

Chánov housing estate in the town of Most while taking care of the needs of its inhabitants, who should be provided with a long-term lease in standard-quality flats in non-segregated localities. The local authorities contemplated building container housing for the inhabitants to move them out of the decrepit tenement houses in Chánov. The Public Defender and NGOs were alarmed by this solution as it would further reduce the living standards of the inhabitants as containers are not suitable for long-term habitation, especially because they are difficult to heat properly and susceptible to dampness (ECRI, 2020).

Similar situations are observed in Italy and Bulgaria. In Italy in 2015, the expulsions of Roma, particularly in Rome, have increased compared with 2013 and 2014. The municipal authorities offered the evicted families temporary solutions at best and often the evicted Roma preferred to move to another unauthorised settlement. The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance concluded that these forced evictions did not improve housing or sanitary conditions and even had unwanted effects of simply reproducing, elsewhere, the same precarious and insalubrious situation that led to the evictions in the first place (ECRI, 2016).

In Bulgaria in 2001, 30 families were evicted from a municipal plot in the capital's Lyulin district, known as Asanova Mahala. A hypermarket was built there, and the Roma families were housed “temporarily” in vans on Europa Blvd. They lived in these terrible conditions for 12 years before gaining access to social housing.

Usually, evictions from informal settlements affect large numbers of families (Batalova Vodenitza in Sofia, Bulgaria; ECHR, 2012). In cases of mass evictions of large communities, the authorities face difficulties in providing adequate rehousing and alternative accommodation.

#### **Box 5.5: How eviction and displacement lead to informal housing**

In July 2014, the local municipality of Miskolc, a former industrial town in Northern Hungary summoned tenants with fixed-term contracts in the poorest segregated neighbourhood to vacate their homes after the expiry of their contracts due to plans to demolish or otherwise eliminate the neighbourhood. The local government decree stated as reason for the elimination that the apartments are old and inadequate for housing and according to the city

development plan this area will be part of the reconstruction of a modern football stadium. In this case study I present how the elimination of the segregated neighbourhood leads not only to a more precarious housing situation of the former tenants but in many cases pushed them into informal housing situations.

The former workers' colony called Numbered Streets, was strongly connected to the steel factory founded at the end of the 19th century together with its own institutions (an elementary school, community house, etc.) within the neighbourhood. During the socialist time the colony was provided social housing to both Roma and non-Roma factory workers. The factory was closed down in the early 1990s, triggering mass out-migration from the neighbourhood as well as from the town. In parallel, the mass privatisation after 1990s led to the residualisation<sup>59</sup> of social housing (Hegedüs, 2013). By the turn of the millennium, Numbered Streets was home to around 900 persons, possibly equivalent to over 200 families, living in low-comfort social housing flats in one- or two storey buildings that are over a hundred years old. As the local authorities did not invest in the renovation and modernization of these apartments for decades, the physical conditions of this neighbourhood continued to decline, as a result of which by the end of 1990s the colony was characterized by the worst housing condition in the city. Moreover, the decades long strategy of the municipality is to eliminate from time to time the neighbourhood in the worst physical condition, and residents are relocated to municipal housing in different areas of the town. The municipality has hundreds of social housing units in this colony, therefore most of the marginalized Roma families were relocated. Though the local municipality had no interest and human capacity to control the users of the apartments, therefore more and more families had used and paid for the municipality owned apartments informally without proper contract. Some families were just squatting in the vacant, unused apartments without any housing contract, but paid for the utility costs. From the perspective of the majority society, the local authorities and stakeholders, and the local media, this neighbourhood became a socially and ethnically homogenous,

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<sup>59</sup> 'Residualisation' of social housing refers to the process whereby those who have the means and opportunities leave the social housing units: those who stay are the most disadvantaged and the poorest. (Understanding the 'Residualisation' of Social Housing | AHURI). Residualisation has an impact on the mix of dwellers in social housing decreasing their capability to maintain the dwellings and the environment. Residualisation is often associated in a stigmatizing way with increasing disorder, crime, neighbourhood conflicts, substance abuse and other forms of social disorganisation.

dangerous criminal place, a stigmatized Roma neighbourhood (Lengyel, 2009, Havasi, 2018).

After the local election in 2010 the local government introduced the new housing policy based on the principle of controlling and disciplining the tenants of social housing. The main tool to achieve this was to change more and more open-ended long term housing contracts to fixed term contracts which provide flexibility to the municipality but create insecurity for the tenants. In parallel, families with more secure, indefinite-term contracts are often faced with rent hikes and harassment by local authorities, for example, regular checking of the condition of the apartment, etc. According to the new regulations, in the event of late payment of rent or utility cost, the local government has the right to change the social housing contract to fixed term without any explanation. According to the local regulations, families with fixed-term social housing contracts are not offered any kind of long-term housing solutions when their contract expires, the local government extends their contract year-by-year, and they must leave the apartment without any compensation if the local government does not extend their contract. If the tenants do not leave their homes, they can be forcefully evicted. Changing indefinite long-term contracts and terminating fixed term contracts are tools for the local government to get rid of families deemed “undeserving” or “undesirable”, and to relegate these families to living informally or outside of the city in allotment gardens.

In the process of elimination of the neighbourhood in Miskolc, the local government offered compensation amounting to two million Hungarian forints (approximately 6,700 EUR) to tenants willing to terminate their fixed-term rental contract for low-comfort social housing, yet several controversial conditions for compensation were set: tenants who terminate the contract and receive compensation must use the compensation to purchase property, the purchased property must be located strictly outside the territory of the city, and it could not be sold or mortgaged for at least five years. In response a number of municipalities in the vicinity introduced decrees specifying that persons from other municipalities wishing to buy property in their municipalities would not be able to access social assistance, social housing or public employment (OSCE, 2016).

On April 2015, the Supreme Court of Hungary struck down the municipal decree on amendments to social housing regulations as discriminatory on the grounds of financial situation and other characteristics of the tenants affected by the amendment. Shortly afterwards, In June 2015, the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights and, later, the Equal Treatment Authority also found that the local government was directly discriminating against the residents of the neighbourhood and in its report stated that the practice of evictions in the city was not adequate to the task of dealing with the problems in segregated areas (AJBH).

Despite these declarations condemning its policies, the local government ultimately succeeded in achieving its goal, which was to eliminate the neighbourhood. At the beginning of this process, the families who were squatting in the vacant apartments left, due to police harassment. Many tenants with fixed-term social housing contracts were afraid of possible forceful eviction (the costs of which they would have to bear) and were suffering from harassment by local authorities, so they left 'voluntarily' and moved to cheaper housing, often situated in other segregated neighbourhoods or to the allotment gardens. In the spring of 2017, the last tenants left and the local government demolished the last houses of this century-old neighbourhood to clear the space for renewal.

Moving to garden-plot areas today is one of the most significant, statistically detectable form of displacement in Hungary not only in Miskolc but in many other settlements in the country (Czirfusz et al., 2018, Vígvári & Gagyí, 2018). During the socialist period, in a long valley, between the residential neighbourhoods in Miskolc and the workplaces in coal mines a big garden plot area was founded. As it was never meant to be a residential area, it had only limited infrastructure (only electricity) and, because of the vicinity of the mine and its tunnels, building residential houses was not allowed. Currently, according to different estimations of social workers, this area has about three to five thousand inhabitants. Estimates vary greatly, as part of the families live here only temporarily, finding other solutions in the city; furthermore, parts of the long valley are invisible to the social workers or other services and nobody knows who and how many families live at the end of the valley from where the accessibility of educational and social services for the children as well as of jobs for the adults is a huge problem. The increasing population of allotment gardens can be explained on the one hand by the voluntary movement of the lower-class families who escaped from indebtedness after the economic crisis or by

the arrival of those who move to the city from the neighbouring villages searching for better employment conditions and affordable housing. On the other hand, it is a relegation of the poorest, who live there mainly informally or illegally.

*Source: Tünde Virág*

### **Chapter 5.4.2 – Resettlement and rehousing**

Resettlement of the inhabitants of informal settlements has always been one of the main policy tools for addressing informality (cf. Chapter 7 for further policy instruments). Resettlement unlike evacuation includes offering a place to live elsewhere. Resettlement can be part of policies for desegregation or ethnic mixing. A more positive term ‘rehousing’ is also being used underscoring the provision of new and allegedly better dwellings in the process of resettlement.

Resettlement involves many ethical issues and most often than not is a painful experience for those resettled. Residents of any area are likely to feel some level of personal attachment to the place they live in and its surroundings (Málovics et al., 2019). Attachment can be shaped both by the network of social relations providing support and the features of the place. However, the most marginalized cannot benefit from the bonding capital and reciprocity as they are excluded in their own neighbourhoods (Ibid.). Even if Roma are provided with adequate housing after evacuations and demolition, this is typically not done in a holistic, sustainable manner. For example, access to schools and jobs is not taken into account when Roma are resettled. Moreover, Roma are often moved to social housing projects without their expressed agreement or to places where they no longer have ties to the community (Robayo-Abril & Millan, 2019).

It has been argued by some researchers that many public housing projects in the past, often involving resettlement, have failed because they did not correspond to the ‘traditional way of life’ of Roma, who presumably lived close to nature and breeding livestock. Roma families were described as having very close ties with their relatives and living often in extended families. Therefore, low-rise flexible forms of housing that would make extensions easier and affordable would correspond much more closely to Roma needs (Slaev, 2007). Although this