

Roma Youth in Europe: A snapshot of key data, issues, and policy gaps affecting young Roma across Europe

Who Are Roma Youth?

Roma youth represent a vibrant, diverse, and resilient segment of Europe's largest ethnic minority. With the total Roma population in Europe estimated at 10–12 million, youth comprise a significant proportion, with around 35–40% under 18 and approximately 25–30% in the 15–29 age group.

Diversity within Roma youth is multidimensional. They include girls, boys, and non-binary individuals, and speak a variety of Romani dialects as well as majority languages. Religious affiliations are equally diverse, with Christian, Muslim, and other faith traditions represented. Many Roma youth identify as LGBTQ+ and face intersecting forms of discrimination. Migration status and statelessness also affect a significant number, particularly among those in Western Europe or the Balkan diaspora. Roma youth with disabilities encounter additional barriers to participation and inclusion.

Embracing Intersectionality

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Policy Gaps

There is a lack of Roma youth-specific strategies across Europe. Roma youth are excluded from national youth councils and do not have access to structures of representation. Mainstream youth institutions do not target Roma youth specifically, and policies and policymakers have yet to address the needs of Roma youth in Europe. ERGO Networked assessed the effectiveness of existing youth measures for including the Roma youth in various policies regarding decision-making and participation within related youth initiatives. The findings affirm that Roma youth continue to be underrepresented in the European Union's youth-focused policies despite numerous inclusion efforts (e.g. UN, NYCs, EU Youth Strategy, Erasmus+).



Systemic Barriers and Challenges

Educational exclusion remains a profound challenge.

- Every second Roma child, or **53%**, attends Early Childhood Education and Care.
- Almost every second Roma child (aged 6–15), or **46%**, is educated in a school where all or most of the pupils are Roma. Segregation in schools has increased in Bulgaria, Czechia, France, Greece, and Romania.
- Only **32%** of Roma aged 20–24 have completed at least upper-secondary education. In Albania, Bulgaria, North Macedonia, Serbia, and Spain, more Roma men than women have upper-secondary education or higher.
- About **14%** of Roma respondents felt discriminated against when in contact with an educational institution (as a student or parent/guardian) in the 12 months.

Employment prospects for Roma youth are bleak.

- Every second young Roma (aged 16–24), or **47%**, is Not in Education, Employment or Training), out of whom 61% women.
- Young Roma (aged 16–24) face difficulties entering the job market; the share of people in paid work in this age group is generally lower than in other age groups.
- Discrimination in the labor market is widespread, pushing many into informal, precarious work with little social protection.
- Digital exclusion further exacerbates inequalities, as limited access to technology and digital skills restricts opportunities for learning and employment.

- Roma youth face significant barriers to healthcare, including sexual and reproductive health services and mental health support. On average across Europe, young Roma people record higher rates of hate-motivated harassment than those aged 65 or older. Experiences of discrimination, poverty, and social exclusion contribute to high levels of stress and mental health challenges, which are often left unaddressed due to systemic barriers and stigma.
- Antigypsyism—the specific form of racism targeting Roma—and work and descent based discrimination remains pervasive. Roma youth are frequent targets of hate speech, bullying, police violence, and institutional racism.

- On average, **77%** of Roma children aged under 18 live in households at risk of poverty, much higher than the rate for children in the general EU-27 population (19% in 2024).
- The share of Roma children aged 17 and under living in severe material deprivation is **40%**.
- Many Roma youth grow up in segregated settlements, facing unsafe living conditions, overcrowding, and the constant threat of forced eviction. Poor housing impacts health, educational attainment, and social participation.
- Roma children (aged 15 and under) live in housing deprivation more often (52%) than Roma aged 25–60 (**43%**).
- Roma children (aged 15 and under) are more likely than older Roma to live in households without tap water.

Role of Youth in the Roma movement, communities and activism

"As Roma youth, we are not only demanding our right to education — we are reclaiming our future. We fight not only to access education, but to be seen, heard, and respected. I believe in a future where Roma girls and boys lead with dignity, knowledge, and pride. And we must continue to fight together, united and resilient, to overcome antigypsyism and ensure that every Roma girl and boy has the opportunity to learn and grow." Edis Eminoski



Edis is a medical student and Roma youth activist from North Macedonia, has been actively engaged in educational and human rights initiatives, working to combat antigypsyism and promote equality. He has led awareness campaigns; facilitated youth projects, and serves as a student delegate in his college assembly. Additionally serves as a Youth Coordinator at RROMA.

- Roma youth are increasingly visible as leaders, activists, and cultural innovators. They play a vital role in shaping the future of their communities, organizing grassroots initiatives, and advocating for equality and justice at local, national, and European levels.
- Youth-led organizations such as ternYpe, Phiren Amenca, and ERGO Network's youth branches have become central platforms for mobilization, peer support, and policy advocacy. Roma youth have been pushing for a shift of narrative from victimhood towards empowerment, dignity and active citizenship.
- It is the Roma youth who tend to challenge internalised discrimination and stereotypes both inside the community and in society as a whole - by either becoming role-models, or by creating a counternarrative that promotes a positive representation of Roma in media, arts and politics.
- They often are the ones to advocate and push into a more intersectional approach, thus connecting Roma rights with feminism, LGBTQA+ rights and antiracism. Youth led grassroot initiatives which vary from local community actions to online campaigns. They often use digital activism and creative methods to challenge discrimination and traditional leadership structures.
- They often serve as bridges between traditional community structures and modern civic activism, translating community needs into political demands.

- ternYpe as an international Roma youth network has helped and continues to support youth to step into the European advocacy spaces.
- Young Roma leaders have been active in European forums (e.g., Phiren Amenca in European Youth Forum, Council of Europe initiatives).
- They push for meaningful youth participation rather than tokenism in Roma organizations and policymaking.



“Roma youth, in Ukraine and across the diaspora, are actively advancing human rights, asserting their rightful place in Ukraine’s recovery and reconstruction, and contributing to a more inclusive society on the path to European Union accession.” Natalii Tomenko

Nataliia Tomenko is a researcher and expert in the cultural heritage of the Romani people. She is a human rights advocate, a leader of the Romani youth movement in Ukraine, and the deputy director of the Youth Agency for the Advocacy of Roma Culture “ARCA” in Ukraine.

The Global Forum of Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent (GFoD) remains firmly committed to empowering and amplifying the voices of youth from our communities.

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