

ESTONIA

Country Fiche

Assessment of the progress in the NRSF implementation
between 1 June 2023 and 30 March 2025

APPROACH OF THE NATIONAL ROMA STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK (NRSF)	Estonia does not have a dedicated National Roma Strategic Framework (NRSF) but responds to EU requirements by referring to its ten-year national integration strategy entitled ‘Cohesive Estonia 2021–2030’ with a supplemental policy document entitled ‘Integration, incl. Adaptation Programme 2022–2025’. The programme includes indicators on Roma education and employment. ¹ Civil society organisations have long recommended that the state develops a National Roma Strategic Framework or, at a minimum, incorporate a clear Roma-specific strategy within the Integration Programmes.
ESTIMATED ROMA POPULATION Council of Europe estimates (plus national census data, where available)	1,000-1,500
National Roma Contact Point (NRCP)	Ministry of Culture, Department of Cultural Diversity

HORIZONTAL OBJECTIVES

1. FIGHT AND PREVENT ANTIGYPSYISM AND DISCRIMINATION

PROGRESS MADE <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The initiatives undertaken primarily focus on cultural promotion. For instance, in 2024, the Integration Foundation funded Roma dance groups as part of a grant round intended to support the cultural expression of national minorities in Estonia. 	AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Integration Programmes 2023–2025 do not include specific measures aimed at fighting and preventing antigypsyism and discrimination. No targeted actions addressing the systemic exclusion of Roma communities have been implemented. Research on the extent of antigypsyism and discrimination in Estonian society remains very limited despite the Roma community identifying it as an issue. According to Roma mentors and volunteers at Valga Youth Centre, negative stereotypes continue to shape public perceptions of the Roma.² This concern is further supported by a 2024
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¹ Ministry of Culture, *Sidus Eesti: Lõimumine, sh kohanemine 2022-2025*. Available at: https://www.kul.ee/sites/default/files/documents/2022-02/Lõimumis_kohanemisprogramm_2022_2025_kinnitamiseks.pdf.

² Group interview with Roma mentors and Valga Youth Centre volunteers, 2 October 2024.

	<p>thesis on the social adaptation of the Roma in Valga, which found that all interviewed Roma individuals had experienced discrimination.³ Incorporating indicators of discrimination and antigypsyism into the Integration Programmes would bridge the longstanding gap in data and understanding, enabling more effective and targeted policy responses.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For years, Estonian NGOs and international organisations have drawn attention to the issue that the current provision on incitement to hatred in the Penal Code does not effectively protect minorities from hate speech and there are no provisions on hate crimes.⁴ . To ensure the effective protection of the Roma community, it is essential to advance the proposed amendments on hate speech and hate crimes. Strengthening the legal framework would enable accurate data collection and more effectively address hate speech and hate-motivated incidents.
2. REDUCE POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION	
<p>PROGRESS MADE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No significant achievements have been made in reducing poverty and social exclusion. Furthermore, no specific measures targeting the Roma community have been implemented. 	<p>AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The primary initiative to reduce poverty and social exclusion is still the mentorship service in Valga, a town where approximately one-third of the Estonian Roma population resides. Their role is to promote cooperation and mediate communication between Roma families, the local government, and other institutions.⁵ The mentors also provide humanitarian aid to Roma families in need.⁶ Although the last two Integration Programmes identified the expansion of the mentorship service to other cities as a development need, no steps have been taken to achieve this due to budget constraints.⁷ Expanding the mentorship service is the next step towards reducing poverty and social exclusion among all Roma communities in Estonia. As mentors

³ Podiradt, K. (2024), *Romade sotsiaalne kohanemine Eesti kultuuriruumi Valga linna näitel. Lõputöö. [Social Adaptation of Roma to the Estonian Cultural Space: A Case Study of Valga City. Thesis.]* Tartu Ülikool, Pärnu Kolledž. Available at: <https://hdl.handle.net/10062/102967>.

⁴ Grossthal, K. (2024) *Human Rights in Estonia 2024: Prohibition of discrimination*, Estonian Human Rights Centre. Available at: <https://humanrights.ee/en/materials/inimoigused-ee2024/diskrimineerimise-keeld/>.

⁵ Interview with Anne-Ly Reimaa, Advisor in the Department of Cultural Diversity, Ministry of Culture, 4 October 2024.

⁶ Group interview with Roma mentors and Valga Youth Centre volunteers, 2 October 2024.

⁷ Interview with Anne-Ly Reimaa, Advisor in the Department of Cultural Diversity, Ministry of Culture, 4 October 2024.

currently provide clothing and other humanitarian aid to Roma families in need without any allocated budget, the next step is to establish a dedicated fund. This would enable mentors to support Roma communities more strategically and sustainably.

3. PROMOTE PARTICIPATION THROUGH EMPOWERMENT, COOPERATION AND TRUST

CONTEXT

- There is one active Roma advocacy NGO in Estonia, namely the European Roma Forum based in Tallinn. The organisation operates without any paid staff and has very limited funding, which significantly hinders its capacity to contribute effectively. The European Roma Forum in Estonia primarily represents the Roma community in the capital region and does not provide comprehensive representation across all geographical areas of the country. Two members of the organisation also serve on the Roma Integration Council. In 2024, a new NGO, Shukar Roma, was established in Valga. While the NGO is represented in the Roma Integration Council, its activities are currently focused more on cultural initiatives rather than advocacy.
- The Roma Integration Council is responsible for analysing issues related to Roma integration and making recommendations to relevant organisations to address these issues and promote the integration of the Roma community. As of 2024, the Council has 11 members: three representatives from the Roma community, three from local governments, four from ministries, and one from the Integration Foundation.⁸

PROGRESS MADE

- In 2023, the Ministry of Culture, with the support of the European Commission under

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

- Roma civil society organisations often face limited capacity and resources, which restricts their ability to effectively engage in policymaking and advocacy.¹² To ensure that policies and measures are responsive to the needs of Roma communities, it is essential to actively involve Roma NGOs in the development, implementation, and monitoring of these processes. Concrete steps should be taken to guarantee the full participation of Roma civil society in all stages of the integration process and ensure that their feedback is systematically used to inform and update Roma Integration Programmes.
- Current active members of the Roma community have expressed concern about the lack of new engaged people and the risk of burnout among existing contributors.¹³ This highlights the need for a more strategic approach to empowering Roma civil society, either through the development of a dedicated strategy or the explicit recognition of the Roma as a target group within existing civil society development frameworks.

⁸ Ministry of Culture, *Romade lõimumise nõukoda. [Roma Integration Council.]* Available at: <https://www.kul.ee/kultuuriline-mitmekesisus-ja-loimumine/rahvusvahemused-ja-rahvuskaslasel/romade-loimumise-noukoda>.

¹² Roma Civil Monitor (2025) *Civil society monitoring report on the implementation of the national strategic framework for Roma equality, inclusion, and participation in Estonia.* Available at: <https://romacivilmonitoring.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/RCM2-2024-C4-Estonia-FINAL-ISBN.pdf>.

¹³ Interview with Zalina Dabla from the European Roma Forum in Estonia (ERFE), 4 October 2024.

<p>the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme, implemented the ESTROM 3 project to empower the Roma community. The project included a training event for Roma women, a youth training event for the Roma, two seminars for teachers working with the Roma, a joint workshop for Roma youth and youth centre staff on the island of Kihnu, and mentoring workshops for Roma mentors in Pärnu.⁹</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In 2024, the European Roma Forum received, for the first time, an operating grant of €7300 through the Ministry of Culture.¹⁰ • During the period from September to December 2024, state budget funds were also used for additional training to empower Roma youth. This three-part training series aimed to support the personal and professional development of Roma youth and included time management, cultural sensitivity, and an introduction to NGOs.¹¹ 	
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SECTORAL OBJECTIVES	
4. INCREASE EFFECTIVE EQUAL ACCESS TO QUALITY INCLUSIVE MAINSTREAM EDUCATION	
<p>PROGRESS MADE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No new nationwide Roma-specific initiatives have been introduced. However, at the local municipal level, the mentorship service in Valga, established in 2020, continues to support young people and parents with school issues through a Roma mentor and an assistant mentor. In 2023, the Roma Youth Centre opened in Valga, offering cultural activities and weekly Estonian language classes.¹⁴ 	<p>AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Although no data is available on Roma children's kindergarten attendance, both state authorities and Roma representatives acknowledge low participation as an issue.¹⁷ To improve this, kindergarten fees should be reimbursed for families in need, and awareness of early childhood education should be raised. • The lack of comprehensive data makes it difficult to address key challenges, such as inconsistent school attendance among Roma youth during primary education. This often contributes to early school leaving in

⁹ Projekt ESTROM 3. Available at: <https://www.eestiromad.ee/projekt-estrom-3/>.

¹⁰ Interview with Zalina Dabla from the European Roma Forum in Estonia (ERFE), 4 October 2024.

¹¹ Integration Foundation, Response to an information request, 20 November 2024.

¹⁴ Ministry of Culture, Response to an information request, 28 November 2024.

¹⁷ Ministry of Education and Research, Response to an information request, 18 December 2024; Interview with Zalina Dabla from the European Roma Forum in Estonia (ERFE), 4 October 2024.

While not specifically targeted to the Roma, some national educational initiatives may still benefit Roma children and youth:

- As of 1 September 2024, schools in Estonia must offer native language and cultural education if requested by the parents of at least ten students.¹⁵ While no Roma-attended school has implemented this yet, raising awareness and developing materials could promote Roma culture.
- Since 2024, Estonia has been transitioning to Estonian-language education, a reform that holds the potential to facilitate the integration of Roma children into Estonian society. This is particularly relevant in regions such as Valga, where many Roma students have historically attended Russian-language schools. By shifting to Estonian as the language of instruction, the reform aims to enhance social cohesion and equal opportunities.
- Starting from September 2025, Estonia will require students entering the ninth grade to stay in education until age 18 unless they complete secondary or vocational education earlier.¹⁶ The impact of this on Roma youth is unclear but may increase the share of Roma aged 15+ with secondary or higher education.

secondary education, which remains a persistent issue.¹⁸

- Transitioning to Estonian-language education may pose a challenge for Roma children as many speak Russian as their first foreign language and have limited Estonian skills. A Roma community member noted that this makes the transition particularly difficult.¹⁹ To improve the situation, Roma students should receive additional support when transferring to Estonian-language instruction.

5. INCREASE EFFECTIVE EQUAL ACCESS TO QUALITY AND SUSTAINABLE EMPLOYMENT

PROGRESS MADE

- The Integration Programmes include mentoring services in Valga for Roma in vulnerable situations. In 2023, the programme helped ten young Roma find summer jobs through this service.²⁰
- Since 1 March 2025, the Integration Foundation has been running Estonia's first nationwide project to improve Roma

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

- The high unemployment rate among Roma and the lack of labour market services specifically targeting their needs remain persistent challenges. To address this, the mentorship service currently operating in Valga should be expanded to other municipalities with significant Roma populations, such as Tallinn, Ida-Virumaa,

¹⁵ Ministry of Education and Research, Response to an information request, 18 December 2024.

¹⁶ Ministry of Education and Research, *Õppimiskohustus*. [Compulsory Education.] Available at: <https://www.hm.ee/uldharidus-ja-noored/alus-pohi-ja-keskharidus/oppimiskohustus>.

¹⁸ Ministry of Culture, *Lõimumis-, sh kohanemisprogramm 2022-2025*. [Integration, including Adaptation Programme 2022-2025.], p 12. Available at: https://www.kul.ee/sites/default/files/documents/2022-02/Lõimumis_kohanemisprogramm_2022_2025_kinnitamiseks.pdf.

¹⁹ *Ibid*.

²⁰ Ministry of Culture, *Sidus ühiskond 2023. aasta tulemusaruanne*. [Cohesive Society 2023 Performance Report.] Available at: https://kul.ee/sites/default/files/documents/2024-06/2023%20tulemusaruanne_TUV%20Sidus%20ühiskond.pdf.

<p>employment, entitled ‘Creating and Expanding Employment Opportunities for Roma’. The project targets Roma communities in five cities and aims to boost access to the labour market and increase motivation to work. Activities include participant mapping, job clubs, vocational and language training, computer and time management courses as well as career and debt counselling. The project also offers work placements and networking seminars for professionals working with Roma. The goal is to support Roma inclusion in the labour market through tailored and practical support.²¹</p>	<p>and Tartu. Expanding the service geographically would ensure broader access to support. Additionally, introducing dedicated employment mentors could provide more focused and structured guidance, improving Roma participation in the labour market and supporting their long-term inclusion.</p>
6. IMPROVE ROMA HEALTH AND EFFECTIVE EQUAL ACCESS TO QUALITY HEALTHCARE AND SOCIAL SERVICES	
<p>PROGRESS MADE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No progress has been made in improving the health of the Roma population or ensuring their equal access to quality healthcare and social services. To date, no targeted measures addressing the specific needs of the Roma community have been implemented. Moreover, neither the Cohesive Estonia 2030 strategy nor the Integration Programmes contain any measures or references related to healthcare for the Roma.²² 	<p>AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No data is currently collected on healthcare coverage among the Roma or on antigypsyism in the healthcare system. The Health Insurance Fund does not record the ethnicity of individuals covered by health insurance, which limits the ability to assess disparities. Interviews with Roma community representatives reveal that the lack of health insurance is a common issue. Additionally, some interviewees mentioned having heard about discriminatory attitudes from family physicians.²³ However, without broader research, it is not possible to determine the extent or systemic nature of such discrimination. Therefore, the first step would be to conduct targeted research to better understand these challenges. As the Roma community itself identifies this as a concern, appropriate measures should be included in subsequent Integration Programmes to address this issue.

²¹ Integration Foundation, Improving Employment Opportunities for Roma (2025–2027). Available at: <https://www.integratsioon.ee/en/work-roma-community>.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Group interview with Roma mentors and Valga Youth Centre volunteers, 2 October 2024.

7. INCREASE EFFECTIVE EQUAL ACCESS TO ADEQUATE DESEGREGATED HOUSING AND ESSENTIAL SERVICES

PROGRESS MADE

- The Roma in Estonia live in regular housing; so, there are no specific services developed to ensure adequate, desegregated housing and access to essential services for the Roma community.

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

- Challenges in finding affordable rentals sometimes lead to reliance on social housing, which may be influenced by both general market conditions and possible discriminatory attitudes.²⁴ While homelessness is not reported, poor living conditions have been noted. To better understand the problem and address the lack of adequate data, targeted research should be conducted.

PARTNERSHIPS AND INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY

No effective mechanisms have been established to ensure the meaningful involvement of the Roma community in the implementation and monitoring of integration policies, thereby limiting their capacity to participate in a substantive way. While the European Roma Forum in Estonia has been involved in the development of the Cohesive Estonia Strategy 2021–2030, alongside other national minority organisations, participation has primarily consisted of invitations to attend workshops and meetings, rather than structured collaboration or co-decision-making.²⁵ Although three Roma community representatives are members of the Roma Integration Council, the Council's role is largely limited to infrequent meetings and general information-sharing, with limited opportunities for influencing decision-making.

Roma participation in implementation is largely confined to the mentorship service in Valga, which is carried out by one Roma mentor and an assistant with close ties to the community. These individuals are also responsible for operating the Roma Youth Centre in Valga.²⁶ There are no Roma representatives within public institutions tasked with the implementation of the National Roma Strategic Framework.

The Ministry of Culture reports on the implementation of the Integration Programme in an annual performance report submitted to the Ministry of Finance and the National Audit Office. While the Roma Integration Council is briefed on activities under the Integration Programme, mechanisms for Roma involvement in the monitoring and evaluation of these activities remain absent.²⁷

Data on hate crimes, hate speech, and other offences committed against the Roma community is not systematically collected. Moreover, civil society organisations are not involved in the data collection process, nor have they been consulted or approached to contribute information or report on the relevant cases. This lack of engagement limits the comprehensiveness and accuracy of available statistics and hinders effective policy responses.

²⁴ Roma Civil Monitor (2023), *Civil society monitoring report on the quality of the national strategic framework for Roma equality, inclusion, and participation in Estonia*. Available at: <https://romacivilmonitoring.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/RCM2-2022-C4-Estonia-CATALOGUE.pdf>.

²⁵ Interview with Zalina Dabla from the European Roma Forum in Estonia (ERFE), 4 October 2024.

²⁶ Interview with Ave Härsing, Head of Cultural Diversity Activities in the Integration Foundation, 4 October 2024.

²⁷ Roma Civil Monitor (2025) *Civil society monitoring report on the implementation of the national strategic framework for Roma equality, inclusion, and participation in Estonia*. Available at: <https://romacivilmonitoring.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/RCM2-2024-C4-Estonia-FINAL-ISBN.pdf>.

PROMISING PRACTICES

The project ‘Untold Stories: Roma Youth in Youth Work and Education’, led by the Estonian NGO International House in partnership with organisations from Latvia, Lithuania and Finland, was implemented in 2022 and 2023 with the financial support of Erasmus+. ²⁸ Its objective was to strengthen the capacity of youth and education professionals in the Baltic countries to support Roma children and youth, while also providing Roma families with a platform to share their experiences in education and youth work. The collection of personal stories was particularly valuable as it contextualised and validated the experiences of stigmatisation and discrimination. The format of storytelling offered deeper insights into individual lived experiences, including the broader familial and cultural background that influences a child’s education. Unlike broad labels such as ‘discrimination’, which can sometimes fail to convey the full picture, personal stories illustrate the actual impact that stigmatisation and bias have on people’s lives.

In Estonia, the Roma community has received little systemic support in the field of education, so the project also served as a chance to learn from the experiences of neighbouring countries Latvia, Lithuania and especially Finland. ²⁹ The project produced guidance materials for professionals on how to better engage Roma families, support cultural preservation, manage mutual expectations, and address unconscious bias. ³⁰ Additionally, videos were created featuring Roma individuals sharing their educational journeys, intended to inspire and empower the community. This was the first notable initiative conducted by NGOs without state involvement, setting an example of effective collaboration.

²⁸ https://kaart.noored.ee/en/projects/arc_9290/

²⁹ International House Tartu, Response to an information request, 3 March 2025.

³⁰ Tartu Rahvusvaheline Maja, Kuidas perega hea kontakt leida? [How to establish good contact with family?] Available at: <https://edu.internationalhouse.ee/romakogemused>.