

HOUSEINC INVESTIGATES The different dimensions of housing inequality

ABOUT



The Czech case study, drawing on the work of the NGO Romodrom, **investigates housing inequality** within a specific marginalised group, with an emphasis on the **Roma population** in two selected cities in the Czech Republic, Karviná and Ostrava.



MAIN FINDINGS

- Housing inequality is a complex issue influenced by numerous internal and external factors. These include the challenges Roma face in accessing mortgages due to **low incomes, discrimination, excessive housing costs, state, municipal, and local housing policies, as well as the attitudes of property owners.**
- Both the causes and consequences of housing inequality manifest in various areas, such as excessive housing costs, the risk of falling into energy poverty, and reduced social mobility.
- For the Roma community living in the Czech Republic, compared to the general population, there are more **frequent instances of lower education levels, reduced mobility, lower incomes, and more challenging access to information,** leading to lower overall functional literacy, including financial and energy literacy.
- Roma individuals in the Czech Republic continue to face discrimination across many areas.



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Case Study Czech Republic

POLICY POTENTIAL



Addressing housing inequality requires a coordinated policy response at the national, local, and individual levels. A unified housing support law is essential to address legislative fragmentation and prevent discriminatory practices.



At the municipal level, expanding access to social housing and financial support mechanisms, such as rental guarantees, can help remove economic barriers.



Social work and long-term support programs must be adequately funded to provide continuous assistance.



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The Romanian case study, drawing on the work of the NGO Politeia, analyses **housing issues** at both the national and local levels, with a particular focus on **informal housing and segregated communities** living in these types of settlements, with a **focus on the Roma community** in Dârvari, Ciorogârla.



MAIN FINDINGS

- Citizens living in informal communities face **multiple forms of inequality**, beginning with lack of documentation, which restricts their access to essential social services such as healthcare, social assistance, education, waste management, and energy.
- Families live in overcrowded and unsafe conditions, with many **lacking legal ownership** of their homes or land.
- The infrastructure is severely underdeveloped: most households **lack access to basic utilities**, such as electricity, running water, and heating. This creates a precarious environment where energy poverty and unsafe living conditions are the norm, exposing families to significant risks, especially during the winter months.
- Most of the community **relies on informal employment**, often in low-paying and unstable jobs, perpetuating a cycle of poverty. The lack of formal contracts not only leaves workers **vulnerable to exploitation** but also discourages participation in official employment due to outstanding debts and fines.
- Educational opportunities are limited, and early dropout rates remain high, particularly as children are pressured to contribute to family incomes, further narrowing their prospects. Discrimination plays a critical role in this marginalization.
- The Roma community faces **systemic exclusion from essential services**, such as healthcare and education, and **their voices are often unheard** in political decision-making processes.
- **Women are further marginalised**, as traditional patriarchal norms confine them to domestic roles, limiting their economic independence and access to opportunities.



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Case Study Romania

POLICY POTENTIAL



Addressing informal living in Romania requires complex and resource-intensive measures from the national government and local municipalities to both identify and address the challenges faced by people in informal housing.



Progress on helping people living in informal housing has often been slow, although findings suggest that significant progress has been recently made with the adoption of a legal framework which can facilitate the work of governmental agencies, as well as local municipalities to identify and address the needs of informal communities.



However, significant work remains in identifying these communities and developing targeted measures tailored to the diverse needs that people from these settlements have.



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The Italian case study focuses on the work of the NGO Liberitutti involved in the community-based reception systems for Ukrainian refugees in the Piedmont Region, North-West Italy, in response to the ongoing conflict triggered by Russia's invasion of Ukraine.



MAIN FINDINGS

- Housing is conceived not just as a shelter but as a foundation for personal and professional development as well as for social stability and inclusion. In the context of refugees fleeing war, the housing system results in temporary and often inadequate accommodations, where **refugees live in a condition of uncertainty and precarity**.
- This significantly affects integration processes in terms of labour market opportunities, access to education and formation, ability to develop stable social relations, as well as mental well-being, and quality of life as a whole.
- Primary data emerged that key factors such as the geographical location of the accommodations, the activation of strong local community networks, and the reception system model can mitigate housing inequalities and improve long-term integration outcomes.
- Policymakers and stakeholders must prioritise these elements to ensure that **housing serves not just as shelter but as a foundation for stability and inclusion**.



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Case Study Italy

POLICY POTENTIAL



The case study highlights that the impact of housing policies depends on the intersection between refugee population characteristics, pre-existing inequalities in the host regions, and the extent to which housing policies are designed to address and manage these dynamics, to avoid unintended consequences.



Housing systems must promote integration between housing solutions and additional policy initiatives related to different services (language, education, employment integration), while being ready to change as contextual characteristics and beneficiary needs evolve.



A comprehensive and flexible approach, which considers both short and more structural long-term strategies, assessing the social, economic and psychological needs of refugees, may be essential in this context. Taking into consideration these aspects would further improve housing policies to actively promote and encourage integration.



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- The German case study is the result of a cooperation with the City of Mannheim and concentrates on **perceptions of energy poverty** and possible policy solutions to address energy poverty in the Vogelstang district in the city of Mannheim.



MAIN FINDINGS

- The findings reveal significant differences in **how energy poverty is perceived among stakeholders and residents in the district**. While city administrators do not see it as a major issue (e.g. because the issue of energy poverty is not visible in municipal statistics and people often live just above the threshold for social welfare benefits), residents and non-official stakeholders report that **many households struggle with high energy costs and inefficiencies**.
- There is a notable **lack of awareness** about city policies and programs addressing energy inefficiency and energy poverty effects in the building sector, driven by factors such as diverse communication needs, low public trust, and social segregation tendencies within the neighbourhood. These challenges highlight the need for **more inclusive communication strategies**.
- Energy poverty is deeply embedded in broader housing inequality, influenced by disparities in housing quality, ownership status, and access to financial and institutional support and should be addressed in an integrated way as part of the city's overall housing and neighbourhood development policies.



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Case Study Germany

POLICY POTENTIAL



The case study highlights the need for improved and needs-tailored communication and information pathways to address the diverse population groups in the neighbourhood (particularly focusing on energy and housing-poor residents, who are a heterogeneous group in themselves) to increase the visibility of the city and its programs and to improve public trust.



One possibility to achieve this would be the establishment of a one-stop shop in Vogelstang to offer advice and implementation support for energy renovations as well as services to alleviate energy poverty.



Subsidy/policy programs are needed to mitigate both the investment costs for homeowners as well as the effects of modernisation/renovation costs for tenants, e.g. due to often implemented rent increases after energy renovations that are not balanced by reduced energy costs.

