

Statement – Tamas Buchler

Thank you Madame Co-chair,

My name is Tamas Buchler, and on behalf of Minority Rights Group Europe I wish to focus on the environmental injustices faced by Roma communities across Europe and beyond; and their intersections with racial discrimination, segregation and other manifestations of antigypsism.

Roma often live in unsafe and segregated environments, exposed to earthquakes and flooding. They also lack the resources to recover from such disasters, and are disproportionately affected by additional environmental burdens and risks, such as pollution and environmental degradation, stemming from landfills and contaminated industrial facilities. Communities are excluded from basic services, such as access of drinking water, adequate sanitation, and waste collection. The consequences have devastating health impacts, ranging from infectious diseases to mental health issues contributing to the fact that Roma populations have a significantly lower life expectancy than the general population in Europe, between 5 to 15 years less than the average.

Europe's largest waste-related Roma settlement is Pata-Rât in Romania. Around 1,500 people live around a landfill, that pollutes the soil and groundwater. The inhabitants often suffer from infections, asthma or bronchitis, heart and stomach problems due to oozing substances and toxic smoke when waste is burned. In Turkey, the three earthquakes in 2023 laid bare the vulnerability of Roma Dom and Lom communities who are not able to access basic humanitarian needs such as shelter, water and electricity due to discrimination.

There are no easy solutions for the complexities of these injustices against the Roma people, but neither are we powerless to face them. MRGE has been supporting and partnering with rural, grassroots Roma CSOs and activists in the region. Acknowledging and celebrating their work and resistance, **I'd like to make the following recommendations to lead us to change:**

Governments need to ensure that Roma communities are not disproportionately burdened by pollution and environmental hazards, and take proactive measures to protect Roma communities from industrial emissions and hazardous waste and provide them with safe and affordable housing in non-segregated neighborhoods with sustainable heating solutions and access to safe water. They should explicitly address the unique gender-based vulnerabilities and discrimination faced by Roma women, the well-being of children and inclusion of persons with disabilities. They should also establish mechanisms for Roma communities to participate meaningfully in locally driven, community-led decision making.

Thank you for your attention.