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Severe housing deprivation: Addressing the social sustainability challenge in the EU

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ABSTRACT

Severe housing deprivation is an important element of social sustainability. Social sustainability has been described as a concept in 'chaos' and of limited utility. This paper argues that meeting basic human needs is central to social sustainability and housing is a key dimension of need. It examines severe housing deprivation by analysing the extent to which households living in extreme poverty experience problems such as overcrowding, sub-standard dwelling quality and housing-related risks such as unaffordable housing and rent/mortgage arrears. The paper draws on data from the EU Survey on Income and Living Conditions for this purpose. However, household surveys are somewhat limited in the extent to which they capture some groups living in 'extreme poverty'. Therefore, we supplement these data with a case study of a particularly vulnerable group who experience housing exclusion in several relatively wealthy European countries - Roma in Ireland. The paper concludes with a discussion of strategies to address severe housing deprivation in the EU.

KEY WORDS: Housing quality; housing affordability; Roma; social sustainability; poverty; deprivation; UN SDGs.

Charts and tables:

http://www.ucd.ie/geary/static/publications/Charts_Tables_Winston_Kennedy.pdf

Introduction

The publication of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) presents a challenge for housing researchers to focus on the living conditions of those experiencing extreme poverty in the Global North, as this region is included in these Goals whereas it was not part of the previous incumbent, the Millennium Development Goals. From a housing perspective, SDG 11 on sustainable cities and communities is most relevant. One of its 11 targets is to ensure access for all to adequate, safe, affordable housing, basic services and upgrade slums by 2030. In terms of monitoring this goal, the only indicator employed is housing affordabilityⁱ. The SDGs also provide an important opportunity to assess the concept of social sustainability and its relevance for housing. The World Commission on SD specified that three mutually reinforcing pillars were required for SD, environment, economic and social (WCED, 1987). The social dimension has been relatively neglected compared with the other pillars, but the Commission considered that it would provide a social mandate for sustainable development (SD). This paper examines the housing situation of households who may be considered to live in extreme poverty in one part of the Global North, namely the EU. Ending poverty is goal 1 of the UN SDGs, but poverty is multidimensional so those living on inadequate incomes may be deprived in a variety of ways including in relation to housing. In line with SDG 11, this paper assesses the extent to which these households experience problems with housing adequacy, safety, affordability, and access to basic services such as sanitation, heating, cooking facilities and lighting. People experiencing these problems are at high risk of becoming homeless, or they may already be in that situation, given that poverty is a key driver of homelessness (Bramley and Fitzpatrick, 2018; Johnsen & Watts, 2014). In addition, these households are also likely to have periodic and/or on-going challenges paying for other essential goods, such as food and energy.

Aspects of severe housing deprivation, such as poor dwelling quality, unaffordability and insecurity, have been linked to a range of problems including lower quality of life and well-being (Barnes et al, 2011; Burgard et al, 2012; Cannuscio et al, 2012; Mulder, 2007); poor physical and mental health, especially among those living in accommodation which is damp and/or mouldy (Bentley et al, 2011; Clark and Kearns, 2012; Marmot, 2015; Mendell, 2015; Reeves et al, 2016; Rollins et al, 2012; Webb et al, 2013) ; and poorer access to jobs, schools, amenities and social networks (Mulder, 2007; Acolin and Wachter, 2017). There is a growing body of research indicating that residents of poor housing frequently suffer from energy poverty, which is likely to result in, or exacerbate, health challenges (Healy 2003; 2016; Liddel and Morris, 2010). The effects of living in

poor residential environments on morbidity and life expectancy are a particular concern (Baciu et al 2017; Kim et al, 2018; Woolf and Purnell, 2016).

The next section explores the relevant conceptual and empirical literature on housing deprivation and social sustainability in a European context. The paper proceeds by describing the data and methods used in our analysis of these problems, including data from the EU Survey on Income and Living Conditions. Given the limitations of household surveys in capturing information on certain groups living in 'extreme poverty', this section is followed by a case study of one group which experiences extreme housing exclusion in a relatively wealthy European society – the Roma. Identified as the largest and most disadvantaged minority group in Europe (EFR, 2016), it is important to note that not all of those identifying as Roma are living in poverty (Panteas, 2012; Zamfir, 2013). The term Roma is used to refer to a range of different groups including Sinti, Manouche, Lovari, Gitano and Ashkali (Liégeois, 2006, McGarry, 2014). We employ data from a national needs' assessment of Roma in Ireland, which provides a socioeconomic analysis of the situation of Roma in Ireland which reflects the key priority areas of accommodation, health, education and employment as prioritized in the *EU Framework for National Traveller and Roma integration Strategies up to 2020*. The participatory mixed methods study provides valuable data which was generated in partnership with the Roma community which is vital when we consider Munté's observation 'Roma people's exclusion has been reinforced through research that has legitimised stereotypes rather than helping to overcome them' (2011, 256). The final section discusses some of the strategies which might be adopted to address some of the more severe challenges highlighted in this paper, along with the limitations of the study and suggestions for future research.

Severe housing deprivation and social sustainability

Social sustainability has been described as a 'concept in chaos' with contradictory definitions, much confusion and, as a result, it may be of limited utility (Vallance et al, 2011). Alongside the economic and environmental pillars, the social pillar was crucial to the view of sustainable development adopted by the Brundtland Commission report (WCED, 1987). It was considered to provide a social mandate for sustainable development (SD) but the pillar has been relatively neglected by researchers. Social sustainability is often linked to discussions of housing density and/or intensification (Ancell and Thompson-Fawcett, 2008; Carroll et al, 2011) or energy poverty and the need for zero carbon homes (e.g. Goodchild and Walshaw, 2011; Spinney, 2012; Willand et al, 2017). Vallance et al (2011) identify three sub-categories of social sustainability: developmental, bridge and

maintenance sustainability. Developmental sustainability is about addressing basic needs and poverty and it is argued that environmental issues cannot be addressed unless these are met. Bridge sustainability is about the changes in behavior and ethics that are required to achieve environmental goals. Finally, maintenance sustainability is concerned with the traditions, practices, preferences and places people want maintained or improved. It includes the ways people adopt or resist change, and why they do so. Vallance et al (2011) highlight that there can be conflicts between these forms of social sustainability which may be difficult to reconcile. For example, what we need (developmental sustainability) is not necessarily what is good for the environment (bridge sustainability).

Among researchers who examine policy and social sustainability, particularly pertinent issues include the satisfaction of basic material needs and self-fulfilment (Littig and Griessler, 2005); providing facilities which address need and the capacity for participation (Cuthill, 2010); and promoting inclusion by providing basic needs (Vavik and Keitsch, 2010). Murphy advances this by linking the social and environmental pillars with policy (Murphy, 2012). He argues that the four pre-eminent concepts of the social pillar include equity, awareness for sustainability, participation, and social cohesion. Two of these are most relevant from a housing perspective. In terms of equity, the policy issues he highlights are the effects of climate change (CC) on vulnerable groups and measures to assist them in adapting to CC; the effects of CC mitigation fiscal measures on vulnerable groups; and the need to decarbonize welfare provision.

The social conditions necessary for SD are considered essential for Chiu (2002, 2003) in her analysis of social sustainability and housing in Hong Kong. She highlights equality and the equitable distribution of resources and opportunities. Social equity is central to Bramley and Power (2009) in their research on social sustainability and urban form, as is the concept of sustainability of community (see also Dempsey et al 2012;). For them, social equity involves: the fair distribution of resources and avoiding exclusionary practices; allowing residents to participate fully in society, socially, economically and politically. Regarding the built environment they include the nature and extent of access to services and facilities via sustainable transportation methods. Sustainability of community consists of: social interaction/networks in the community; participation in collective groups/networks in community; community stability; pride/sense of place attachment; safety and security.

Meeting basic needs is a key theme in the literature on social sustainability. Doyal and Gough's (1991) theory of need foregrounds personal autonomy and health as the basic needs that people must have met to

participate in society. These needs are supported by twelve intermediary needs, including housing, food and water, education, adequate clothing, a safe work environment, health care and security in childhood. Good physical health is foregrounded because 'to complete a range of tasks in daily life requires manual, mental and emotional abilities with which poor physical health usually interferes' (Doyal and Gough, 1991:56). Autonomy is crucial 'to have the ability to make informed choices about what should be done and how to go about doing it'. These needs are encompassed in a human rights framework and many of them mirror Sen's (1985, 1999) capabilities approach relating capabilities to well-being.

Severe housing deprivation may be viewed as one dimension of social unsustainability, in the form of unmet basic housing needs. Indicators of this form of deprivation will include a combination of income poverty, problems with housing affordability and poor housing conditions. The literature reveals that housing quality varies by country and region depending on factors such as its level of economic development, housing and welfare systems, fiscal, financial and real estate policies as well as household incomes and family support (Lowe and Tsenkova, 2017; Mandic and Cirman, 2011; Norris and Shiels, 2007; Norris and Domanski, 2009; Tosics, 2017a; 2017b; Tosics and Hegedus, 2017). Ball (2005) revealed lower standards in Southern European countries compared with Northern ones, although these have declined to some extent. Norris and Shiels (2007) found significant differences between EU15 and CEE member states in dwelling size and in the availability of basic facilities. Norris and Domanski (2009) argue that there are three broad groupings with the best housing in the EU15, followed by a group including some CEE and most Southern European countries while the worst conditions were found in some of the other CEE states (but also Portugal). Cross-national variations in both housing conditions and affordability have been linked to the relative importance of the state, market and family for housing in each country (Norris and Domanski, 2009). Poor housing outcomes were associated with a reliance on one of these, while better housing outcomes were found in cases where at least two were significant (e.g. the state and the market). Prior to the 1990s, many of the 'new' member states (NMS) depended on the State for housing provision but by the end of the 1990s, this dependence ceased to a very large extent. As market provisions were relatively underdeveloped, households were increasingly reliant on the family. State interventions were also reduced in some of the EU15 countries. However, Norris and Domanski (2009:403-404) argue that a more 'mixed housing model' remained there compared with the CEE as both the state and market continued to be central to housing, and there was increased access to market housing and

finance for low income households. Due to the relatively small or absent role of the state in housing in many Southern European countries, the family is dominant in housing provision there usually via inheritance, self-provisioning of housing and inter-generational living (Allen et al, 2004). Norris and Domanski argue that an increased role of the market in some of these countries (e.g. Spain and Portugal) may have contributed to improved standards there (2009: 404). Borg (2014) finds a negative correlation between the size of the rental sector and housing deprivation, arguing that an integrated rental sector encompassing a larger population significantly reduces the prevalence of housing deprivation. However, Norris and Winston (2012) found that the largest cross-national differences in housing conditions and affordability were between Northern and Southern European EU15 member states rather than between dual and unitary housing systems.

Recent research on the sustainable urban communities in Europe revealed that housing affordability was the most common challenge (Winston and Pareja-Eastaway, 2017). Limited availability of affordable rental accommodation may force lower income households into home ownership, with substantial risks (Smith etc). These risks include relatively high levels of mortgage arrears (Norris and Winston, 2012), as well as risk of mortgage foreclosure, homelessness and substantial impacts on health (Burgard et al 2012; Cannuscio et al, 2012). Dewilde and Decker (2011) reveal that low-income respondents experienced more affordability problems but better housing conditions in countries with more commodified housing regimes (Dewilde and Decker 2011). Housing affordability among low-income owners and private renters deteriorated over time (1995 and 2012) due to increased financialization of housing, and a decline in the stock of private rented housing. Declining affordability for low-income owners and private renters in more financialized housing regimes has not been compensated by improved housing conditions and it is not due to declining household incomes since the GFC. In Southern European countries, those on low-incomes reside in relatively poor housing conditions in the private sector with relatively high housing costs. These countries have relatively limited social welfare systems (Ferrera,1996) and the extended family/neighbours play a substantial role in the provision of housing (Allen et al., 2004: 272). Austerity has had a major effect in Southern Europe (Taylor-Gooby et al, 2017) and this is likely to exacerbated housing deprivation there. Research prior to the GFC indicated that levels of housing satisfaction were lower in the Mediterranean regime than in the other regimes while there appears to be little difference between the other regimes in terms of satisfaction (Hoeskstra, 2005: 491).

Following the collapse of communism, rapid 'giveaway' privatisation of state rented accommodation led to 'super' owner occupation in many countries plus low levels of mortgage debt (Mandic, 2010; Stephens et al, 2015: 21). The best housing was sold at greatly reduced prices while the remaining housing consisted of poor-quality accommodation with its residents tending to be families living in poverty (Tsenkova and Lowe, 2017). Housing standards there are substantially below those found in many older EU member states (see for example Dodd et al, 2013; Lowe and Tsenkova, 2017). Poorly maintained older dwellings and high levels of deterioration are particularly problematic as are overcrowding and health risks (Dodd et al, 2013). While newly constructed dwellings provide better quality housing, their cost combined with the low levels of household incomes means these are unaffordable for many. Affordability problems have been particularly prominent in many CEE countries given the relatively limited supply of social rented housing there but also the high rates of poverty (Tosics, 2017b; Tosics and Hegedus, 2017). Some have argued that there is a distinctive post-communist welfare regime (e.g. Castles and Obinger, 2008; Fenger, 2007) with lower levels of state spending on social protection than other European countries. However, Golinowska et al. (2009) contend that East-Central European (ECE) welfare states are remarkably similar to other European countries with similar levels economic development and Cook (2015) suggests that they 'retain large elements of public responsibility for societal well-being despite retrenchment and liberalization' (Cook, 2015).

Stephens and van Steen's (2011) analysis of 'housing poverty' in England and the Netherlands highlights the extent to which welfare and housing systems combine to reduce poverty. Reforms to housing and welfare policies during the Global Fiscal Crisis are likely to have impacted on the housing circumstances of poor households, particularly in some countries. Reeves and Loopstra (2017) reveal the impact of severe penalties applied to those on social welfare who failed to meet the increased conditions associated with social welfare benefits in the UK. However, Stephens and Leishman (2017) find that the British housing system protected the most chronically poor from housing deprivation up to 2008, acting as a 'saving grace' from the welfare state', but question its role thereafter in light of subsequent developments in housing policy. In relation to post-communist countries, Cook (2015) highlights the negative impact of the global financial crisis on welfare throughout that region. DeWilde (2017) argues housing regimes became more commodified between 1995 and 2012, and housing outcomes became less associated with housing regimes and more with the country's welfare state and level of economic affluence.

Roma in Europe experience direct and indirect discrimination in access to housing (ERRC, 2016; ERRC 2015; FRA, 2009). Many are subjected to *anti-Gypsyism*, a specific form of racism directed towards Roma and Travellers, which Valeriu (2006) describes as ‘an ideology of racial superiority, a form of dehumanisation and of institutionalised racism’. Numerous reports on Roma in EU member states provide evidence of appalling living conditions and highlight very significant concerns for personal and public health (FRA 2009; Van Hout and Staniewicz, 2011, Watt and Charles, 2009). In light of the very considerable evidence of Roma disadvantage in relation to housing throughout the EU, including experiences of discrimination in access, extremely poor dwelling quality, forced segregation and forced evictions (Arraiza & Ohman, 2009; Berescu, 2011; FRA 2008; Joseph, 2005; Ladányi, 1998; Lancione, 2017; Manzoni, 2017; Nolan, 2011; Slaev, 2007), their housing deprivation in Ireland is likely to be a continuation of extremely challenging housing careers. Calls to address the issues and realise Roma rights have been made by a range of international organisations (ECRI, 2011; United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination 2000; United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights 2013). However, concerns about the lack of progress led the European Commission to publish the *EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020* requiring each member state to draw up a national strategy outlining actions and funding in a number of areas including housing. Attempts to create a movement focusing on the rights of Roma have been limited by the heterogeneity of the population (McGarry 2012) and Vermeersch cautions, “even if problems seem similar, causes may vary a lot from place to place and each community might possess different resources and dynamics to deal with these problems” (2012, 15).

In sum, severe housing deprivation may be considered one form of social unsustainability involving unmet basic needs which affect health, personal autonomy and ability to participate in society. It is experienced when living on a low income and having problems with overcrowding, sub-standard dwelling quality, burdensome housing costs and rent/mortgage arrears. Households in this situation are also likely to have periodic and/or on-going challenges paying for other essential goods such as food and energy and may be at risk of homelessness. This resonates with SDG 11, one of its targets being to ensure access for all to adequate, safe, affordable housing, basic services and upgrade slums by 2030. The remainder of this paper presents data on each of these aspects of severe housing deprivation. It does this by examining data from the EU Survey of Income and Living Conditions but also data from a case study of Roma in Ireland to illustrate the housing experiences of a particularly vulnerable

group living in in a relatively wealthy society. These data and methods are outlined below.

Data and methods

The EU-Survey on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC)

Studies of poverty and material deprivation highlight its multidimensional nature, including both monetary and non-monetary indicators (e.g. Alkire and Foster, 2008; Jenkins and Micklewright, 2007; Nolan and Whelan, 2011; Townsend, 1987). Increasing efforts have been made to collate data on non-monetary indicators in the EU to help identify the poor and capture the multidimensionality of poverty (Nolan and Whelan, 2007: 162). Material deprivation is now measured using a range of indicators in the EU Survey of Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) and it is the established source for statistics on material deprivation and poverty across the EU (Nolan and Whelan, 2011: 23).

The first part of our analysis utilises the 2014 EU-SILC data to assess severe housing deprivation among those on very low incomes. Income is assessed at household level and includes cash transfers, while income tax and social insurance payments are deducted. An equivalization adjustment is made to the total household income to take account of the number of adults and children, and the OECD scale is used for this purpose. The poverty threshold as a percentage of the median is normally set at 40%, 50% or 60% of the national median (Walker, 2014: 17). The poverty threshold employed here focuses on those who are below 50% of median household equivalized income. The 20 and 30% of median income thresholds are problematic, as income at the bottom end of the distribution can be unreliable. The 40% threshold results in too few cases for analysis in some Scandinavian countries and the 60% threshold, the EU's target for poverty reduction, is not an indicator of extreme poverty. There are some problems comparing EU28 countries using national relative income poverty lines due to their significant differences in standard of living (Bradshaw and Mayhew 2011; Fahey, 2007; Guio 2009; Nolan and Whelan 2011). However, we alleviate these problems by combining income poverty with a variety of housing issues to demonstrate severe housing deprivation in the countries under examination.

Our investigation of housing quality includes the housing questions in EU SILC's material deprivation measure, namely whether or not households have: dampness/rot (a leaking roof, damp walls/ceilings/floors/foundations, rot in doors, window frames); rooms too dark, or not enough light; no bath/shower and/or no indoor toilet. The numbers experiencing deprivation for bath/shower

and indoor toilet are extremely small in many cases and therefore too small to be reported without breaching Eurostat guidelines on this. Instead, we use a measure where those who are deprived lack either of the two but also include those sharing these facilities rather than having them for the sole use of the household.

EU-SILC provides data on the percentage of the sample living in an overcrowded household, excluding single person households. Overcrowding is defined as a household which does not have at its disposal a minimum number of rooms equal to: one room for the household; one room per couple in the household; one room for each single person aged 18 or more; one room per pair of single people of the same gender between 12 and 17 years of age; one room for each single person between 12 and 17 years of age and not included in the previous category; one room per pair of children under 12 years of age. For housing affordability, we utilise subjective and objective indicators. First, we investigate those who are income poor and perceive their housing costs to be a heavy burden. Second, we examine those who are income poor and have been in rent or mortgage arrears in the previous 12 months.

Case study of Roma in Ireland

Household surveys such as EU-SILC tend to underrepresent or exclude some of the most vulnerable social groups (Carr-Hill, 2015). These groups include asylum seekers, undocumented migrants and homeless people. Such groups are likely to be experiencing severe housing deprivation even in higher income countries with established housing and welfare regimes. To address this problem, to some extent, we supplement our analysis of EU-SILC data with a case study of the housing situation of Roma in Ireland. This section of the paper draws on data from a national needs' assessment of Roma in Ireland which was carried out in 2015 (Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre & Department of Justice and Equality, 2018). It was a community based, participatory project involving 15 peer researchers from the Roma community in Ireland. It adopted a mixed methods approach, including a survey, focus groups and in-depth interviews. The study employed purposive sampling, with particular efforts made to reach the most vulnerable households, including the homeless. This resulted in a total of 108 Roma households (609 people) taking part in the study which is approximately 13 per cent of the Roma estimated to be living in Ireland. The questionnaire was translated into Romani and the interviews conducted by the Roma peer-researchers. The survey was followed by 8 focus groups in six locations across Ireland, which provided additional rich data from 120 adults, including members of the Roma community and professionals in relevant NGOs

and statutory agencies whose work brings them into contact with the community (e.g. public health nurses, and social workers). In addition to this, 31 depth interviews were conducted with adult Roma and professionals in relevant NGOs and statutory agencies. The study reveals evidence of extreme poverty experienced by many Roma living in Ireland. Many are on very low, unreliable incomes, lacking regular employment and savings. The community experiences multiple forms of disadvantage, including very low levels of education, high levels of illiteracy, unemployment and extreme poverty. All respondents were born outside Ireland. The experiences of children, many of whom were born in Ireland, have been detailed elsewhere (Kennedy and Smith, 2018), including a key finding that inadequate and overcrowded accommodation impeded their educational attainment and participation. The housing and accommodation problems from that study are elaborated here.

Severe housing deprivation among poor households in the EU

In this section of the paper, we investigate severe housing deprivation among poor households in the EU employing the 2014 EU SILC data supplemented with the housing data from the needs assessment of Roma in Ireland. Specifically, we examine the issues of accommodation quality, the extent of overcrowding and housing unaffordability problems.

Dwelling quality

The quality of accommodation in the EU is relatively good overall, which is most likely due to both historical and recent investment in the housing stock in many locations. However, poor households in some countries experienced multiple problems with their accommodation including dampness and rot, the lack of an indoor toilet/no bath/shower for the sole use of the household, and rooms considered too dark (see Figures 1-3). Problems with dampness and rot are a cause for concern as they will have adverse effects on health, including respiratory problems (Figure 1). The Hungarian situation was most severe as 57% of poor households suffered from this problem but it was also common in Slovenia, Latvia, Portugal and Lithuania. Residing in accommodation that was too dark is also very problematic, but it was much less likely to be considered a problem with 10% of poor households in the EU considering this to be an issue (Figure 2). However, it was more of an issue in particular countries, for example Bulgaria and Hungary (20%), but also Latvia and Portugal (16 and 15 percent).

Figures 1 and 2 about here

Approximately 14% of poor households in the EU lack a bath/shower and/or an indoor toilet for the sole use of the household. However, in many Western European countries, this figure is much higher and in some cases it affects a substantial majority. Romania and Bulgaria may be considered extreme cases on this aspect of severe housing deprivation as it affected 73 and 62% of poor households respectively. A number of other CEE countries reveal substantial problems in this regard, for example Latvia (44%), Lithuania (40%), Hungary (30%); Estonia (19%); and Slovakia (18%). Of the Western European countries examined, the Netherlands was the only one case more than ten percent of poor households had this problem (13%).

Figure 3 about here

Turning to the quality of housing experienced by Roma in Ireland, the needs assessment revealed that many reside in extremely poor conditions (see Table 1). It highlighted many accommodation issues which are detrimental to health including damp, mould, mildew, broken windows, leaking toilets, sewerage, and rats. It also revealed that there was a cohort of Roma respondents living in accommodation without access to basic facilities. Twelve percent of respondents did not have a kitchen, 9.6% did not have a cooker and 13.5% did not have a fridge. 14.4% did not have a bathroom in their home. There were several accounts of dwellings with no heating, no water and/or no sanitation and a lack of light for many children to do homework. In both interviews and focus groups, participants described families living in rooms with young children where open electric plates were placed on the floor and used for both cooking and heating.

Table 1 about here

A particularly vulnerable group lives in overcrowded, dangerous, sometimes abandoned buildings with rat infestation, and no light, heat or cooking facilities. Rat infestation was a regularly recurring theme in this research. Service providers reported seeing rats tunnelling through properties. One family support worker described how when she was showing a child how to do exercises prescribed by a physiotherapist, a rat ran across the floor. Public health nurses, family support workers and workers from homeless organisations expressed concerns about the presence of rats for food safety and general health and well-being of adults and children. The presence of rats was not just in abandoned dwellings or 'informal settlements' but also in 'standard' housing, including basement flats/apartments in Dublin's Inner City. These rent-paying

tenants did not complain or contact the services responsible for environmental health as they were afraid of being evicted with no alternative accommodation provided. Housing situations such as these are extremely detrimental to health especially those with rat infestation, dampness, mould, and mildew, broken windows, leaking toilets and sewerage, and no light to do homework, which was the case for many children in the study.

Housing unaffordability

The EUSILC enables us to employ two measures of housing unaffordability. Firstly, we examine the proportion of poor households who indicate that their housing costs are a heavy burden (see Figure 4) and find this is the case for a relatively high proportion in most countries. However, it is particularly problematic in some CEE and some Mediterranean countries. For example, 88% of poor households in Croatia felt this way, while the figure was approximately 80% in Cyprus, Spain, Poland, Italy, and Hungary. Some of the Scandinavian and continental, Western European countries appear to offer more affordable housing to poor households, for example the Netherlands, Germany, Finland, and Denmark, but especially Sweden where the lowest proportion of poor households (16%) indicated their housing costs were a heavy burden.

Figure 4 about here

Our second measure of housing affordability from EUSILC is the proportion of poor households who had rent/mortgage arrears in the previous twelve months. Arrears were most challenging in Mediterranean countries, Greece (27%) and to a lesser extent Spain (20%), but they were also relatively problematical in Portugal (16%), Cyprus (14%) and Italy (13%) (see Figure 5). Arrears were relatively low in many of the CEE countries where there is a high level of outright home ownership, but they were relatively high in the Czech Republic (20%) and Hungary (16%). Of the higher income Northern and Western European countries, the Belgian rate of arrears was relatively high (14%).

Fig 5 about here

Turning to the case study of Roma in Ireland, access to affordable housing is a key concern for this community and it is intrinsically linked to issues of discrimination and housing exclusion. Given their low levels of income, renting is the only option for many. Seventy seven percent reported living in rented accommodation. Of these, 77% were renting from a private landlord and 13% from a local authority. Many Roma cannot obtain the housing supports they

require. Similar to other EU migrants, those who do not meet the Habitual Residence Condition and Right to Reside they are not entitled to social protection in Ireland, including housing allowances. Furthermore, housing authorities were directed by the Housing Ministry to exclude EU citizens from social housing assessments unless they were in employment, unemployed due to illness or accident, or involuntarily unemployed following a period of employment longer than a year and registered as a jobseeker. Many Roma fail to meet these criteria, even though many were born in Ireland, including 60 percent of children in the study. These are very significant barriers for Roma respondents in accessing affordable housing and they have several implications including forcing many to reside in the extremely poor conditions outlined above and/or in situations where they cannot afford their housing costs. There was considerable evidence of rent and utility arrears. Service providers pointed out that it was a regular occurrence for utilities such as electricity and water being cut off due to non-payment of bills. There were also reports of fuses being removed by landlords when rent is overdue. While the issues above emerged in relation to more vulnerable families, fuel poverty emerged as a wider concern affecting a larger proportion of respondents. Sixty six percent of respondents said they could not afford to keep the house warm all the time, while 44% said they could not afford hot water when needed (Table 1).

In addition to these systemic barriers to accessing affordable housing, many Roma experienced very serious problems in obtaining private rented accommodation due to both overt and covert discrimination by private landlords. These reports came from both Roma respondents and service providers. Ninety three percent of Roma perceived that they had been discriminated against in trying to obtain housing. In some cases this was also linked to very large household size, numeracy and literacy issues, linguistic problems, and an ability to produce identity documents and/or references. Feantsa (nd) argues that migrant households are more vulnerable to destitution because of these 'administrative' issues unless they are provided with support (Feasta, nd). This results in a high level of dependence among Roma on unprincipled landlords in the private rented sector whose accommodation falls very far short of the regulations which apply to rental housing in Ireland (see section on housing conditions above). More than a third of Roma (36.6%) had no security of tenure and this was often the case for a long period of time - the average length of time without a tenancy agreement was six years. This group were most vulnerable, forced as they were to live in dangerous, overcrowded conditions, afraid of eviction at any time, and at high risk of homelessness. Many Roma live with very high levels of insecurity. Thirty seven percent of respondents

reported that they did not have a tenancy agreement and the average length of time in Ireland for those without tenancy agreements was 5.6 years. Some do not have the basic documents to prove their length of time living in Ireland. Barriers to accessing affordable housing supports arising from systemic and individual discrimination can lead to homelessness. Seven percent of Roma households reported that they were homeless at the time of the study, but 46 percent had experienced homelessness at some stage in their housing career either in Ireland or prior to arrival. The restrictions of the HRC and right to reside mean that many Roma were also excluded from access to homeless services (Focus Ireland and Immigrant Council of Ireland, 2011).

Overcrowding

Overcrowding is hypothesised to be an issue in many countries given the extent to which housing unaffordability is a problem among poor households. Figure 6 reveals very significant differences in overcrowding rates, but nevertheless overall it is an issue affecting relatively high proportions of poor household in many EU countries. The worst cases were CEE countries, particularly Romania, Hungary, Slovakia, Bulgaria, and Poland, with overcrowding rates above 60%. However, relatively high rates were also in evidence in Italy (46%), Greece (45%), Sweden (44%), Austria (34), Denmark (29%), Finland (25%) and France (24%). In the case of this latter group, it may be that these are immigrant households, as various studies have documented the strategy of enforced sharing to cope with unaffordable housing in a range of jurisdictions (Angel and Tienda, 1982; Myers, Baer, and Choi, 1996; Joint Center for Housing Studies, 2007; Rosenbaum and Friedman, 2007).

Overcrowding was identified as a major concern for Roma in Ireland. While a majority of households comprised five people or less, 24% of Roma respondents lived in households of 8 or more people. However, 45% of respondents said they did not have enough beds in their accommodation. Representatives from the NGOs and statutory organisations outlined situations where six or more people lived in one room. For example, one family support worker reported having to step over six men sleeping on mattresses on the floor, to access a young mother and baby. Similar situations were reported by social workers and public health nurses. There is a willingness to support extended family members and friends within Roma communities. As a result homelessness tends to be under-reported as people are living with family and friends in overcrowded conditions tend not to identify as homeless.

Figure 6 about here

Service providers who observed overcrowding noted that it was often accompanied by very poor-quality accommodation with a lack of facilities. Residents were afraid to complain about their situation for fear of eviction. Many Roma participants felt despair and shame about their housing situation and life in general. This is revealed in a quote from one respondent who was sharing a four-bedroom house with fourteen people despite living in Ireland for six years:

I am hopeless, homeless, and workless. I have no support.

Strategies to address severe housing deprivation and enhance social sustainability

Addressing the housing situation of poor households may involve a range of strategies actors including the State, NGOs, the family, and the market, depending on the context. Housing regeneration schemes are essential to tackle the very substantial problems of dwelling quality highlighted by this and many other papers. As particular countries in the CEE super-home ownership housing regime (Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, Latvia and Lithuania) deserve special attention. Housing affordability problems, common among poor households in many countries and frequently accompanied by overcrowding, may be addressed via a range of housing policies depending on the housing and welfare regime. These may include: increasing the supply of affordable housing via inclusionary housing measures in the planning system; introducing or expanding housing allowances; extending housing tenure options to include more affordable options (Gurran and Bramley 2017). However, particularly vulnerable groups such as Roma may require additional strategies to address social sustainability issues and improve their basic housing needs. These strategies may include anti-poverty, equality, anti-discrimination, anti-racism, and integration strategies. They may need to be tackled using a human rights law framework which emphasises universal basic standards and ensures that every person is treated with dignity, respect and without discrimination. Within this legal framework, strategies which address equality, discrimination, and poverty may be most useful in addressing severe housing deprivation in the EU.

The human rights approach ‘...transforms passive beneficiaries into claims holders and identifies states and other actors as duty-bearers that can be held responsible for their discharge of legal, and not merely moral, obligations’ (Yamin, 2008). Under international human rights treaties, states are required to provide basic shelter and housing as an essential component of rights (United Nations Committee on Economic Social and Cultural Rights, CESCR General Comment No. 14: The Right to the Highest Attainable Standard of Health, Art. 12). Many argue that the right to adequate housing has been undermined by

globalization and neoliberalism (e.g. Rolnik, 2013). This has occurred via the retreat of states from housing provision, increased use of market-based housing finance, the commodification of housing and increased use of housing as an investment asset within a globalized financial market. Rolnik (2013: 1059-160) argues that, in many countries have abandoned 'the conceptual meaning of housing as a social good, part of the commonalities a society agrees to share or to provide to those with fewer resources'. However, Fitzpatrick et al (2014) critique the right to housing approach arguing that where normative issues are overtly addressed it is generally in a shallow manner. They contend that loose 'rights talk' often permeates housing, homelessness and wider social policy debates with little reflection on what we actually mean by rights or the practical consequences of employing 'human rights' as the primary moral paradigm (Fitzpatrick, Bengtsson, and Watts, 2014).

The principle of non-discrimination, central to the international human rights system, requires that states cease discriminating and protect against discrimination by NGOs and other non-state actors. Apparently neutral policies and/or strategies can disproportionately affect certain groups as is emphasised by the UN Committee on Economic Social and Cultural Rights (Non-discrimination in Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, article 2, paragraph 2) and institutions may discriminate without realising it (Macpherson report, 1999, n 89, para 6.23). Tackling indirect discrimination may require differential treatment, and the 'adoption of temporary special measures designed to secure the full and equal enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms for disadvantaged groups' (the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination). This would be consistent with definitions of equality which focus on equality of condition rather than more minimalist definitions which emphasise equal opportunities and equal treatment before the law (Baker et al, 2004). Achieving equal outcomes of policies or practices is fundamental to equality of condition and the approach also acknowledges that equal treatment may require treating dominant and minority groups differently (Majury, 2002).

An equal rights framework which demands equal outcomes would entail recognising both historic and current injustices experienced by Roma. It acknowledges that discrimination may be so entrenched against them that governments may be obliged to put in place systematic remedies to address past injustice. The findings presented here on the housing conditions of Roma in Ireland indicates that substantial work is required to achieve equality of opportunity, access, participation and outcomes on this aspect of social sustainability. *The EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020* (2011) required each member state to devise a national Roma integration

strategy up to 2020 with specific actions and funding streams in several areas, including housing. This highlights the necessity, indeed urgency, of implementing measures to address the extreme housing deprivation of Roma in many countries.

Given the relatively high levels of poverty of the households examined in this paper, not just the Roma, anti-poverty strategies are particularly important for addressing social sustainability. Poverty reduction is prominent in the Europe 2020 strategy, with targets for Member States and EU coordination in the area. However, Daly (2012) is critical of this strategy, arguing that the poverty target is 'loose and risks being rendered ineffective as an EU-wide target'. Furthermore, she argues that 'it is not made clear how growth will bring about the planned reduction in poverty'. She concludes that it 'lacks a coherent model of social development. Philosophically, it draws mainly from social investment and liberal approaches, neither of which has a strong orientation to addressing poverty'.

Conclusion

Achieving more SD requires not just addressing environmental, and economic issues but also social sustainability. Viewing social sustainability as meeting basic needs, this paper explored the extent to which basic housing needs are met in the EU. Our examination of severe housing deprivation via EU-SILC revealed that households on very low incomes face significant problems of affordability, overcrowding and dwelling quality. Extremely poor conditions were found in many CEE countries, particularly Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, Latvia and Lithuania. However, problems with dampness and rot were experienced by more than one in five poor households in many Western European countries, especially some Mediterranean ones. Housing renewal schemes are urgently required to address these problems. The EU-SILC data also indicate that poor households in many countries have significant problems with housing affordability. This is especially true in some Mediterranean and CEE countries, but relatively high proportions of poor households in more affluent countries considered their housing costs to be a heavy burden. Rent and mortgage arrears were conspicuous in Southern European countries, some CEE states but also in Belgium, France and the Netherlands. Many of these households are at risk of homelessness. Housing unaffordability problems are often accompanied by overcrowding. Our results indicate significant problems of overcrowding in many CEE member states and some Mediterranean ones. However, a significant proportion of poor households in 'more advanced' welfare and housing regimes experienced this problem, e.g. Sweden, Austria, Denmark and Finland.

Our examination of Roma in Ireland highlights the importance of triangulating multiple forms of data for understanding extreme housing deprivation. For many, their current situation may be considered socially unsustainable with the most basic needs being unmet. Some experience systemic discrimination via the HRC, Right to Reside and housing policies which mean they cannot access requisite supports essential to counterbalance their extremely limited and undependable income. Discrimination by private landlords was perceived to be a problem for a very high number. Consequently, many were living in severely overcrowded, precarious, unsanitary accommodation. They expressed high levels of anxiety about being evicted and forced to sleep rough in public spaces, fears which were justified as a high proportion reported experiencing racism and verbal abuse there, particularly women. As many Roma reported similar experiences prior to arriving in Ireland, their housing deprivation is persistent and systemic.

Addressing severe housing deprivation requires an array of strategies, including place-based housing renewal schemes and people-based social inclusion measures. However, legal strategies which address discrimination, institutional racism, inequality, and poverty may be required to address some of the severe elements of housing deprivation highlighted in this paper. Implementing such measure will help meet some of the UNSDGs including the sustainable cities and communities' targets of access to adequate, safe, affordable housing. They would also assist in making progress towards several other SDGs: clean water and sanitation; affordable and clean energy; reduced inequalities; climate action; health and well-being of the residents of poor households; social inclusion and poverty reduction.

Alkire and Samman (2014) argued that reporting progress on the core indicators of poverty for the SDGs requires 'high quality multi-topic household surveys complemented by interim lighter surveys' have a demonstrated ability to collect the core indicators of human poverty'. This paper included data from one such high quality household survey. However, it has some limitations when examining extreme deprivation. First, housing deprivation likely varies by housing tenure but, due to the small number of cases, we cannot report these figures without breaching Eurostat guidelines. Another limitation of that data is that the results are based on those living below national income poverty lines which may obscure substantial income inequalities between member states. The adoption by Eurostat of an EU-wide threshold would be more meaningful for the anti-poverty project than current income poverty lines (Nolan and Whelan, 2011). The project would also be improved by collecting comparative data on the most vulnerable groups in society who are generally underrepresented in household surveys (e.g. the homeless). Our use of mixed methods and datasets is our first effort to report on core indicators of extreme housing deprivation in one part of the Global North.

The qualitative interviews with Roma provided rich data highlighting their experiences of persistent discrimination across the different housing systems they had lived in prior to arriving in Ireland. However, the quantitative data presented here is cross-sectional and comes with the usual limitations which apply to snapshots of people's lives. Stephens and Leishman's (2017) longitudinal analysis of the housing pathways of those in chronic, recurrent and temporary poverty in the UK indicates that housing deprivation is not experienced by the vast majority of people living in chronic poverty. Their findings emphasise the value of longitudinal data for the analysis of housing experiences and future research might focus on adopting this approach to housing deprivation experiences in other countries.

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Charts and tables:

http://www.ucd.ie/geary/static/publications/Charts_Tables_Winston_Kennedy.pdf

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ⁱ The OECD measure is employed: percentage of population in households where total housing costs ('net' of housing allowances) are over 40 % of disposable income ('net' of housing allowance).