

Bearing the brunt:

Roma
and traveller
experiences of
**environmental
racism**

IN WESTERN EUROPE

The EEB is the largest network of environmental citizens' organisations in Europe. It currently consists of over 180 member organisations in 40 countries, including a growing number of networks, and representing some 30 million individual members and supporters.

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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 January 2024

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This report is supported by the LIFE Programme of the European Union and Open Society Foundations. Its contents are the sole responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the donors.

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Introduction

ROMA NEIGHBOURHOODS FACE HEIGHTENED EXPOSURE TO AIR, WATER AND GROUND POLLUTION, ACCOMPANIED BY ASSOCIATED HEALTH RISKS.

ROMA AND TRAVELLER COMMUNITIES FACE A LIFE EXPECTANCY THAT IS 10-15 YEARS SHORTER THAN MOST EUROPEANS.

Pushed to the margins of European societies, many Roma and traveller communities grapple with the stark realities of environmental injustice. Situated near landfills, waste disposal sites, and industrial zones, many communities are forced to endure the consequences of such environmental hazards, dwelling in makeshift camps or segregated so-called 'settlements.' The spectre of environmental injustice works in the background hidden from the majority population, as these Roma neighbourhoods face heightened exposure to air, water and ground pollution, accompanied by associated health risks. Many of these communities are often denied equal access to fundamental resources like clean water, sanitation, and affordable energy, leading to compounded challenges that underscore a deeper narrative of environmental racism.

While these injustices largely occur beneath the surface of societal awareness across Europe, the evidence is unmistakably tangible. Roma and Traveller communities face a life expectancy that is 10-15 years shorter than most Europeans and in certain countries, infants face a mortality rate six times higher than the average. Those who survive often contend with more infections and diseases compared to other societal groups in similar economic conditions.¹ In 2020, the EEB and the ERGO Network with the collaboration of the EJAtlas released a groundbreaking study, showing through brief case studies² the reality on the ground by pointing to how environmental racism is unfolding in eastern Europe, where most of Europe's Roma population lives. This study made the central claim that in Eastern Europe, Roma communities face environmental racism through a triple threat to their well-being.

First, Roma communities are **cut off** and disconnected from or denied public environmental services, leaving them without access to essentials like clean water and proper waste collection, while neighbouring areas enjoy these services. Second, they are **put in danger** by being compelled to live and work in environmentally degraded and polluted sites, such as landfills or contaminated industrial areas, exposing them to health risks. Finally, Roma communities are **pushed aside** and become victims of forced evictions from valuable land and water resources to make way for projects like housing, roads, tourism facilities, or nature protection measures, further marginalising them.

For a comprehensive understanding of the impact of environmental racism on Roma and Traveller communities in Europe, it is essential to broaden the investigation beyond Eastern Europe to include Western Europe. While the proportion of Roma and Traveller communities in Western Europe may not be as high as in Eastern Europe, these regions still harbour hidden injustices. This report aims to illuminate persistent environmental injustices in Western Europe, focusing on five countries: Germany, Spain, Ireland, France, and Sweden.

While our initial report presented a case for the EU and Member States to address environmental justice through brief case studies, this subsequent report delves deeper into the realm of environmental justice. It examines various facets of environmental racism, such as access to water in Sweden, spatial segregation impacting Traveller communities in Ireland and France, access to energy in Spain, and residing in polluted areas in Germany. Importantly, these cases highlight that Roma and Traveller communities are not passive victims of environmental hazards; rather, they actively organise, resist, and innovate to counter environmental racism, with some instances showcasing successful achievements toward environmental justice.

The journey toward environmental justice is lengthy, and while legislative efforts are making strides to enhance on-the-ground conditions, there remains a dearth of ongoing research and a limited societal understanding of the extent of injustices occurring, particularly in Western Europe. As we elaborate, these injustices often unfold "out of sight, out of mind," but for whom? For thousands of Roma communities grappling with environmental hazards, these injustices are palpable. They manifest in high rates of asthma, respiratory illnesses, significantly lower life expectancy, and a higher prevalence of chronic health issues.

As we embark on this exploration into the environmental injustices faced by Roma and Traveller communities, the subsequent sections will shed light on both the struggles and resilience of Roma and Traveller populations, aiming to inspire a deeper understanding and actionable change in the pursuit of environmental justice.

Environmental justice history and framework

The roots of environmental justice can be traced back to the 1970s and 80s when marginalised communities in the United States began mobilising against the disproportionate environmental burdens they faced. The movement gained momentum in the United States during the 1980s and culminated in the 1991 National People of Colour Environmental Leadership Summit, which defined environmental justice principles.³ These principles emphasised the right to a clean and healthy environment regardless of race, class, or income, influencing international discussions on sustainable development.

The movement resonated internationally and shaped discussions on sustainable development and human rights. This influence was particularly evident during the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, where the principles informed conversations about equitable environmental practices. The movement's evolution over time broadened its scope to encompass various concerns, addressing issues like industrial pollution, hazardous waste exposure, and unequal access to resources. Legal frameworks and policies, such as the Executive Order on Environmental Justice in the United States, were established to address these disparities.⁴

The concept of environmental justice pivots on the conjugation of two elements, justice and the environment, which refer to values linked firstly with equity, balance, fairness, and secondly with natural values, the environment and ultimately environmental protection. In this context, Cutter defines environmental justice as "equal access to a clean environment and equal protection from possible environmental harm irrespective of race, income, class, or any other differentiating feature of socio-economic status."⁵

The environmental justice movement represents an evolution of modern environmentalism, which emerged in response to socio-economic, technological, and health factors particularly related to the use of pesticides in the 1960s and 70s.⁶ As the general population's income

THE ROOTS OF
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TO THE 1970S
AND 80S.

and basic needs satisfaction increased during this period, so did the use of natural resources (metals, biomass, energy, fossil fuels, among others), leading to heightened awareness of environmental hazards like pollution and waste management. This awareness, associated with post-materialistic values such as those values that focus on aspects such as quality of life, self-esteem, belonging, etc., highlighted concerns beyond basic necessities. However, modern environmentalism faced criticism for being predominantly led by individuals of medium to high socioeconomic status and mainly white, lacking representation from ethnic minorities or lower socioeconomic profiles.⁷ Environmental justice, as a response, seeks to address these shortcomings, ensuring a more inclusive representation of diverse perspectives within the environmental movement while retaining the intergenerational focus of modern environmentalism.

The dynamic landscape of the environmental justice movement continually evolves, embracing diverse perspectives beyond its traditional scope of class and race. This evolution extends to scrutinizing the role of the state, exploring its potential to either exacerbate or improve the results of environmental discrimination.⁸ Additionally, the movement underscores the significance of intersectionality, as well as transcending local boundaries to establish connections between interconnected environmental injustices. While rooted in the fundamental goal of achieving equitable distribution of environmental goods, the movement seamlessly aligns with core principles of justice—embracing **distributive justice, recognitional justice, procedural justice, and restorative justice.**⁹

The movement encompasses **distributive justice** by addressing disparities in the distribution of natural resources and pollution, ensuring that the benefits and burdens as a cause of economic activities of societies are not disproportionately distributed such as the distribution of food security, energy, water, air quality, to jobs, wealth and also income. Additionally, the movement incorporates **recognitional justice**, which acknowledges the social, historical, and cultural factors shaping a community's power dynamics. Its aim is to affirm each member's inherent value and equal moral standing, recognising them as active participants.¹⁰ **Procedural justice** is evident in the advocacy for fair and inclusive decision-making processes, emphasizing the active participation of all communities and treating diverse ethnicities and social groups with equal respect. Lastly, environmental justice embodies **restorative justice** by seeking to rectify historical injustices and restore balance, ensuring that communities impacted by pollution or other environmental harms have their needs addressed.

In the context of Europe, particularly concerning the Roma and Traveller communities, environmental racism is recognised as a facet of antigypsyism. This phenomenon manifests when individuals from Roma and Traveller communities are labelled as 'gypsies' and experience a disproportionate impact of environmental burdens. These communities often face inequitable access to environmental resources and services, further exacerbating the systemic discrimination they endure. Antigypsyism contributes to the placement of toxic facilities and environmental hazards in proximity to Roma settlements, reflecting a broader pattern of injustice. The result is a dual burden where environmental challenges intersect with the social and cultural marginalisation perpetuated by antigypsyism. This interconnected struggle highlights the need for a comprehensive approach that addresses both environmental justice and the fight against antigypsyism, recognising the complexity of the challenges faced by the Roma and Traveller communities in Europe.

Though the field of environmental justice is expanding in Europe, there are some legislative measures being explored which pave the way for a more institutional recognition of how environmental harms, disproportionately impact Roma and Traveller communities in Europe.

THE ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE MOVEMENT REPRESENTS AN EVOLUTION OF MODERN ENVIRONMENTALISM.

IN THE CONTEXT OF EUROPE, ENVIRONMENTAL RACISM IS RECOGNISED AS A FACET OF ANTIGYPSYISM.

The **EU strategic framework** and the **inclusion** of **environmental justice**

IN THE LATTER PART OF 2020, THE EU UNVEILED ITS EU STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK FOR ROMA EQUALITY, INCLUSION, AND PARTICIPATION.

In the latter part of 2020, the EU unveiled its EU Strategic Framework for Roma Equality, Inclusion, and Participation. Notably, this marked the EU's first substantial policy document recognising the critical need to address environmental justice. Consequently, Member States were directed to formulate and implement National Roma Integration Strategies (NRIS). These strategies are designed to enhance social inclusion and equitable treatment for Roma communities, focusing on key areas such as education, employment, healthcare, and housing.

The guidelines accompanying the Roma Strategic Framework introduced specific indicators, incorporating measures in national Roma frameworks to combat environmental deprivation.¹¹ The guidelines prioritise access to social housing in environmentally hazardous areas and enforce standards for housing safety. Moreover, secured financial resources should be assigned for the resettlement of Roma families living within hazardous areas, as well as impact assessments that consider environmental factors. The EU guidelines also underscore the importance of collaborating with Roma civil society to develop specific measures addressing environmental challenges, implementing interventions for safe and sustainable environments. Active participation in monitoring committees overseeing environmental improvement programs in marginalised Roma communities is also emphasised.

Yet despite more than three years passing since the introduction of the Roma Strategic Framework and subsequent Roma national strategies, there is still considerable work to be done. A recent first-look assessment of 26 Member States revealed that only five countries (Croatia, France, Hungary, Slovenia, Spain) include integrated measures that address environmental racism, though these still contain limitations.¹² Croatia, for instance, introduced a specific measure targeting the reduction of environmental inequalities in Roma communities, while Hungary focused on territorial inequalities, settlement development, housing, energy poverty, and environmental awareness. In 18 Member States (BE, BG, CY, CZ, DE, FI, DE, GR, IA, IT, LV, LU, NL, PL, PT, RO, SK, SE), environmental aspects are indirectly considered in the context of housing and basic services, yet explicit mention or dedicated efforts toward environmental goals are frequently lacking. This gap may stem from a broader lack of awareness regarding the need to explicitly address environmental justice and inequalities. Notably, only three countries (AU, ES, LT) have been identified as entirely lacking environmental aspects in their national strategies, either through specific mention or proxy.

ADDRESSING
ENVIRONMENTAL
INJUSTICES
REQUIRES
STRATEGIC
INTERVENTIONS
AND A
COMMITMENT
TO FOSTERING
EQUITY.

Against this backdrop, the subsequent section analyses detailed case studies from the five countries with measures addressing environmental racism. The section begins in Germany, where a Sinti community residing in the former Industriestrasse in Heidelberg faced the challenges of living in a chemically polluted area. The section then shifts its focus to Font de la Pólvara, Girona, exploring the plight of a Roma community grappling with energy poverty and their pursuit for energy justice. Two subsequent case studies focus on Traveller communities in Ireland and France, shedding light on issues of spatial segregation and deteriorating conditions within halting sites and the communities' struggles to attain improved housing conditions. Finally, a case study from Sweden delves into the impact of denied access to water for a community in Malmo, exemplifying a deliberate effort to relocate the Roma population from the area. As we navigate through these intricate stories, it becomes evident that addressing environmental injustices requires strategic interventions and a commitment to fostering equity and it is important to remember, these are only five cases, among thousands that are ongoing.

Methodology

For the case studies, five countries were chosen based on different field areas that are interesting for environmental justice, access to energy, access to water, pollution, and spatial segregation. Each case study uses a different methodology and in some the methodology is similar. For the methodologies, desk research formed a basis, encompassing literature reviews and scrutiny of secondary sources, including institutional documents, statistical data, articles, and official law and policy documents. In some cases, field visits were conducted to acquire firsthand observations, with a focus on engaging in semi-structured interviews with residents and stakeholders when feasible.

The methodology also included direct interaction with relevant authorities and associations, such as Sinti, Traveller and Roma associations, archives, research institutions, and municipal authorities. Additionally, in one of the case, requests for the release of environmental information were filed with pertinent environmental protection agencies. A critical aspect involved analysing media coverage and published articles over the last decade to understand responses from private companies and public authorities. Direct observations through on-site visits were complemented by semi-directed online interviews with various actors involved in the situations, including local councils, human rights organisations, and private entities. In-depth expert interviews were conducted with stakeholders such as civil society organisations, former residents, and human rights researchers. Findings were cross-checked through a process of data triangulation to enhance reliability, providing a robust foundation for a nuanced exploration of environmental injustices.

For more information, you can see the methodology section within each case studies below.

Case Studies



IRELAND

SWEDEN

FRANCE

GERMANY

SPAIN

GERMANY

LOCATION:

HENKEL-TEROSON
STRASSE (FORMERLY
INDUSTRIESTRASSE)
IN PFAFFENGRUND,
HEIDELBERG

What reasons for redress? Sinti housing on an environmental contaminated area

Sinti is the self-chosen name of a Romani group that have a longstanding history in the German-speaking region. The presence of Romanesque in the German-speaking region is reflected in historical chronicles dating as far back as 1419.¹³ The word pair “Sinti and Roma” has become established in Germany to replace discriminatory designations.¹⁴ Studies examining antigypsism show that discrimination against Roma and Sinti is still deeply rooted in German society, institutions and policies.¹⁵ For centuries, Sinti and Roma have been among the most affected by racist, segregatory housing practices that have pushed Sinti and Roma into the periphery and in proximity to pollution. The exact number of Sinti and Roma in Germany is unknown, but it is estimated that between 70,000 and 200,000 German Sinti and Roma and up to 100,000 non-citizen Roma reside in Germany.¹⁶

As Romani Rose, chairperson of the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma, stated in 1985, regarding a settlement in Darmstadt, Roma and Sinti were often “banned to the outskirts of the city in tents, next to rubbish dumps, sewage treatment plants, rat holes and motorway slip roads.”¹⁷ Examples of former and current Sinti and Roma settlements with significant pollution include Heidelberg, Bad Hersfeld,¹⁸ Darmstadt,¹⁹ Düsseldorf,²⁰ Hamburg,²¹ and Ravensburg.²² The health impacts of exposure to heightened levels of pollution have not been evaluated in any of the cases. The settlement in Ravensburg is the only case where the lack of sanitation facilities, access to safe electricity and resulting adverse impacts on the residents’ health, particularly among children, were made public.²³ In the 1970s and 80s, the civil rights movement of German Sinti and Roma pointed out racist continuities and successfully fought for important legal and political changes. The civil rights movement achieved significant progress regarding the recognition of the genocide, the dismantling of institutional discrimination and the compensation of survivors.²⁴

The focus of this case study is Heidelberg, where Sinti families were settled close to a production site of the chemical producer Henkel.²⁵ The case study examines a case of environmental racism in Heidelberg, in which a housing location predominantly inhabited by German Sinti was exposed to environmental pollution. With the demolition of the buildings in 2005, this case of environmental racism is no longer ongoing. However, the

STUDIES
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AND POLICIES.

historical circumstances which led to this environmental injustice demonstrate the historical mechanisms which have caused similar resolved and ongoing cases of environmental racism against German Sinti and Roma in Germany. Furthermore, the findings of this case also point to the fact that environmental racism is not a phenomenon of the past. To the contrary, racialised groups, particularly refugees, are still vulnerable to environmental racism.

Heidelberg is a city of 160,000 inhabitants located in Baden-Württemberg, a federal state in southwest Germany. In 2018, with an economic output of 511 billion Euros Baden-Württemberg was the seventh largest economy in the European Union, with a gross domestic product of 46,300 euros per inhabitant.²⁶ The settlement was located in Industriestrasse, Pfaffengrund. The 1999 district framework plan (Stadt Heidelberg, 1999) states that there is an obvious division between the industrial north of Pfaffengrund and the residential south of Pfaffengrund. Industriestrasse (now Henkel-Teroson Strasse) is located in the industrial part of Pfaffengrund. The Pfaffengrund district is located at the Western border of Heidelberg and has a size of 3.51 km². The A5 motorway and train tracks separate the area from the city centre and the adjoining districts of Wieblingen and Weststadt. These spatial barriers contributed to Pfaffengrund's peripheral location with limited access points.

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Methodology

Methods have involved desk research, a field visit and a semi-structured interview with an expert and former resident of Industriestrasse. As the settlement no longer exists, it was not possible to interview residents on site. Instead, the case study relied on secondary sources. Several (1) Sinti and Roma associations,²⁷ (2) archives and research institutions²⁸ and (3) relevant municipal authorities²⁹ were contacted with targeted questions regarding their field of expertise. In addition, a request for the release of environmental information was filed with the Office for Environmental Protection, Trade Inspection and Energy under the Environmental Administration Act (UVwG).

Background history of the housing area in industriestrasse

The history of Sinti's presence in Industriestrasse, Pfaffengrund, dates back at least to the beginning of the 1930s when the municipality of Heidelberg built simple houses to establish the Wichern settlement, Wichernsiedlung in German. The Wichernsiedlung was built in 1934 to replace the previously existing Fürstenhof barrack camp, inhabited by people categorised as "asozial."³⁰ The families who had lived in Fürstenhof barrack camp were moved to newly built simple, one-story buildings built in the same location. The Wichernsiedlung was administered by the Welfare Office. Beginning in 1934, families categorised as "asozial" by the Nazis were forcibly moved to the settlement from their previous residences in different parts of the city. The aim of so-called "asozial settlements", Asozialensiedlungen, was to spatially segregate and control people the Nazis stigmatised and persecuted for their health or living conditions such as the poor, the homeless, or those with physical or mental disabilities. This segregation also extended to their political opponents such as the communist and socialists, but also those categorised as "non-white" such Jewish communities as well as the Sinti and Roma.

In the mid-1930s, Carl Neinhaus, the mayor of this time,³¹ commissioned the Welfare Office to find ways to remove Sinti families from the old town of Heidelberg, by forcibly relocating them to Industriestrasse, Pfaffengrund, at the outskirts of Heidelberg. However, for legal reasons only families that received welfare assistance from the Welfare Office could be forcibly relocated. Since only a few of the Sinti families took advantage of welfare assistance, the mayor only partially achieved his aim of driving Sinti out of the city centre. In 1935, six of 17 Sinti families, around 40 people, lived in Industriestrasse³². These

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were families who received welfare payments, but who could not afford other housing or were not able to find privately rented accommodation. As Sinti were principal targets of extermination policies during the Nazi regime,³³ most of the Heidelberg Sinti were deported to concentration camps. It is estimated that well over 50% of the German Sinti and Roma population were killed during the genocide. After the war, Sinti and Roma, who survived the genocide, returned to their hometowns without being allowed to reclaim their confiscated possessions, residences and property. The period after the war presents the beginning of the so-called "Sinti settlements."³⁴ The settlements were usually located in desolate, peripheral areas that were unattractive to the German majority society. Although they were not the only ones living in the houses on Industriestrasse, Sinti were significantly overrepresented in this residential area.

Housing conditions in industriestrasse

THESE NEW HOUSING PROJECTS WERE LOCATED NEAR THE PERIPHERIES OF THE CITY AND SOON BECAME STIGMATISED.

The history and condition of the buildings cannot be fully traced,³⁵ but there were certainly two types of buildings in Industriestrasse: (1) several of the single-story houses built in 1934 and demolished in 1968, (2) and eight two-story houses with four flats each that were built after the second world war and later demolished in 2005. The two types of houses were built close to each other and can be understood as one residential area. In the post-war period, the houses had access to the water and electricity network. However, the buildings were not equipped with central heating. Where Sintis lived in Heidelberg had to do with a number of factors. On the one hand, housing discrimination impacted options of Sintis to find housing, often limiting options to state housing offered by the municipalities. For many Sinti holocaust survivors returning to the old town of Heidelberg, the houses in Industriestrasse provided more space and better amenities such as bathrooms located within the flat and laundry rooms. Living with other members of the Sinti community was also a decisive reason for Sinti and Roma survivors to move to Industriestrasse. However, this changed at the beginning of the 1980s.

Since the war period, no additional residential buildings were built in Industriestrasse and with the formation of new households and the construction of new state housing in other parts of the city, many Sinti families moved to other parts of Heidelberg for better amenities. The municipalities also encouraged and supported residents of Industriestrasse to relocate to other parts of the city. However, the interviewee indicated that many Sintis relocating from Industriestrasse to the new state housing projects found difficulties settling in. These new housing projects were located near the peripheries of the city and soon became stigmatised. Once again Sinti families faced living in socially segregated areas. The buildings on Industriestrasse were demolished in 2005 and one year later new buildings were built in the exact same location to accommodate asylum seekers, which by 2016, was able to accommodate around 220 people. With the new buildings in place, the housing project changed its name from Industriestrasse to Henkel-Teroson Strasse.³⁶

Housed on contaminated land and the legacy of pollution

Industriestrasse was located in the northern part of Pfaffengrund, which is the oldest industrial area of Heidelberg.³⁷ In 1919 a gas plant was the first industrial site to become operational in the district.³⁸ Since 1933 the chemical producer Henkel has operated a production site on Industriestrasse³⁹ which produced adhesives, sealants, and other coatings for automotive industries.⁴⁰ This site is part of Henkel's business unit Adhesive Technologies and listed by the municipal authorities as a hazardous incident operation.⁴¹ The buildings housing Sinti families on Industriestrasse, were located in close proximity to the Henkel chemical production site. According to several reports, the soil and

groundwater of the settlement were polluted by emissions from the production site.⁴² In response to an environmental information request filed in the context of this case study, the Office for Environmental Protection, Trade Inspection and Energy provided the information that in some places in the area of the Henkel KGaA company inputs of volatile chlorinated hydrocarbons (CHCs) were detected at the beginning of the 1980s. Chlorinated hydrocarbons, are a group of man-made compounds such as PCBs and DDT, which have been associated with numerous adverse health impacts including increased incidence of a variety of human cancers, such as lymphoma, leukemia and liver and breast cancers.⁴³ The Office states that after investigations, these affected areas were remediated by means of soil vapour extraction, hydraulic groundwater remediation and soil replacement. Since then, groundwater monitoring has been discontinued, as no further CHC inputs have been detected in the groundwater. From the documents submitted by the municipality to the researcher, Henkel had the permission to emit established amounts of organic compounds, dust and Isocyanate. Isocyanates are a group of compounds that have been found to have an irritating effect to the skin, mucous membranes, eyes, and respiratory tract.⁴⁴

As this case dates back several decades, it has not been possible to substantiate if and how former residents were informed about potential environmental risks. The former resident that was interviewed in the context of this case study cannot recall that any information was shared or invitations to participate in planning processes were issued, which points to a lack of environmental decision making from those living in the industrial part of Pfaffenburg, and most affected by environmental pollution. A Pfaffengrund district plan published in 1999 mentions a participatory process that included residents of Pfaffengrund.⁴⁵ Interestingly, this district plan also problematises the number of foreigners in Pfaffengrund as too high. Even though Sinti residents of Industriestrasse were not foreigners, it is likely that they were included in this problem description, as non-white Germans are often designated as foreigners. As former Sinti residents of Industriestrasse had entirely relocated to various other locations by 2005 after the demolitions, the impacts of the environmental pollution on the health of Sinti residents of Industriestrasse cannot be traced. According to a former resident, a few Sinti who used to live in Industriestrasse, have developed cancer. However, in the absence of health data and demographic data about the buildings, it is difficult to draw conclusions about the link between legacy pollution and direct impacts. Only with a class action lawsuit or research funds to followed with all of these lives that were impacted could an understanding of the long-term impacts be gained, and justice be obtained for the people who lived in Industriestrasse.

THE BUILDINGS HOUSING SINTI FAMILIES ON INDUSTRIESTRASSE, WERE LOCATED IN CLOSE PROXIMITY TO THE HENKEL CHEMICAL PRODUCTION SITE.

Environmental racism and its limits

DISCRIMINATION HAS HISTORICALLY RENDERED GERMAN SINTI AND ROMA PARTICULARLY VULNERABLE TO ENVIRONMENTAL RACISM.

The injustices Sinti and Roma have historically faced in Germany, and more recently, the failure of post-war governments to recognise and address structural discrimination has rendered Sinti and Roma in Germany vulnerable to disproportional exposure to environmental harms. After systematically segregating Sinti and Roma in the first decades of the post-war period, integration projects attempted to reverse decades of segregatory housing policies.⁴⁶ The approach and aims of these integration politics are contentious. However, as environmental racism is only possible when racialised people are spatially segregated, repealing segregation has inevitably contributed to a decreased risk of environmental racism for German Sinti. Drawing on the example of Heidelberg, this case study has highlighted how discrimination has historically rendered German Sinti and Roma particularly vulnerable to environmental racism. While in Heidelberg Sinti do no longer live in the affected industrial area, other cases of environmental racism impacting German Sinti and Roma are still ongoing such as in Hamburg.⁴⁷

What the example of Heidelberg shows, however, is that environmental racism did not automatically disappear with the demolition of the old buildings formerly inhabited mostly by German Sintis. In Heidelberg, accommodation for 220 refugees was built in the exact same location.⁴⁸ Similarly, in many parts of Germany, racialised people – particularly

racialised refugees including Eastern European Roma – still bear the brunt of environmental pollution.⁴⁹ In Heidelberg, building the new accommodation for refugees at the exact same location as the previous accommodation mostly inhabited by German Sinti ultimately has not solved the issue of spatial segregation and environmental racism, as other racialised minorities are now in potentially exposed to environmental pollution. This corresponds with other studies examining environmental injustice in Kassel^{50 51} and Hamburg,⁵² which have found that polluting industries are more frequently located in cities and neighbourhoods with higher proportions of racialised communities. Both the results of the case study and the results of other previous studies point to the fact that environmental racism is still present in Germany. The health impacts of environmental racism are difficult to trace and to proof. As Germany's environmental regulations limit environmental pollution, in most cases of environmental racism the level exposure is likely low but can compound over time. Thus, adverse health impacts take time to unfold, which make it difficult to estimate and trace the impacts.

SPAIN

LOCATION:
FONT DE LA
PÓLVORA, GIRONA

Navigating power struggles: energy poverty and the Roma community

In 2019, a report by the Fundación Secretariado Gitano,⁵³ highlighted the pervasive impact of poverty and exclusion on over 80% of Spain's Roma population, with just under half experiencing extreme poverty, particularly affecting minors. The study also underscored the Roma community's limited presence in the labour market, marked by precariousness and minimal protection, reflected in a staggering 52% unemployment rate, over three times higher than the general population. Furthermore, Roma women face a distinct disadvantage, with an employment rate reaching only 16%, reflecting challenges arising from their dual status as both women and Roma.

As part of the Spanish National Strategy for Roma Equality, Inclusion and Participation 2021-2030, the Government mapped almost a thousand neighbourhoods, mostly inhabited by Roma people, who present poverty and extreme poverty rates. The neighbourhood of Font de la Pólvora, in Girona, is one of those affected.⁵⁴ Font de la Pólvora is a working-class neighbourhood situated on the outskirts of Girona, Spain, and home to 1,771

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residents. Comprising eight streets and a block square, this neighbourhood consists primarily of houses with the city's lowest incomes, predominantly Roma communities. The neighbourhood ranks among the areas with the lowest income levels in Catalonia, Spain, registering at 6,155 euros per capita as opposed to Catalonia's average of 13,634 euros.⁵⁵

Starting from 2014 to 2022, the neighbourhood has been impacted by constant power outages, with extremely negative consequences on their quality of life, with the consequent implications for basic rights for all affected families.⁵⁶ In 2018, a group of neighbours created the Platform for Dignity, which calls on the local administration and Endesa, the Distribution System Operator (DSO), for a solution to the lack of supply. Locals argued that the neighbourhood's power line, the same that was installed in the 70s, is in a deficient state and that is the reason many of the overloads occur and denounced the situation in 2020 after 5 years of continuous electricity supply interruptions.⁵⁷ This assertion is contradicted by the Girona City Council and Endesa, which refutes the claims, asserting that the available technical reports on the grid's condition are favourable.⁵⁸ According to them, the cuts should be attributed to illegal connections, some of them used for illegal marijuana plantations, which demand much more energy than the grid can support.

Indeed, as mentioned, civil society organisations were raising concerns over the poor state of the electricity grid,⁵⁹ and the lack of investment and solutions by Endesa. However, according to the Girona local council and Endesa itself, the cuts should be attributed to illegal connections, some of them used for illegal marijuana plantations, which demand much more energy than the grid can support. Indeed, the cultivation of marijuana has become a growing concern in Spain. According to Spanish authorities, in addition to perceived leniency in drug laws, the increase in poverty following the financial crisis of the 2010s has prompted some individuals to resort to cultivating marijuana. Criminal organizations are offering up to €5,000 per harvest to economically disadvantaged families willing to cultivate the drug within their residences.⁶⁰

The electricity cuts have been affecting the lives of their neighbours for years and everyday activities such as cooking, showering, or getting warm were challenging for the residents because of the daily cuts would last for hours.⁶¹ Some elderly people were particularly affected as they needed oxygen machines to breathe, or medications were becoming useless due to malfunctioning refrigerators. For children, the power cuts added difficulties to following education, and in general they increased anxiety and had negative impacts on the mental health of the population.⁶² According to an interviewed academic expert, on the best days in 2020 the affected neighbours had a reduction of 30% of the availability of electricity supply, but in the worst days it could rise to 80%.

IN 2018, A GROUP OF NEIGHBOURS CREATED THE PLATFORM FOR DIGNITY.

COOKING, SHOWERING, OR GETTING WARM WERE CHALLENGING FOR THE RESIDENTS BECAUSE OF THE DAILY CUTS WOULD LAST FOR HOURS.

Methodology

The research focuses on analysing to what extent the situation related to the massive and indiscriminate cuts of electricity in Font de la Polvora (Girona) constitute or not a case of environmental injustice, based on the responses to the energy poverty situation by the private company Endesa and the involved public authorities, including the municipality. The research seeks to determine if these responses are compatible with a public interest approach (although Endesa is a private entity, the company holders of a concession by the state to carry on the distribution activity), based on non-discriminatory action which considers the specific socioeconomic and cultural conditions of the Font de la Pólvora inhabitants, and existing intersectionalities. To this end, the data used for this research has relied on an analysis of published articles in the media in the last 10 years, desk research on other secondary sources such as institutional documents, statistical data, etc. and direct observation based on on-site visits in July 2022. Also 7 semi-directed online interviews were carried out with different actors directly or indirectly involved in the situation in Font de la Polvora such as the Girona Local Council, the Catalan Ombudsman, 2 Roma associations, an academic expert, an association defending citizen energy rights, and a Distribution Electricity Company. The interviews were recorded and transcribed.

Power struggles: seeking solutions for energy cuts in Font de la Pólvora

In 2019, the Catalan Ombudsman intervened and published a report indicating some measures to be addressed by public administrations to improve the situation in Font de la Pólvora, as well as demands on Endesa to improve the state of the grid. This would include the need to start regularisation processes to ensure that consumers without legal grid connections establish proper legal contracts, and providing assistance to vulnerable households in accordance with the legislation in Catalonia regarding Energy Poverty.⁶³ The law stipulates that disconnecting the electricity supply to a residence is prohibited without first verifying its vulnerability for qualifying low-income households. Other measures defended by the Catalan Ombudsman were the prosecution of illegal activities and implementing various procedures to compensate for the infringement of consumer rights resulting from the low-quality of energy supply.⁶⁴

As a consequence, the Girona Local Council launched campaigns to encourage households without legal grid connections to rectify their status. Subsidies were offered to users meeting the criteria outlined in the Catalan Law on Energy Poverty, catering to low-income or vulnerable households. Unfortunately, these efforts saw limited success, attributed to various factors: internal community pressures, concerns about shouldering high bills for an unreliable electricity supply, distrust of local and regional authorities, and apprehension about potential legal repercussions during the regularization process. Residents were reluctant to regularise their situations, fearing “paying the bills and receiving a very deficient supply”, as one resident mentioned.

Following pressure from civil society entities and opposition political parties in the local council, an audit was conducted in 2022, which established that the grid was suitable according to the applicable regulations of the year of construction of the buildings (1973). However, the audit also established that if the more recent 2002 regulations were taken as a hypothetical reference, the power of the transformation centre, considering current consumption habits, would be insufficient or would operate at the limit of its capacities. The study also mentioned that over 40% (294) of the supply points in the neighbourhood lack legal contracts.

In November 2021, Endesa initiated a 130,000-euro investment for expanding new low-voltage lines, enhancing existing infrastructure, and installing a second transformation centre in the neighbourhood. Individuals interviewed from civil society entities viewed this move as a tacit acknowledgment by Endesa of the suboptimal state of the grid condition. On the other hand, Endesa continued to attribute the situation to illegal connections and argued that “despite the fact that the current infrastructures are dimensioned in accordance with the power contracted in the neighbourhood, there were almost 2,000 incidents registered since 2019, all due to electric frauds”⁶⁵ and stated that this has generated losses of more than 500.000 euros to the company.⁶⁶

Since these last investments on the grid, the situation has improved, and the number and duration of the cuts has been drastically reduced according to the consulted stakeholders. However, staff from the Distribution company points out that it is a matter of time that electricity cuts resume, since the frequency and intensity of illegal connections continues to increase, and the recent investments may not be sufficient in the medium term.

IN 2019, THE CATALAN OMBUDSMAN INTERVENED AND PUBLISHED A REPORT INDICATING SOME MEASURES TO BE ADDRESSED BY PUBLIC ADMINISTRATIONS TO IMPROVE THE SITUATION IN FONT DE LA PÓLVORA

RESIDENTS WERE RELUCTANT TO REGULARISE THEIR SITUATIONS, FEARING “PAYING THE BILLS AND RECEIVING A VERY DEFICIENT SUPPLY”.

Beyond labels: the stigmatization of Font de la Polvora and Roma districts

THE SETTLEMENT WAS PLAGUED BY INADEQUATE LIVING CONDITIONS

Amid the early days of Spanish democracy, Font de la Polvora saw the inauguration of 500 substandard homes intended to relocate families living in shacks two kilometres from Girona in 1978. Despite its picturesque natural surroundings and a water source with reputed healing properties, the new residents—primarily Portuguese and Galician immigrants of Roma ethnicity—from Montjuïc, Girona encountered far from idyllic conditions.

The settlement was plagued by inadequate living conditions, including leaky and damp buildings, putrid air due to a lack of sewage channels, and rat infestations. Services were notably absent, with no public transportation, municipal cleaning, and, most crucially, schools for both children and adults, hindering educational advancement.

As a result, Font de la Pólvora evolved into a social and urban anomaly, marked by marginality fuelled by criminal activities and drug trafficking within certain families. These challenges persist to this day, contributing to the enduring stigmatisation faced by residents from the non-Roma population and the over policing of the neighbourhood.⁶⁷

Probably the most well-known of these neighbourhoods is La Cañada Real in Madrid, where in December 2020, the United Nations Special Rapporteur expressed concern by sending a letter to the Spanish Government seeking explanations for the dire energy poverty situation in the district. The Special Rapporteur described the circumstances as both a “humanitarian catastrophe” and a “defeat of social rights.”⁶⁹

Who's to blame: cannabis cultivation or poor electricity infrastructure?

The conflict over power cuts in Font de la Pólvora has sparked two main perspectives. The Commission for the Dignity of Font de la Pólvora, along with civil society groups like the Alliance for Energy Poverty and the Network for Energy Sovereignty, primarily blames the distribution company, Endesa, citing insufficient investment and a deteriorating distribution network. Conversely, Endesa attributes power outages to illegal connections. Girona City Council urges Endesa and the police to intensify efforts in identifying fraud cases, with a specific focus on eliminating illicit connections, particularly those linked to high-energy consumption activities like marijuana cultivation.

To assess whether environmental injustice exists, a comparison between the condition of the electrical grid in Font de la Polvora and other neighbourhoods in the city is necessary. Organizations like the Network for Energy Sovereignty (XSE) and the Alliance against Energy Poverty suggest an uneven maintenance of the electrical grid, drawing attention to what they call a “classist maintenance approach,” emphasizing how inadequate maintenance is in socioeconomically disadvantaged or sparsely populated neighborhoods like Font de la Polvora.⁶⁸

The primary issue lies in Endesa's lack of transparency concerning the grid's condition. According to an interviewed academic expert, there's a dearth of data because current legislation only mandates distribution companies to disclose information at the municipal level, not the district level. On the other hand, the interviews with representatives of Roma and energy rights associations suggest that the lack of consideration for the structural characteristics and socioeconomic-cultural conditions of Font de la Polvora has led to ineffective solutions. They argue that the issue of energy poverty has been exploited, whether intentionally or unintentionally, to perpetuate the neighbourhood's stigma. From their point of view, the discourse surrounding marijuana plantations and irregular connections is seen as a justification for Endesa's and public authorities' inaction, further widening the gap between the residents of Font de la Pólvora and the rest of Girona.

THE ISSUE OF ENERGY POVERTY HAS BEEN EXPLOITED, WHETHER INTENTIONALLY OR UNINTENTIONALLY, TO PERPETUATE THE NEIGHBOURHOOD'S STIGMA.

As a representative of Foundation Girona Est puts it: "The people of Girona only know from Font de la Polvora what they read in the newspapers...the problems with the electricity, the domestic cannabis plantations, and little else. No one goes up to the neighbourhood for fear of having their wallet or car wheels stolen, even though it is a beautiful space". Coupled with an overly emphasised "criminal" narrative, there's a need to broaden the focus to encompass the structural challenges within the community, which include poverty, discrimination, and general distrust of regional and local administrations.

Energy justice in Font de la Polvora

THE LACK OF
ACCESSIBLE
DATA
REGARDING
THE CONDITION
OF THE
ELECTRICAL
GRID POSES A
CHALLENGE IN
IDENTIFYING
THE FACTORS
CONTRIBUTING
TO ENERGY
POVERTY.

After years of mobilisation by civil society organisations and the political pressure exerted by the inhabitants of the neighbourhood, the distribution company, Endesa, finished in February 2022 the necessary works to guarantee the quality of the electricity supply in accordance with the established legal parameters.

The lack of accessible data regarding the condition of the electrical grid poses a challenge in identifying the factors contributing to energy poverty. While recognizing the adverse effects of unauthorised connections and illicit activities in Font de la Pólvora, a neighbourhood characterised by poverty and a predominantly Roma population in Girona, it is evident that concerns related to the quality of electricity supply have endured for seven years, surpassing issues in more prosperous areas. This circumstance prompts inquiries into environmental justice, as residents of Font de la Pólvora have endured a consistently lower quality of electricity supply, substantially impacting their daily lives.

Additionally, the failure to recognise the identity factors of Font de la Pólvora's inhabitants, particularly the Roma community, exacerbates the problem. The existing social and cultural distance between them and the rest of the city's population, coupled with socioeconomic disparities, hinders conflict resolution. In this sense, throughout the case study, both in the interviews carried out and in the analysed press articles, it can be perceived the existing separation between "them and us" which results in the stigmatisation of the neighbourhood. As a resident says when looking for a job, "I can't put on my resume that I'm from Font de la Pólvora."

The neighbourhood faces stigmatisation and a lack of integration, both physically and socially, with a deficit of transportation services further isolation from the city. This lack of trust has led to decreased participation of the Roma community and Font de la Pólvora residents in municipal policies, perpetuated by mutual mistrust. These structural factors have negatively impacted the effectiveness of public policies to solve the energy poverty situation, which have not successfully addressed the problem due to overlooking key considerations such as mutual mistrust, existing stigma, and urban degradation.

IRELAND

LOCATION:
SPRING LANE,
CORK CITY

Still ‘no end in site’: understanding environmental hazards impacting irish traveller communities

In Ireland, Mincéirs (or Travellers) have been defined as “an indigenous ethnic minority who are traditionally nomadic and distinct from the majority Irish population”.⁶⁹ The term ‘Traveller’ was ascribed to Irish Travellers due to their nomadism and legislative treatment of them has been the definition and categorisation of their way of life as criminal.⁷⁰ Like Roma, Travellers experience antigypsyism manifesting in different forms and dimensions of discrimination including disproportionate exposure to environmental hazards such as waste management and access to related infrastructure.⁷¹ To quote the Irish Traveller Movement, “Travellers, as individuals and as a group, experience a prominent level of prejudice and exclusion in Irish society. Many have to endure living in intolerable conditions, such as lack of access to basic facilities of sanitation, water and electricity”.⁷² The Central Statistics Office report a total number of 30,987 Irish Travellers usually resident in Ireland, accounting for 0.7% of the general population.⁷³ Travellers constitute the most disadvantaged population subgroup and have been described as a classic case study of a socially excluded group.⁷⁴

Section 13 of the Housing Act 1988 and the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act 1998 seek to address the accommodation needs of Travellers, including the provision of halting site accommodation. Halting sites are generally purpose-built residential accommodation for Travellers provided by local authorities with an individual bay for each family unit and a concrete structure providing basic services. Whyte has noted that accommodation is one of two primary areas of litigation concerning Travellers, the other being discrimination.⁷⁵ It has been the subject of several high-profile domestic legal actions,⁷⁶ noting the gross inadequacies in conditions on halting sites, and a collective complaint to the European Social Rights Committee which found Ireland in breach of the Revised European Social Charter given the inadequate conditions on a high proportion of sites.⁷⁷ In its findings, published in March 2021 as a follow-up to its decision, it noted that Ireland remains in breach.⁷⁸ In a study conducted on behalf of Pavee Point Traveller & Roma Centre in 2004,⁷⁹ the

THE CENTRAL
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environmental hazards experienced by Travellers on their sites was documented. It highlighted illegal dumping by private citizens, sewage and drainage problems, water hygiene issues and pest infestation. In exploratory research conducted by the Environmental Justice Project in 2022 similar findings were made, noting the 'out of sight' placement of sites frequently near traditional dumps, landfills and motorways.⁸⁰ This has been connected to the constructive assimilation of Travellers into standard housing and the settled population.⁸¹ This supports the ongoing critique that the ultimate goal of settlement, spatial fixity, and erasure of Travellers as a distinct people continue to define state policy.⁸²

The spring lane halting site

AN EXAMPLE OF THE RECURRENT EXPOSURE OF TRAVELLERS TO ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS IN LOCAL AUTHORITY HALTING SITES IS SPRING LANE.

An example of the recurrent exposure of Travellers to environmental hazards in local authority halting sites is Spring Lane, the subject of this case-study. The site was established as an official 10 bay halting site for Travellers by Cork City Council within a former sand and gravel quarry in 1989. From the outset of the site's establishment the conditions were less than desirable, being in shadow for the majority of daylight hours given its positioning below a cliff edge from the site's prior function as a quarry, with basic services being provided and rudimentary concrete infrastructure. From the establishment of the site there was no organised allocation process with the bays being populated on a first-come, first-served basis. Other families took up unauthorised residency on the site and overcrowding has become a significant issue as with family growth extended families took up residence on the periphery of the halting site. By the estimate of the local authority, there are now 38 families in residence on the site with 66 children amongst them. However no substantial infrastructural improvements have taken place since the inception of the site. Resultingly, the estimated 140 residents of the site are relying on the infrastructure and facilities initially built for 40 people or 10 families. Demonstratively, the 28 families of "[u]nauthorised residents on the site have no separate toilet, washing facilities, or running water of their own and depend on the tenants of the 10 serviced bays".⁸³

A campaign concerning the conditions on the site began around 2013,⁸⁴ started by the residents and local Traveller organisations such as the Traveller Visibility Group ('TVG') framed around their accommodation rights. They sought to draw attention to the site and "tell the real story of [their] lives living in these conditions". They invited a number of politicians, elected officials and other high-profile individuals to the site so that they could "see with their own eyes what the site was like". Kathleen Delaney detailed how her previous meetings with the council had produced no change for those on the site and reflected on the shock evident in visits to the site given its visible rat-infestation and the flooding from a burst sewage pipe. The campaign developed a community manifesto on behalf of the residents, providing information on the site and expressing the accommodation preferences of residents such as a new site of group housing. The central appeal of the manifesto was to create proper homes for the families of Spring Lane and for all with Kathleen reflecting that "[i]t can wear you down, but I'll never stop: [w]e need to keep going until we get proper homes for our children and a proper future".

Children's obudsman inquiry: uncovering the facts

On the 15th of March 2018 the Irish Ombudsman for Children's Office ('OCO'), an independent statutory body which investigates administrative actions of public bodies which may have an adverse effect on the child, received a complaint by a Traveller Advocacy Group concerning the general conditions on the site. Amongst other things the complaint stated that: there was a persistent problem with rodent infestation, the sanitation on site was inadequate, there was extreme overcrowding in mobile homes and on the designated

bays, there were illegal dumping problems on the adjacent site, there was inconsistent and inadequate waste disposal arrangements on site, and there was a high rate of childhood illness including impetigo, dermatitis, eczema, and abscesses along with upper respiratory and lower urinary tract infections, related to the conditions on the site.

The complaint alleged that the living conditions on the site were having a serious impact on the health and wellbeing of children living there. Having reviewed the complaint, the OCO identified accommodation issues, sanitation problems, health and safety concerns alongside absence of amenities for children as four key areas of concern. The terms of reference of the investigation were, amongst other things, to investigate the actions and inactions of the Local Authority focusing on their efforts to improve the conditions and facilities on the site affecting the health and wellbeing of individual children.

The sanitary provisions on site were a large feature of this investigation, concerning the communal washrooms referred to as 'welfare huts' which consisted of a toilet, a bath/shower and sink. They are located within non-insulated out-houses made of blocks and concrete with the sinks and baths made of stainless steel. Mains water and communal washrooms are shared in some cases by three families or up to 16 people, including children. Not all welfare huts have hot water, and during electricity outages children spoke about having to boil kettles for a bath that is shared by the entire family. Testimony from residents flags the intensely detrimental impacts from the deficient sanitary provisions and associated infrastructure on the site as an area of major concern.⁸⁵

On inspection by the OCO, the welfare huts were in various states of disrepair and washrooms were in a poor physical state with evidence of damp, mould, and leakage. The OCO noted that the same issues arose each year with falling ceilings in the welfare huts, recurrent blockage of toilets and dampness. These maintenance issues were stated to be significant and an ongoing concern by the caretakers engaged by Cork County Council. In the local authority's Traveller Accommodation Plan 2019-2024 they directly note the deficiencies in welfare facilities without particularising any plans for upgrade or repair. The HSE Director of Public Health Nursing stated that "in her opinion [the poor health of children on the site was] direct result of the conditions of the halting site and welfare huts."

A particularly foul example of the conditions on the site due to environmental hazards arise in relation to the large lagoon of water and raw untreated sewage linked to the inadequacies of the sanitary provisions and basic infrastructure. The main drainage system and sewerage system is located at the north-western side of the site and is not connected to the main grid. As recorded in the complaints to the OCO, "it has malfunctioned on numerous occasions resulting in the lagooning of water". In early 2012, testing was arranged for said water by a water quality testing laboratory. The subsequent report identified important levels of e-coli contamination consistent with the presence of faecal matter. Residents informed the OCO that raw sewage has been always visible, stating that a combination of poor drainage, potholing and sewage problems has led to the pooling of waste when there is rainfall. An engineering report conducted in 2014 flagged that the lagoon, which had visible human excrement floating at its edges, may pose a drowning risk for children on the site if they fell in.⁸⁶

On this basis, the principal finding by the OCO was that the local authority had failed in its duty to consider the best interests of children, it had failed to ensure that children living on the site enjoyed a 'safe, suitable standard of accommodation'. It stated that there "was a failure to refurbish the welfare units in a timely manner, and to ensure consistent waste management and pest control on the site" while finding other failures by the local authority particularly in dealing with the housing needs of Travellers.

RECEIVED A COMPLAINT BY A TRAVELLER ADVOCACY GROUP CONCERNING THE GENERAL CONDITIONS ON THE SITE.

THE PRINCIPAL FINDING BY THE OCO WAS THAT THE LOCAL AUTHORITY HAD FAILED IN ITS DUTY TO CONSIDER THE BEST INTERESTS OF CHILDREN.

Enduring environmental hazards and institutional neglect

SPRING LANE BECAME THE SUBJECT OF INTENSE PUBLIC SCRUTINY AND MEDIA COVERAGE.

Following the publication of the report, Spring Lane became the subject of intense public scrutiny and media coverage with the Irish Times visiting the site and documenting the views of residents on the site's conditions.⁸⁷ The experiences shared by the residents highlights the affront to human dignity which the conditions on the site amount to, with one mother sharing her daughter tripping and landing in a puddle of waste with one of her tiny shoes "floating in the excrement" days later. Another disclosed her visits to the council showing videos of her children in the sewage. One resident of the site expressed fears that the site could become "the next Carrickmines" where 10 Travellers lost their lives after a fire in October 2015 which had prompting the rollout of a national fire safety audit in Traveller accommodation.⁸⁸ These fears now seem well-placed considering subsequent reporting in December 2021 on an internal briefing for Minister of State Peter Burke detailing a "serious loss of life" for those on the site due environmental conditions, namely the burning rubbish and the afore-referenced cliff face which was in danger of collapse.⁸⁹

In correspondence with the OCO, which became known in August 2021, Cork County Council rebutted a number of aspects of the report stating that matters were "nowhere near as simple as outlined" and that the report did not show "complete understanding or appreciation of the complex problems and deep-rooted socio-economic issues" relating to the site.⁹⁰ Residents and representatives of Traveller advocacy organisations described this rebuttal as 'soul destroying' with Breda O'Donoghue of TVG expressing it felt "like being kicked in the gut".⁹¹ TVG further described this response as duplicitous given that the local authority had indicated its commitment to the recommendations of the report but simultaneously rejected its findings.

In an editorial produced shortly thereafter the Irish Times compellingly observed that "some elected representatives and agencies of the State continue to find new ways to thwart the spirit of the law and deny members of a vulnerable minority their rights".⁹² One councillor, Ken O'Flynn has been critical of residents of the site for their refusals to accept offers of social housing despite these offers being at odds with the stated preferences and needs of residents in their community manifesto.⁹³ Expressing these views, amongst others, in a subsequent radio interview O'Flynn was found in January 2022 by the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland to have made inappropriate and unjustifiable representation of the residents of the Spring Lane halting site and Travellers generally, depicting them as unreasonable, dishonest, criminal, and violent and further implying parental neglect and abuse.⁹⁴

IN MAY 2022 THE LAND BESIDE THE SITE WAS REZONED FOR HOUSING.

That same month, funding was secured by Cork County Council to draft plans for a group housing scheme broadly aligned with the community manifesto developed by the Spring Lane Solidarity Group.⁹⁵ A report was furnished to the elected members of the local authority detailing steps taken by the council to date and other measures it plans to implement to address the recommendations of the OCO.⁹⁶ It discussed a risk assessment undertaken by an experienced consulting engineer and several mitigation measures put in place to address concerns raised in the short-term. These included upgrading the potable water and water distribution network, weekly visits by a drain clean company while the extensive sewage-related issues are being addressed and the provision of temporary welfare pods. The report stated a comprehensive assessment of resident's accommodation needs and the local authority's roadmap for meeting them was being finalised. Subsequently, in May 2022 the land beside the site was rezoned for housing by a vote of the elected members of the local authority.⁹⁷ At the time this was welcomed, particularly as elected members of local authorities often act as 'veto-players' in the provision of Traveller accommodation.⁹⁸

Scepticism, discrimination, and the pervasive impact of environmental racism

The residents remain sceptical regarding the local authorities' commitments to improve their living conditions. As stated by Minister of State for Rural and Community Development Joe O'Brien, following a visit to the site on the 28th of June 2021, the residents were "sick of promises".⁹⁹ This remains the case, on the 25th of May 2022 the 'Spring Lane Site Solidarity Group' reshared a post expressing strong discontent with the lack of action in delivering on Traveller accommodation.¹⁰⁰ Their scepticism is well founded, given the categorical failure to close the site by 2020 as previously targeted.¹⁰¹ The Equality Review or audit of an organisation's practices for compliance with equality law conducted by the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission on the failures nationally to draw down ring fenced capital budget to meet obligations on Traveller specific accommodation evidence that the substantive delivery of Traveller accommodation projects rarely matches the targets set by local authorities in their statutorily-mandated Traveller Accommodation Plans ("TAP").¹⁰²

While the adoption of a TAP is mandated, the applicable legislation contains no sanctions for failures to substantively deliver on its aims and judicial oversight in enforcing its provisions is incredibly limited.¹⁰³ In light of this, and the enduring inhospitable conditions due to environmental hazards, it can be said that there remains no end in sight for the residents of Spring Lane even a year after it was marked one of the worst halting sites in Ireland with unacceptable living conditions and the local authority's approach to the situation being characterised as "passive, careless and discriminatory".¹⁰⁴

This case illustrates the environmental racism experienced by Irish Travellers through disproportionate exposure to environmental hazards within accommodation provided by local authorities under state policy. This case is not isolated and reflects the experiences of many Travellers in Ireland. The deficient approaches of local authorities to Traveller accommodation results in inhospitable sites with the environmental conditions thereon pushing Travellers to accept offers of standard housing thereby playing a central role in their constructive inclusion.

RESIDENTS
REMAIN
SCEPTICAL
REGARDING
THE LOCAL
AUTHORITIES'
COMMITMENTS
TO IMPROVE
THEIR LIVING
CONDITIONS.

THIS CASE ILLUSTRATES THE
ENVIRONMENTAL RACISM
EXPERIENCED BY IRISH
TRAVELLERS THROUGH
DISPROPORTIONATE EXPOSURE
TO ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS.

FRANCE

LOCATION:
HELLEMES-
RONCHIN
RECEPTION AREA,
LILLE

Legalising Environmental Racism: How gens du voyage bear environmental burdens

The term gens du voyage, means traveling people in English, and refers to an administrative category for Traveller communities by the French state.¹⁰⁵ The people described as such are of French nationality and come from a diverse group of Romani and other Traveller communities known as Yenish, among others, that have been established in France for several centuries. However, the diversity of these communities is not reflected in the public imagination and discourse, where around 300,000 people are collectively known as gens du voyage and are systematically perceived as "Gypsies." Despite the name, not all people identified as gens du voyage have a travelling lifestyle. The administration refers to those who do not travel as gens du voyage sédentaires (sedentary Travellers), and these usages illustrate the racialising tendencies of the public approach. The legal context of the term can be traced back to 1912, with the creation of the legal status of "nomad", and more contemporarily to 2017 with end of discriminatory rules applied to gens du voyage, marked by ethnic registration, internment, spoliation, deportation, repression, control of mobility and exceptional statuses.¹⁰⁶ Despite recent legal advances, anti-gypsyism persists virulently in France. In 2021, the Défenseur des Droits, independent administrative authority, noted the persistence of "obstacles to rights" and the existence of "systemic discrimination" affecting gens du voyage.¹⁰⁷

In France, the life expectancy of gens du voyage is 15 years lower than the national average and the degraded environmental conditions of the living areas can be seen as a negative factor for the health of its occupants.¹⁰⁸ The issue of environmental inequalities suffered by gens du voyage is not recent, since the end of the 1940s, public reports have highlighted these problems.¹⁰⁹ Emblematic cases exist, such as the cité de l'espérance built in 1967 and reserved for "gypsies" in Berriac, in southern France where the site is located near an electric transformer which generates effects on the health of its inhabitants, with many cases of cancer.¹¹⁰ Housing locations for gens du voyage include zones known as

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BY THE FRENCH
STATE.

“Reception areas” which are projects often rejected by the non-Roma inhabitants of the municipalities concerned. In general, local anti-gypsyism is reported frequently in local press all over France and is exemplified by the systematic appearance of petitions opposing new reception area construction projects. This Not In My Backyard (NIMBY) principle, combine with municipal concerns over public spending generates a toxic mix which leads to low-quality locations that are subject to pollution, further impacting the bodies of Roma people and perpetuating social exclusion.

The analysis of reception areas in France reveals a compelling case of environmental racism, underscored by three distinctive characteristics. Firstly, these spaces are specifically allocated for minorities that have faced historical and legal discrimination. Secondly, the selection and administration of these areas are influenced by public decisions, shaping their overall dynamics. Lastly, these reception areas tend to be geographically isolated from the broader population, often burdened with environmental challenges that further contribute to their marginalised status. This confluence of factors paints a complex picture, shedding light on the intersectionality of social, legal, and environmental dimensions within the context of these designated spaces.

THIS NOT IN MY BACKYARD (NIMBY) PRINCIPLE, COMBINE WITH MUNICIPAL CONCERNS OVER PUBLIC SPENDING GENERATES A TOXIC MIX.

Between spatial relegation and systemic pollution

INTO PRECARIOUS AND ILLEGAL HOUSING SITUATIONS DUE TO THE LACK OF ADEQUATE HOUSING FACILITIES. IN FRANCE, MORE THAN 94% OF MUNICIPALITIES DO NOT WELCOME GENS DU VOYAGE.

Since 1990, all municipalities with more than 5,000 inhabitants must have a reception area. However, after more than 30 years of legal obligations, only 3.6% of municipalities have this type of site, which is just under 1,400 reception areas spread throughout France.¹¹¹ This situation leads to the exclusion of gens du voyage from the rest of society, not only by forcing them to live in overcrowded sites but also by forcing many families into precarious and illegal housing situations due to the lack of adequate housing facilities. In France, more than 94% of municipalities do not welcome gens du voyage.¹¹²

A reception area is like a car park. It consists of a tarmac or concrete slab, fences marked with white paint strips, sanitary blocks, water and electricity connections. The number of fences varies from 5 to 50 per site. However, as populations generally grow, many reception areas house several hundred people, which are not designed for such populations, leading to unsanitary living conditions. The architectural characteristics of the areas are provided for in the decree of 17 December 2019. This regulatory text specifies the rules for construction to improve the living conditions of gens du voyage. Though the decree sets a higher standard of housing for reception areas, the decree only applies to sites built from 2020 onwards and does not apply to sites built before 2020, though most sites were constructed pre-2020.

These reception areas are also largely outside of cities and many of them are fenced and guarded. The management of these facilities is often delegated to private companies which for several decades have been developing "security" solutions such as including barbed wire to fence off the reception areas, 24-hour guard, video surveillance, automated anti-intrusion harrows, etc. These measures are strongly criticised by the gens du voyage who inhabit these reception areas. In 2021, the author published an inventory analysing the location and immediate environment of 1358 reception areas in France.¹¹³

The inventory study spanned nearly two years, initiated in the aftermath of the devastating fire at the Lubrizol petrochemical plant on September 26, 2019, in Rouen, France. Among the most directly affected by the incident were the residents of the Petit Quevilly reception area, who received no immediate assistance. The Lubrizol plant is categorised as a SEVESO¹¹⁴ plant due to its high industrial risk level. Despite full awareness of this risk, as documented in the Prevention of Technological Risks Plan for the Lubrizol factory, the local authorities opted to establish a reception area just a short distance away. This situation underscores how industrial risk compounds environmental inequality, amplifying the impact of systemic pollution. In France, there are 44 reception areas situated near SEVESO classified sites.^{115 116}

Two major findings include:

- 71% of the reception areas are relegated from areas dedicated to housing, mostly located in industrial zones, peripheral areas and on the borders of municipalities.
- 51% of the sites are directly adjacent to potentially polluting installations: waste disposal centres, sewage treatment plants, chemical factories, motorways, power stations, etc.

Methodology

In addition to the comprehensive analysis of reception areas in France, a crucial component of the methodology involves firsthand insights obtained through interviews with residents of the Hellemmes-Ronchin reception area. These interviews were conducted on-site on July 16, 2022, providing a direct and immediate understanding of the experiences and perspectives of individuals within these designated spaces. The inclusion of qualitative data from these interviews enriches the overall research, offering a more nuanced and personal dimension to the findings. This approach enhances the depth of the study, bridging quantitative analysis with the lived experiences of the community members, thereby contributing to a more holistic and informed examination of the environmental and social dynamics in reception areas.

The Hellemmes-Ronchin reception area

The Hellemmes-Ronchin reception area situated near the city of Lille serves as a poignant illustration of the environmental challenges endured by gens du voyage. Established in 2006, its original purpose was to offer temporary lodging for gens du voyage passing through the region. However, since its inception, families have settled there permanently due to the lack of viable alternatives, a trend seen in many reception areas across France. Consequently, the site was repurposed as a permanent housing area, with its infrastructure ill-suited for this role. While living conditions are rudimentary at best, it is the pollution that poses the biggest challenge for the approximately 275 individuals residing in this overcrowded space, which was originally designed for a maximum of 100 people.

While the residents have no alternative but to reside in this reception area, it's essential to clarify that access is not provided free of charge. They are still required to cover the monthly expenses for their parcel, water, and electricity. The substandard quality of these facilities, combined with heightened exposure to weather-related challenges, such as freezing water installations during winter, inadequate heating, and excessive summer heat due to the absence of vegetation results in varying monthly expenses for families, ranging from €150 to €400 per month per parcel. As gens du voyage are ineligible for housing subsidies available under French common law, most of these families find themselves in a perpetual state of indebtedness. This further perpetuates the cycle of impoverishment for these households, the majority of whom already live in precarious circumstances.

Geographical location, environmental realities, and challenges faced by residents

The reception area is close to the Lille city centre, yet despite its relative proximity to one of the largest cities in France, the area has been relegated to an industrial zone and has no nearby neighbourhoods. Above all, it is located at the crossroads of several sources of pollution. To the west is a concrete production plant, to the north a crushing plant, which is a place for storing and mixing waste from public works. To the east are the TGV tracks and to the south are agricultural areas regularly sprayed with pesticides. Agricultural activities take place all year round due to the different crops. The two factories operate from 6 a.m. to 7 p.m. from Monday to Friday and sometimes on Saturday evenings until 2 a.m.

These industrial facilities generate significant disturbances, primarily stemming from vibrations and noise, particularly from the rock crusher. At times, engaging in even a simple conversation becomes a challenge due to the relentless noise pollution. Another notable source of inconvenience arises from the continuous transit of several hundred trucks daily, as they enter and exit the factories, traversing the immediate vicinity of the caravan-dwellings, which generate a lot of dust. Upon arrival at the Hellemmes-Ronchin area, the predominant feature that immediately draws one's attention is the ubiquitous presence of dust. It covers everything, from the ground to vehicles, soiling of caravans and other vehicles, speeding up their degradation. Dust can also be found on tree leaves, and even on individuals. With every stride, the slightest disturbance gives rise to a miniature dust cloud, and even a mild breeze prompts the need to shield one's face. The second observation, apparent within a few minutes of presence, is the discomfort it induces: eyes start to sting, throats become irritated, and skin begins to itch. Whenever these trucks pass by or a gust of wind sweeps through, the residents find it nearly impossible to venture outside their caravans. Hanging laundry outdoors becomes impractical, as the dust readily clings to the fabric. Furthermore, the drainage sewers frequently become clogged with dust, leading to noxious odours that are unbearable for the inhabitants.

The most serious effect is on the health of the inhabitants. Between the dust and the pesticides used during the periods of agricultural spraying, life on the area has become unbreathable. Many people suffer from skin problems such as dermatitis due to the contact of cement with the skin, known as "cement scabies". During periods of pesticide spraying, residents report infections and itching of the skin. Several people suffer from impetigo, an infection caused by staphylococcus or streptococcus, which during the site visit, we learned of the then recent amputation of the foot of one of the children in the field. An outbreak of cement scabies and impetigo occurred on the site when the neighbouring crusher plant decided to create a mound (mixing soil and various mineral wastes from the site) to isolate the plant from the area. Others suffer from eye problems linked to overexposure to the dust and chemicals sprayed during the spraying: conjunctivitis, blepharitis or corneal lesions. As for lung problems, these are the ones that appear to be the most serious for the inhabitants of the area. Of the last 5 newborns, 3 are asthmatic and all have suffered from bronchiolitis. The elderly are also overexposed to these problems.

There are also cancers which (according to the inhabitants) are more frequent than elsewhere. Although they are aware that this pathology can be caused by many factors, the doctors treating the inhabitants told them that the environment could play a role. Since 2020, three people have died of cancer in the area. However, since 2013, the inhabitants of the area have repeatedly called for a health assessment to establish the links between the environment and their deteriorating health. Nothing has been done by the local authority in charge of the site, where people rarely live beyond the age of 65.

AT TIMES,
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POLLUTION.

Tracing Hellemmes-Ronchin's evolution, activism, and political landscape

The reception area in Hellemmes-Ronchin opened in 2006. Following an epidemic of hepatitis A, the ARS stated in a 2008 report: "with regard to the nuisances associated with the cement plant, the situation of this industrial facility should be verified and, if necessary, regularised as a classified facility for environmental protection (ICPE)". Despite this warning, the Matériaux Recyclés crushing plant opened and began operations in September 2013. Several women living in the area then decided to create a collective and demanded an environmental and health assessment. Tests were carried out in 2015 but the results were never communicated, the Regional Directorate for the Environment, Planning and Housing (DREAL) merely declared on 3 March 2016 that "the examination of the conclusions of these studies does not reveal any non-compliance."¹¹⁷

For nearly a decade, the women's collective of Hellemmes-Ronchin has been advocating for the acknowledgment of health issues associated with the pollution affecting the local residents and the relocation of their residences. In 2022, the collective established the Da So Vas Women's Collective (meaning "to hold out one's hand" in Romanes), marking the first-ever association comprised entirely of French and Roma women. The association's primary goal is to champion and enhance the living conditions of gens du voyage while actively combating the environmental racism that gens du voyage often face.

The Hellemmes-Ronchin reception area was established in 2006, and concerns arose following a hepatitis A epidemic. In a 2008 report, the ARS highlighted issues related to the nearby cement plant, urging verification and potential regulation as an environmentally protected facility (ICPE). Despite this alert, the Matériaux Recyclés crushing plant commenced operations in September 2013. Responding to environmental and health worries, local women formed a collective, prompting tests in 2015. However, the results were never disclosed, and in March 2016, the Regional Directorate for the Environment, Planning, and Housing (DREAL) stated no identified non-compliance.

Over nearly a decade, the Hellemmes-Ronchin women's collective has advocated for recognition of health issues tied to area pollution and the relocation of residents. In 2022, they established the Da So Vas Women's Collective, the first association comprised entirely of French and Roma women. The collective's mission is to champion and enhance the living conditions of gens du voyage, combating the environmental racism that can impact this community.

The reception area is currently managed by the Métropole Européenne de Lille (MEL), which has delegated the day-to-day management to Véolia and then to the company Vago since June 2022. The MEL has not taken any significant measures since the first mobilisations of the Hellemmes-Ronchin women's collective in 2013. Over the last few years, several promises of rehousing have been made, but none of them have been fulfilled. The political context, it seems, has not worked in favour of the inhabitants of the area. On the one hand, the MEL is regularly criticised for its shortcomings in terms of reception infrastructures and the processes undertaken have been frozen throughout the period of the pandemic.¹¹⁸ On the other hand, since the appointment of the head of the northern prefecture in July 2019 a strengthening of repressive measures against Roma people were observed.¹¹⁹

The vice-president of CNDH Romeurope has observed an increase in harsh eviction actions targeting Roma families living in vulnerable conditions and also directed at illegal settlements of gens du voyage. Unfortunately, the reception area of Hellemmes-Ronchin experienced such actions firsthand. On March 27, 2020, a forceful police raid occurred during the night and amidst a full lockdown. The Lille anti-crime brigade (BAC) intervened, resorting to physical violence and verbal abuse against multiple individuals. In interviews, many spoke of enduring routine intimidation by the national police, who, before the March 2020 incident, frequently passed by the reception area, hurling anti-Gypsy insults.

RESPONDING TO ENVIRONMENTAL AND HEALTH WORRIES, LOCAL WOMEN FORMED A COLLECTIVE, PROMPTING TESTS IN 2015.

Lille is also one of 6 jurisdictions testing a new fixed fine system (AFD), which is strongly criticised by gens du voyage¹²⁰ because it punishes settlement outside reception areas with an automatic fine of 500 euros. Though the MEL does not fulfill its obligations by offering adequate living for housing sites, yet the very victims of these failures are sanctioned by fines. In 2021, the Metropolitan Councillor for gens du voyage, even threatened to resign as a result of MEL's inability to find solutions for the gens du voyage.¹²¹

Navigating challenges: the unmet promises of Hellemmes-Ronchin

By September 2022, the deputy mayor of Hellemmes committed to a temporary relocation solution for the Hellemmes-Ronchin reception area.¹²² Two plots of land were identified, one close to the site but far from pollution, the other in the town of Mons-en-Baroeul. However, through discussions with inhabitants, they remained sceptical and by the time of writing, were still awaiting adequate relocation. The residents of the area express a keen desire for swift relocation, seeking distance from the pollution associated with nearby factories. Beyond this immediate need, they aspire to explore more tailored solutions that align with their lifestyles. Specifically, residents are eager to secure the option of living in family plots, enabling the coexistence of small buildings and caravans. Identifying suitable plots of land for each family is crucial to avoid enforced cohabitation.

Unfortunately, public policy development consultations often overlook the gens du voyage community, who bear the brunt of poorly planned locations. The Da So Vas Women's Collective association has recently requested inclusion in the departmental consultative commission for gens du voyage. Their aim is to actively contribute to the formulation of future reception and housing policies, recognizing the importance of their perspective in addressing the challenges faced by the community.

To address the pressing challenges faced by Traveller communities, a multifaceted approach is necessary. For starters, it involves the prohibition of establishing reception areas in proximity to polluting or hazardous equipment, coupled with the development of urban planning laws that take into account the unique requirements of light housing. Recognizing the right to water is crucial, ensuring that inhabitants of informal spaces have access to emergency solutions. Granting the "housing" status to caravans not only provides better legal protection for these habitats but also facilitates access to housing aid, energy-related assistance, and protection during the winter truce. Additionally, putting an end to the system of fixed penalty fines, which disproportionately affects the most precarious families, is imperative.

Lastly, efforts must be intensified to combat public authorities refusing to fulfil their legal obligations concerning the reception and housing of gens du voyage. Despite a recent mandate urging caution in site selection near potentially harmful installations, challenges persist, as evidenced by new projects near polluting facilities.¹²³ Consequently, there remains a substantial amount of political, legal, media, and urban planning work to be undertaken to eliminate environmental racism against Roma communities in France.

PUBLIC POLICY
DEVELOPMENT
CONSULTATIONS
OFTEN
OVERLOOK
THE GENS
DU VOYAGE
COMMUNITY,
WHO BEAR
THE BRUNT
OF POORLY
PLANNED
LOCATIONS.

SWEDEN

LOCATION:
SORGENFRI CAMP,
MALMÖ

On the grounds of water access: the Sorgenfri case of Roma community eviction in Sweden

The Roma have a longstanding presence in Sweden since the 1500s. Over the centuries, diverse Roma groups migrated to Sweden from different European countries. The Swedish Roma community is heterogeneous, including individuals from various countries, educational backgrounds, and socio-economic statuses, with internal perceptions varying on origin, language, culture, and traditions.

This diverse community encompasses around 20 Romani language dialects. Among the estimated 50,000 Roma residents, approximately 25,000 trace their ancestry to the early sixteenth century migration wave, while the rest belong to groups arriving since the twentieth century. Despite the cultural diversity within the Roma population, common challenges persist, particularly in terms of living conditions. Many Roma individuals in Sweden find themselves residing in deprived areas characterised by a low socioeconomic status. Obtaining access to apartments often proves challenging due to racial discrimination and prejudice, prompting some to seek housing near other Roma individuals, fostering mutual support through informal networks.¹²⁴

Presently, multiple Roma groups reside in Sweden, recognised as one of the five national minorities. EU citizens, primarily identifying as Roma, faced challenges in Swedish cities, leaving countries like Romania and Bulgaria due to structural discrimination. Categorised as "vulnerable EU citizens" in Sweden, many lack housing and a regular income. Since the EU enlargement in 2007, there has been a surge in Roma migration to Sweden to escape widespread poverty in their home countries.

Sweden boasts an elaborate and generous social welfare system, featuring a well-developed safety net designed to meet the needs and uphold the rights of its citizens. However, despite these provisions, the Roma community frequently faces difficulties

OBTAINING
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OFTEN PROVES
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AND PREJUDICE.

accessing the full benefits of the welfare system. They often feel that they "fall between the cracks" and end up relying on each other for support. This reliance on informal networks underscores the persisting challenges that the Roma in Sweden encounter, despite the country's efforts to provide comprehensive social services.¹²⁵

Methodology

The case study draws upon multiple sources and processes of data collection. At an early stage in research, a comprehensive literature research was conducted to grasp the general context of the Sorgenfri Case. This included a wide range of relevant documents spanning articles, a dissertation, academic papers and official law/policy documents. Further, five in-depth expert interviews were conducted with stakeholders, such as civil society organizations, a former student lawyer involved in the protests and human rights researchers working on sanitary issues in Sweden. Finally, findings were cross-checked in a process of data triangulation.

'Vulnerable citizens': structural patterns of discrimination and evictions of Roma

As mentioned, in the Swedish context, most Roma communities are categorised under the legal term 'vulnerable EU citizens', but often framed as 'failed' citizens whereas the role of race and unequal environmental burdens remain largely under the radar. Swedes generally perceive themselves to be an egalitarian and just society in which the category of race plays a subordinate role.¹²⁶ The term is used by Swedish government authorities to refer to citizens from other EU Member States that reside in Sweden under situations of poverty and marginality. The vulnerable EU citizen framing implies a status of no formal employment and hence no stable right of residence in Sweden with access to social assistance and services only under the fulfilment of certain criteria (e.g. sufficient funds or health insurance). More importantly, the term 'vulnerable EU citizen' reflects the Swedish government's commitment to brand anti-racism in contrast to the discourse of 'the Roma problem' prevalent in many European countries (Brännström 2016).¹²⁷ This framing has important societal implications in the sense that it sets the foundation on how local governments and authorities interact and engage with Roma communities.

Between 2013 and 2016, more than 80 evictions of informal Roma settlements were initiated by Swedish municipalities on the grounds of poor sanitation.¹²⁸ According to this report, the main reason for the evictions were complains by the municipalities and residents that Roma settlements pose an environmental threat to the nearby residents and their neighborhood due to low sanitary standards. The Sorgenfrilägret ("The Sorgenfri Camp") Roma settlement in the Norra Sorgenfri area of the municipality of Malmö was home to approximately 150-200 Roma including minors and pregnant women, all of whom have Romanian nationality. Following a decision issued by the environmental council the settlement posed health risks to the surrounding population. This is due to soil pollution as well as the lack of adequate sanitation services which the municipalities failed to provide. Framing the Sorgenfri camp as a sanitation problem, including health risks, hence set the legal ground for its eviction. In October 2015 the Malmö municipality announced its intention to evict the camp following the decision of the environmental council. The mechanism at force here is called *rättelse*, a special legal mechanism that empowers municipal authorities to act independently from the national legislation with the intention to be used in cases with a necessity to act to prevent environmental damage (Bard UN Special Rapporteur, 2015).¹²⁹ According to the Public Water and Wastewater Plant Act of 2006, the provision of water and sanitation services lies within the sole responsibility of the municipalities (Mattison & Thomasson 2010).¹³⁰ Most Swedish residents are provided with access to drinking water

BETWEEN 2013 AND 2016, MORE THAN 80 EVICTIONS OF INFORMAL ROMA SETTLEMENTS WERE INITIATED BY SWEDISH MUNICIPALITIES ON THE GROUNDS OF POOR SANITATION.

including sanitation facilities. Individuals under the status of vulnerable EU citizen have the right of residence in other Member States up to three months as per the Free Movement Directive legislated by the EU (Movement Directive 2004).¹³¹ This also includes non-discrimination treatment on grounds of nationality. Yet, Member States are only forced to guarantee social welfare at this initial stage of residence so long as residents are employed, seeking for work, studying or having a family member meeting these conditions and with enough income to provide guardianship (ibid.) Hence, social assistance, including access to water and sanitation, is interpreted with legal complications often contradictory in regard to the national law on the one hand and human rights guided norms on the other. In this, the competence given local municipalities, often act on a vague basis for legal action.

At the very core of the eviction, however, lies the role of unequal environmental burdens placed on the Roma mainly through the denial of proper access to water and sanitation which further contributed to their exclusion. This is despite access to WSI is a basic social right, regardless of citizenship or housing status. Given the Free Movement Directive¹³², the latter is reflected in EU law¹³³ according to which EU citizens have a prolonged right of residence in a Member State following the initial three months. During this time a Member State is not obliged to give access to provide for social assistance, including WSI. If migrating EU citizens are working, actively seeking work or having sufficient resources, these social services should be provided after the initial stay. In fact, on the national level, however, various interpretations and applications of these provisions are applied by the responsible municipalities of Member States trying to harmonise EU with national law regarding social assistance (Davis & Ryan 2016).¹³⁴ Regardless of diverging legal interpretation, in Sweden the provision of social assistance, including access to WSI, remains within the competence of these municipalities implying unpredictable outcomes. Thus, while municipalities are responsible for meeting the basic needs, they cannot transgress Swedish national law as given by the Swedish Local Government Acts (ibid.).

The recent Swedish evictions follow a similar structure of government actions across Europe. This structure manifests in the control of migration over Roma communities by denying access to water and sanitation and thereby aims at preventing and discouraging EU citizens from settling. As outlined, this is often rooted in varying legal assessments of the measures taken by the local municipality for social assistance of vulnerable EU citizens. Access to water and sanitation have been central elements throughout the history of discrimination against Roma groups and individuals in Sweden. The control over water access has often been used by Swedish municipalities to prevent Roma groups from permanent settling, which in turn further contributed to their marginalization in a society where cleanliness is an established norm.¹³⁵ As a result, former Roma settlements have been identified systematically as 'sanitary or hygienic issues' giving reason for the eviction of unsanitary camps.

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ROMA.

Water access and the role of local municipalities

In 2015, local authorities in Malmö (Sweden) evicted the informal Sorgenfri Camp for alleged health and safety reasons as well as due to a possible redevelopment plan of the formerly industrialised area.¹³⁶ Around two hundred Romani EU migrants were living in the segregated settlement that lacked electricity, sanitary facilities and access to the municipality's waste management system. Previously, the area used to house small-scale industries, which in turn, after their decline in the 80s, left the area heavily contaminated with toxic concentrations of chromium as well as residues of oil and chlorine solutions in the soil.¹³⁷ Through an environmental justice perspective, this article sheds light on the conditions under which the eviction was legitimised paying close attention to the role of access to water and sanitation. In doing so, it is aimed at gaining insights into the broader scope of discrimination against Roma people in Western Europe on the grounds of environmental concern and injustices.

CAMP RESIDENTS STARTED TO FILL UP PLASTIC BOTTLES AT A NEARBY CEMETERY AND USED THE WATER FROM NEARBY GAS STATION.

In the case of Malmö, camp residents were held responsible for the maintenance, or even the installation, of sanitation facilities as well as for the provision of clean water. This was the result of repeated inquiries to the local municipality since de facto the Sorgenfri camp was private property. In previous years, the empty plot had been used by homeless people without complaints from the owner. Since the settlement steadily grew larger the owner began cooperating with the municipality and the police to clear the place and complete the eviction.¹³⁸

The municipality, however, certainly had a role in making the place rather uninhabitable and way easier to clear out. In the present case, the responsible local municipality provided little assistance to the Roma residents towards access to WSI. Rather than ensuring proper sanitation to the informal settlement, priority was given to the voices of the surrounding neighbourhood. These claimed that the local municipality is responsible to keep the area clean in the sense that no environmental threat is posed towards local residents. Alternatively, camp residents started to fill up plastic bottles at a nearby cemetery and used the water from nearby gas station. In addition, people were taking showers at social service agencies and with the support of a local NGO, located a few blocks away. In the shadow of the local authorities' responsibility, access to water and sanitation became contested in diverse ways through the Sorgenfri residents.

Access to water and gender dynamics

The link between access to water and sanitation runs deep. Considering the impacts on gender with regard to water and sanitation, women were unequally affected and exposed. In comparison to men, women bare different levels of vulnerability as well as responsibilities on the camp site. Women require clean water and sanitation access due to menstruation issues and for hygienic reasons. In this, women were more exposed than men since they require a safe place to go to as, for example, to the bathroom for washing which normally is a solo activity. This goes in hand with feelings of vulnerability especially when women are forced to go outside at night in the absence of proper plumbing. Potential violence or harassment contribute to the factor of being exposed when being outside.

Besides, women on the camp were reported to be the primary caregivers in the family. Children have water needs and need to be washed and diapers need to be changed. Also, in terms of domestic water uses women were hold responsible because frequently they were the ones who cooked for the entire family. In order to provide sufficient water supplies, mainly women were collecting water in the nearby area. These phenomena could also be explained in the context of different earning capacities and the consequent division of labour around water and sanitation related jobs. However, the outlined tasks strongly impinged on women's lives and placed an extra burden while living in Sorgenfri. Men, on the other hand, would often find work in Sweden's informal sector, mainly in construction, accompanied by hazardous conditions with no social insurance. Another source of income still represents begging or as waste collectors, gathering bottles and cans for recycling purposes.

CONSIDERING THE IMPACTS ON GENDER WITH REGARD TO WATER AND SANITATION, WOMEN WERE UNEQUALLY AFFECTED AND EXPOSED.

Water access-related Roma evictions

The present case study represents a complex case of environmental racism which has been aimed at decomposing to analyse the forces at play when it comes to structural discrimination and ultimately evictions of Roma communities in Sweden. The denial of access to water and sanitation as well as the underlying discouragement by the authorities deepened the problematization leading to exclusion of the Sorgenfri community remarkably. Herein, unequal environmental burdens showed up as a form of antigypsyism, among

others, manifesting in the denied access to water and sanitation. At the same time, residents of Sorgenfri were framed as an environmental threat.

While the local municipalities in Malmö held the decisional power on the provision and regulation of water, they were also repeatedly left alone by the national government's administration stuck between Swedish law and EU policy. The municipality in the Sorgenfri Case has received little guidance by the national government on how to deal with informal settlements in line with human rights norms.¹³⁹ On the contrary, municipalities were rather encouraged to prevent long-term settlements as given by Sorgenfri. However, it is upon the Swedish state to comply with international human rights as well as to ensure that local authorities are supported in adopting respective policies. Accompanied by national political will, municipal authorities can address their obligation to guarantee the human right to water and sanitation rather than forcibly displace Roma communities in informal camps such as the Sorgenfri. In the present case, the evicted Roma either fled to other informal settlements in Sweden or were given a ticket back to their home country.

IT IS UPON THE SWEDISH STATE
TO COMPLY WITH INTERNATIONAL
HUMAN RIGHTS

Case study evaluation and conclusion

QUANTIFYING
RACISM IS
CHALLENGING,
AS IT OFTEN
OPERATES
SUBTLY
AND GOES
UNRECOGNISED
BY INDIVIDUALS

Quantifying racism is challenging, as it often operates subtly and goes unrecognised by individuals who would deny harbouring such tendencies. Yet, racism permeates various aspects of society, and it can be obvious once patterns are connected. How racism interconnects with the environment can be experienced by siting of infrastructural projects, discriminatory water cutoffs, limited energy access for marginalised groups, and the deliberate placement of these communities in polluted housing locations. Environmental justice extends beyond housing, encompassing broader concerns such as equitable access to energy resources, availability of clean water, and scrutinising the siting of polluted areas.

Within infrastructural projects, antigypsyism influences decision-making, leading to unequal distribution of benefits and burdens, affecting already marginalised communities such as Roma and Travellers. Since environmental racism towards Roma is a manifestation of antigypsyism, discriminatory practices become evident in the siting of projects as in the case of Hellemmes-Ronchin, revealing systemic biases ingrained in infrastructure planning. The injustice further manifests in the unequal distribution of water resources, such as discriminatory water cutoffs in the Sorgenfri camp. Energy access becomes another battleground for environmental justice, as the unequal allocation of energy resources perpetuates socio-economic inequalities as in the case of Font de la Pólvara. Finally, we see injustice in the deliberate placement of marginalised communities in sites burdened by pollution as in the case of Industriestrasse, which exacerbates health risks and socio-economic inequalities.

Environmental racism, akin to the concept of slow violence,¹⁴⁰ operates subtly and often remains unnoticed by the majority of the population. This invisibility not only intensifies its insidious nature but also contributes to its societal normalisation. The damage caused by environmental racism, while not immediately visible, accumulates over time, leading to significant disparities in health and socio-economic conditions. This form of slow violence manifests in numerous ways, such as the disproportionate siting of hazardous waste facilities in communities of colour or the lack of access to clean air and water in these areas. The impacts, though gradual and less perceptible, are nonetheless devastating, leading to chronic health conditions and reduced life expectancies.

The concept of slow violence, as demonstrated in the experiences of the Sinti community in Industriestrasse, Germany, and the Traveller communities in Hellemmes-Ronchin, France, and in Springlane, Ireland are case and point examples. In Industriestrasse, the Sinti community has experienced the gradual repercussions of living in a chemically polluted area, leading to adverse health outcomes and a reduced quality of life. In a similar vein, the Traveller communities in Hellemmes-Ronchin have been subjected to slow violence through enduring spatial segregation and substandard housing conditions, resulting in prolonged harm and contributing to health disparities and social marginalisation. Meanwhile, in Springlane, the Traveller communities have faced the consequences of spatial segregation

and inadequate housing conditions, leading to health disparities and social exclusion, as shown by the 2022 research conducted by the Environmental Justice Project.¹⁴¹ The study highlights the 'out of sight' placement of sites, which are frequently located near traditional dumps, landfills, and motorways, further exacerbating the challenges faced by these communities.

Germany

The case study in Germany, specifically the Sinti community residing in the former Industriestrasse in Heidelberg, exemplifies the need for restorative justice. The community has been grappling with the challenges of living in a chemically polluted area, leading to adverse health effects and a diminished quality of life. Restorative justice in this context would involve rectifying the historical injustices by addressing the environmental harms inflicted on the community and working towards restoring a healthy and safe living environment. Distributive justice is also pertinent, as the community has been disproportionately burdened by the pollution. The unequal distribution of environmental goods, such as clean air and water, highlights the need for equitable allocation of resources to ensure that all members of society, including marginalised communities like the Sinti, have access to a healthy environment.

The German strategy outlines measures to ensure equal access to education, employment, health, and housing, with a specific focus on providing adequate, non-segregated housing and basic services through integrated urban development programs. This emphasis is directed towards migrants and individuals with a migration background rather than specifically targeting the Roma community. Although housing implementation falls under Germany's federal system, social housing promotion responsibilities shifted from the Federation to the Länder since 2006.

While the strategy mentions the German Federal Government's indicator-based integration monitoring at federal and Länder levels, it lacks a detailed list of indicators. In alignment with the EU Roma framework, the Federation allocated 5 billion euros to the Länder for social housing promotion, facilitating the construction of 100,000 new social rental apartments.¹⁴² Additionally, an extra 1 billion euros, earmarked for climate-friendly social housing construction under the Climate Action Emergency Programme and the Energy and Climate Fund, was indicated for 2022.¹⁴³ The strategy commits to ongoing financial support for social housing construction, with plans to increase funding.

RESTORATIVE
JUSTICE IN
THIS CONTEXT
WOULD INVOLVE
RECTIFYING THE
HISTORICAL
INJUSTICES BY
ADDRESSING
THE
ENVIRONMENTAL
HARMS

France

THE ACTIVE
PARTICIPATION
OF THE
TRAVELLER
COMMUNITIES IN
THE DECISION-
MAKING
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CONDITIONS IS
CRUCIAL

In France, the case study sheds light on spatial segregation impacting Traveller communities and their struggles to attain improved housing conditions. This scenario underscores the significance of recognitional justice, as it is essential to acknowledge the social, historical, and cultural factors shaping the power dynamics that have led to the spatial segregation of these communities. Procedural justice is also evident in the advocacy for fair and inclusive decision-making processes. The active participation of the Traveller communities in the decision-making regarding housing conditions is crucial for addressing the spatial segregation and ensuring that diverse ethnicities and social groups are treated with equal respect in the pursuit of improved living conditions. Lastly, within the framework of recognitional justice, area residents advocate for the acknowledgment of their concerns and aspirations for a fair living environment. Seeking swift relocation to escape nearby pollution, they aspire to tailored solutions like family plots accommodating small buildings and caravans. The identification of suitable land for each family is crucial to prevent enforced cohabitation, emphasising the need for recognising individual needs within the pursuit of justice. Municipalities can contribute to recognitional justice by actively engaging with the residents, understanding their unique requirements, and incorporating their perspectives into housing arrangements.

THE FRENCH STRATEGY GIVES PROMINENCE TO THE 'HOUSING FIRST' PRINCIPLE

In addressing the needs of Travellers, the French Roma Strategy focuses on improving the environment and location of halting sites as part of its second strategic objective to enhance living and inclusion conditions. It also includes measures to relaunch the implementation of departmental plans for receiving and accommodating Travellers, support the development of rented family plots, and establish corresponding monitoring indicators. Additionally, a third strategic objective is dedicated to accelerating slum clearance in areas where vulnerable intra-European nationals reside. However, the budgets allocated especially for both Roma and gens du voyage are not only too low but have also declined in recent years.

The French strategy gives prominence to the 'housing first' principle as a means to regularise and facilitate social inclusion, serving as a gateway to addressing issues related to employment, education, and healthcare.¹⁴⁴ This marks a positive departure from the previous decade's focus on demolishing shanties/slums and displacing inhabitants from a national security perspective. In the context of migrant Roma and slum inhabitants, civil society associations advocate for the application of the 'housing first' principle to shape public policies on access to accommodation, as proposed in the NRSF. Encouraging pathways to residency based on common law is recommended. Achieving environmental justice will be realised when slum inhabitants are provided with housing solutions, eliminating the need for squatting on abandoned industrial sites or establishing shantytowns in polluted areas.

Ireland

The case study in Ireland highlights the struggles of Traveller communities within halting sites and their pursuit of improved housing conditions. Restorative justice is essential in this context to rectify the historical injustices and restore balance by addressing the substandard living conditions and working towards providing adequate housing for the communities. Recognitional justice in the case of Springlane, underscores the importance of acknowledging and respecting the cultural identity and rights. Like the case in France, this would mean ensuring that in future cultural norms are taken into account within housing developments. Lastly, distributive justice is also crucial, as the unequal distribution of resources has resulted in the communities being disproportionately impacted by inadequate housing. The pursuit of distributive justice would involve ensuring that the benefits and burdens of societal activities, such as housing provision, are equitably distributed among all members of society, including the marginalised Traveller communities.

Ireland has yet to adopt its new Strategy and the previous strategy, spanning from 2017 to 2021, did not explicitly mention aspects of environmental justice though, it did include measures in the areas of education, accommodation, healthcare, and employment specifically for the Traveller Community. The strategy also highlighted initiatives designed to assist the Roma community, who are EEA citizens, in these same areas. The focus of housing and accommodation activities under this strategy was primarily on enhancing the implementation of Traveller-specific accommodation programmes via local authorities. However, the strategy did not address the accommodation needs of the Roma community. According to the strategy, Travellers have the freedom to express their preference for any form of accommodation, including halting site accommodation, through the statutory Assessment of Housing Needs conducted by local authorities. These assessments inform the Local Authority Traveller Accommodation Programmes and indicate that the majority of Travellers have chosen standard or group housing.

The new National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy (NTRIS) should define, at a minimum, specific accommodation targets in line with the EU Roma framework. These targets include halving the number of Travellers and Roma sleeping rough or using emergency accommodation by 2030, reducing overcrowding among Travellers by 50% by 2030, ensuring that 95% of Travellers have access to tap water within their residences by 2030, and diminishing Traveller accommodation deprivation by one-third by the year 2030. These objectives serve as crucial benchmarks to address the accommodation challenges faced by the Traveller and Roma communities and align with broader European goals for equality, inclusion, and participation.¹⁴⁵

RECOGNITIONAL JUSTICE IN THE CASE OF SPRINGLANE, UNDERSCORES THE IMPORTANCE OF ACKNOWLEDGING AND RESPECTING THE CULTURAL IDENTITY AND RIGHTS.

THE PURSUIT OF DISTRIBUTIVE JUSTICE WOULD INVOLVE ADDRESSING DISPARITIES IN THE DISTRIBUTION OF ENERGY RESOURCES

Spain

The case study in Spain focuses on the access to energy for Roma communities and their pursuit for energy justice. Restorative justice is imperative in this context to address the historical injustices that have led to energy poverty within the Roma communities and to work towards restoring a balance by ensuring access to reliable and affordable energy sources. Distributive justice is also significant, as the unequal distribution of energy resources has resulted in the communities facing energy poverty. The pursuit of distributive justice would involve addressing disparities in the distribution of energy resources to ensure that all members of society, including the Roma communities, have access to essential energy services.

Within the Spanish national strategy, there is an element of addressing energy justice, focusing on energy security and setting clear objectives to reduce housing segregation and improve access to essential services.¹⁴⁶ The strategy aims to align with the National Strategy against Energy Poverty 2019-2024, ensuring that vulnerable consumers, including Roma families, benefit from measures designed to alleviate energy poverty. As part of the National Strategy against Energy Poverty (2021-2024), there is a focus on implementing structural and energy efficiency measures. These measures are intended to improve the equipment and conditions of buildings and homes for vulnerable consumers, including the Roma community. The strategy also plans to incorporate additional protective measures for consumers facing vulnerability, along with initiatives to enhance information and training mechanisms. The objective is to improve understanding of rights, obligations, and alternatives in the realm of energy consumption.

Sweden

The case study in Sweden delves into the impact of denied access to water for a Roma community in Malmo, which betrays a deliberate effort to relocate the Roma population from the area. Restorative justice is crucial in this context to rectify the historical injustices and restore balance by addressing the denied access to water and working towards ensuring that the community's needs are addressed. Recognition justice is also pertinent, as it is essential to acknowledge the social, historical, and cultural factors shaping the power dynamics that have led to access to water being denied for the Roma community, in this case being labelled as 'failed citizens'. Procedural justice is evident in the advocacy for fair and inclusive decision-making processes, emphasising the active participation of the Roma community in the decisions regarding access to water, especially when the water was cut-off without any alternative and without the community's knowledge.

Following the adoption of the 2020 EU Roma Framework, the Swedish government asserted that its existing ten-year strategy, set to run until 2032, is already consistent with the new framework. Therefore, it deemed any modifications to the current strategy unnecessary. The ongoing Swedish strategy aims to promote equitable access to appropriate, non-segregated housing, as well as ensuring access to high-quality healthcare and social services. However, the existing strategy lacks specific indicators for measuring progress and outcomes and has no direct measures to address access to water.¹⁴⁷

The stark realities of environmental racism and slow violence, as exemplified in the cases of Industriestrasse, Hellemmes-Ronchin, Font-de-la Polvora, Sorgenfri Camp, and Springlane, highlight the urgent call for a comprehensive approach to environmental justice. This approach should encompass recognition, procedural, restorative and distributive justice, aiming to rectify historical injustices, and alleviate the environmental harm inflicted on marginalised communities, as well as ensuring an equitable distribution of environmental benefits and burdens. At the heart is the necessity to challenge and overturn the societal normalisation of these injustices, sparking systemic changes that halt the continuation of harm over time. The role of mobilization and resistance as exemplified by grassroots movements and civil society in many of these cases is crucial in this journey, as communities and advocates rally to dismantle oppressive structures. By nurturing such transformative change, we can actively strive towards crafting a more equitable and sustainable future, where every community has access to a safe and healthy living environment.

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Notes



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