



EEB

European
Environmental
Bureau

Photo credits: tranzit.ro

Conference Report

1st Roma Environmental Justice
Conference: Leveraging the EU Roma
Strategic Framework



Conference Report

1st Roma Environmental Justice Conference: Leveraging the EU Roma Strategic Framework

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.

The EEB is an International non-profit association /
Association internationale sans but lucratif (AISBL).
EC register for interest representatives:
Identification number 06798511314-27
BCE identification number: 0415.814.848
RPM Tribunal de l'entreprise francophone de Bruxelles

Published December 2023
Responsible editor: Ruby Silk

European Environmental Bureau (EEB)
Rue des Deux Eglises 14-16
1000 Brussels, Belgium
+32 (0)2 289 1090
eeb@eeb.org
eeb.org
meta.eeb.org



With the support of the LIFE Programme of
the European Union

*This publication reflects the authors' views
and does not commit the donors.*

Contents

Agenda Overview	4
October 11 – Workshop Day	5
Introduction to the concept of Antigypsyism	7
Introduction to Environmental Justice and Environmental Racism.....	7
The interconnections between health, racism and the environment.....	8
Discussions Session and the Basic Common Principles for the Environmental Justice.....	8
Conclusions.....	9
October 12 – Conference proceedings – Panel Sessions	10
Session 1: Political messages from EU and national policymakers	10
Session 2: Environmental Justice and Common Basic Principles.....	13
Session 3: What should local and national governments do to improve environmental justice (housing, access to services, etc.)?	14
Session 4: Environmental racism and EU policies: EU Roma Strategic Framework and the European Green Deal	17
Session 5: The role of municipalities - What are cities doing to ensure environmental justice for Roma communities?	18
Conclusions and Recommendations.....	20
October 13 – Site visit to Roma community Pata Rat.....	22

Agenda Overview

All over Europe, Roma communities are grappling with unsafe and segregated living conditions that are the result of the multiple dimensions of antigypsyism. These communities routinely face exclusion from essential environmental services, including access to clean drinking water, proper sanitation, and effective waste management. The adverse effects of environmental challenges, such as pollution and degradation stemming from waste dumps, landfills, contaminated sites, and polluting industries, which disproportionately impact their health, education, and overall well-being, can be understood as environmental racism.

A striking example is Pata-Rât, Europe's largest waste-related enclave, located in Cluj-Napoca, Romania's fourth-largest city. Here, Roma live across four different informal settlements - Dallas, Garbage Dump, Cantonului and Coastei street - around the Pata Rât landfill, situated six kilometres away from the city centre, each with its distinct history of discrimination and environmental exposure.

The last eviction was in December 2010, where around 76 Roma families were forcefully displaced from Coastei Streets. Now, approximately 1,500 individuals, predominantly Roma, inhabit four distinct informal settlements surrounding the Pata-Rât landfill. The landfill is situated just a few kilometres away from the city centre. The condition from the landfill not only contaminates the soil and groundwater but also gives rise to a myriad of health issues among residents.

The significance of environmental justice is on the rise in the European Union, as underscored by the newly adopted EU Roma Strategic Framework in October 2020. This framework acknowledges environmental justice as a pressing area for intervention, marking a notable milestone as the first major EU policy document to address this issue.

This three-day event held at the Faculty of Environmental Science and Engineering, Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca, was orchestrated with three primary objectives: firstly, to enhance understanding of environmental justice among various civil society actors, including NGOs and academia, during a workshop day; secondly, to advocate for the prominence of environmental justice within the political sphere during the main event; and thirdly, to highlight Pata Rat's central role as a focal point for initiatives combating environmental racism, underscoring the city's crucial significance in the broader struggle for environmental justice across the Conference.

October 11 – Workshop Day

Location: Faculty of Environmental Science and Engineering, Strada Fântânele 30, Cluj-Napoca.

Attendees: Local Roma and non-Roma organisations, partners, local civil society organisations, journalists, and academics.

Organisations: ERGO, EEB, Ecoteca, Zero Waste Europe, Desire Foundation, Roma Coastei Association, Roma Youth Civil Organisation, Interethnic Association from Dumitrița, EPHA, Bankwatch, Ergo network/Nevo Parudimos, Center of the social science, Reseacher Pata Rat (Vasile Galbea), Center for Integrative Inclusion of Roma Otaharin, Foundation for Children, Community and Family Cluj, Independent Researcher (Georgios Tsiakalos), Minority Rights Group Europe, Journalists from Human Rights, Rota – UK, Amrita Association Hungary, Researcher Institute for Quality of life (Catalin Berescu), Friends of the Earth Hungary, CEU University.



Agenda

- Getting to know each other
- Round of introductions – name and organisation
- Short presentation by Diego Marin (EEB) - *Why we are here?*
- *Intro to Antigypsyism* – Isabela Mihalache (ERGO Network)
- *Intro to Environmental Justice and Environmental Racism* – Lorena Doghi and Diego Marin (EEB) – [slides](#)
- Discussion and Co-creation of *Common Basic Principles of Environmental Justice*

Getting to know each other, round of introductions and why are we here?

This initial session served as a brief icebreaker, offering a chance for participants to acquaint themselves with one another and providing an overview of the day's agenda and also to outline the anticipated outcomes, including the co-creation of the common basic principles for environmental justice. Diego took the opportunity to explain the EEB's commitment to promoting environmental justice, articulating the timeliness and significance of open discussions on this topic. The session aimed to underscore the importance of delving into the subject three years after the inclusion of environmental justice as an important topic within the EU Roma Strategic Framework.



Introduction to the concept of Antigypsyism

By Isabela Mihalache, Senior Advocacy Officer at ERGO Network - [See slides](#)

The presentation by Isabela delves into the multifaceted issue of antigypsyism, emphasizing its systemic nature and historical roots. It highlights that antigypsyism is not solely a minority issue but a problem within majority societies, with high levels of social acceptance and legitimacy. The presentation stresses the need to recognize and address the historical dimensions of antigypsyism, fight discrimination and hate speech, and promote access to justice for victims. It also outlines recommendations for combating antigypsyism within National Roma Strategic Frameworks, emphasizing the importance of recognizing its existence, improving institutional frameworks, and supporting victims while also enabling free movement and strengthening Roma leadership and empowerment. The presentation concludes by providing contact information for further engagement with ERGO Network and related initiatives such as the Guidelines within the EU Roma Framework to fighting antigypsyism.



Introduction to Environmental Justice and Environmental Racism

By Lorena Doghi, Assistant for Environmental Justice and Roma Rights and Diego Marin, Policy Officer for Environmental Justice (EEB) - [See slides](#)

Diego and Lorena gave a presentation introducing environmental justice and environmental racism, emphasizing the need for analysis at multiple levels, including considerations of fairness,

underlying factors such as economic and social influences, and the impact on the environment and communities, as well as the history of the movement. It highlights the importance of gathering data and conducting research to understand the effects of increasing climate change and environmental pressures on marginalized communities, particularly the Roma communities, and the topic of slow violence which is a gradual, often imperceptible forms of harm and environmental degradation that unfolds over time, impacting communities and ecosystems. Unlike sudden, dramatic events, slow violence encompasses prolonged processes such as pollution, climate change, and systemic inequalities, which erode well-being and justice incrementally. The presentation was concluded by Lorena, who explained the concept within a visual graph that helps to illustrate the connection between these complex topics.

The interconnections between health, racism and the environment

By Tomas De Jong, Policy Officer for Health Equity, EPHA – [See slides](#)

Tomas discussed the intersection of public health, environmental justice, and the impacts on Roma communities, emphasizing the wide-ranging effects of environmental injustice on the Roma population, including lack of infrastructure, proximity to landfills and industry, stagnant water, pollution, high unemployment, low education, and difficulties accessing the National Health System. Tomas also presented a 2022 EPHA report on [health and housing](#), indicating the findings from the report and case studies from Greece, Hungary and North Macedonia. Tomas also showed how Member States score on these two core pillars of environmental justice and highlights that though environmental justice concepts related to health and housing are scattered within national strategies, environmental Justice is covered more extensively in southern and eastern parts of Europe.

Discussions Session and the Basic Common Principles for the Environmental Justice

– [See document](#)

Following the presentations, the discussion opened up, revealing participants' newfound interest in the concept of environmental justice, which was unfamiliar to many. Some expressed concerns about the potential dilution of focus on Roma rights within the environmental movement. Scepticism arose regarding the effectiveness of the environmental focus, with participants questioning whether it could contribute meaningfully given the historical challenges faced by Roma rights advocates. Issues of funding and expertise were raised, with some asserting that the environmental realm seemed distant and unfamiliar to their advocacy efforts.

Conversely, contrasting opinions emerged, with participants noting the potential benefits of an environmental focus. Some highlighted the financial resources flowing into EU environmental goals, suggesting that this could positively impact the overall movement. Job creation within the Roma

community was seen as a potential advantage. Additionally, some participants viewed the current mainstreaming of environmental concerns in the EU as an opportunity to capture attention for ongoing environmental injustices throughout Europe by framing Roma rights within an environmental justice lens.

Following the discussions, the audience were divided three separate working groups (online/onsite) together with a chosen person representing a draft of the Basic Common Principles for Roma Environmental Justice. The Principles are meant to serve as a starting point to highlight what environmental justice means for Roma communities. It was an exercise meant to be co-created with the civil society, academic and practitioners participants that attended the workshop.

For the exercise, the groups were separated and discussed what these common basic principles should look like. After the time for separate discussions, the groups came back into a plenary to summarize the groups' discussions and agreements or disagreements with some of the points as well as additional points to add. The common basic principles from the three groups were later consolidated and can now be seen here: [see document](#)

Conclusions

The discussions were lively and drove forward the knowledge of environmental justice, both from conceptual frameworks as well as case studies as well as the opportunity to exchange among various experts from academia, civil society and practitioners who were able to exchange on their understanding of environmental justice. Lastly, the common basic principles for environmental justice for Roma communities was a successful conclusion of the discussions and sets the tone for future work on environmental justice. Overall, it was agreed that this is the beginning of such discussions and for the movement to grow, many more future events will be organised as well as research on the ground to highlight environmental injustices in Europe.

October 12 – Conference proceedings – Panel Sessions

Session 1: Political messages from EU and national policymakers

The conference was a starting point in addressing environmental racism against Roma in EU Member States and Enlargement Countries as a priority policy concern under the national Roma strategic frameworks and specific national policies and measures regarding the environment, housing, health, employment, social protection, and education policies.

More specifically, the conference has proposed to achieve the following objectives:

- Raise awareness about Roma and environmental racism in EU Member States and Enlargement Countries, together with relevant stakeholders.
- Identify targeted policy measures to address environmental justice and antigypsyism issues in Pata-Rât, Cluj-Napoca as well as more broader policy measures applying to other European countries and situations.
- Facilitate networking and exchanges amongst civil society on Roma environmental issues.

The opening panel featured **Mr Nicolaj Ajtai** (Dean of the Faculty of Environmental Science and Engineering), **Ms. Patrizia Heidegger** (Director European Environmental Bureau), **Ms. Gabriela Hrabáňová**, Director, ERGO Network, **Mr. Dragoș Pîslaru MEP**, Romania / Renew Europe, Chair of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs, **Linda Greta Zsiga – Romani women activist** from Pata Rat, Cluj Napoca, **Peter Pollak** – Slovak Roma MP – Group of the European People's Party (on line video messages), **Claudia Kovacs** - Roma Rights activist



Diego Francesco Marin, (EEB), Diego moderated this session and he spoke about the importance of discussing environmental justice in Europe, particularly in Brussels, as it is an epicentre of laws that can influence environmental justices measures around the EU.

Mr. Nicolaj Ajtai, the Dean of Faculty of Environmental Science and Engineering Cluj Napoca, where the conference is being held in his welcoming messages provided an overview of the university and its focus on sustainable development and climate change, emphasizing the importance of social equity in sustainable development.

Ms. Patrizia Heidegger, Director, European Environmental Bureau (EEB) highlighted the disproportionate impact of pollution and environmental burdens on these communities and the potential for environmental policies to either help or further marginalize them. She expressed the hope that the conference would bring environmental and Roma rights organizations together to integrate an environmental lens into their work for the benefit of both the planet and the people they represent.

Ms. Gabriela Hrahaňová, Director, ERGO Network discussed their journey from a 2020 report, stressing the importance of addressing both environmental change and discrimination together. She highlighted the suffering of over 1,500 people in Pata Rat due to contamination and hoped the conference would raise awareness, urging authorities to provide solutions. She called for national strategic frameworks to address these issues and hoped the conference would inspire action on environmental justice and discrimination.

Mr. Dragoș Pîslaru MEP, Romania / Renew Europe, Chair of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs, MEP Pislaru underscored the intersection of two critical themes: environmental justice and the profound challenges faced by the Roma community in Europe. He emphasised the imperative of adopting a comprehensive approach to address the intertwined issues of environmental justice, discrimination, and antigypsyism, recognizing the collective effort required on a continental scale, he highlighted the pressing challenges posed by the twin transition (green and digital) and the vulnerability of Roma communities to environmental shifts

and the digital divide. He also stressed that the situation should not be confined to Roma communities alone but integrated into mainstream concerns, he emphasized the necessity for a progressive agenda and grassroots pressure to drive transformative change. He closed by calling for a decisive response from authorities at all levels, treating the situation as an emergency.

Linda Greta Zsiga, Romani women activist from Pata Rat, Cluj Napoca. Linda shared her experience of being forcibly evicted from Coastei Streets to the landfill site in Pata Rat. She emphasized that despite some organizational involvement, the situation in Pata Rat is far from entirely positive, with the community still residing in a polluted area comprising approximately 1,800 individuals, including 1,000 adults and 800 children. Linda underscored the urgent requirements for decent housing, advocating for the relocation of people from Pata Rât to improve living conditions and access to essential services. She particularly emphasized the critical need for enhanced access to education, which she considers of utmost importance for the community.

Peter Pollak, Slovak Roma MP (European People's Party Group) – [Video message](#)



MEP Pollak delivered a strong message about environmental racism disproportionately affecting Roma communities across various countries. He also called on members of the European Parliament to include addressing environmental racism against racialized minorities, including Roma, in their campaign agendas for the upcoming elections next year, highlighting it as a crucial opportunity to advance change in this regard.

Claudia Kovacs, Roma activists worked in Government bodies, Claudia was mentioning about the National plan for Roma in the National Strategy, which is very well described but not adopted

accordingly because the political decision makers don't assume fully these plans and at the national level there is not enough mechanism and implementation for this. Nobody wants to be involved in the justice process especially when it comes to Roma issue.

Petrica Dulgheru, co-founder and chairman of the Board for REDI NGO and REDI Fund REDI, focused on Pata Rat, and he mentioned how the city of Cluj Napoca the most develop and expensive living area from Romania. If the cost of living is expensive the houses are very expensive, and the condition of Roma to live in a good area is very limited. The solution is not to have earn a project for the Roma, but how we are implementing them as well as how Roma members can find adequate jobs and especially benefit from green jobs. Lastly, Petrica stressed, how Roma rights advocates can have increased collaboration with the local authorities as they're important players at ensuring environmental justice for affected communities.

Session 2: Environmental Justice and Common Basic Principles



Diego Francesco Marin (EEB), Presentation on Environmental Racism and case studies, unpacked the concepts of environmental justice and environmental racism. He also went through the EEB's first report on environmental justice, [Pushed to the Wastelands](#), which focused on case studies in eastern europe. He concluded by presenting a forthcoming EEB report, slated for launch, which delves into two case studies from Germany and France. He underscored the

systemic nature of the issue, urging the formulation of national strategic plans that prioritize equitable access to clean environments and healthcare for affected communities. Additionally, he emphasized the significance of recognizing the concept of "slow violence," which adds complexity to acknowledging the long-term environmental effects on health. [See presentation slides.](#)

Isabela Mihalache (ERGO), Presentation on Roma National Frameworks' inclusion of environmental justice, Within the EU framework, 26 countries need to create their own national frameworks for Roma inclusion. Isabela presented her research, analysing how environmental inequalities affect Roma, Sinti, and traveller communities in the EU and evaluating the presence of environmental justice in national strategies. Out of 26, only four countries explicitly mention environmental justice in their strategies: Croatia, France, Hungary, and Spain, providing specific examples of their approaches. Lastly, she underscored the need for member states to align their strategies with Commission guidelines and allocate funding to address environmental justice issues. [See presentation slides.](#)

Dr. Karen Bell Nicola, Senior Lecturer in Sustainable Urban Development at the University of Glasgow, Dr. Bell presented a case study from Bulgaria on the issue of environmental injustice in waste management in Stolipinovo, Bulgaria, which is an ethnic minority neighbourhood subjected to everyday and institutional racism. The media-government complex in Bulgaria contributes to this injustice by portraying the community as uncivilized and responsible for the waste that surrounds them. The presentation also discusses the concept of environmental justice and its principles, as well as the theoretical causes of environmental injustice in waste management. Finally, the presentation offers recommendations to address this issue, including community empowerment and participation, policy changes, education, and awareness-raising. [See presentation slides.](#)

Session 3: What should local and national governments do to improve environmental justice (housing, access to services, etc.)?

Moderator, Diego Francesco Marin (EEB)

Dan Pavel Doghi, Team Leader, Non-Discrimination: Anti-Racism and Roma Coordination Unit, European Commission (DG JUST), Dan presented the European Commission's evaluation of the EU Roma strategic framework for 2020-2030, released in January, with a focus on the content of the strategies rather than their implementation. While not legally binding, the framework offers guidance to member states, introducing three new objectives concerning anti-

discrimination, poverty reduction, and the empowerment of Roma communities. Member states are expected to submit their updated national strategies by Autumn 2021. The Commission's report recognizes progress in some areas but identifies notable gaps, especially in environmental justice. This aspect is often integrated into mainstream policies targeting social inclusion and equality for marginalized groups, despite its absence from national Roma strategic frameworks.



Andrey Ivanov, Head of sector, Roma and migrants integration at European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), Andrey delves into the intersection of environmental justice and social inclusion for the Roma community. It emphasizes the detrimental impact of environmental deprivation and residential segregation on the goals of the European Framework for equality, inclusion, and participation. The document also highlights the EU policy framework, including the Council's Recommendation which provides guidelines for planning and implementing national Roma strategic frameworks with a focus on delivering environmental justice. Additionally, it discusses specific indicators, such as the share of people exposed to noise and pollution, as well as possible data sources for additional outcome indicators under specific objective 7, underscoring the importance of addressing environmental aspects in combating Roma exclusion. [See presentation slides.](#)

Lacatus Bela Olimpiu Jakab, Director of the Association for Inclusion, Transformation and Social Innovation delved into the history of the Pata Rat community, highlighting the intricate challenges rooted in systemic racism, structural violence, and environmental hazards, drawing on their nearly two decades of experience in child protection and community development, detailing Pata Rat's division into four communities shaped by systemic and structural racism with local authorities' consent, acknowledging recent strides in community engagement, emphasizing heightened homelessness and housing issues for the Roma population, noting recent legal changes facilitating the identification of informal settlements and the establishment of a working

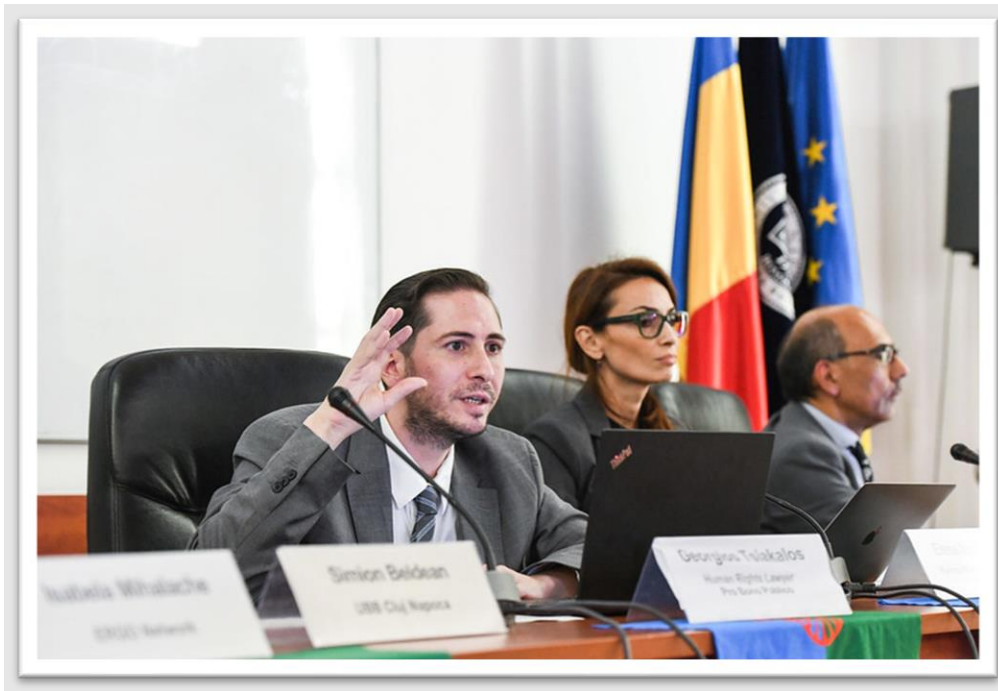
group, and stressing the imperative for an integrated approach with a specific focus on housing concerns.

Eniko Vincze, President Desire Foundation, transitioning from academia to activism, has honed her focus on housing rights and environmental justice, with grassroots activism and the pivotal role of the Pata Rat community in shaping the housing movement. Collaborating with colleagues, she spearheaded the "Environmental and Housing Justice for Anti-racist Politics" campaign, unveiling research that exposed environmental issues impacting residents' health within the context of profit-driven policies. Emphasizing the nexus between legal rights, socioeconomic conditions, and the exercise of individual rights, Eniko underscored the imperative of anti-racist politics addressing both housing and environmental concerns. Her presentation delved into international conventions, EU legislation, and constitutional changes geared toward safeguarding the right to a healthy environment and adequate housing, while also shedding light on challenges in their effective implementation. [See slides here.](#)

Jekatyerina Dunajeva, Assistant professor of political science at Pázmány Péter Catholic University, discussed the green deal and its focus on a fair and inclusive transition, highlighting the ongoing development of its implementation and the necessity for appropriate policies. She mentioned that political action is required to mitigate expected job losses, particularly among vulnerable groups, and underscored the importance of green skills not covered by formal education systems.

Anne Scheinberg, Director Springloop Cooperatie, underscored the critical significance of strategically locating waste disposal sites. In any locale where waste is generated, a designated landfill is essential to manage its disposal. Simply shutting down a landfill is socially undesirable, as waste will continue to be produced and may end up in inappropriate locations such as rivers and fields. Anne advocated for a decentralized approach, asserting that local authorities, rather than national ones, should assume the responsibility of establishing new landfills, implementing waste disposal fees, and ensuring effective waste management. The speaker contended that the absence of such a system would render efforts to close dump sites ineffective. She also highlighted distinctions between the recycling industry, a globally organized sector with publicly available prices, and the solid waste industry.

Session 4: Environmental racism and EU policies: EU Roma Strategic Framework and the European Green Deal



Georgios Tsiakalos, Independent Human Rights Lawyer Greece, highlighted the challenges related to legislation, forced evictions, and fines that impact Roma communities. He emphasized the importance of restorative environmental justice and the need to repeal legislation that perpetuates segregation. He also discussed about the European Commission's preconditions and the need for political will to recognize minority rights.

Elena Iordanescu, National Contact Point of Romania, discussed the condition introduced in the financial regulations regarding cohesion funds (ESF, ERDF) related to Roma strategies. They mentioned that to receive funding, governments need to have Roma strategies in place. However, she expressed concerns about the government's lack of action in implementing these strategies effectively. She was calling on the mayor of Cluj and the local authorities to create a collaboration in the future regarding the community in Pata Rat.

Simion Beldean, Associate Professor, Department of Environmental Analysis and Engineering, Babeş-Bolyai University, presented a research project focused on increasing the safety of water and food consumption in rural Roma communities in Transylvania, Romania. The project involved various scientific disciplines, such as sociological investigation, chemical and biological analysis, epidemiological studies, and computer modelling. The project identified communities with high-risk exposure to uncontrolled water and food sources, assessed various chemical and biological

contaminants, and developed guidelines for improving health and safety in these communities. The findings revealed high levels of certain contaminants and health issues among the Roma community, emphasizing the need for public health interventions.

Daniel Grebeldingher, President Nevo Parudimos Association, discussed a project conducted in Romania over the last three years, which involved closing a Roma ghetto and relocating the families living there. Daniel emphasized the importance of political will and individual needs in the process. He mentioned the role of monitoring, support, and employment in helping families maintain their new housing. Even though the project had a positive impact, project organisers believed that the overall political will for Roma inclusion in Romania was lacking. He expressed a desire for clearer indicators and strategies to support Roma inclusion.

Andor Urmos, Co-founder Bridge EU, discussed examples of residential segregation and environmental justice issues in Eastern European countries. He highlighted cases of Roma settlements being located in areas prone to floods, discrimination in housing permits, and the reinforcement of segregation even with EU funds. He mentioned the European Commission's guidance on addressing segregation in education and housing, advocating for desegregation and finding housing solutions in mainstream neighbourhoods.

Session 5: The role of municipalities - What are cities doing to ensure environmental justice for Roma communities?



Virgil Bitu, activist at Green Deal England, classified environmental justice as the right to a clean and safe environment, particularly addressing its connection to social injustices in Roma communities. The speaker critiques the lack of genuine consultation and participation in Roma communities, suggesting that political involvement needs to be decentralized, with a focus on community and capacity building. They highlight the importance of Roma communities becoming partners with local and central authorities to effectively implement policies, citing the failure of current strategies due to a disconnect between leaders and the communities they represent. The speaker advocates for a shift in approach, away from institutionalized methods that communities may resist, towards building the capacity of Roma communities to actively engage in policymaking.

Adriatik Hasantiri, Director, Roma Active Albania, Adriatik highlighted the often overlooked contributions of the Roma community to both economic growth and environmental sustainability, emphasizing their pivotal role in circular economy practices like recycling and the trade of second-hand clothes. The discussion delved into the historical neglect faced by informal Roma collectors and the adverse effects of forced evictions by local authorities. Adriatik acknowledged positive instances and underscored the crucial perspective of viewing territories as empowering resources for people rather than mere property. A central call-to-action emerged for a "do not harm" approach when addressing Roma inclusion and environmental justice. This plea emphasized the importance of fostering collaboration among various stakeholders, including local authorities, politicians, activists, and relevant projects, to collectively advance the cause.

Vasile Galbea, Pata Rat Researcher, provides a comprehensive overview of the housing situation in Pata Rat. He contends that the housing issue is not novel, drawing attention to his extensive research involvement in multiple cases in Romania, where approximately 12 infringement cases were reported to the Court of Human Rights. These cases highlight the pervasive problem of informal settlements and housing challenges, extending beyond Pata Rat to communities in Zalau, Baia Mare, Hetea, Miercurea Ciuc, and Turda. Vasile underscores the limited contribution of the European Commission to Romania's infringement proceedings on the landfill directive. Urgently, he calls for collaboration between the Commission and Roma organizations to address environmental injustice.

Asib Zekir, Executive Director REDI Recycling, North Macedonia discussed the environmental justice issues faced by Roma communities, focusing on informal waste collectors in Macedonia. He highlighted the challenges these collectors face, such as exposure to health risks, police brutality, and discrimination. Asib described efforts to formalise and organise waste collectors into a social enterprise, REDI Recycling. This initiative aims to change the perspective on waste collectors, increase their recognition, and eventually rename them as "green agents" due to their significant contribution to recycling and portraying the recycling as an environmental benefit. Despite progress, Asib acknowledges the ongoing need to address environmental justice and discrimination issues faced by waste collectors.

Conclusions and Recommendations



The environmental justice conference for Roma communities concluded with several key insights. Firstly, it was acknowledged that adding another layer of analysis on how environmental policies affect Roma communities within the overall Roma rights struggle can create value-added for the movement and provide stronger synergies to unpack antigypsyism. Additionally, environmental justice focus is strategically useful given the EU's mainstreaming of net-zero policies through the green deal that can unlock opportunities for the Roma rights movement.

Increasingly, the need to address how climate change is already affecting Roma communities all over Europe was emphasised, as was the need to challenging environments to raise awareness, hold authorities accountable, and address the synergies of antigypsyism and environmental policies. It was underscored that governments are not yet doing enough to address environmental racism and most member states do not have targeted initiatives to achieve environmental justice for Roma communities.

In the case of local authorities they are not doing enough to reduce the impacts of environmental racism which is particularly true within segregation and housing. The emblematic case of environmental racism in Pata Rat also took centre stage during the Conference with many participants highlighting the shortcomings of political efforts and funding the properly achieve a positive and environmentally just outcome for the 1500 families currently living there.

Despite the frustration over lack of specific solutions, Roma and non-Roma participants found hope in shared success stories, having the space to do networking and learn more about each

other's work in their respective countries and as well as country initiatives including integrated housing projects and green economy initiatives.

The call for action resonated at all levels, stressing the need for further research to understand the magnitude of impacts across the EU, the involvement at local, national, and European levels, especially considering the impact of discussions at the European level on significant investments. The collective effort to find solutions, merging human rights and environmental justice expertise, was highlighted. Stakeholders were urged to develop tangible options for effective lobbying and advocacy.

Finally, underscoring the imperative of sustaining political solidarity among Roma and non-Roma entails expanding the recognition of environmental justice beyond Roma communities. This involves acknowledging that other communities also grapple with environmental injustices, and fostering synergies with these communities is essential. The role of Roma rights, human rights, and environmental NGOs, working collaboratively with partners, was underscored in evaluating policy and program options, as well as in generating momentum and political interest. The significance of environmental justice is only beginning to permeate broader political awareness, sparking a crucial dialogue that demands collective commitment and ongoing collaboration.

The conference concluded with a vibrant cultural session featuring Roma dance and cuisine, creating a lively atmosphere before most guests departed Cluj to return to their respective home countries.





October 13 – Site visit to Roma community Pata Rat

On the final day of the conference program, a field trip to Pata Rat, Cluj Napoca was organized with a select group of participants engaging in discussions with community members. This collaborative effort, facilitated by community facilitators, provided an opportunity to discuss the daily lives in Pata Rat, shedding light on living conditions, health challenges, and educational obstacles. During the conversation, community facilitators and Roma individuals shared details about the Pata 1 and Pata 2 projects, illustrating their implementation. Although some children have been included in the educational system, a lingering issue persists as they continue to learn in segregated classes and access to education is still limited.

Addressing this concern, one of the facilitators from Pata Rat emphasized the need for a comprehensive plan to move these individuals into proper housing and facilitate their integration as swiftly as possible. The heartfelt desire of the community members to break free from these challenging circumstances and embrace a more ordinary life resonated profoundly throughout the discussions. There is still much work to be done to achieve environmental justice for the thousands of Roma communities all over Europe. The work persists.



EEB
European
Environmental
Bureau

eeb.org



A better future where people and nature thrive together