed the "social dimension" of environmental pollution and "unequal distribution of environmental health risks" providing firm evidence of "the unequal impact of environmental pollution and degradation on socially deprived communities and vulnerable groups." This has galvanized the emerging debate regarding environmental justice and the Roma minority in Europe.

Europe's Roma are among the most sizeable vulnerable groups in Europe who face unequal exposure to environmental burdens. This issue gained importance with the Covid-19 pandemic that brought about a crisis of unparalleled proportions. The crisis allowed us to revisit some important questions, especially those concerning environmental and social justice. For instance, the pandemic exacerbated the already prevailing socio-spatial forms of injustice, leading to new forms of exclusion and environmental racism (Cole, et al., 2021), and amplified health inequalities, which aggravated environmental health disparities.

Beyond doubt, Roma have been disproportionately affected by the Covid-19 pandemic (see Figure 1 below), aptly generating a discussion about environmental justice. The case of North Macedonia illustrates the severity of environmental racism and the disproportional challenges Roma faced during the pandemic. In North Macedonia, Roma comprises approximately 9.56% of the total population, based on 2012 Council of Europe estimates. A 2018 report by the Minority Rights Group International revealed that over a quarter (28%) of Roma live in deprived and overcrowded neighbourhoods, and many of the poorest Roma settlements lack running water, as well as access to drinking water, sanitation and electricity. With that, maintaining basic hygiene to halt the spread of diseases, including Covid-19, was an overwhelming task. Consequently, Roma faced a higher risk of death from Covid than the non-Roma population.

*Figure 1: How the COVID-19 pandemic adversely affected Roma communities.*
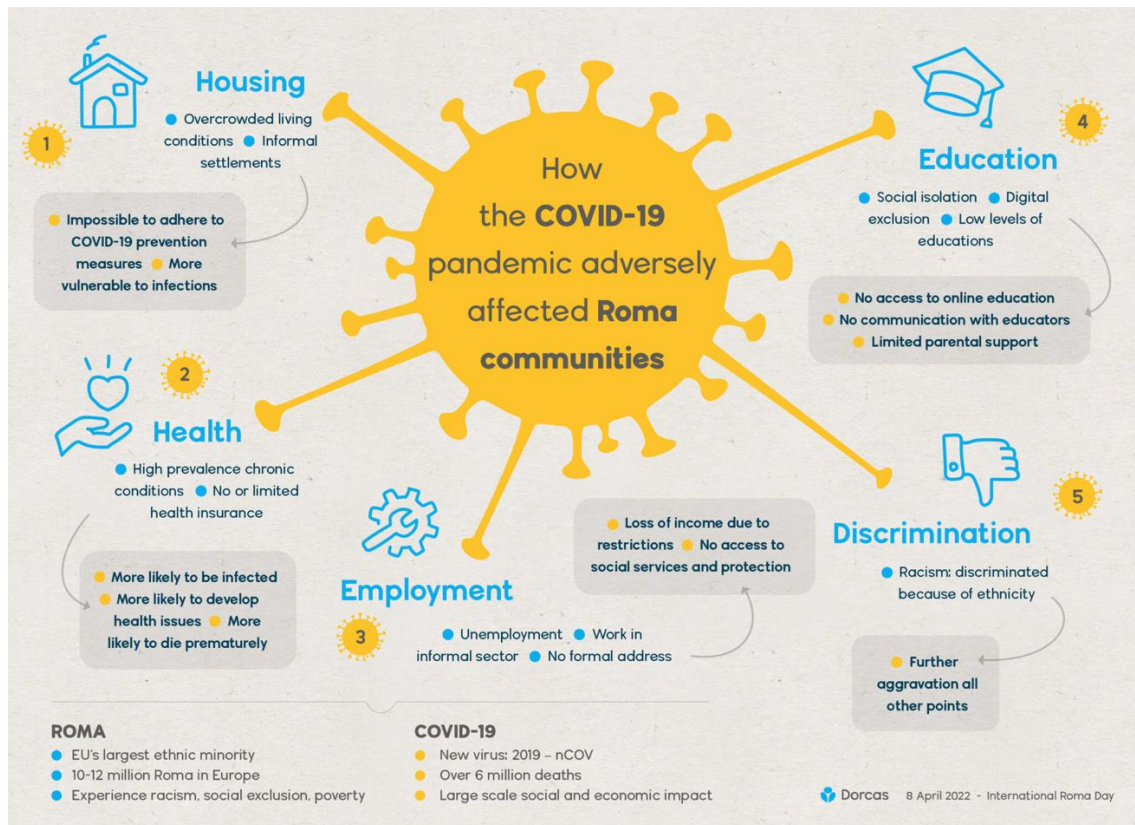


**Source:** Ioana Lungoci and Ioana Ghiurau. 2022. <u>Dorcas</u>. "How the COVID-19 pandemic adversely affected Roma communities".

Antigypsyism[2] spiked during the pandemic throughout Europe, with hate speech becoming even more prevalent in the region, as reported by the <u>United Nations</u> and the EU <u>Agency for Fundamental Rights</u>. Hostile rhetoric often blamed Roma for the spread of the virus or presented the group as a public threat, highlighting inadequate housing conditions in Roma settlements, poor living circumstances, lack of basic sanitation and low levels of hygiene. In addition, with no or sporadic access to such basic environmental services as <u>organi</u>sed garbage collection in many Roma settlements throughout Europe and in particular the Western Balkans, Roma were more exposed to infectious diseases and suffered from devastating health impacts. In other words, the very conditions Roma faced as a result of structural discrimination were further fueling hatred against Roma during the pandemic.

In October 2020, in the midst of the pandemic, the European Commission launched a new 10-year <u>Roma strategic </u>Framework for equality, inclusion and participation, calling on Member States to submit national strategies by September 2021. It serves as a post-COVID recovery plan and a <u>strategy</u> that *"sets out guidance to better meet emerging challenges, such as tackling the disproportionate impact on Roma of crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, ensuring digital inclusion and delivering environmental justice."* The acknowledgement of environmental justice is congruent with the European Green Deal that was issued by the European Commission in December 2019, which envisions future growth at the intersection of economy, environment and society, and with that may serve as the foundation for <u>environmental and climate justice</u>. As one of the building blocks of the European Green Deal, the European Commission adopted the new Circular Economy Action Plan

in March 2020, in part aimed at sustainability and waste prevention. However, criticism has emerged regarding the Green Deal's failure to include race and racial justice in its policies, consequently paying little attention to the intersection of racial and environmental justice.

North Macedonia, a potential candidate for EU membership, as far back in 2004 named *"living in an environment that has been extremely neglected"* as the manifestation of the problem of poverty and social inclusion in its National Strategy for Roma, and listed *"protection of the environment and nature (measures for the protection from pollution of water, air and land; protection of the environment from noise and ionic radiation)"* among the responsibilities of municipal governments. Additionally, the Government of Macedonia took an active part in the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015 initiative,[3] with the aim of greater integration of Roma into mainstream Macedonian society and reduction of poverty, among other goals (Donev, Cicevalieva, Kosevska, & Kendrovski, 2012). However, many of these goals are yet to be fully realized.

Despite the growing recognition of the importance of environmental justice, environmental and social justice are not yet reflected in EU- or national-level policymaking. In recent years, the circular economy has been widely praised as a green and economic solution to unsustainable and linear business practices of take, make, and throw-away[4]. The circular economy, therefore, is seen as an essential step towards achieving sustainability. Despite the green potential for circularity, the role of justice and equity, including environmental justice, in the circular economy is relatively understudied. There is a need to strengthen social considerations within the concept of circular economy (Corona, Shen, Reike, Carreón, & Worrel, 2019; de Oliveira, 2021). In fact, available research warns of the possibility that a circular economy may perpetuate the marginalisation and exclusion of certain groups, particularly in the case of informal waste workers (Carenzo, 2017; Weslynne, Fratini, Isenhour, & Krueger, 2022).

This report focuses on a group that has long been practicing circularity – Roma informal recycling communities in North Macedonia, known here as "green agents." The term is used to refer to groups described elsewhere as informal waste workers, waste collectors, informal recyclers, waste pickers and alike. The term "green agents" reflect the environmental contribution that informal recyclers, particularly of Roma origin, contribute to but are seldom recognised for, and instead being marginalised for their waste management practices.   Josifovski et al., found that, "*on average [green agents] collect 2.2 tons of waste monthly*" This means that, "***a single Roma waste collector treats and deals with the garbage of 27 [Macedonians on a monthly basis]***" (Josifovski, B. & REDI 2023).

This report further analyses 5 locations and investigates the life of different Roma communities that rely on waste collection and recycling to make ends meet. Each case study highlights how these communities were affected by Covid-19. At times, entire Roma neighbourhoods were cordoned off or quarantined by police, restricting their access to the waste that generates their livelihoods, while facing growing instances of arbitrary and discriminatory treatment, as well as deteriorating quality of life, living conditions and health. In other words, the report aims at revealing the multidimensionality of the marginalisation of green agents, and with that, contribute to their understudied role in the EU-wide discourse regarding environmental justice.

# Methodology

This report was inspired by the [mission](#) of the European Environmental Bureau (EEB) to bring the environmental injustice that many Roma communities face in Europe to the attention of policymakers, various institutions and the wider public. Considering the marginal attention that environmental justice has received, it is imperative to create a better knowledge base of environmental racism as one dimension of antigypsyism. In turn, we hope to initiate a conversation about environmental justice and push for policy changes at the level of the EU and Member States.

For the report, desk research was complemented with fieldwork in North Macedonia that took place in June and July of 2022 in 5 Roma communities. Fieldwork was conducted by Mustafa Asanovski and commissioned by the EEB; the case studies are based on fieldwork observations and on-site interviews. Qualitative data collection through interviews pursued two interrelated goals: to understand the multi-dimensionality of discrimination that Roma waste pickers (green agents) face in their daily lives and to inquire into waste-picking activities with a focus on challenges during the pandemic.

In total, 50 interviews were taken with 10 interviews per site. All interviews are anonymised in the report, and in every case, informed consent[5] was assured before the interview took place. Considering the field researcher's familiarity with the sites and in some cases the communities, key informant interviews were conducted with Roma who have engaged with waste picking for a considerable time and were keen on sharing their experience. While some leading interview questions informed these interviews, in general, key informant interviews were structured along key issues and allowed for the "[free flow of ideas and information](#)."

On the one hand, the sites were selected based on the field researcher's familiarity with the community, which was important not only for access to key informants but also to assure trust between informants and the researcher. Trust is necessary to ensure that opinions and views are expressed without reservations (Akhter, 2022, p. 392). On the other hand, these sites were identified in earlier reports and studies, providing additional information to contextualise the report. This report aims to give an additional understanding of environmental justice and provide a background into the living conditions of green agent communities. As a result, the sites were mainly assessed due to the substandard living conditions in these communities and forms of discrimination that local Roma residents faced within them. This report does not directly inquire into the question of waste and the situation of green agents on a policy level. For more detailed information on waste legislation and Macedonian informal recycling practices, please see study, "Informal Waste Collectors in North Macedonia: Perspectives, Constraints and Opportunities."

For instance, a [2015 report](#) by the European Roma Rights Centre brought up the case of Teneke Mahala Roma neighbourhood in Kavadarci, alarmed by the eviction cases and poverty; the Roma community in Kochani is [included](#) in the Environmental Justice Atlas due to the risk of displacement, the lack of residents access to clean water and the community's exposure to infectious diseases; a [2017 report](#) by Habitat for Humanity–North Macedonia provided details on the poor living conditions of the Neurology Department in the old hospital of Shtip; the dire conditions at the Petocna Voda community deemed as "illegal" in the Municipality of Bitola were raised by [CIVIL - Center for Freedom](#) in 2018 and the [2012 report](#) by the Habitat for Humanity–North Macedonia; and finally, the Roma

community of Shuto Orizari is perhaps the most discussed case, in some accounts celebrated as [Macedonia's only Roma-run municipality](#) and [the only district in Europe where Roma are the majority](#).

With this report, we aim to revisit these cases through the lens of environmental justice, documenting the living conditions and the experience of the green agents.

# Case Studies

## Municipality of Kavadarci and the Teneke Mahala Community



*Image 1: Sub-standard housing in Teneke Mahala Community. Photo by Mustafa Asanovski (June, 2022)*

The neighbourhood of Teneke Mahala was established in 1976. Currently, around 200 Roma people reside there in 18 houses. Roma families live in substandard living conditions, and there is a feeling among the community of neglect by the local authority. Residents recalled only one occasion when the municipality of Kavadarci distributed hygiene and food packages during the pandemic. Houses occupied by Roma lack electricity, water and sewage systems. Most residents are unemployed and the majority, including women and children, are engaged in the informal recycling sector, collecting and selling plastics and cardboard. Before the pandemic, many Roma were involved in the informal economy, and most were laid off during the pandemic without any compensation. Residents referred to waste collection as a "family business" and a form of self-employment which provides the main source of income for households. Other sources of income are the minimum guaranteed social assistance,[6] which many residents claim they are not entitled to due to the lack of personal documents, and the governmental economic relief[7] that many residents were not receiving for reasons unknown to them.

A 41-year-old informal waste collector explained his living conditions:

*"There are 12 of us living in one room of 30m², none of us is employed, and we are all engaged in the collection of plastic bottles that is our primary source of income. Our daily earn is about 1000 MKD (16 euros) and we pay VAT on top of that, which is not enough to survive. We are not entitled to minimal social welfare assistance as we do not have personal documents. In addition, my seven minor children do not attend any educational institution, as one of the criteria to be enrolled in elementary school is having a birth certificate, but my children do not have it."*

During the lockdown, many Roma residents who partook in recycling activities, complained of not being able to access waste because of curfews and Roma neighbourhoods being cordoned off. This

led to further deprivation and hunger, while others testified how police officers at times tolerated those who were caught collecting bottles during curfew hours. Residents of Teneke Mahala community were acutely aware that living near waste exposes the community to vermin, and their reliance on waste puts them at elevated risk of contamination and viruses. Residents primarily complained about inadequate living conditions and lack of services as main obstacles to combatting the spread of Covid-19, highlighting the need for a sewage system and garbage disposal services. Being infected with the virus, as many admitted, would result in an inability to generate income from waste. Due to this fear, some residents reported avoiding clinics and even vaccines.

Antigypsyism unquestionably intensified as a result of the pandemic, with the community seen as "a nest of contagion" by some non-Roma residents, who increasingly avoided any form of interaction with Roma. Roma also faced severe discrimination before the pandemic, which culminated in a racially charged petition from non-Roma neighbours in June 2015, leading to the eviction of the community by the local authorities. Money was set aside from the municipal budget to purchase "second-hand containers" for re-housing the affected Roma community. This decision was annulled only after the European Roma Rights Centre filed a discrimination complaint to the Macedonian Commission for Protection against Discrimination, later urging the authorities of the municipality of Kavadarci to find a long-term solution to the housing of Roma residents. As a result, in April 2022, the Equality Body ruled in favour of the ERRC and found direct discrimination against the Roma residents.[8]

# Municipality of Kocani and the ASNOM Community

In the 1970s, Roma families were moved into the former ASNOM[9]) army barracks for housing, and 24 families continue to live in the rundown barracks until today. The lack of housing maintenance is of significant concern for residents, who complained of fearing that their houses are at high risk of collapsing.



**Image 2:** *Waste on the outskirts of the ASNOM Community. Photo by Mustafa Asanovski (June, 2022)*

This area is dominated by an image of scattered waste and plastic bottles – a constant reminder of the authorities' utter neglect of the community. The inadequate access to water illustrates the abandonment of about one hundred residents.[10] The community must rely on a single waterpipe provided by the local, publicly owned water company that provides water for two collectively used taps installed by the community and a private tap in one of the houses. With no sewage, no sanitary services, and no access to electricity, the community was left to meet their needs through means of improvisation, such as connecting to the electric grid of a nearby electric pole. Maintaining basic hygiene is challenging, with waste defining everyday existence and triggering various infections and diseases. Residents complained that the pandemic has significantly worsened their situation, and dire living conditions were described as the cause of a recent death of a 2-month-old baby.

Discrimination was acutely felt during the pandemic, with many residents lamenting about non-Roma treating them as "transmitters of the virus":

*"We were not allowed to enter pharmacies. We were told to wait outside and thus would be served while non-Roma were allowed to enter. In an event when I had to take my child to a hospital due to a high fever, a doctor asked where I was from, when I told her that I was from the old military barrack ASNOM, she got scared and angry because she saw me as a transmitter of the virus. We were afraid to seek medical assistance during the pandemic, because whenever we needed medical assistance and we went to the local medical centre, we were told that there was not a doctor present there to help"* – explains a 31-year-old green agent.

Similarly to the Teneke Mahala Community, there was an attempt to provide better housing, which was halted due to widespread antigypsyism. As part of the EU Roma strategic framework for equality, inclusion and participation, in early 2021 the Mayor of the Municipality of Kocani, Nikolco Iliev announced the construction of residential buildings in Trajanovo Trlo (Presecena Skala) as the site for permanent housing for Roma residents from the old ASNOM military barracks. Following the announcement, the non-Roma resident of Trajanovo Trlo protested and argued that the Roma were "thieves and criminals." During the protests, the Trajanovo Trlo residents held racist banners, such as one that read "Only over our dead bodies." Following these protests, a group of 10 non-Roma men had beaten a 10-year-old Roma boy in Kocani for alleged theft.

Given the tensions, the Mayor decided to choose another location to house the Roma residents, yet as of summer of 2022, construction has not begun. Romalitico, a pro-Roma NGO, has published an informative video about the dismal living conditions of Roma who continue to live in the barracks.

There was a high level of vaccine hesitancy and very few accepted the vaccine. During the pandemic, respondents explained that families received some assistance from civil society in the form of hygiene and food packages, and from the Municipality of Kocani that distributed food vouchers as part of the government's Covid-19 relief assistance. The municipality also distributed face masks and protective gloves, but only once. To make ends meet, families must supplement social welfare assistance with other sources of income that mainly consists of waste recycling, considering the high unemployment rate. In particular, women are actively engaged in this activity. During lockdowns, Roma residents were unable to collect bottles and scraps due to restrictions and curfews, losing their livelihood:

*"During the COVID-19, we used to crush walnuts and thus make a living, otherwise we would remain hungry. Some of us had gone into debt to buy food."* – explains a 32-year-old green agent.

# Municipality of Shtip and the Old Neurology Ward



*Image 3:* *Makeshift housing and piles of plastic collected from nearby waste sites. Photo by Mustafa Asanovski (June, 2022)*

In the broader downtown area of Shtip, a small Roma community live in an abandoned neurology ward of a former hospital.[11] Some dwellings are made from scavenged materials, makeshift supplies, cardboard and wood. The inadequate building lacks basic infrastructure and utilities, such as access to sewage or drainage systems, and Roma live in overcrowded, substandard conditions. It is through inventiveness that Roma families must assert their rights to access basic services, for example, residents tapped into public services to channel water and electricity into their neighbourhood. Some services are generally provided, such as waste collection, while access to healthcare was associated with additional fees:

*"Whenever there was a need to visit a doctor, I had to pay for an examination and prescribed medicines"* – explains the 40-year-old green agent.

One of the foremost complaints of residents revolved around their health and discrimination. Moisture and mould in homes led to respiratory conditions and flooding during rain resulted in various gastrointestinal infections. Many were particularly concerned about children constantly being exposed to diseases. During the pandemic, all interviewed residents admitted that their health has further deteriorated, coupled with growing tensions with residents from neighbouring communities, calling the Roma neighbourhood an "environmental hazard" and a "landfill." Racism was blamed when lamenting the multiple attempts to set family homes on fire since 2017, which, the residents explained, were aimed at expelling and displacing them, causing great distress and anxiety:

*"Non-Roma do not like us in their proximity, during the pandemic, they were afraid to get close to us because they thought we would transmit the virus"* – explains a 50-year-old woman green agent.

Despite an investigation by the local police, no one has been convicted. The majority of Roma residents were forced to leave their homes, as residents explained, reducing the size of the Roma community to the current residents. Residents shared that, although the Municipality of Shtip announced on 28 January 2022 their plan to provide prefabricated homes for residents, this plan has not been realised by the summer of that year. Roma lamented that they were promised decent housing several years ago, with no concrete steps taken in this direction.

Residents named financial deprivation as one of the foremost problems. All families receive a meager social allowance from the Macedonian government, which is usually not enough to make ends meet. With no employment opportunities, most families work as plastic bottle collectors. Covid-19 lockdowns presented a serious challenge by restricting access to garbage: families were not able to collect plastic bottles as their neighbourhood was cordoned off by police. In dire need of assistance during the pandemic, families claimed to have received a one-time financial assistance as part of the government's relief COVID-19 package, as well as face masks and protective gloves from the Municipality of Shtip.[12]

# Municipality of Bitola and the Petocna Voda Roma Community

The Roma residents of "Petocna Voda" live in the poorest area in the city of Bitola. Based on the 2019 Social Mapping Report prepared by AECOM, Bair is considered the Roma neighbourhood in Bitola, with around 95% of Roma living there. Bair is further divided into three areas: Centralen Bair, Ljubojno and Karaorman. The estimated population of the latter area is 700-800 people or 175-200 households. There is a road that runs across the Roma community and Roma live on both sides of the road. The majority of Roma inhabit cardboard dwellings without basic infrastructure or utilities, and these are not considered official houses by the municipality of Bitola.



*Image 4: Plastic recycling transported from Petocna Voda Roma Community. Photo by Mustafa Asanovski (June, 2022)*

According to recent research by Geosphera (Bitola regional association):

- 76% of Roma residents in Petocna Voda are not connected to the city water supply,

- 45% of respondents complained of no paved roads,

- more than half of Roma respondents claimed that solid waste is disposed of in improvised landfills or the street,

- 26% of respondents stated that waste collection is organised by the public enterprise "Komunalec."

Many Roma suffer from poor health directly associated with inadequate living conditions and the lack of infrastructure. Residents complained about respiratory issues due to moisture, dampness, and mould. While most households are connected to the local electric power supply system, the low capacity of the substation often causes power outages, and many families are without electricity due to their inability to pay electricity bills. The absence of adequate sanitation facilities, electricity and running water make Roma more susceptible to infectious diseases, especially during the hot summer months and the pandemic:

*"At the time of the pandemic, we were not able to maintain hygiene as recommended by the health authorities. During summer, there is restricted access to water, so there is only water from 23:00 to 6:00 in the morning. When there is low water pressure, we must use a water pump, otherwise, we will not be able to get any water. As for the winter, we do not have water at all since the improvised pipes are frozen"* – explains the 37-year-old green agent.

Indeed, many of the Roma households were unable to practice social distancing due to overcrowding; residents shared that an average Roma family consists of five members and resides in a house of 35 m². During fieldwork, many residents complained about high rates of Covid-19 in their community, also admitting that a significant share of the community refused to be vaccinated due to "safety concerns" and "religious beliefs."

While most families receive welfare assistance, residents explained mounting hardships during the pandemic. With no or limited access to sanitary services, the lack of social benefits during the pandemic aggravated their already dismal living conditions. Despite being eligible for such assistance as families at social risk, half of Roma respondents reported being left out of state emergency relief packages during the pandemic. Residents claimed that while some received food vouchers from the national government, no assistance was provided by the Municipality of Bitola. While some families were not aware of available assistance or felt unable to navigate through the state bureaucracy, no help was provided in such cases. With little income and state relief, many Roma households could not afford food and took on debt during the months of pandemic lockdown:

*"As we were in a deep crisis during the pandemic, I used to earn 500 MKD (8 EUR) daily, and there are ten of us in the family. It was not possible for us to have enough food for all of us. I had to enter into debt to survive"* – explains the 32-year-old green agent.

With high unemployment, respondents stated that the majority of Roma in the community engage in the informal economy, for instance in waste collection. One example of waste collection is in the recuperation of metals, to extract metallic and metal-bearing wastes such as copper (most profitable), iron and aluminium, wires are burnt – a hazardous practice for the health and the environment. Indeed, Roma complained about the massive air pollution resulting from wire burning and illegal landfills in the vicinity of their houses. Conversations regarding waste embodied the paradox of relying on garbage to make ends meet, while also recognising waste as a source of health and environmental hazard for the entire community. Attempts to limit access to waste, which became more common during the pandemic, jeopardised green agents' survival strategies:

*"During the pandemic, police officers used to fine us for crossing streets with our carts and were instructing us not to collect bottles from the streets"* – explains the 32-year-old green agent.

In addition, discrimination against green agents also increased during the pandemic, as described by one resident, 60-year-old green agent, recounted:

*"I remember once I was collecting bottles from a street, and a non-Roma woman approached me and asked why I forgot to collect one bottle. She suggested that if the bottle was in her house, I would come inside and most certainly steal other*

*things from her house. The non-Roma in Bitola perceive us, waste collectors, as thieves."*

# Municipality of Shuto Orizari



*Image 5: Accumulated waste in Shuto Orizari. Photo by Mustafa Asanovski (June, 2022)*

Over 11,000 Roma people live in the city municipality of Shuto Orizari. During fieldwork, approximately 100 households were identified as particularly important. These households are spread, largely, across two parallel narrow and unpaved streets, one of which is in a dire condition.

The neighbourhood is not part of the formal city planning of Shuto Orizari and is hidden from the public eye. These are improvised homes, constructed from various materials such as cardboard, plastic, and wood. Several Roma residents claimed they had no access to water, while others complained about extremely low water pressure which is even more concerning during the summer months. Electricity is sporadically available in some households, while other residents explained that those who pay for electricity have access to it. The neighbourhood is exposed to flooding due to unpaved roads without drainage systems that become muddy as water builds up.

The neighbourhood also lacks a sewage system, which leads to sewage and wastewater passing through open channels in the streets. The residents shared that they were promised a sewage system by politicians before the October 2021 local elections, yet at the time of fieldwork, no formal plans have been announced. Consequently, the toilets in the neighbourhood consist of structures of improvised wooden sheets installed directly over the open sewage. During heavy rain, the open sewage overflows and houses are flooded with water containing waste, contributing to infectious bacteria and disease. Residents reported that there are cases of severe respiratory illnesses, skin rashes, tuberculosis, and lung disease in the community. Others complained of pests such as rats and mice.

The most critical issue for the community is inadequate waste management. Residents lamented irregular waste removal and the lack of garbage containers; some claimed they pay for this public service out-of-pocket. In addition, the land near the community is used as a waste dump, presenting a health hazard, especially for children. Due to the large concentration of waste in the location, nearly all the Roma residents make ends meet by collecting and separating waste. Some Roma residents stated that they benefited from the state emergency Covid-19 packages in the form of food vouchers. Many did not receive state assistance because they lack official identification documents (based on one informant's observation, on average out of a family of 10 members, approximately 3 members may have identification documents):

*"I was not even aware that the state offered any assistance to us, I did not get any of it. I guess I was excluded since I am not the recipient of social welfare assistance. I need a personal identification document to be able to register for social assistance"*

– explains the 42-year-old green agent.

Apart from minor assistance, such as the Municipality of Shuto Orizari's efforts to distribute hygienic packages to the residents during the lockdown, the community relied on the local mosque and a few individuals who on occasion distributed food packages. Considering that waste constitutes a significant part of the residents' income, when access to waste was limited during the pandemic by police cordoning off the neighbourhood, it caused a serious burden for the Roma green agents, who experienced a deterioration of their already dire living standards. Making access to waste illegal, coupled with discrimination against Roma, at times led to violence and abuse; in one instance, two minors from the community were breaking lockdown rules by collecting bottles and were caught by police officers who physically harmed them and charged them with theft.
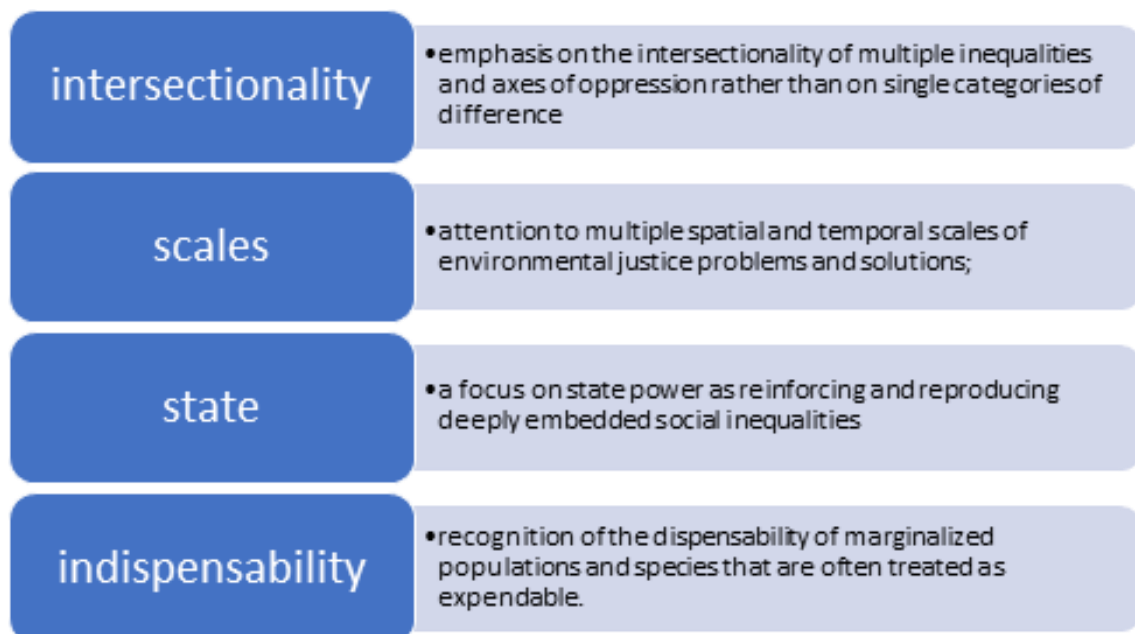
# Critical Environmental Justice, Slow Violence and Gender

## Critical Environmental Justice

This report is informed by critical environmental justice research. Critical environmental justice [advocates](#) that ecological violence[13] must be seen as a form of social violence, driven by social structures and discourses. As a framework, it builds on environmental justice, but embraces greater interdisciplinarity (Pellow, 2018). Critical environmental justice is a particularly instructive perspective for its sensitivity to multiple forms of inequality and their intersections, highlighting the multidimensionality of discrimination and marginalisation. In other words, spatial or the physical separation of groups[14], and material marginalisation, as well as political exclusion and forms of racism are all factors contributing to how environmental burdens are distributed. The four pillars of critical environmental justice are presented below.

*Figure 2: Pillars of critical environmental justice*



**intersectionality**
- emphasis on the intersectionality of multiple inequalities and axes of oppression rather than on single categories of difference

**scales**
- attention to multiple spatial and temporal scales of environmental justice problems and solutions;

**state**
- a focus on state power as reinforcing and reproducing deeply embedded social inequalities

**indispensability**
- recognition of the dispensability of marginalized populations and species that are often treated as expendable.

**Source:** Pellow (2018)

The case studies described above illustrate well the symbolic and economic role of waste for Roma. Living in constant material deprivation, many Roma in the reviewed communities must rely on waste to make ends meet. In most case studies, Roma residents were concerned about their inability to access garbage, which was a particularly acute issue under lockdown during the pandemic. Indeed, waste collection is an important source of income for many green agents, and for some, it is the only source. Multiple studies revealed the dangers and negative consequences of penalising informal waste pickers by creating barriers to their access to waste and offered arguments for respecting the rights of green agents to access waste (Dias, 2016). Globally, such barriers can range from bulldozing the waste before the green agents can reach it, to local authorities, security guards or municipal workers preventing green agents from accessing landfill sites (Schenck, Blaauw, & Viljoen, 2016). In wealthier urban areas, capital-intensive methods of mechanisation of waste processing also threaten green agents' livelihoods (Marello & Helwege, 2018).

A field survey conducted by the Roma Entrepreneurship Development Initiative (REDI), interviewing 512 green agents in 15 cities[15] – the most systematic inquiry to date of this group – revealed that waste collecting work is the main source of income for 33% of respondents (REDI, 2023). This finding suggests that the inability to access waste, with no additional forms of income provided, would threaten the livelihood of one-third of surveyed green agents. Meanwhile, green agents contribute immensely to economic circularity globally (for example, collecting and recovering 60% of plastics, which prevents plastic from contaminating the environment and preventing marine waste pollution). In North Macedonia, the 2023 report by REDI concludes that "waste collectors are the most important stakeholders in the Macedonian packaging waste recycling value chain" (p. 82).

But the effects of green agents on the environment are not so clear-cut. Academic studies warn that although green agents contribute to recycling and circularity of the economy, nevertheless the recycling techniques often used not only pose serious health risks, but also exacerbate environmental pollution, especially of air, soil and water (Yang, Ma, Thompson, & Flower, 2018). What is beyond doubt is that green agents themselves face disproportionate risk factors, hazards, and during the collection and separation of recyclables (Gutberlet & Uddin, 2017). In a similar vein, the World Health Organization highlights that:

*"While informal waste management activities can provide income and support the livelihoods of families and local communities, the price in terms of direct health impact for those involved is likely to be very high."*

The abandonment and discrimination of these communities powerfully come through each case study. For instance, attempts to provide better housing in each case were met either with resistance from the majority society or not realised due to the politicians' reluctance to deliver on their promise. Moreover, harassment fuelled by discrimination, over-policing of Roma and under-policing of anti-Roma crimes were experiences most informants shared—manifested in unpunished arson in Shtip, police fines for violating curfew in Petocna Voda Roma Community to intimidate the Roma community, police cordoning off entire Roma neighbourhood, and simply the insecurity of relying on police tolerating waste pickers during curfew hours in Teneke Mahala. The European Roma Rights Centre, in a report entitled "Roma Rights in the Times of COVID" listed further cases of police brutality against Roma in Bitola during the pandemic.

If the police are *"one of the most visible reminders of a State's coercive power*," then police misconduct can be seen as the state's negligence in assuring that the rights of Roma are respected. The state also neglects Roma communities by selectively not fulfilling elementary obligations towards their citizens, such as providing access to basic services and a clean environment or providing waste removal many informants raised as issues. A comparative analysis of waste management in Roma neighbourhoods in four European countries revealed that "neoliberal[1] governance[2] [strongly] bounds Roma people to garbage – practically and symbolically" by associating Roma with waste and relegating their living spaces to and near landfills (Dunajeva & Kostka, 2021). Case studies in this report also showed that Roma were often associated with criminality and treated as a threat to public security, and hence undeserving (Yang, Ma, Thompson, & Flower, 2018)(Gutberlet & Uddin, 2017).

# Slow Violence

Violence can come in many forms. Violence is often understood as its most visceral expression which is often related to physical violence such as murder or aggravated assault. It is often thought of as war crimes or even alcohol-fueled violence. This is understood as fast violence. However, social scientists such as Rob Nixon have introduced the concept of 'slow violence', defined as "violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all" (2011, p. 2), it is evident that the environmental pollution and health hazards as a result of the waste collection are a form of slow violence that marginalized communities, like the Roma, must endure to engage in waste recycling for survival.
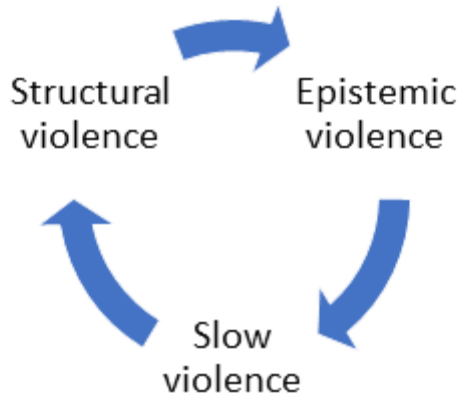


*Figure 3: Diagram showing the cyclical links between structural, slow, and epistemic violence in contested polluted landscapes (Davies, 2019).*

A further expansion of the concept of slow violence makes the claim that slow violence only occurs out of sight to the general population, meaning in this case non-Roma, but it does not occur out of sight to those Roma affected communities, it is just that their account matters little in policy making. Asking the central question, 'out of sight to whom?' we can begin "*to take more seriously the knowledge claims of communities who inhabit toxic spaces, and we can…unravel the political structures that sustain the uneven geographies of pollution*" (Davies 2019). Thom Davies views slow violence as a

---

[1] By neoliberalism, we refer to the political approach that favours free-market capitalism, deregulation, and reduction in government spending.
[2] Others have made a link between slow violence (discussed later in this report) and neoliberalism (Nixon, 2011, p. 59).

cyclical phenomenon that generates "epistemic violence"[18], meaning whose knowledge and accounts matter in policymaking, which ultimately leads to structural violence, where fast violence (the more traditional interpretation of violence) is mainly seen. Davies argues that:

**"Slow violence does not persist due to a lack of arresting stories about pollution, but because these stories do not count [epistemic], thus rendering certain populations and geographies vulnerable to sacrifice"** (ibid.; see Image 5).

Davies' introduction of epistemic violence relates to the concept of dispensability as suggested by Pellow.

By looking at environmental injustice as a form of slow violence, the Roma green agents in the Petocna Voda Roma Community burn wires to extract metal-bearing wastes – a practice that is particularly risky to the health of the exposed population (Cesaro, et al., 2019, p. 11042) – are indeed victims of slow violence. Metal (iron, aluminium and electrical waste) is the primary type of waste collected for 39.8% of surveyed waste-pickers in North Macedonia, only exceeded by plastic with 43.2% (REDI, 2023). It is a common practice among poor Roma in other countries as well, such as Romania, who illegally set fire to whatever items contain metal in order to survive. The environmental and health hazards of these practices may include chronic nausea, debilitating headaches, back problems, open wounds becoming infected but with more serious problems such as respiratory health issues from toxic fumes.

This tension between waste constituting a source of sustenance and at the same time, a major environmental concern has been perplexing for journalists as well. For example, a recent article in the *Balkan Insight* about Roma residents of Romania's Bair neighbourhood called it a "contradiction" that the biggest environmental concerns "*come from the illegal landfills and the air pollution that is caused by the burning of cables*" while the residents "*perceive their environments as being polluted from their means to have a livelihood and therefore an income.*" This is not a "contradiction" but rather an everyday reality of Roma impoverished green agents, whose existential needs depend on accessing recycles in garbage dumps, often without being able to consider the environmental and health impact of their activities. This is why slow violence aptly captures this form of abuse of abandoning entire communities in piles of waste to make ends meet on their own. Waste then becomes the only source of survival, even despite the immense environmental and health costs—these are not immediate consequences but should be seen as slow-onsetting contamination and attritional injury, which are core to slow environmental violence (Rice, 2016).

What is particularly concerning is when slow violence meets systemic and structural racism, as in the case of Roma. Enduring poverty and discrimination, Roma are treated not only as perennial outsiders to European societies, but they are blamed for society's ills, *and* for their own. Associating Roma people with waste has become all too common, with politicians openly blaming Roma for their "dirty ways of life," depicting Roma communities as "itinerant dumps" and referring to them as "epidemiological hazard" (Dunajeva & Kostka, 2021). This practice of blaming the victim, while discursively equating Roma with waste is a particularly dangerous vicious circle that leads to a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The deeply entrenched culture of blame that is pervasive, especially in Central and East European societies, thus uses the visuality of waste in association with Roma, alluding that the lives of Roma are less valuable and, in fact, superfluous. In this framing, "*superfluous life can lead us to imagine that there really are disposable people*" (Denning, 2016). Expendability is another aspect that critical

environmental justice underlines as an unexamined question that deserves more attention (Pellow, 2018). "Superfluous" people tend to be geographically excluded as well; each community discussed in this report was situated remotely, far from non-Roma neighbourhoods, carefully hidden from public scrutiny, rendered invisible and, in a symbolic way, uncoupled from the idea of belonging to the society.

# Gender

This report showed that green agents face various forms of oppression and invisibilities, tied to their low socio-economic status, waste-picking practices and ethnic identities. An under-explored aspect of vulnerability among green agents is gender, for example how women are particularly affected in terms of health, inclusion, and empowerment. Though the topic of gender and Roma women green agents is rather understudied, scholarship on Latin American and African women green agents demonstrated that indeed women face intersectional oppressions (e.g., Dias, and Ogando, 2015). A collaborative Gender & Waste project involving Latin American green agents has shed light on the multiple levels of discrimination that women green agents face. Namely, the project revealed that women had less access to recyclables with high value and enjoyed less respect than their male counterparts. Moreover, when informal waste-picking practices were formalised, women had less opportunities to take on leadership positions and participate in decision making, in part due to other obligations they had at home (Ogando, Roever & Rogan, 2017). In addition, women green agents tend to be exposed to greater health while handling waste (Dias & Fernandez, 2013).

In the case of North Macedonia, waste picking is largely considered to be a man's job due to the physical nature of picking, lifting and transporting cardboard, plastic and electronic waste materials from landfills. However, women still partake in these activities, but they do tend to earn considerably less than men and also because on average, women collect half the amount of recyclable materials than men. There are many reasons for this, such as women having to tend to the household and due to women having to take care of children and children often accompany them during the waste-picking activities which reduce their ability to collect compared to the men (Sapuric, et al.,2018).

For policies to be truly inclusive, a gender analysis needs to be considered when developing these policies towards the informal waste-picking sector. For more gender-specific policy recommendations, see (REDI, 2023).

# Policy Implications

Green recovery is a top policy priority for North Macedonia, and the country is already making its development greener with an emphasis on just transition and energy transition. Furthermore, the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans provides the policy framework for improving environmental quality regulations and committing the region to a circular economy, achieved through recycling and waste management. The Green Agenda does not mention Roma but references the transition to climate-neutrality as "socially just and inclusive" (p. 3) and requires an establishment of an environmental governance framework with "access to justice in environmental matters" (p. 16). The description of the green transition in general and the circular economy, particularly in the Green Agenda, does not pay adequate attention to the role of informal recycling and the marginalisation of

Roma green agents. This is even though a significant share of recycling is currently undertaken by the informal sector in the country (REDI, 2023). Instead, greening and circularity are discussed in predominantly technical terms, identifying goals, standards and milestones. What is missing is an explicit recognition of disproportionate environmental burden and forms of environmental injustice, which may be exacerbated during the transition, if other measures are not provided.

It is important to return to the concept of indispensability, earlier presented as one of the pillars of environmental justice and defined as the treatment of marginalised populations as expendable (Pellow, 2018). In other contexts, it is called "racial expendability" (Márquez, 2013) implying that some, usually racialised, groups are undervalued and deemed as insignificant or redundant. Redundancy, in turn, is semantically related to garbage, and people declared as "redundant" are discussed as a problem, a nuisance or even annoyance (Bauman, 2004). In this case, Roma green agents are framed in these terms, not only do their efforts in recycling go unacknowledged but they are treated as fundamentally disruptive to the society and the economy. Eirik Seathre, in his vivid account of Roma and Ashkali scavengers in Serbia, writes:

*"Scavengers were the antithesis of customers because they took items without making payment…and Ashkali [scavengers] were transformed into thieves… [Scavenging] resurrected abject commodities, complicated notions of public and private property, and blurred the line between worth and worthlessness."* (Saethre, 2020, pp. 100-103)

To contrast this view, Seathre repeatedly states that Roma themselves considered scavenging as honest work. Overall, accession to the EU is a significant motivation for North Macedonian policy-making, especially in the environmental sector. Considering the [advancements](#) in the EU accession process for North Macedonia, it is then worth asking whether North Macedonia will benefit from EU accession in terms of buttressing its environmental justice policy. In the European Union, environmental policy has noticeably enjoyed a priority in recent years, with the recognition of the urgency of the matter. Policy analysis performed by critical scholars, however, warns that Europe still lags behind in acknowledging and addressing environmental inequalities (Petric, 2019). With an increase in scholarly interest, cases of environmental injustice in Europe will become even more apparent requiring an urgent need to address the matter, where "the most horrific examples of environmental injustice" recorded were committed against Roma people (Petric, 2019, p. 225).

Overall, accession to the EU is a significant motivation for North Macedonian policymaking, especially in the environmental sector. Considering the [advancements](#) in the EU accession process for North Macedonia, it is then worth asking whether North Macedonia will benefit from EU accession in terms of buttressing its environmental justice policy. In the European Union, environmental policy has noticeably enjoyed a priority in recent years, with the recognition of the urgency of the matter. Policy analysis performed by critical scholars, however, warns that Europe still lags in acknowledging and addressing environmental inequalities (Petric, 2019). With an increase in scholarly interest, cases of environmental injustice in Europe will become even more apparent requiring an urgent need to address the matter, where "the most horrific examples of environmental injustice" recorded were committed against Roma people (Petric, 2019, p. 225).

On the one hand, there is a growing recognition at the level of the EU regarding environmental risks being distributed disproportionately, addressed through some policies. For instance, the European Commission's [Climate Action](#) states that "unemployed and socially marginalised people are among the most vulnerable to climate risks". Under [Action 06 – EU for Green Economy](#) (Annual Action Plan

in favour of North Macedonia for 2021), there is a goal to "decrease the marginalisation and provide a development perspective for Roma people, as well as other vulnerable categories." On the other hand, critics of EU-wide regional policy suggest that within Europe, there is a structural divide resulting in the division of "core" and "periphery"—these power dynamics are responsible for uneven distribution of policy outcomes, benefitting more developed countries at the expense of poor ones (Kukovec, 2015).

With that, disproportionate burdens of environmental pollution are borne by the poorest and most marginalised countries and populations, due to underlying inequalities of power globally, regionally and locally (London, Joshi, Cairncross, Gilmore, & Claudio, 2019). For instance, the European Union exports a significant amount of waste to poorer countries, essentially shipping the EU's pollution abroad, with that aggravating environmental injustices. Although organisations such as Zero Waste Europe are fighting injustices of the waste trade, current practices are an indication that despite a growing understanding of environmental justice, policies change slowly.

In addition to recognising environmental injustice in policy approaches, tackling slow violence is another particularly challenging endeavour—academics have only recently begun understanding the relevance of slow violence for environmental justice, while policymakers are yet to recognize and act on forms of injustice that "do not display themselves in spectacular moments of terror as a single event, but instead quietly accumulate and defer their damage over time" (Davies T. , 2022, p. 410). Indeed, the most significant criticism of scholarship analysing forms of slow environmental violence is the inattention policymakers have paid to the attritional lethality of environmental crises and certain (economic) practices. The invisibility of slow violence by policymakers may be due to the graduality of contamination and hazards, ambiguity of boundaries of impact, and expansive scale of slow environmental violence (Rice, 2016).

As a result, an explicit and comprehensive policy approach towards green agents is largely missing. Though, a noteworthy policy initiative in North Macedonia is the 2018-2020 Strategy for Formalisation of the Informal Economy, aimed at the legalisation of work in the informal economy and addressing the issue of undocumented people, to which the pandemic has served as an additional impetus as entire groups of people engaged in informal economy were excluded from assistance, as demonstrated by some accounts in the case studies. This initiative, however, falls short of recognising environmental and other forms of injustice. Environmental justice then remains largely unaddressed, and as Rob Nixon aptly put it, the "evasive politics of deferral in matters of environmental injury, remediation, and redress" has resulted in virtually no local, national or supra-national entity taking responsibility and addressing issues of environmental justice. (Nixon, 2011, p. 46).

In a similar vein, Dunajeva and Kostka advance an equivalent argument in their article "Racialized politics of garbage", analysing disproportionate exposure to adverse environmental conditions of Roma. The authors suggest that top-down frameworks (state, municipality, or the EU) "*had little effect in reality, given that their implementation was either inefficient or completely ignored*" (Dunajeva & Kostka, 2021, p. 17). The authors conclude that policy approaches concerning the environment and waste must be re-considered and re-formulated, incorporating the perspective of justice, and not only sustainability. In addition, the implementation of these policies must be better monitored and enforced, so that policies do not remain just "window dressing."

With a growing number of studies that provide robust evidence for environmental inequality, there is a need for more cooperation, partnership and cross-fertilisation between academia, civil society and policy-making. Over a decade ago, scholars and civil society already emphasised the importance of

addressing the intersection of environmental inequalities and social exclusion, as well as developing an appropriate approach to the dual problem of discrimination and environmental racism regarding Roma in Central and Eastern Europe (most notably Harper, Steger, & Filčák, 2009 and Varga, Kiss, & Ember, 2002). Most recently, green and pro-Roma organisations have begun collecting first-hand data and examining forms of environmental justice that Roma face (e.g., Josifovski, 2023, and EEB's reports authored by Heidegger & Wiese, 2020 and Meynen & Marin, 2022). Yet there is still limited echoing of these findings in the realm of policy-making.

It is worthwhile to learn from the experience of green agents in non-European regions. Due to their key role in the chain of recycling and knowledge of recycling practices, in some countries, most notably in Latin America, the vulnerability of green agents is being mitigated by their gradual inclusion in municipal waste management plans and services (with Brazil as the forerunner of this practice). Green agents are invited to teach about proper waste recycling; most recently, green agents contributed during negotiations designing a global treaty to curb plastic pollution. In Europe, there is virtually no collective voice of Roma green agents and no systematic recognition of their contribution to local economies and environmental sustainability, let alone an attempt to address the challenges they face while sorting waste. An innovative initiative by REDI aims to collectivise Roma waste pickers in Skopje, developing a business model to assure ownership of the business. Due to the innovative and rather recent initiative, results are yet to be seen to which level business initiatives such as REDI will be able to create inclusive circular economy practices as well as working towards recognising environmental injustices occurring within Roma informal waste picker communities.

With this report, we urge an Environmental Justice framework to inform policy priorities to advance the health of marginalised minority groups and poor communities, while also promoting environmental sustainability and social justice. We also urge against maintaining a selective policy discourse of environmental sustainability and recognising the burdens and vulnerabilities of marginalized communities.

# Bibliography

Akhter, S. (2022). Key Informants' Interviews. In M. Islam, N. Khan, & R. Baikady, *Principles of Social Research Methodology.* Singapore: Springer.

Carenzo, S. (2017). Invisibilized Creativity: Sociogenesis of an 'Innovation' Process Developed by Cartoneros for Post-Consumption Waste Recycling. *International Journal of Engineering, Social Justice, and Peace , 5*(1), 30–49.

Cesaro, A., Belgiorno, V., Gorrasi, G., Viscusi, G., Vaccari, M., Vinti, G., . . . Salhofer, S. (2019). A relative risk assessment of the open burning of WEEE. *Environmental Science and Pollution Research, 26*(11), 11042-11052.

Cole, H. V., Anguelovski, I., Baró, F., García-Lamarca, M., Kotsila, P., Pérez del Pulgar, C., . . . Triguero-Mas, M. (2021). The COVID-19 pandemic: power and privilege, gentrification, and urban environmental justice in the global north. *Cities & Health, 5*(1), 71-75.

Corona, B., Shen, L., Reike, D., Carreón, J. R., & Worrel, E. (2019). Towards sustainable development through the circular economy—A review and critical assessment on current circularity metrics. *Resources, Conservation and Recycling, 151*.

Davies, T. (2022). Slow violence and toxic geographies: 'Out of sight' to whom? *Politics and Space, 40*(2), 409–427.

Davies, T. (2022). Slow violence and toxic geographies: 'Out of sight' to whom? *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space, 40*(2), 409–427.

Dias, S. M., & Ogando, A. C. (2015) Rethinking Gender and Waste: Exploratory Findings from Participatory Action Research in Brazil. Work Organisation, Labour & Globalisation, 9(2), 51–63.

Dias, S. and Fernandez, L. (2013), "Waste pickers – a gendered perspective", in Blerta, C., Dankelman, I. and Stern, J. (Eds), Powerful Synergies: Gender Equality, Economic Development and Environmental Sustainability, United Nations Development Programme, Geneva, pp. 153-157.

de Oliveira, Í. A. (2021). Environmental Justice and Circular Economy: Analyzing Justice for Waste Pickers in Upcoming Circular Economy in Fortaleza, Brazil. *Circular Economy and Sustainability volume, 1*, 815–834.

Denning, M. (2016). Wageless Life. In A. Eckert, *Global Histories of Work* (pp. 273–90). Berlin: De Gruyter.

Donev, D., Cicevalieva, S., Kosevska, E., & Kendrovski, V. (2012). Strategy and Decade for Roma Inclusion in the Republic ofMacedonia 2005-2015. *13th World Congress on Public Health* , Addis Ababa: Ethiopia.

Dunajeva, J., & Kostka, J. (2021). Racialized politics of garbage: waste management in urban Roma settlements in Eastern Europe. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*.

Fischer, D. (2013). Johan Galtung, the Father of Peace Studies. In J. Galtung, & D. Fischer, *Johan Galtung: Pioneer of Peace Research (Vol. 5).* New York: Springer.

Gutberlet, J., & Uddin, S. M. (2017). Household waste and health risks affecting waste pickers and the environment in low- and middle-income countries. *International Journal of Occupational Environmental Health, 23*(4), 299-310.

Harper, K., Steger, T., & Filčák, R. (2009). Environmental Justice and Roma Communities in Central and Eastern Europe. *Environmental Policy and Governance*(5).

Heidegger, P., & Wiese, K. (2020). *Pushed to the wastelands: Environmental racism against Roma communities in Central and Eastern Europe.* Brussels: European Environmental Bureau.

Issah, I., Arko-Mensah, J., Agyekum, T. P., Dwomoh, D., & Fobil, J. N. (2022). Health Risks Associated with Informal ElectronicWaste Recycling in Africa: A Systematic Review. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*(19), 14278.

Josifovski, B (Roma Entrepreneurship Development Initiative). (2023). *Informal waste collectors in North Macedonia: perspectives, constraints and opportunities.*

Kool, R. (2019). Violence, environmental violence, and pro-environmental action. *Clearing: Journal of Environmental Education in the Cascadian Bioregion*, https://clearingmagazine.org/archives/15219.

Kukovec, D. (2015). Law and the Periphery. *European Law Journal, 21*(3).

London, L., Joshi, E., Cairncross, E., Gilmore, G., & Claudio, L. (2019). Environmental Justice: An International Perspective. In J. Nriagu, *Encyclopedia of Environmental Health* (pp. 553-560). Elsevier.

Meynen, N., & Marin, D. (2022). *Why Energy Justice: Towards a New Economic and Energy Framework in Europe.* Brussels: European Environmental Bureau.

Mohai, P., Pellow, D., & Roberts, J. T. (2009). Environmental Justice . *Annual Review of Environment and Resources, 34*(1), 405-430.

Nixon, R. (2011). *Slow violence and the environmentalism of the poor.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Ogando, A.C., Roever, S. and Rogan, M. (2017), Gender and informal livelihoods: Coping strategies and perceptions of waste pickers in Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America, International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy, 37 (7/8), p. 435-451.

Pellow, D. N. (2018). *What is Critical Environmental Justice?* Cambridge: Polity Press.

Petric, D. (2019). Environmental Justice in the European Union: A Critical Reassessment. *Croatian Yearbook of European Law & Policy, 15*, 215-268.

Rice, J. (2016). Slow Violence and the Challenges of Environmental Inequality . *Environmental Justice, 9*(6), 176-180.

Saethre, E. (2020). *Wastelands Recycled Commodities and the Perpetual Displacement of Ashkali and Romani Scavengers.* Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Sapuric, Z., Shkrijelj, S. and Josifovski, B., (2018), "Informal sector inclusion in the sustainable waste management system as an opportunity for employment and social inclusion of vulnerable groups", Finance Think Policy Studies, Finance Think - Economic Research and Policy Institute.

Varga, C., Kiss, I., & Ember, I. (2002). Environmental Health Perspectives. *'The Lack of Environmental Justice in Central and Eastern Europe, 110*(11).

Weslynne, S. A., Fratini, C. F., Isenhour, C., & Krueger, R. (2022). Justice, equity, and the circular economy: introduction to the special double issue. *Local Environment, 27*(10-11), 1173-1181.

Yang, H., Ma, M., Thompson, J. R., & Flower, R. J. (2018). Waste Management, Informal Recycling, Environmental Pollution and Public Health. *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health, 72*(3), 237–43.