



National Forum Summary

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Introduction

The National Forum „Decent Home, Secure Future: Housing Conditions as a Key Determinant of Child Rights“ took place on 17 March 2026, in Sofia. It brought together representatives of international, national and local authorities, civil society organizations, international partners, and representatives of the Roma community.

The Forum aimed to position housing at the centre of child rights discussions and to generate actionable recommendations for national and local authorities.

This reports aims at gathering the valuable information shared between the participants and the creative ideas conceived in the heat of the discussion.

As the final conference organised under the ROMACT programme in Bulgaria, this forum represents both a culmination of efforts and a final call to action.

Summary

Housing insecurity in Bulgaria is not an isolated issue but a systemic failure that directly undermines children’s rights. For many children, especially in Roma communities, growing up without stable, safe, and legally secure home means facing barriers to education, health, and a dignified future from the very start.

The Forum made clear that this situation is not the result of the actions of parents, but of long-standing structural exclusion, weak implementation of legal safeguards, and fragmented institutional responses. While policies recognise children’s rights, they often fail to protect them in practice, even in extreme situations such as forced evictions.

At the same time, solutions are within reach. Examples from some Bulgarian municipalities and across Europe show that when housing is treated as a right, and when institutions work together in a coordinated and practical way, real change is possible.

The challenge ahead is to act, to move from principles to implementation, from fragmented efforts to integrated systems, and from temporary fixes to lasting solutions that ensure every child grows up with a safe and secure home.

Five key findings emerged from the forum.

1. Housing as a foundational right

Housing is the core condition for dignity, security, and development for children. Without a stable home, they cannot fully access education, health care, or protection systems.

2. Structural nature of housing insecurity

Housing insecurity is not the result of individual failure but of a systemic gap. Informality in housing is often a consequence of exclusion rather than choice. There are deep structural barriers preventing families living in existing housing from obtaining legal status.

3. Strong impact on children

Children living in overcrowded, unsafe, or informal housing conditions face cumulative disadvantages that affect their physical, cognitive, and emotional development, resulting in unequal access to opportunities.

4. Institutional fragmentation

The ministries of Social Policy, Regional Development and Health operate in parallel rather than in coordination, leading to ineffective responses.

5. Gap between legal frameworks and practice

Although children's rights are well established in existing legal and policy frameworks, there is a lack of specific, enforceable legal mechanisms and safeguards to ensure their consistent application in practice.

Policy recommendations

Six main recommendations emerged from the discussions during the forum.

1. Introduction of legal mechanisms to address housing informality.

Current legislation does not provide viable pathways for the regularisation of long-standing homes, leaving demolition as the default legal outcome. Participants called for amendments to the Spatial Planning Act and related legislation to enable the legalisation of existing housing, particularly where it is the only home of families with children.

2. Embed enforceable safeguards for forced evictions.

It was recommended that all eviction decisions include mandatory child risk assessments, application of the principle of proportionality, and the development of relocation plans.

3. Development of integrated, cross-sectoral policy frameworks.

Housing insecurity was consistently identified as an issue that cannot be addressed by a single institution. Effective solutions require coordinated action between ministries responsible for social policy, regional development, health, and education, as well as strong collaboration with municipalities and civil society. Participants called for the establishment of formal coordination mechanisms, shared data systems, and joint planning processes to ensure that housing, social, and child protection policies are aligned.

4. Expanding access to housing support.

This includes increasing the stock of social housing, complemented by more flexible and scalable support mechanisms, particularly by expanding rental assistance schemes to include access to private housing markets.

5. Mapping households case-by-case

This serves as a foundation for effective housing policy on municipal level. Experience from local practice shows that without a detailed, pre-emptive mapping of families, their legal status, vulnerabilities, and specific needs, interventions remain reactive and often harmful.

6. Address discrimination and structural exclusion as underlying drivers of housing insecurity.

Even where legal and financial mechanisms exist, discriminatory practices, particularly in the private housing market, limit access to alternative housing solutions. Policies must therefore include anti-discrimination measures, awareness-raising, and enforcement mechanisms to ensure equal access to housing.

Overall, the recommendations point toward a systemic transformation: from declarative rights to enforceable guarantees, from fragmented interventions to coordinated systems, and from reactive crisis management to preventive, long-term solutions. Ensuring adequate housing for children requires not only legal reform, but also institutional commitment, resource allocation, and a sustained focus on inclusion and equity.