

Status of Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent: The situation of Roma women in Europe 2025



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Introduction

This report aims to contribute towards a general understanding of Roma, especially Roma women - one of the largest Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent (CDWD), in Europe. It aims to raise awareness about the challenges Roma women in Europe face but also about the precarity of civil society organizations working on/with Roma women. The scarce information and data on the situation of Roma women in Europe precludes their social inclusion and their presence in key policy documents at the national and regional levels. Nowadays, Roma and Roma women NGOs and other structures that work defending women and minorities' rights are in a constant struggle to improve the situation of Roma women and girls. Such structures are critical to implementing legislation combating discrimination against women and promoting gender equality. The report also explores how the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations can contribute to improving the situation of Roma.

With regards to the methodology, the report relies mainly on several country reports on the situation of Roma in Albania, Bulgaria, Czechia, Romania, Turkey, and Slovakia prepared by Rights Experts at the Global Forum of Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent (GFoD). In addition, it relies on a joint survey of the Global Forum of Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent, ERGO Network, Romalitico Institute for Roma Policy Analyses, and the Feminist Collective of Romani Gender Experts. The report includes a variety of opinions and voices of Roma women and relies on an online survey opened between November 2023 and February 2024, which targeted Romani gender experts, Roma and Roma women NGOs and structures across Europe. The survey has been disseminated through online platforms, emails targeting Roma and pro-Roma NGOs, and during the 9th International Roma Women's Conference. In total, 30 NGO representatives and experts have answered the survey.¹ The report also relies on existing secondary data, published reports by different European institutions and civil society organizations, such as the Fundamental Rights Agency and European Roma Grassroots Organizations Network (ERGO), as well as news collected and other materials documented by different Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and international bodies.

The report has been compiled based on guidance from GFoD research experts. Throughout the data collection process, the GFoD team ensured common issues were addressed and that rights experts had a good understanding of the expectations of this research process and the concepts

¹ The survey explored several aspects, including: The profile of the civil society structure answering the survey (i.e., Roma women led NGO exclusively dedicated to Roma women, etc.), the organisational capacity of the structure (in terms of staff, projects and membership in other networks and structures), their thematic priorities and activities, and their partnerships and alliances. The presence of Roma women in key national strategies and national programs or policy documents (i.e., National Roma Strategy, equality, poverty, education, health or employment strategies) and the extent to which Roma women are an explicit target. The key socio-economic challenges affecting Roma women and girls. Roma women's participation in policy making processes and the existence of specific measures ensuring their participation.

used. The report aims to lay the foundation for further research, and the collected data will also be used for advocacy purposes at the UN and other global organizations while advocating for the promotion and protection of the rights of CDWD in different parts of the world. The data can also be used by professional researchers for academic purposes, thereby promoting awareness and knowledge about these communities.

This research aims to

- inform the European level institutions, the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), and other relevant structures on the situation of Roma women and girls
- provide insights into the situation of Roma women and girls across Europe
- raise awareness about the key challenges Roma women and girls face
- contribute to the body of knowledge on Roma women and lay the foundation for further research.

The results of this report aim to inform the programmatic work of different stakeholders with intersectional perspectives and ensure that action responds to up-to-date challenges facing Roma women. The collected data can be used for advocacy purposes while advocating for the promotion and protection of the rights of Roma women across Europe. Professional researchers can also use the data for academic purposes, promoting awareness and knowledge about Roma women and the civil society sector working with/on issues affecting Roma women.

Chapter 1: General Roma Context

More than 270 million people across the world are discriminated against based on work, descent and/or face caste-based discrimination. Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent (CDWD)² are some of the most excluded, segregated, and marginalised groups at the global and local levels within their social, economic, political, and cultural systems. The consequences of this marginalization include deprivation and systematic exclusion from education, health, and access to water and sanitation, employment, voting rights, equal access to land and housing, access to religious institutions in the public sphere.

The Roma community is defined as Europe's largest ethnic minority, with an estimated 10-12 million Roma living in Europe, including around 6 million in the European Union.

² See more at [Home - Global Forum of Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent - GFoD \(globalforumcdwd.org\)](http://globalforumcdwd.org)

Intersectionality aspects

Roma communities across Europe face widespread antigypsyism, fueled by historical and ongoing prejudice. Roma women face structural, institutional, and intersectional discrimination and social exclusion on multiple grounds including ethnicity/race, gender, sexual orientation, (dis)ability, class, traditional work and occupation, descent migration status³ and even education. Roma women experience discrimination in employment, healthcare, and education due mainly to their ethnicity and gender. They are also disproportionately affected by gender-based violence. Systemic exclusion from education and employment leads to high rates of poverty, further marginalizing Roma communities. Roma migrants and refugees face additional barriers to integration, including discrimination in access to housing, healthcare, and social services. Many countries do not allocate sufficient resources to address Roma women's intersectional needs comprehensively, leaving policies on paper rather than in practice.⁴ Roma women face deep-rooted stereotypes that affect both their social standing and access to services, including health, education, and employment. Often, gender and ethnic data regarding Roma women is not collected or analyzed, which hinders the development of targeted and effective policies. Some aspects of the European Court on Human Rights' (ECtHR) case law on violence against women are progressively recognizing intersectionality (e.g., when it comes to the forced sterilization of Roma women, as seen in *N.B. v. Slovakia*, Application No. 29518/10, 12 June 2012, para. 96). However, the ECtHR is still reluctant to apply intersectional lenses (and consequently to use the term) even in cases where intersectionality is a clear issue. The detrimental effects of intersectional discrimination on gender-based violence and official responses to it have neither been sufficiently explored nor effectively addressed - see *J.I. v. Croatia*. Recommendation CM/Rec(2024)1 of the Committee of Ministers to member States marks a significant and positive development in recognizing the unique and intersecting forms of discrimination faced by Roma and Traveller women and girls. It highlights the compounded discrimination they experience not only due to antigypsyism, but also as a result of their gender and other personal characteristics, including ethnicity, migration or refugee status, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, and disabilities. This intersectional discrimination creates specific vulnerabilities and deepens the inequalities these women already face, including sexism, violence, and stereotyping. By acknowledging this intersectionality, the Recommendation encourages member states to take comprehensive action to address both the gendered and ethnic dimensions of inequality. Although it is a non-binding tool, this recommendation represents a vital step forward in advocating for Roma and Traveller women's rights and well-being, offering valuable guidance for policies and practices aimed at dismantling the multiple layers of discrimination they face.

³ [From the multi-dimensional to the personal: approaching intersectional discrimination against Roma women – IDEES](#)

⁴ See Croatia: [View of Fighting Intersectional Violence Against Roma Women and Girls – The Case of Croatia](#)

Chapter 2: Roma women and SDG5

Roma women as part of Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent (CDWD) are regarded as the most vulnerable groups in terms of social, economic, and political development. Roma women and girls experience intersectional discrimination and oppression because of overlapping social constructs of ethnicity, work, class, and gender. A significant number of Roma women are highly present in traditional, patriarchal Roma communities and exposed to mainstream discrimination and abuse. They have a voice, yet they lack political representation and public participation and are sidelined and downsized by mainstream women's organizations.

Reproductive and sexual rights and information

Roma women and girls may not have access to reproductive and sexual rights and information, they can lack education on family planning, in particular in relation to the usage of contraceptive means, and usage of childcare facilities. All of these factors contribute towards gender inequality, while women's participation is restricted including by the fact that they have no income or property. On one hand, one can find high fertility rates, but on the other hand, a high infant mortality rate exists as a result of medical negligence, infrequent check-ups during pregnancy and neglect during childbirth driven by the low quality of health services provided and the pejorative attitudes of healthcare professionals. Roma women going to family practice centers or hospitals are kept waiting, ignored, not given enough attention, or sometimes rejected by health personnel. This situation increases not just physical ailments but also contributes to mental health issues. Their experience of racism results in unequal access to health care services and poor living conditions. Poor accommodation was specifically problematic when children had to follow remote classes while living in overcrowded spaces, and inequalities in education have become much worse. During the lockdown, many women whose homes were not safe have become more exposed to domestic violence.

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In recent years, obstetric violence against Roma women⁵ has gained growing attention, revealing it to be widespread and systematic in nature. It remains highly underreported and urgently needs to be addressed from a rights-based perspective. In Bulgaria, Romani women routinely experience discriminatory treatment, segregated maternity wards, verbal and physical harassment, and obstetric violence in various public hospitals.⁶ In North Macedonia, a Romani woman with contractions suffered acute pain for hours with the nursing staff insulting her.⁷ The most recent case was in January 2024 when a Roma mother from Serbia reported a horrifying account of obstetric violence she experienced at the hands of a brutal doctor, mistreatment that culminated in the death of her baby.⁸

Romani women often find themselves at the cruel intersection of racism and gender-based and institutional violence. In Slovakia, the widespread and historical practice of forced and coercive sterilization of Roma women is just one example of reproductive rights violations that Romani women face. Monitoring over recent years has revealed that Romani women continue to face multiple forms of discrimination in the context of reproductive health care, including segregation in maternity wards, Roma-only bathrooms, verbal racial abuse, and ill-treatment by medical personnel.⁹

Gender-based violence

Gender based violence is often a tool used by both state and non-state actors to maintain the “low” status of descent-based communities, and may be deployed in response to their assertion of rights. Sexual violence targeted at women and girls from Roma communities, is often a result of a broader continuum of persecution, social dominance, and systemic oppression by dominant groups and State officials to dehumanise and subordinate Roma women resulting in serious bodily and mental harm to members of the group. There are reported cases of sexual harassment, and intimidation of women from Roma communities, as well as their lack of access to public services and resources. The downplaying by key State officials of the grave criminal nature of sexual violence against women and girls remains a concern. Women and girls living in multidimensionally poor households are at higher risk of violence because they often face uncertain living conditions and have less financial independence and bargaining power within the household. Available data indicates that women from some of these communities are vulnerable to a disproportionately higher rate of sexual and gender-based violence. They are also often excluded from public and

⁵ [Denmark's tough laws on begging hit Roma women with few other options | Roma | Al Jazeera](#)

⁶ [Cause of Action: Reproductive Rights of Romani Women in Bulgaria - European Roma Rights Centre \(errc.org\)](#)

⁷ [Childbirth in Macedonia: Racist abuse, slapped faces and slashed budgets - European Roma Rights Centre \(errc.org\)](#)

⁸ [Serbia: baby dies after shocking incident of obstetric violence - European Roma Rights Centre \(errc.org\)](#)

⁹ [‘An Attempt at Genocide’: Roma Women Still Being Unlawfully Sterilised \(vice.com\)](#)

political processes when responses to human rights violations are being designed and implemented. Roma women and girls are vulnerable to trafficking in human beings due to such factors as social exclusion and poverty, and there is often a failure to address the root causes of trafficking. Moreover, children can be trafficked abroad, including for forced begging. Roma women who are human rights defenders can also face targeted threats, attacks, harassment, intimidation, including online, and even murder, including in the context of land demarcation and titling.

Education

When it comes to education, the deprivation is not only linked to formal classes but also to meals and after-school lessons and activities; as well as access to electronic devices and internet access. Difficulties in accessing digital learning have raised the risk of girls dropping out of school and strengthened the likelihood of them entering early marriages. The persistent and structural barriers to equitable access to education cause further restrictions and inequities for Roma women and girls. These barriers manifest in disproportionately high dropout rates, lower levels of literacy and educational attainment. Furthermore, they are direct contributors that hinder the success of the women and girls compared to the majority communities that go on to achieve higher levels of education; which leads to systemic exclusion from quality educational environments. Additionally, there are cases of segregation and lack of inclusive and quality education. Instances of segregation and the lack of inclusive curricula or pedagogical approaches further marginalize these communities. Critically, the absence of targeted interventions, such as affirmative action policies or need-based scholarship schemes, has significantly limited Roma women's access to secondary and tertiary education, thereby reinforcing cycles of intergenerational disadvantage.

Employment

Young Roma women from Central Eastern Europe are prone to EU migration, because of a lack of opportunities for participation in their own societies, whose capacities are not resourced even though highly educated. Their potential should be used not only in a way to provide economic development but more importantly to introduce diversity, to avoid homogenous structures, and to illustrate openness by the society for persons with different backgrounds.

In order to empower Roma women to access the labor market and become economically independent, absolute poverty has to be fought in all its aspects. Those who did not have an opportunity to gain a proper education and who due to the lack of support and information did not manage to leave the cycle of intergenerational poverty, who still live in poor living conditions and in homes that do not satisfy the minimum space for the number of members, in many cases lacking electricity, running water, a toilet or bathroom, become asylum seekers at some point, in particular those without EU nationality.

Generally, the high unemployment rate results in their involvement in the gray economy and inability to access pension and social security rights. Roma women are mostly employed in the informal sector, in jobs such as scrap and paper collecting, flower selling, and cleaning. As nearly all of their jobs require public space and social interaction, with social distancing measures and lockdowns, their sources of income decreased. Additionally, Roma women are not informed about business application procedures; they do not know how to promote their work and how the labor market works in terms of digitalization, social networks, and online platforms; although there are strategic documents for Roma in the field of employment throughout the region, they do not have information on how to access these programs and how to apply for incentives.

Roma women remain mostly out of the labour markets and therefore there is a need for more knowledge-sharing, training and incentives that will make their active participation in the official labour market possible. The current ongoing trends in digital and green transitions can serve in the path of advancement of Roma women. Embracing new trends such as green and digital initiatives can tremendously benefit Roma women and girls. These trends create an opportunity for them to gain new skills, access employment opportunities, share experiences through connectivity and improve their financial independence. Therefore, the challenges such as lack of digital literacy and understanding of the environmental situation shall be tackled through measures for upskilling and reskilling schemes.

Environmental Racism

Environmental racism creates bigger issues for women since they are often care providers at home and engaged in domestic duties such as cooking, household work, and fetching drinking water. Disparities in access to tap water and sanitation become a source of gender inequalities, as in most cases they create hardship for women and girls, who are more frequently responsible for collecting water. Moreover, it increases exposure to poverty and exclusion among Roma as the need to buy bottled water contributes towards financial hardship.¹⁰ A higher level of hazardous environmental conditions increases the potential for miscarriage and stillbirths, neonatal deaths and high rates of maternal death during pregnancy and after childbirth.¹¹

¹⁰ [Access to water - a major driver of health inequalities for Roma - EPHA](#)

¹¹ [The Experience of Pregnancy in the British Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Communities | AIMS](#)

LGBT+

Roma LGBT+ women exist. They are a clear example of the intersecting burdens of gender, race, nationality, class, and minority sexual orientation. There is constant discrimination and neglect of Roma LGBT women within Roma, feminist and LGBT movements. Working within communities to reduce sexism, patriarchal thinking and structures, and unequal relationships is of paramount importance.

In the summer of 2023, a collective of Roma feminists, Queers, transgender, lesbians and allies, raised their voices against racial inequalities among the mainstream LGBT+ and feminist movements across Europe through a manifesto¹². It points out that in different countries Roma LGBT+ still don't feel included in the movement nor in the planning of Pride festivities. When invited by NGOs or collectives, many feel excluded based on the non-Roma criteria and values. For many Roma LGBT+ these spaces remain exclusive, elitist, and white.

*‘We are aware of the vulnerabilities and struggles in our communities and spaces. We all share different oppression systems and fight to dismantle the power dynamics that perpetuate discrimination. By possessing a discriminated identity or sexual orientation doesn't make communities/collectives less racist or sexist. At times there have been different allegations of racism and violence towards Roma LGBT+ in different spaces. Or stories whitewashed, to be accepted. As if our voices or stories are too disturbing and must be said in such a way as to satisfy the majority's expectation’.*¹³

The manifesto also denounces the exclusion and marginalization of Roma trans, Roma lesbians, and Roma Queers from Feminist and Queer spaces, NGO's or groups, orchestrated by those who seek to maintain their power and privilege. The presence of these groups in the social movements should not be contingent upon fitting into white non-Roma standards or rainbow capitalism, but on the recognition of their diversity, experiences and positions based on racial injustice.

Participation

The main challenge of Roma women initially is seen in the absence of their needs in policy documents while their political education can also contribute to learning about and claiming rights

¹²https://docs.google.com/document/d/1ayX6ioiUozF3u2HEL_3EcBg6CqqfNuq88_-dh2N0mtY/edit?fbclid=IwAR12NccwjU76hSvKraPCIEhtK174IX6M_0aK_4b577k3tOwsEtjiRLJMz2g

¹³ *Idem*

and tools and opportunities. The needs of young Roma women are related to access to rights, tools, and opportunities as a way to invest back into their communities.

Roma women and girls face many social barriers and prejudices that impact their capacity to participate in public life. They are underrepresented in the local or national political structures and decision-making processes. As a result of an ethnic stigma, the amplitude of violence against Roma and young girls is unreported and invisible. When asked whether respondents are aware of reserved seats or other measures aimed at ensuring the participation of Roma women in decision-making processes in their country, it was revealed that in Croatia, gender quotas are prescribed to promote gender equality in the political process. Still, unfortunately, no single Roma woman benefited from the quota. In Serbia, no Directive reserving places for Roma women in decision-making positions. North Macedonia has implemented measures to ensure Roma women's participation in decision-making processes. One significant initiative is the establishment of reserved seats for ethnic minorities, including Roma, in the Parliament of North Macedonia. These reserved seats represent minority communities, including Roma women, in the country's legislative body. In Finland, the Finnish Roma Association is doing a lot of advocacy work, but on a political/decision-making level, Roma women (and men) are absent.

Roma women are not included in the mechanisms and decision-making of the majority society. Roma women's expertise in creating positive public policies is not recognized, and they are also victims of invisible discrimination, disrespect for their work, and invisibility of educated Roma women. Roma women participate in politics and public life in very small numbers. As revealed, some of the main obstacles to equal participation of Roma women and girls in women and/or Roma policy-making and/or in policy consultation mechanisms are strongly linked to the discrimination, patriarchy, and sexism that Roma women encounter and to tokenism, and ignorance from policy-makers and key stakeholders. There is also a lack of proactive recruitment, communication, and networking. One of the main obstacles to this is discrimination against Roma. Roma women are not seen as 'worthy' to participate in this process in the context of intersectional discrimination. Apart from that, they are not given information about the processes, and their access to education is very low, which prevents them from participating in decision-making mechanisms. In addition, toxic masculinity restricts Roma women to the home sphere or only to the daily work sphere.

There is a crucial need of Roma women to become part of the politics and decision-making process at national and local level. Roma women and girls have to understand the power of voting and the power of being elected on different levels. They are not included in the mainstream gender discussions and in the processes of design and implementation of gender equality policies.

Roma women and girls can bring diverse experience, can benefit the agenda of gender equality in general, can build inclusive society and design better policies.

Therefore, building alliances and active participation of Roma women and girls in all gender equality agendas is crucial so they can contribute to implementing the Roma gender agenda, but also provide input to the mainstream agendas. The struggle of Roma women and girls is often seen as unique, but shared discussions can bring solutions and support, especially from other marginalized women communities and other communities of colour.

One of the essential steps in supporting democratic participation is through voters' education and by ensuring that women's needs are main targets. As it was shared, besides participation in politics, Roma women have to become part of the design and implementation of the gender equality policies.

Chapter 3: Europe wide protection mechanisms and policy developments

In the context of Beijing+30 and the CSW69, addressing the inclusion of Roma women in national and regional gender equality frameworks should be a priority. However, an analysis of 35 European countries shows that about 38% of the reviewed countries do not mention Roma women at all in their Beijing+30 national reports.¹⁴ On the other side, countries from Central Eastern Europe, with a significant percentage of Roma population, have made efforts to include Roma women in their national reports, highlighting specific challenges and initiatives aimed at improving their situation. However, there is a lack of mention in some countries, indicating a need for increased focus on this marginalized group. The depth and context of these mentions vary, with some countries providing more detailed and targeted measures than others.

The reports from various countries highlight the challenges and efforts concerning Roma women in different contexts. In Albania, Roma women are mentioned several times, focusing on their struggles in agriculture and healthcare access, with an emphasis on intersectional challenges like the impacts of climate change. Bosnia and Herzegovina also address Roma women, particularly focusing on their economic empowerment and access to healthcare. Croatia presents detailed initiatives for Roma women, such as programs to improve their social status, education, and empowerment, including media representation. In Czechia, specific initiatives like compensation for forced sterilization are highlighted, along with broader support for Roma women as part of policies for marginalized groups. However, countries such as Austria or Türkiye do not mention Roma women in their reports at all. These varying mentions underscore the differing levels of attention and action regarding Roma women's rights and challenges across Europe.

The European Commission's Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 explicitly acknowledges that some women are structurally underrepresented in the labor market due to overlapping vulnerabilities, including ethnic (including Roma) or religious minority status and migrant backgrounds. It references specific data from the FRA on Roma women highlighting the compounded barriers they face in employment and social inclusion. The strategy did not provide enough targeted measures or dedicated attention to address the unique structural discrimination and exclusion that Roma women experience. As a result, the strategy failed short of fully integrating Roma women's distinct realities and needs into its framework, limiting its effectiveness

¹⁴ <https://romareact.org/roma-womens-engagement-at-the-commission-on-the-status-of-women-a-two-decade-gap/>

in advancing substantive gender equality and social justice for Roma women within the broader EU agenda. The current Roadmap has the potential to ensure Roma women are explicitly targeted and mentioned in the new EU Gender Equality Strategy.

Although European countries have anti-discrimination legislation in place in line with the European Union (EU) Racial Equality Directive, implementation of these legal protections remains poor. Even those few cases that reach the judicial system are often dismissed or racial discrimination is not found, while in other cases Roma applicants withdraw from the procedures before they end. Roma are often faced with investigators who refuse to investigate hate crimes and prosecutors who refuse to prosecute the cases, or legal systems that don't provide sanctions for the breach of Constitutional guarantees of non-discrimination.¹⁵ In practice, however, implementation remains poor: the number of cases of discrimination against Roma resolved by courts is still very low across Europe. Even among legal personnel, knowledge of anti-discrimination law is limited, and Roma themselves are often reluctant themselves to report incidents due to lack of awareness, mistrust of the judicial system or a generalized disbelief that their situation will change. The Covid-19 pandemic also amplified ongoing shortcomings in the protection of Roma rights. Antigypsyism and deep-rooted stereotypes associated with the Roma community continue to hamper their inclusion.

As expressed by the survey respondents, Roma women are an explicit target in 8 national Roma strategies and only mentioned or completely left out from other strategies. These strategies would be key to advancing the situation of Roma women in terms of equality, poverty reduction, health, education, and employment. There is a considerably more explicit focus on Roma women in the post-2020 National Roma Strategies than mainstream equality strategies. However, research has shown that such objectives are not ambitious enough, and there is a clear disparity among EU countries in terms of focus on Roma women.¹⁶

¹⁵ [CF \(minorityrights.org\)](https://minorityrights.org)

¹⁶ https://www.etd.ceu.edu/2023/sanchez_alba.pdf

ROMA WOMEN IN THE NATIONAL (GENDER) EQUALITY STRATEGY



Case study - Roma women in Finland

Roma women have been considered in Finland's National Roma Policy (2023-2030). The programme has been drawn up closely with Roma NGOs and Roma actors. However, in Finland's earlier National Roma Policy (ROMPO) 2018–2022, Roma girls/women were more prominent and played a major role also in the EU/CERV programme.

Roma women in Finland's National Roma Policy (2023-2030):

1. Removing barriers to Roma employment
2. Reforming instruments in the European policy on Roma, making use of digitalisation and technology as well as social innovations to increase Roma inclusion
3. Reinforcing the Roma policy of European organizations and improving Roma access to influence
4. Empowering Roma women and supporting self-motivated activities at all levels
5. Strengthening the fundamental and human rights perspective as part of European policy on Roma

64. Action proposal	Cooperation partners	Monitoring
Supporting the capacity of Finnish Roma organisations and actors, particularly young Roma and Roma women, to participate in European cooperation and supporting the strengthening of cooperation between Roma organisations. Exploring and promoting opportunities for increasing Roma cooperation in the Nordic countries and Baltic Sea region.	Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, Ministry of Justice in cooperation with Roma organisations.	Clear measures to support participation capacity and inclusion are reported during the operating period. Training for Roma actors has been provided relating to international Roma policy.

A recent report covering access to justice for Roma in Serbia and Hungary has shown that Roma routinely experience discrimination, usually fuelled by negative attitudes and prejudices, in a variety of areas of their lives from an early age. Despite the high number of occurrences, incidents of discrimination typically go unreported. Roma often have to accept discrimination against them

as part of their daily lives and are reluctant to report cases to the authorities out of fear of retaliation or because they lack faith in the effectiveness of the justice system. In both countries, Roma are in need of legal support since they often lack knowledge of the legal definition of discrimination, the available legal remedies and the legal fora they could turn to. They are also discouraged by the inefficient nature of the legal system and the various barriers they face once they choose to report it. Therefore, the number of cases reported to the national equality bodies only represent a small proportion of the actual discrimination Roma face.¹⁷

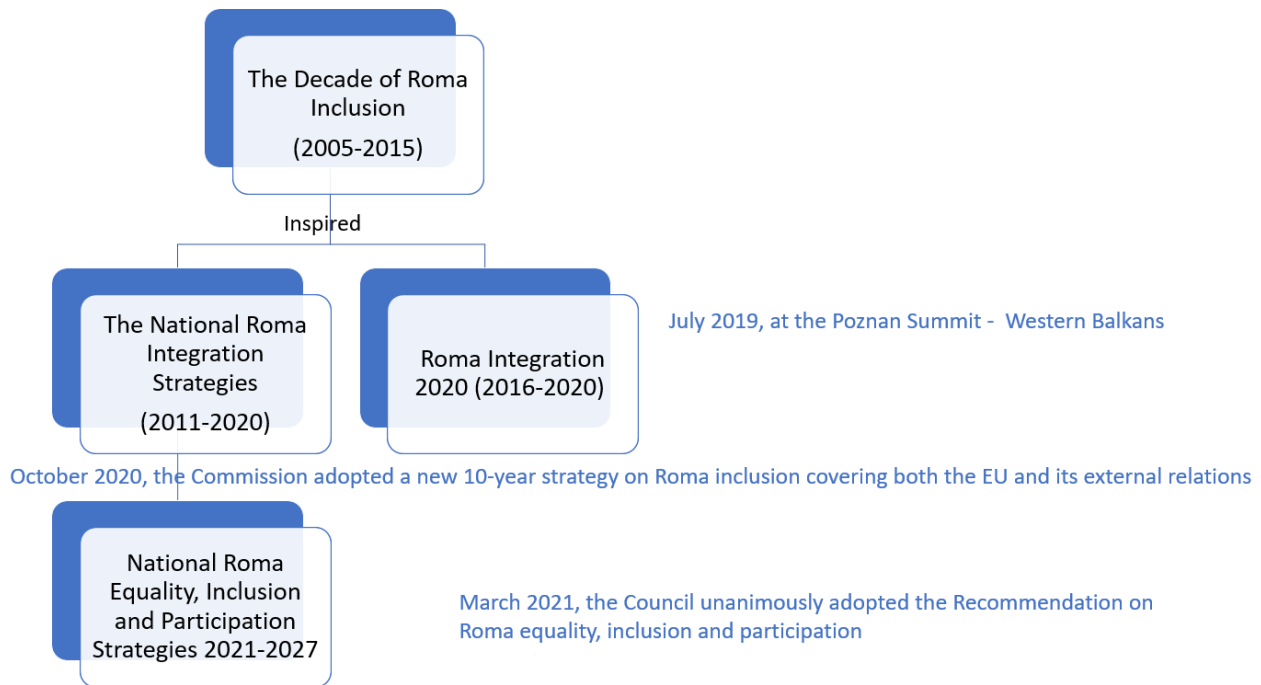
In 2020, the European Commission set a new EU Roma Strategic Framework for Equality, Participation and Inclusion and proposed that all national Roma strategic frameworks have among others a focus on the four policy areas education, employment, healthcare and housing, in particular antigypsyism as a key objective and cross-cutting priority in each policy area.¹⁸ In addition, the 2021 Council Recommendation on Roma, asks the European Union member states to introduce antigypsyism as a horizontal objective and to set quantitative targets by 2030 to combat and prevent it.

However, such initiatives are not new. Since 2005, the European Commission, the World Bank, the Open Society Institute and others have launched the Decade of Roma Inclusion (See Figure 1 below). An ambitious project for Europe's Roma yet, due to its soft law nature, it did not lead to significant changes on the ground.

¹⁷ [CF \(praxis.org.rs\)](http://praxis.org.rs)

¹⁸ eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0620&from=EN

Figure 1. The evolution of European policy developments targeting Roma



Since 2011, the European institutions have promoted the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies (NRIS) that has brought Roma issues to the agenda, triggered some policy action but had a rather limited impact in terms of improving the living conditions in health, education, housing and employment as well as tackling the cross-cutting issues of antigypsyism and Roma empowerment. The current EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies is a logical continuation of previous institutional efforts to improve the situation of Roma, however the non-binding character of the EU Roma Framework as a “soft” policy tool can only ensure that European Commission pressures EU member states - mainly through European Structural and Investment Funds and the National Roma Contact Points - to adopt a national strategy and to report on a regular basis on its progress.

While seeking solutions to the problems of Roma in the European Union, ethnic discrimination and antigypsyism were ignored in recognizing the Roma as a social group instead of recognizing

their ethnic identity.¹⁹ Another important issue is the lack of reliable, disaggregated data on Roma across Europe. Studies show that many states lack data on ethnicity, and statistics on Roma issues are limited despite efforts by civil society to provide data. The European Commission also emphasized the importance of data and recommended the collection of data to measure progress over time and to assist Member States in developing effective monitoring tools. The general lack of data makes it very difficult to obtain a complete picture of the Roma situation in Europe. Another issue for the relatively low progress and the failure of Roma policies is the low Roma representation and political participation at the European, National and local level which makes it difficult to promote policies supporting the inclusion of Roma.

The 2024 assessment of the EU Roma strategies reveals that Member States largely fail to specifically target Roma women in their national programs and Roma inclusion efforts. It underscores the urgent need for Member States to integrate explicit, gender-responsive measures and dedicated resources for Roma women.

Chapter 4: Conclusions and Recommendations

Roma women, as part of Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent (CDWD), are regarded as one of the most vulnerable groups in terms of social, economic, and political development. Roma women and girls experience intersectional discrimination and oppression because of overlapping social constructs of ethnicity, work, class, and gender. A significant number of Roma women live in traditional, patriarchal Roma communities and are exposed to mainstream discrimination and abuse. They have a voice, lack political representation and public participation and are sidelined and downsized by mainstream women's organizations. Making progress towards greater inclusion of Roma women and girls is not only a human rights imperative; the recognition of their existence and addressing their challenges is one of the best ways to move forward in ensuring that they can access education, health services, social benefits, and employment opportunities.

Recommendations:

- Civil society participation is elementary to democracy and it requires continuous strengthening and commitment in the work of different structures. That is why it is crucial to create opportunities for a structured dialogue with Roma women organizations;

¹⁹ Rostas, I. (2019). *A Task for Sisyphus : Why Europe's Roma Policies Fail*. Central European University Press.

- Enhanced participation should be enabled through formal and informal mentorship and leadership programmes, career advice, networking and capacity-building initiatives, and the promotion of role models;
- Create the conditions and the tools for young Roma and Traveller women to participate in decision-making processes and policy creation, including affirmative actions for their employment or political education;
- Equal representation of Roma women in politics should be enabled through targeted measures and ethnic quotas in local Councils and Parliaments, as well as the adoption of gender-sensitive legislation, policies and programs, and gender budgeting initiatives;
- Member States should address structural racism and antigypsyism and take part in the development of anti-discrimination strategies;
- Funding should be made available to local governments to ensure environmental services, decent housing and green public spaces;
- Actions and funding for social inclusion must be explicitly targeting the community level, explicitly Roma women as a way to fight absolute poverty and inequality;
- Member States should improve the living conditions of Roma women as part of the public investments in green technologies;
- Member States should create programs for Roma women and girls' employment so that new opportunities are created;
- National governments should support women working in arts through introducing scholarships, trainings and most importantly – health and pension security;
- Ensure that all Roma are legally registered through their involvement in national censuses and by introducing procedures for granting citizenship and documentation for those who are lacking them;
- Ethnic data collection needs to be collected through an equality and human rights framework;
- Fight against harmful practices such as early marriages should be integrated into gender-based and racial violence policies;
- Training and capacity building for officials and health care providers should be introduced as a way to improve intersectional intercultural understanding and eliminate stereotypical and discriminatory attitudes;
- There is a need for the creation of more targeted health programs for Roma women and girls, with a focus on sexual and reproductive health;
- We urge the UN mechanisms to adhere to key human rights standards and adopt a Declaration for the rights of CDWD, highlighting the intersecting marginalisation faced by Roma women, girls, and gender-diverse people and ensuring it consistently reflects in national laws, policies and practices, and in the programmes and activities of the UN through thematic research, awareness-raising and capacity-building.

- Recognize antigypsyism and the specific form of discrimination Roma and other Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent (CDWD) encounter, including the hierarchical systems of oppression surrounding these communities.
- Adopt an intersectional approach in all programmes and policies both within the United Nations (UN) and government policies.
- Advocate for the adoption of intersectional policy frameworks within the UN system, including guidelines and protocols that explicitly address the intersecting forms of discrimination faced by Roma women. Encourage UN agencies to mainstream intersectionality into their policies, programs, and initiatives to ensure that the needs and priorities of Roma women are adequately addressed.
- Provide training and capacity-building opportunities for UN staff, including those working in field offices and country teams, on issues related to gender equality, social inclusion, and Roma rights. Offer specialized training on cultural sensitivity, anti-discrimination practices, and effective engagement with Roma communities to enhance the UN's ability to support Roma women's empowerment and rights.
- Allocate resources and funding to support Roma women's organizations and civil society groups working on gender equality and social inclusion. Provide grants, technical assistance, and capacity-building support to strengthen the organizational capacity and advocacy efforts of Roma women-led organizations, particularly those operating in marginalized communities.
- Prioritize funding and support for intersectional research and data collection initiatives that capture the diverse experiences and needs of Roma women. Collaborate with Roma women's organizations, academic institutions, and national statistical offices to collect disaggregated data on key indicators related to education, health, employment, and violence against women.
- Facilitate policy dialogue and advocacy efforts to promote the rights and inclusion of Roma women within UN forums and international platforms. Organize high-level meetings, expert consultations, and thematic discussions on Roma women's issues to raise awareness, share best practices, and mobilize support for targeted interventions.
- Strengthen partnerships and collaboration with Roma women's organizations, UN agencies, governments, and other stakeholders to advance gender equality and social inclusion for Roma women. Foster multi-stakeholder initiatives and joint programming to address the root causes of discrimination and empower Roma women to participate fully in society.
- Establish robust monitoring and reporting mechanisms to track progress on gender equality and social inclusion for Roma women. Develop indicators, benchmarks, and reporting frameworks to assess the implementation of policies and programs, identify gaps and challenges, and measure the impact of interventions on Roma women's rights and well-being.

- Advocate for increased resource mobilization and investment in initiatives that promote gender equality and social inclusion for Roma women. Lobby for dedicated funding streams, donor support, and innovative financing mechanisms to sustainably address the needs and priorities of Roma women and girls in Europe and beyond.

European Union specific recommendations:

- As a truly global development agenda, the 2030 Agenda must be considered in all policies for EU member states as well as the enlargement region. Its 17 Sustainable Development Goals and the promise of governments to “leave no one behind” provide crucial opportunities for advancing the rights of Roma in Europe.
- At the same time, policy-makers and civil society face challenges when bringing European economic and social policies, such as Europe 2020 and the European Pillar of Social Rights, under the roof of the 2030 Agenda.
- The European Institutions should push member states towards aligning their policies and measurement mechanisms with the SDG framework as well as incorporating the SDGs into EU policies and programs
- The EU should ensure that the Sustainable Development Goals are included in the Social Scoreboard that monitors Member States’ performance in relation to the Pillar of Social Rights.

European Union Member States specific recommendations:

- Formally recognize and acknowledge the existence of discrimination based on work and descent as a distinct form of discrimination that deserves the attention of the international community and that affects communities around the world including among others, the Roma in Europe.
- Address the deep-rooted structural and institutional discrimination that exists at all levels of society and is a major barrier for members of the communities discriminated on work and descent to fully enjoy their fundamental rights in all spheres of life, including employment, housing, education, healthcare, care, social protection, and other key public services.

- Take all necessary constitutional, legislative, administrative, budgetary, judicial, and educational measures to eliminate discrimination based on work and descent in their respective territories and to respect, protect, promote, restitute, implement, and monitor the human rights of those facing discrimination based on caste and work and descent.
- Combat prejudicial beliefs and practices in all their forms, including practices of untouchability, segregation, pollution, and caste superiority or inferiority, and prevent human rights violations taken on the basis of such beliefs.
- Work in collaboration with National Human Rights Institutions, civil society organizations, human rights defenders, and other stakeholders to address the root causes and effects of discrimination on the basis of work and descent that nullify or impair equal enjoyment of human rights.
- Improve data collection and disaggregation, in line with data protection and data privacy principles, to measure progress, inter alia, in the Sustainable Development Goals for persons affected by discrimination on the basis of work and descent, to ensure they are not left behind.