



Civil society's assessment  
of the implementation of the national  
Roma strategic frameworks in the EU  
**Synthesis report**

**Prepared by:**

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CEE	Central and Eastern European (countries)
CSOs	Civil society organisations
DI/CEU	Democracy Institute of the Central European University
ESF	European Social Fund
EU-CERV	EU Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme
EU-MIDIS II	European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey II
EURSF	EU Roma Strategic Framework
FRA	Fundamental Rights Agency
FSG	Fundación Secretariado Gitano
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
MC	Monitoring committee
NEET	Not in education, employment, or training
NRCP	National Roma Contact Point
NRP	National Roma Platform
NRSF	National Roma Strategic Framework
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OP	Operational programme
RCM	Roma Civil Monitor

### Country abbreviations:

AT	Austria
BE	Belgium
BG	Bulgaria
CY	Cyprus
CZ	Czechia
DE	Germany
DK	Denmark
EE	Estonia
EL	Greece
ES	Spain
FI	Finland
FR	France
HR	Croatia
HU	Hungary
IE	Ireland
IT	Italy
LT	Lithuania
LV	Latvia
NL	Netherland
PL	Poland
PT	Portugal
RO	Romania
SE	Sweden
SI	Slovenia
SK	Slovakia

### Note on terminology

Unless specified, this report uses the term 'Roma' as an umbrella term to include Roma, Sinti, Travellers, Rroms and Kalé, as well as populations administratively designated as *gens du voyage* and other groups.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The present RCM synthesis report on the implementation of NRSFs documents a persistent gap between Member States' commitments and the lived reality of Roma communities. Despite expectations created by the 2020 EURSF 2020, progress on the ground remains limited. Antigypsyism is identified as the underlying grammar of policymaking across all domains, manifesting both openly and subtly by shaping how institutions define problems. This often shifts responsibility for exclusion to individual Roma rather than addressing structural disadvantage. A key challenge is the failure of local-level implementation to materialise, often due to embedded antigypsyism and the political sensitivity of inclusion at the municipal level. Local practices frequently contradict national and EU principles. Member States frequently defer accountability, although legal pressure, such as the infringement proceedings on education segregation, shows that enforcement can compel serious government action.

### *Participation*

The RCM monitoring confirmed that enhanced Roma civil society involvement in drafting NRSFs has not led to better participation in their subsequent implementation and monitoring. CSOs far more often remain the objects than the co-authors of policy, reflecting a systemic pattern of weak, 'tokenistic' participation. This participation gap stems less from CSO capacity than from insufficient governmental commitment. Pervasive antigypsyism and mistrust discourage engagement and prevent critical CSOs from influencing policies. Implementation relies heavily on short-term projects and unstable funding arrangements, relegating CSOs to dependent subcontractor roles, especially within major government programmes. Monitoring is predominantly state-led, with Roma involvement often intermittent or restricted to information-sharing. A further challenge is the lack of Roma in stable policy-shaping roles within public institutions apart from short-term mediators, which limits their influence over budgets and programmes.

### *Fighting antigypsyism and discrimination*

Antigypsyism remains widespread and largely unaddressed in practice, with RCM reports identifying a distinct lack of political will to combat anti-Roma discrimination in many countries. Popular prejudice against Roma is a formidable obstacle, translating into high rates of racist harassment, hate speech, violence (including fatal police shootings), and institutional discrimination. In many states, police violence and failure to investigate complaints about abuse remain serious concerns. Policy responses are undermined by a lack of accountability, weak coordination, and an unwillingness to address the deep, structural aspects of anti-Roma racism. Even where strategies exist, their impact is often diluted by fragmented implementation and insufficient resource allocation. A fundamental challenge is the lack of a unified monitoring system and the dearth of robust, ethnically disaggregated data, which makes it impossible to evaluate measures, demonstrate need, or inform policy systematically. The weakness of enforcement signals to local authorities that non-implementation involves little risk.

### *Education*

The goal of achieving equitable access to quality education remains profoundly unfulfilled for Roma students, despite EU frameworks and national strategies. Structural discrimination, pervasive segregation, and high dropout rates persist across all Member States. CSOs universally identify antigypsyism as the root cause, manifesting as low expectations, stereotyping, and discrimination from teachers and school staff. Educational segregation remains a critical problem, resulting in Roma students being concentrated in lower-quality facilities or tracks (secondary segregation). The misplacement of Roma children into special education persists and is often compounded by perverse per-capita funding incentives. Attainment levels are critically low, and early school leaving is driven by deep poverty, segregation, and housing instability. Implementation efforts are jeopardised by reliance on short-term, fragmented EU funds and hindered by an absence of systematic, long-term structural reform. The lack of reliable, disaggregated data on Roma ethnicity and educational outcomes is a critical structural barrier to accurately measuring progress.

### *Employment*

Progress in Roma access to quality employment remains limited, reflecting persistent shortcomings in policy design and implementation. Exclusion from the labour market is mutually reinforcing with disadvantage(s) in other areas, such as education and housing. Low levels of education, qualifications, and digital skills represent

some of the most critical barriers to labour-market access. This results in high youth unemployment (exceeding 50% in some states) and significant gender inequalities in participation. Public employment services are consistently assessed as insufficient, generic, and inadequately sensitive to the intersectional disadvantages Roma face, with weak coordination between employment, social, and housing support services. Pervasive discrimination and antigypsyism are widely recognised as the main reasons for the low level of labour-market participation, often leading to rejection based on name or appearance. Policy relies heavily on short-term programmes and public works schemes associated with low pay, limited career progression, and weak links to the open labour market. The lack of reliable, disaggregated data prevents the accurate identification of needs and outcomes, hindering effective monitoring.

### *Healthcare*

Poorer health outcomes among Roma communities are prevalent across Europe, with Roma suffering from consistently lower life expectancy and higher infant mortality than the majority population. This is closely linked to social determinants, with many Roma facing disadvantage due to financial insecurity and administrative barriers. In several Member States, Roma lack *de jure* universal health insurance coverage or face high *de facto* bureaucratic barriers and prohibitive out-of-pocket expenses. Widespread antigypsyism, systemic biases, and prejudice within healthcare settings are a reality in all European countries under study, with a significant percentage of Roma reporting discrimination when accessing health services. Many NRSFs failed to substantively address existing health challenges, with healthcare sometimes entirely excluded as a policy area. Furthermore, reliable, Roma-specific health data is often not available or refused to experts, making adequate targeting and evaluation difficult. Policy responses often rely on short-term measures like mobile health units or Roma health assistants, whose sustainability and quality of implementation are often lacking.

### *Housing*

The situation of Roma families is severely challenged by spatial segregation and isolation, with many living in informal housing or on land with unclear legal status, leading to tenure insecurity and difficulty in regularisation. Forced evictions are a persistent threat, often carried out without proper notice or provision of alternative housing. Roma are concentrated in segregated settlements that typically lack essential services, are in substandard conditions, and are exposed to environmental hazards. Discrimination by landlords and bureaucratic barriers further limit access to stable housing. Antigypsyism and a lack of political will, particularly at the local level, hinder the structural changes necessary to address exclusion. Although EU funds are the most relevant source for implementing NRSFs, many initiatives remain local and fail to address issues at scale. Crucially, major investments often focus on upgrading conditions within pre-existing segregated settlements (*in situ* upgrading) without promoting spatial desegregation, contradicting the core principles of the EU Roma Strategic Framework.

### *Social provisions*

Mainstream social protection measures often fall short of EU objectives regarding the adequacy and accessibility of benefits, especially in post-socialist countries with large Roma populations. The adequacy of minimum income benefits is critically low in several CEE countries and is often subject to politicisation. Structural difficulties in benefit take-up (accessibility) are widespread, as eligibility rules are often stigmatising or difficult for Roma to meet, such as conditionalities tied to public works or continuous residence. Most countries report that social services are not tailored to Roma needs or are inaccessible due to geographical location or lack of active outreach. Services are often fragmented, underfunded, and lack monitoring, preventing holistic case management. Discrimination and the lack of cultural awareness of service providers further limit quality and take-up. Social inclusion measures often rely on short-term EU funds, leading to uncertainty and discontinuation when funding ends. The 2023 Council Recommendation on Adequate Minimum Income calls for combining income support with access to services, but capacity limitations often restrain actual implementation.

### *Child protection*

Roma children face disproportionate exposure to child-protection interventions, largely because child-protection systems often misclassify poverty-related hardship and social exclusion (such as poor housing) as parental neglect. This practice leads to the overrepresentation of Roma children in institutional care. Discrimination and antigypsyism influence welfare decisions, reinforcing deep mistrust and causing families to avoid seeking necessary assistance. Preventive services are inadequate, geographically uneven, and crisis-oriented, resulting

in families encountering services only when problems have already escalated. The insufficient recognition of Roma identity leads to cultural misunderstandings that affect assessments and placements. Significant data gaps persist, as ethnically disaggregated data is not collected or used, limiting the ability of authorities to identify disparities and evaluate reforms. Furthermore, early and forced marriages remain a concern in several countries, lacking consistent, coordinated prevention strategies. Legislative reforms, such as the ban on institutional care for younger children, have the potential to promote durable systemic change and deinstitutionalisation.

# INTRODUCTION

by Marek Hojsík (DI/CEU)

The reality of Member States' approaches to Roma equality, inclusion, and participation is shaped by political declarations, strategic objectives and principles, institutional capacities, everyday administrative practices, and societal attitudes. These layers are often inconsistent or pull in different directions. The Roma Civil Monitor (RCM), with its broad network of national CSOs and individual activists, and direct access to community-level evidence, documents how these contradictions translate into a persistent gap between commitments and lived experience and identifies the gap between commitments and lived reality – persisting even at the mid-term point of the second EU Roma Strategic Framework (EURSF).

The adoption of the EURSF in 2020 – with its refined language, shift in perspective from socioeconomic integration to a more comprehensive paradigm of equality, explicit emphasis on the responsibility of society and the state in tackling social exclusion and racism, attention to several overlooked problems, and quantifiable targets to be reached by 2030 – created expectations. These improvements have been, to varying degrees, reflected in the National Roma Strategic Frameworks (NRSFs) developed by Member States that were assessed in RCM's 2022 cycle.<sup>1</sup> Yet, the most recent RCM country monitoring reports (published in 2025) show only limited progress on the ground.<sup>2</sup> Commitments to end segregation or to mainstream participation often remain declarative.

Across all policy domains, antigypsyism continues to operate not only as a barrier but as the underlying grammar of policymaking. It manifests openly, through prejudice, discriminatory practices, hate speech, and hate crime, but it also functions more subtly, shaping how institutions and policies define problems, allocate responsibilities, and opt for specific actions or justify inaction. Policy design frequently assumes that Roma exclusion stems from individual choices or cultural patterns rather than from structural disadvantage. This shifts responsibility away from institutions and transforms equality from an obligation of public authorities to a matter of individual adaptation.

If we see any progress in addressing antigypsyism, it is often limited to symbolic gestures, such as acknowledging the existence of the problem or, at best, supporting the monitoring of its manifestations. Robust anti-discrimination enforcement is rare, and almost completely absent is the fundamental redesign of policies in ways that address implicit bias or institutional discrimination.

Even in the case of ambitious NRSFs, the central challenges consist of their weak connection to the respective sectoral national policies and a persistent gap between national-level commitments and local-level implementation. Many NRSF measures set out in national and EU strategies fail to materialise where the services are delivered – in municipalities that decide how primary education, housing, or social services function in practice. More seriously, local practices even directly contradict the goals of NRSFs. This reflects not only antigypsyism embedded in institutions and individual decision makers, but also the political sensitivity of Roma inclusion: its costs are immediate and localised – community resistance, political backlash, administrative burdens – while the benefits, such as improved educational attainment, stronger social cohesion, or reduced welfare dependency, are long-term and dispersed across society.

In such conditions, progress depends less on sophisticated strategies and more on the individual commitment of mayors, motivated civil servants, or locally present strong CSOs.<sup>3</sup> Where electoral cycles and local attitudes

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<sup>1</sup> See: Roma Civil Monitor. (2023). *A synthesis of civil society's reports on the quality of the national strategic frameworks for Roma equality, inclusion, and participation in the European Union*. Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg. Available at: [https://romacivilmonitoring.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/RCM\\_2022\\_Synthesis-report.pdf](https://romacivilmonitoring.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/RCM_2022_Synthesis-report.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> The actual implementation of NRSFs is analysed and assessed in the RCM's 2024/2025 cycle. Available at: <https://www.romacivilmonitoring.eu/monitoring-reports/>

<sup>3</sup> See, for example: Roma Civil Monitor. (2024). *Examples of successful housing desegregation as a precondition of Roma integration*. Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg. Edited by Marek Hojsík. Available at: [https://romacivilmonitoring.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/RCM\\_2023\\_Thematic-report-desegregation\\_FINAL-ISBN.pdf](https://romacivilmonitoring.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/RCM_2023_Thematic-report-desegregation_FINAL-ISBN.pdf)

reward risk-avoidance, political rationality favours inaction. Without incentives or enforcement, municipalities select interventions that are locally low-cost rather than nationally or socially optimal. As a result, Roma-related measures are treated as discretionary. Municipalities and regions decide whether, when, and to what extent they will implement equality, inclusion, or desegregation commitments, often choosing low-conflict initiatives while avoiding those that challenge entrenched local hierarchies.

National authorities frequently defer accountability downwards, framing implementation failures as matters beyond their control. This overlooks a fundamental principle: Member States remain fully responsible for fulfilling their human rights and anti-discrimination obligations, irrespective of how public authority is territorially organised. Delegating the delivery of Roma inclusion policies to municipalities does not transfer this responsibility, nor does it absolve central governments of their responsibility to ensure compliance.

Experience from the enforcement of EU anti-discrimination law shows that legal pressure can trigger action, but such proceedings remain rare. When the European Commission concluded infringement proceedings against Slovakia over the segregation of Roma children in education by actually bringing the case before the Court of Justice of the European Union, it broke years of political inertia and compelled the government to address segregation more seriously. The case had spillover effects in Czechia, accelerating reforms that were already underway. However, such proceedings remain rare. No other Member State has been brought to the Union's highest judicial authority for discrimination against Roma (although several individual cases have been decided by the Council of Europe's Court of Human Rights), despite widespread evidence of segregation in housing, education, and access to services. This scarcity of enforcement allows systemic gaps to persist, signalling to local authorities that non-implementation carries little risk.

Although these systemic barriers dominate the landscape, they do not fully determine it. The RCM also documents meaningful progress in some Member States and localities. These examples show that change is possible when political will, governance structures, and community engagement align. Spain continues to demonstrate integrated approaches to desegregation and housing. Italy has begun to abandon the decades-long paradigm of segregated *campi nomadi*, with several cities and regions advancing inclusive housing and placing new emphasis on increasing educational participation. Czechia has initiated reforms on data collection; Bulgaria has regularised address registration for residents of informal settlements; Finland has developed Roma-led family support models; and Roma civil society has gained stronger roles in monitoring committees in several Member States. These promising examples do not negate the broader challenges, but they illustrate the conditions under which progress is possible. They show that exclusion is not inevitable; it is produced by choices, and can be undone by different ones.

### *About this report*

This synthesis report draws primarily on national monitoring reports prepared by more than 120 Roma and pro-Roma civil society organisations and national experts from the 25 Member States<sup>4</sup> participating in the RCM 2021-2025 initiative. National reports applied a shared methodology requiring the analysis of developments, bottlenecks, and promising practices. The synthesis chapters that follow consolidate these findings, identify structural trends, and provide a comparative European perspective.

Editorial quality control has been ensured by the RCM editorial team. The CSOs and individual experts were provided with a draft of this report to help verify information concerning their countries. The editors of this report would like to thank those who commented on the draft.

<sup>4</sup> Malta does not participate in RCM, while in Luxembourg, no local Roma or pro-Roma CSO or activist was identified, and the government claims that no Roma live in the country.

# 1. PARTICIPATION

by Roland Ferkovics (DI/CEU) and Deyan Kolev (Amalipe)

The RCM 2022 monitoring cycle, which focused on the quality of National Roma Strategic Frameworks (NRSFs), observed a generally positive trend in Roma and pro-Roma civil society participation during the *development* of these documents, with significant improvement compared to the previous National Roma Integration Strategies (NRIS). In some Member States (CZ, SK), civil society was deeply involved, sometimes acting as the driver of the strategy's rewriting, while in others, CSOs strongly influenced the New NRSFs' approaches and priorities (DE, FR). However, the 2022 synthesis report concluded that this enhanced involvement in drafting these documents would not necessarily translate into systemic improvement in Roma participation in public policy and active citizenship.<sup>5</sup>

The current (2024/2025) RCM monitoring cycle, which focused on NRSF *implementation*, confirmed these concerns. It documents that, despite the explicit emphasis on participation both by the EURSF and the 2021 Council Recommendation for Roma Equality, Inclusion and Participation, promising initial cooperation between governments and Roma and pro-Roma civil society has not translated into better participation in the NRSF implementation and M&E, or into greater participation in the design of policy measures that impact Roma. Accordingly, the Roma are far more likely to remain objects than co-authors of public decision-making.

The contrast between the effective cooperation during the drafting phase and the limited roles offered to Roma thereafter demonstrates that the participation gap stemmed less from Roma CSO capacity than from insufficient government commitment to inclusive policymaking.

This participation gap is not specific to Roma and pro-Roma civil society, but is rather a broader systemic governance pattern (weak, 'tokenistic' participation, absent institutional structures', lack of meaningful influence) that is leading to the shrinking civic space observed across Europe.<sup>6</sup> In the worst cases (HU, SK), independent critical civil society faces active political hostility, financial restrictions, and demonisation campaigns under the narrative of being 'foreign (or Soros) agents'.<sup>7</sup> However, this trend of marginalisation disproportionately affects vulnerable and racialised groups, which are among the first targets of exclusionary attacks, and lack the necessary resources to resist.<sup>8</sup>

## 1.1. Main challenges and root causes

Despite overall improvements in the **development of NRSFs**, several countries with the largest Roma populations and the most acute challenges remained outside this trend and ignored CSOs' inputs and calls for participatory design (BG, HU, RO). Another pattern that raises concerns is that major programmes with an

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<sup>5</sup> Roma Civil Monitor. (2023). *A synthesis of civil society's reports on the quality of the national strategic frameworks for Roma equality, inclusion, and participation in the European Union*. Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg. Available at: [https://romacivilmonitoring.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/RCM\\_2022\\_Synthesis-report.pdf](https://romacivilmonitoring.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/RCM_2022_Synthesis-report.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Civic Space Watch. (2024). *Civic Space Report 2024*. European Civic Forum. Available at: [https://civic-forum.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Civic-Space-Report-2024\\_ECF.pdf](https://civic-forum.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Civic-Space-Report-2024_ECF.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Elek, F. & Griessler, Ch. (2023). *Civil society organisations and their "space" in backsliding democracies. Policy Brief*. Österreichische Gesellschaft für Europapolitik. Available at: <https://www.wb2eu.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/PB-152023-1.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Kantaria, N. (2025). *Spread of 'foreign agent' laws in Central, Eastern Europe a growing threat to civil society*. International Service for Human Rights. Available at: <https://ishr.ch/latest-updates/spread-of-foreign-agent-laws-in-eastern-europe-pose-increasing-threats-to-civil-society/>

<sup>8</sup> Civic Space Watch. (2024). *Civic Space Report 2024*. European Civic Forum. Available at: [https://civic-forum.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Civic-Space-Report-2024\\_ECF.pdf](https://civic-forum.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Civic-Space-Report-2024_ECF.pdf)

impact on Roma have been designed centrally, leaving out Roma CSOs from the process, which have been rarely engaged beyond formal consultations, their involvement remaining only symbolic (PL, SI, EE). In the case of HU, CSOs' inputs have been considered or disregarded depending on political affiliation. Finally, in countries with smaller Roma populations and consequently limited Roma civil society, with the topic outside the focus of mainstream civil society (HR, IE), consultations occurred, but Roma influence remained limited due to the above-mentioned issues.

Across Member States, **NRSF implementation** relies heavily on project-based, short-term, and unstable arrangements, rather than long-term, structural co-implementation. CSOs are involved but mostly in dependent positions of project partners or subcontractors (BG, CZ, HU, PL, RO, SK). In the case of HU, this phenomenon exemplifies the very limited access of Roma and pro-Roma CSOs to the flagship government initiative targeting disadvantaged rural communities ('Emerging Settlements', FETE), which was entrusted to the Hungarian Charity Service of the Order of Malta. In this, only seven Roma CSOs participate across more than 300 municipalities. In BG, CSOs' participation in EU-funded projects is practically prevented by national rules – the lack of pre-prepayments, strict application of the de minimis rule, and others – and a lack of investment into CSO capacity-building. In other cases (RO, SK), Roma and pro-Roma CSOs have gained access to certain EU-funded initiatives and monitoring structures, but the pattern remains uneven and insecure, with significant gaps across sectors and regions. Capacity limitations, complex eligibility rules, and the perceived risk of political exposure further discourage Roma organisations from competing for large calls. In all Member States (except ES), institutional ownership is low, as Roma CSOs rarely manage to participate in long-term programmes.

A dominant EU-wide pattern and recurrent challenge is the scarcity or absence of **Roma in policy-shaping roles** within the public institutions implementing the NRSFs (AT, BE, EE, FI, FR, HR, HU, IE, IT, NL, PL, RO, SE, SI). Roma are present as educational or health mediators, social workers, or short-term assistants in schools and community centres, often funded through projects rather than permanent posts. In BG and EL (the countries with the largest Roma populations and the most acute challenges), there are almost no Roma staff in ministries with authority over budgets and programmes, managing authorities, or equality bodies.

Another challenge is related to the role of ministries or managing authorities: In HU, RO, BG, SE, NL, and IE, Roma representation in strategic public positions is present, but extremely limited. Political ties to these positions predominate, further influencing the access of Roma CSOs to consultative bodies and committees that could serve as platforms for enhancing the participation of Roma (HU). In HU, Roma experts and politicians hold positions within the State Secretariat for Social Opportunities and Roma Relations and its background institution. However, the RCM report stresses that this does not automatically translate into participatory governance, and strategic decisions remain highly centralised, and civil society input is weak.

When it comes to the **monitoring** of public policy implementation, formal mechanisms exist across all countries, but effective Roma participation is the exception, not the norm. Most country reports underline that monitoring is still predominantly a state-led exercise, with Roma participation intermittent, symbolic, or restricted to information-sharing (AT, BE, BG, CZ, EE, FI, FR, HR, HU, IE, IT, NL, PL, RO, SE, SI, SK). This implies sporadic Roma participation in monitoring (BG), formal monitoring committees that rarely engage Roma CSOs in substantive debate or evaluation processes (HU, PL), and uneven participation in different sectors (SK): For instance, Roma CSOs are often excluded from technical working groups (RO) or undefined monitoring structures (IT). Roma also face challenges in the sense of having no meaningful influence within the monitoring and evaluation processes (fulfilling rather consultative and passive roles), or simply being invisible within these structures (EE, EL, SE, SI).

Structural barriers and weak governance arrangements systematically prevent Roma from influencing policies that shape their lives.

**The following root causes of problems** could be identified in the RCM reports:

An overarching issue that largely hampers meaningful participation is antigypsyism and mistrust. Pervasive antigypsyism, including in public administration and local politics, discourages Roma from engaging with institutions and fuels mistrust in participatory bodies that are perceived as symbolic or controlled from above (AT, BE, BG, CZ, DE, EE, EL, FI, FR, HR, HU, IE, IT, NL, PL, RO, SE, SI, SK). This intersects with socio-economic insecurity and fear of retaliation when Roma organisations take critical positions. Roma communities face a double exclusion: they are disproportionately affected by social inequalities, while at the same time having limited influence over the very policies designed to address these inequalities.

The quality of dialogue with civil society often depends on the individual will and openness of politicians or influential civil servants rather than on lasting rules. This is often linked to the political instrumentalisation of civil society participation, where those in power tend to seek endorsement of their actions rather than critical dialogue or independent monitoring. This is part of the trend of the shrinking of civic space, as already mentioned in the introduction to this chapter. In HU and SK in particular, the politicisation of Roma issues and the broader tightening of civic space constrain critical participation. In HU, the Roma Coordination Council operates more as a political than a professional forum. In SK, political instability and repressive trends have stalled the implementation of participation-oriented measures and weakened cooperation between the government and Roma CSOs.

RCM reports also highlight the structural vulnerability of Roma civil society (AT, BE, BG, CZ, DE, EE, EL, FI, FR, HR, HU, IE, IT, NL, PL, RO, SI, SK); Roma CSOs sometimes (BG, SK) depend heavily on international and project funding and receive little predictable domestic support. When they do access state funding, their autonomy can be constrained by the deteriorating environment for civil society and rising political pressure, which can deter critical engagement in monitoring and advocacy (BG, HU, SK).

The EU-wide approach of the Member States can be best described as tokenistic consultation. Many mechanisms of participation (national councils, platforms, advisory bodies) exist primarily as consultation forums, lacking shared agenda-setting power, transparent procedures, or follow-up on Roma inputs (AT, BE, BG, DE, EE, EL, FI, FR, HR, HU, IE, IT, NL, PL, RO, SI, SK). Another EU-wide state approach concerns unclear mandates and rules regarding CSO participation. Many NRSF monitoring committees and Roma participation forums operate without clear terms of reference, defined roles, selection criteria, or requirements for institutions to respond to Roma recommendations (AT, BE, BG, EE, EL, FI, FR, HR, HU, IE, IT, NL, PL, RO, SI, SK).

## **1.2. Policy responses and their effectiveness**

The participation of CSOs is recognised as a fundamental element of the NRSFs, reflecting the broader European commitment to ensuring that Roma voices are included in the policies that affect them.

Various national strategies define goals for the Roma's involvement in policy planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation.

Member States and policies aim to ensure or promote Roma CSO participation through three main avenues: establishing formal consultative structures, providing opportunities for implementation roles, and developing targeted mechanisms to address capacity deficits, although significant structural challenges often persist, hindering meaningful participation.

Governments aim to include Roma CSOs in the policy cycle by establishing specific formal structures and consultation mechanisms at national and regional levels. For instance, a common state response is the creation or utilisation of high-level interinstitutional bodies designed to include civil society inputs. These include interministerial structures in which representatives from state administration, local governments, and CSOs interact (CZ), and major Roma and pro-Roma CSOs participating as observers via thematic working groups to ensure there is pressure on public structures to deliver results (RO).

The EC invited MSs to establish National Roma Platforms (NRP) with the aim of promoting participation and ensuring coordination among relevant stakeholders in the implementation of the NRSFs. The EC also provides

funding to the NRPs via the National Roma Contact Points (NRCP). The conditions for accessing EU grants are favourable; however, MSs (or their NRCPs) do not apply. One of the main reasons for this tendency is described in the CZ report. In Czechia, the NRCP did not apply for EC funding to support the NRP due to the requirement for co-funding, which the Government Office lacked the mandate or specific budgetary allocations to provide. In the case of RO, the situation is further complicated by the concurrent existence of the National Agency for Roma, which is a specialised executive governmental body, and the NRCP, which is rather a low-profile public structure responsible mainly for communication with the EC.

These NRPs serve as a place for improving the accessibility of policy and administration to external stakeholders (AT), function as the primary forum for dialogue and cooperation between CSOs and the NRCP, utilising specific working groups dedicated to monitoring the NRSF (ES, IT), or aim to enhance Roma participation in policy development and support the NRCP (EL). National Roma Platforms, in general, provide space for Roma voices and generate broad dialogue among Roma activists, authorities, and CSOs; however, these platforms are not always sustained (CY) nor remain active (BG), depending on project resources and institutional commitments. The absence of Roma Platforms in such cases is identified as a major gap in the current NRSF cycle.

EU fund Monitoring Committees (MCs) are also set up in accordance with EU requirements. Their legal function is to oversee national projects targeting Roma. Roma CSOs have actively participated in the preparation of key EU programmes, and their representatives are active participants in these bodies (BG, CZ, HR, HU, RO, SK). Roma representatives are also involved in the working bodies of Operational Programmes (OPs concerning education, labour and social affairs, and regional development) to influence the setting of calls and project designs (CZ). However, regarding these, various caveats are articulated in the RCM reports. For instance, the effectiveness and influence of Roma representatives are limited within these structures (CZ, RO), while the overall representation of Roma remains low (HU, SK), and the selection of Roma representatives is influenced by political alignments (HR).

Member States have promoted Roma CSO involvement by delegating the implementation of specific projects and essential services, often funded through grant schemes (BG, CZ, ES). A significant number of programmes that target Roma continue to rely on civil society initiatives (ES). Such outsourcing is problematic because it allows public administrations to shirk their core responsibilities, creates precariousness through short-term project logic, and often excludes smaller, grassroots Roma-led organisations in favour of large non-Roma entities. Another example of involvement is entrusting Roma CSOs with project implementation associated with specific services (including social and field services, community work, educational programmes, and awareness-raising activities) within the NRSF (CZ), or making participation for Roma CSOs possible through implementing projects under EU programmes (AT, BG, CZ, DE, ES, FI, HR, HU, IE, IT, PL, RO,<sup>9</sup> SK).

### 1.3. Promising cases and interventions to learn from

- **Monitoring of NRSF:**

A promising example can be reported from ES, where the State Council of the Roma People (CERP) is a well-established institution that enables ongoing Roma participation. It brings together representatives of Roma organisations and public authorities within a permanent consultative body that contributes to the monitoring of the NRSF and EU-funded programmes. Its continuity, formal mandate, and regular meetings make it one of the most stable participation structures in the EU.

- **Usage of EU funds**

A positive example from ES can be presented, where Roma organisations such as FSG lead large-scale ESF+ programmes, representing a rare model of Roma-led implementation. Even though this involves a strong

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<sup>9</sup> In the case of RO, this is rather on the local level.

structure for Roma participation, some challenges remain. Engagement often relies on a few well-established organisations, which may unintentionally limit the involvement of smaller grassroots groups.

Roma CSOs (BG, CZ) successfully participated in the process of the preparation of ESF+ programmes for the present and previous programming periods. As a result of successful advocacy, new Operational Programmes contain the specific objective "Socio-economic Integration of Marginalised Communities such as the Roma", and dedicate significant resources to Roma/ vulnerable groups operations, etc. Roma CSOs are among the most influential stakeholders in MCs. At the same time, problems at the national level (lack of prepayment and de minimis thresholds) hinder real CSO participation. The restrictive behaviour of the managing authorities prevents the deployment of the former's full potential.

In CZ, the PRO-ROMA call was launched by the Ministry of Education. This initiative operates within the framework of the Operational Programme Jan Amos Komenský (managed by the Ministry of Education), which is designed to support various projects, including the capacity-building of Roma and pro-Roma CSOs. This opportunity has been utilised both in the previous and the new programming periods.

The 'Latvian Roma Platform' project, which is explicitly co-funded by the EU-CERV, is designed to support Roma participation. Most of the Roma-targeted measures implemented under Latvia's NRSF for 2022–2023 were carried out within the framework of this project. Activities included providing ongoing support for Roma mediators working in Latvian municipalities, capacity-building for Roma women and youth, and events aimed at strengthening Roma civil society.

- **Roma in public institutions**

There are also positive examples (ES, RO) of Roma fulfilling higher-level roles in politics or administrative structures. For instance, in ES, Roma professionals are present in several administrative systems due to long-standing processes of institutional cooperation. An outstanding example exists in RO, where the Minister of Labour is Roma, signalling political visibility.

## 1.4. Recommendations

### Recommendations for Member States:

1. Stabilise and adequately resource NRP by embedding them into binding governmental rules and allocating dedicated state budget lines (not just project funds).
2. Establish permanent consultative bodies, modelled on Spain's CERP, to ensure ongoing Roma participation in monitoring NRSFs and EU-funded programmes. Support these bodies with an independent technical office, a dedicated autonomous budget, and members elected by civil society rather than appointed by the government.
3. Systematically increase the employment of Roma staff in policy-shaping roles within key ministries, managing authorities, and equality bodies, beyond the role of mediators. This will ensure that Roma expertise directly influences budgets and programmes.
4. Actively refrain from stigmatisation and condemn hate speech and hate crimes against Roma CSOs and civil society in general. Member States must reverse the repressive trends that are stalling participation-oriented measures and create an environment of cooperation and trust.

### Recommendations for the European Commission:

5. Make meaningful participation a binding and enabling condition for all EU fund management/programming (ESF+, ERDF) that address Roma inclusion, going beyond formal consultation. This should include clear quality standards and criteria for participation.

6. Prioritise multi-annual and core funding over short-term, project-based funding for Roma CSOs. This will build sustainable institutional capacity and strategic leverage, reducing CSOs' reliance on fragile project logic. This should be done both with Operational Programmes with shared management and Brussels-managed programmes.
7. Include the Roma equality and inclusion topic and Roma participation in the next planning period, 2028-2034.

**Recommendations for municipalities:**

8. Municipalities with significant Roma populations should establish local Roma councils or advisory boards with a legal framework and a mandate to participate in local decision-making and the development of local planning and implementation of initiatives that impact Roma. This will help ensure solutions are tailored to local needs.
9. Municipalities should follow the model of Spain, where Roma-led CSOs (not just large non-Roma CSOs or public bodies) are supported to become the lead implementers and co-owners of significant local inclusion programmes. This shifts the relationship from Roma as junior partners/beneficiaries to equal collaborators, enhancing community ownership and leverage.

## 2. FIGHTING ANTIGYPSYISM AND DISCRIMINATION

by *Bernard Rorke (European Roma Rights Centre)*

A common observation in the Roma Civil Monitor (RCM) reporting was that antigypsyism remains widespread and largely unaddressed in practice. In some countries (BG, EL, HU, RO), the reports found a distinct lack of political will to combat anti-Roma discrimination; and even in countries where the NRSF included dedicated pillars or measures, enforcement and coordination were weak; planning and resource allocation were inadequate; and impact was deemed to be negligible. Even those countries that have in some way formally recognised anti-Roma racism, or adopted a working definition of antigypsyism (CZ, ES), have yet to see any significant or substantive progress, with the impact of such measures diluted by fragmented implementation and a failure to commit resources commensurate with the scale of the problem. Further confirmation of the dire situation revealed by the monitoring reports was provided by the latest Roma survey by the Fundamental Rights Agency, which shows the extent to which antigypsyism continues to devastate the lives of Roma. The data also suggest that no EU Member State is likely to achieve the 2030 EU-level goals that were defined to fight and prevent antigypsyism and discrimination.<sup>10</sup>

### 2.1. Main challenges and root causes

Across many of the Member States, wider political developments have posed a profound challenge to efforts and intentions to combat antigypsyism and discrimination. In addition to efforts to shrink civic space and to erode checks and balances (BG, HU, SK), overt hostility against minorities, especially Roma, has become mainstream in some key Member States (BG, DE, EL, HU, IT, RO, SI, SK). Political instability and increased polarisation, stubbornly persistent economic crises, as well as external security factors, have resulted in a policy environment where the political will to tackle racial anti-Roma discrimination has diminished, or is completely lacking (BG, HU, SK).

Popular *prejudice* against Roma remains one of the most formidable obstacles to progress. While extremist violence has subsided in CZ, for instance, latent negative attitudes persist, with more than half of the population viewing coexistence with Roma negatively. In EL, multiple surveys show that discrimination against Roma has grown worse, with Eurobarometer 2023 reporting that 86% of Greeks now view anti-Roma bias as 'very widespread', as manifest in high levels of racist harassment, hate speech, and violence against Roma, including fatal police shootings in recent years. Deep-rooted prejudicial attitudes help maintain extreme poverty, substandard living conditions in informal settlements, and forced evictions that fail to provide alternative shelter or compensation. In a number of states (EL, HU, LT, RO), pejorative depictions of Roma have been amplified by online disinformation and hate speech, and such prejudicial attitudes translate into everyday institutional discrimination and reproduce inequality and exclusion. Similarly, in SK, progress is undermined by prejudice, which manifests in hate speech online and off, ineffective protections against discrimination, segregation across all areas of life, as well as brutal and discriminatory behaviour by law enforcement. One of the most serious concerns was ongoing police violence against Roma people, and the failure to investigate complaints about abuse, despite states being found guilty on numerous occasions before the European Court of Human Rights (BG, EL, RO, SK).

In DE, the rise of right-wing political extremism and the surge of support for Alternative for Germany (AfD) have led to an increase in racist hostility against minorities, with tolerance toward Roma remaining the lowest among all minorities. Similarly, in FR, tolerance of Roma remains the lowest among all minorities – prejudices include the belief that most Roma are nomadic, that they frequently exploit children, or that they mainly live off theft and trafficking. This 'cultural racism' – portraying Roma as a deviant group – serves to reverse causality and place the responsibility for racism on those who are its victims, while unfiltered anti-Roma rhetoric has become increasingly common in the media. In both countries, it was reported that negative stereotypes deeply embedded in society are reflected in policing through discrimination, the disproportionate use of force, and racial profiling.

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<sup>10</sup> European Union Agency of Fundamental Rights. (2025). *Rights of Roma and Travellers in 13 European Countries: Perspectives from the Roma Survey 2024*. Available at: [https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/fra-2025-roma-survey-2024\\_en.pdf](https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2025-roma-survey-2024_en.pdf)

In IE, despite wider societal and legislative progress on civil rights over the past fifteen years, Travellers and Roma still experience high levels of racist abuse and identity-based harassment, and significantly high levels of discrimination in accessing public services and private goods. This ranges from 93 per cent in accessing accommodation to 75 per cent in accessing shops, pubs, and restaurants. As is the case in other countries, despite the high incidence of discrimination, the level of reporting of such incidents is low. Similarly, in SE, notwithstanding the state's formal legal commitments to minority rights and anti-discrimination, antigypsyism remains pervasive and structurally entrenched across public institutions, media, education, and daily life. Meanwhile, hate crimes targeting Roma are “underreported and often not prosecuted, eroding community trust in the justice system.” In FI, which regularly ranks as one of the most racist countries in Europe (e.g., EU-MIDIS II), anti-Roma racism is on the rise, with Roma youth in focus-group discussions describing an atmosphere that has “become even more strained” with an increased threat of physical violence. The number of suspected hate crimes has risen, with disproportionate numbers of Roma being targeted, and only a small fraction of such crimes being reported. SI reported a rise in tension and conflicts between Roma communities, local authorities, and non-Roma populations, which prompted the Human Rights Ombudsman to warn of the urgent need for systemic interventions to improve coexistence and protect Roma rights.

A common observation across many states was the lack of *political will* at the government level to close the implementation gap when it comes to combating discrimination (BE, BG, CZ, EL, HR, HU, IT, LT, RO, SK). This translates into a slackening of the pace of reform, a diminution of institutional coordination, and a slide down the policy priority scale. Beyond the formal adoption of strategies and action plans, some governments have been passive in implementing their commitments, and ministries have failed to prioritise action on Roma inclusion (CZ). In neighbouring SK, combating antigypsyism is just not a priority for the government: public figures, including the Prime Minister, continue to use anti-Roma rhetoric in public, while existing commitments are weakly implemented and have a marginal effect. Despite the worsening situation of minority groups in HU, and the practices that perpetuate antigypsyism, as documented in the RCM report, including the persistence of segregation and stigmatising rhetoric against Roma, the government has “done little” to combat discrimination. In a country that has witnessed the steady undermining of independent institutions capable of or willing to defend minorities, the government has identified “mutual awareness-raising” and familiarisation with Roma culture as the antidote to discrimination and anti-Roma racism. The example of EL is not untypical, where a lack of political will is manifest in patchy coordination between vague, often non-existent budget allocations and timelines: “This leaves core objectives – from preventing forced evictions to tackling school segregation – in limbo.”

One basic challenge to making progress is the lack of a unified *monitoring* system, and a dearth of robust, ethnically disaggregated equality data across government departments and agencies in many states (CZ, FR, HU, IE, IT, SI). This makes it well-nigh impossible to systematically evaluate the effectiveness of measures taken and results in a fragmentation of information. Regarding hate crime, progress is impeded by incomplete data and underreporting; hate-motivated cases remain under-documented, and there is no systematic analysis of court rulings on discrimination (CZ). While SE's NRSF identifies antigypsyism as a cross-cutting issue, its practical implementation is weakened by the lack of disaggregated data, clear indicators, and mechanisms for monitoring or enforcement. The Equality Ombudsman (DO), which is mandated to combat ethnic discrimination in SE, does not collect ethnically disaggregated data, and thus cannot monitor Roma-related complaints. This absence of data renders antigypsyism statistically invisible in institutional systems, making it difficult to inform policy or demonstrate need. Even in states where anti-Roma discrimination is a central pillar of the NRSF, concrete measures have been hindered by inadequate monitoring and the lack of a comprehensive policy approach (ES). This is indicative of a wider problem of coordination between institutions common to many states, and described in the RO report as “cumbersome, yielding minimal results due to significant difficulties in establishing a common working framework, planning actions and activities, and budgetary allocation.”

## 2.2. Policy responses and their effectiveness

The most consistent observation from civil society monitoring over the past decade is that meaningful progress on Roma inclusion has been stymied by the lack of accountability and weak coordination of Roma inclusion policies, compounded by ineffective protection against discrimination and a lack of political resolve to effectively tackle the persistent and deeply embedded anti-Roma racism in European states. This current round of reporting confirms that, despite some encouraging practices, the fundamental rights situation in countries with significant Roma populations remains much the same, and in some cases (BG, HU, RO, SK) has even deteriorated. Despite many examples of policy responses on paper being better aligned to a human rights-based approach, implementation remains patchy, and substantial change is elusive. In this current round of RCM reporting, key features undermining the effectiveness of policy responses included a deficit of robust

monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, cumbersome coordination between central and local authorities and agencies, and an unwillingness to address the deep structural and institutional aspects of anti-Roma racism.

In HU, despite fifteen years of international concerns about discrimination, there are no interventions planned in the NRSF or other government policies to combat anti-Roma discrimination or hate crimes. In fact, since 2021, the autonomy and functioning of complaint mechanisms have been eroded by government decree, and civil procedure reform has made it more difficult for individuals to initiate a personal rights lawsuit. Concerns about residential segregation were also raised in relation to the 2025 Hungarian Law on the Protection of Local Identity,<sup>11</sup> which gives municipal authorities the right to adopt local decrees to determine who may and may not move into a locality. Despite the gravity of the situation concerning rights and the rule of law, the HU government considers the most effective tools for combating prejudice, discrimination, and hate speech to be 'mutual awareness raising' and the cultivation and promotion of Roma culture.

The RO NRSF includes an essential component dedicated to combating discrimination, anti-Roma discourse, and attitudes that generate hate speech or hate crimes. Several training initiatives were implemented with law enforcement officials and judicial actors to improve the understanding of anti-Roma attitudes and the handling of hate crime cases. However, numerous lines of action remain unimplemented or of limited impact. Government reporting is criticised for its lack of transparency and follow-up, deemed to be "indicative of a broader pattern in governmental actions, where initiatives are launched but their impact is rarely monitored or publicly reported." The RCM report judges the results so far to be minimal, and coordination at best "cumbersome". Although the NRSF includes a diverse array of stakeholders, "the effectiveness of coordination depends on the quality of collaboration rather than the number of institutions involved." Similarly, in SK, despite the official stipulation that policymaking should align with the fight against antigypsyism, this has not happened, and the assessment was that most activities under the *Action Plan Combating Antigypsyism and Promoting Roma Participation* have not been successfully implemented.

In SI, although the existing measures are well-structured on paper, and increased funding has been made available for targeting municipalities where there have been tensions and conflicts between Roma and non-Roma communities, as well as law enforcement, the effectiveness of NRSF interventions remains unknown. This is attributable to the lack of proper monitoring and evaluation, and the report states that "the lack of tangible results indicates that the measures are either not being implemented effectively or are insufficient to address the root causes of antigypsyism and discrimination."

In IE, the strategic objectives include the delivery of much better mechanisms for combating racism and discrimination, ensuring effective access to justice and equality remedies, and addressing the low levels of trust and satisfaction with the police and justice system and their consequences. While the focus on Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty was welcomed, the impact was judged to be diluted by a singular focus on 'cultural competence' in the overall strategic objective, without reference to the obligation to have regard to the need to eliminate discrimination and address racism at the individual and institutional levels across the public sector.

While the SE strategy recognises antigypsyism as a cross-cutting barrier and outlines goals related to equality, participation, and non-discrimination, the implementation deficits are not untypical of a number of states and include a lack of robust indicators, systematic monitoring, and concrete measures explicitly targeting antigypsyism. There is no regular reporting mechanism to track incidents of antigypsyism, or Roma persons' experiences of discrimination. Local initiatives show potential, but efforts remain fragmented, short-term, underfunded, and insufficiently evaluated. The strategy also lacks binding obligations for municipalities, leaving Roma inclusion policies highly dependent on local political will and capacity. Consultation with Roma is often superficial, and exclusion from policy design leads to measures that are misaligned with actual needs and do not address the root causes of discrimination.

In EL, despite the NRSF's dedicated pillar on combating stereotypes and hate crimes, antigypsyism remains widespread and effectively unaddressed. The Greek National Commission on Human Rights has repeatedly warned about the 'persistently poor' implementation of the NRSF. Despite the creation of dedicated police departments, the appointment of specialised prosecutors, and legislative reforms to support victims, their impact is deemed questionable. Many of the newly established police offices are reportedly inactive, along with

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<sup>11</sup> *The Fifteenth Amendment to the Fundamental Law of Hungary*. Available at: [https://helsinki.hu/en/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2025/04/Bill\\_11152\\_adopted\\_EN\\_unofficial\\_translation.pdf](https://helsinki.hu/en/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2025/04/Bill_11152_adopted_EN_unofficial_translation.pdf)

a low level of hate-crime reporting and even fewer convictions. Further, mistrust in law enforcement and fear of retaliation remain high among victims, and awareness about available support channels is persistently low.

In ES, the NRSF was credited with providing a useful theoretical and procedural framework, with a more holistic approach and a welcome emphasis on the fight against antigypsyism, gender perspective, and participation. However, the report noted that when it comes to structural racism, no review process has been established to detect where antigypsyism is embedded in the regulations, laws, rules, and practices of public administration. A perennial difficulty in such a decentralised state is coordination: while a policy intervention may be promoted at the national level, if it falls within the competence of the Autonomous Communities (Regions), they are under no obligation to follow the guidelines or orientations from the state administration. Beyond the Basque Country (see Promising Practices below), the ES report identified a need for greater political impetus, more transformative public policies that can be better evaluated, a more transparent and democratic distribution of public grants, and a thorough review of institutional actions to detect and counteract antigypsyism wherever it operates.

### 2.3. Promising cases and interventions to learn from

Despite the reported 'passivity' in terms of concrete strategy implementation, one welcome development in CZ was the appointment in 2022 of Ms Lucie Fuková as Government Commissioner for Roma Minority Affairs. In April 2024, the endeavours of the Commissioner's office resulted in the Government's formal adoption of a working definition of antigypsyism to help public officials to better identify and combat anti-Roma prejudice and discrimination. The report noted a corresponding increase in commemorative events and initiatives, Days of Romani Culture organised by local municipalities, and increased government funding for civil society projects aimed at combating prejudice and promoting intercultural dialogue. Promising practices at a local level include community events to break down barriers, such as youth sport tournaments, and programmes such as 'Get to know your neighbour', supported by some municipalities through subsidies from the Ministry of Culture and Education. According to polling, the proportion of Czechs rating coexistence with Roma as 'very bad' has fallen from 24% (2019) to 15% (2023), while the proportion of those who see coexistence as 'rather positive' has increased.

Another welcome development in CZ is increased action against hate crime, with police and courts more frequently classifying attacks on Roma as hate crimes, and the fact that proportionate sentencing is perceived to act as a deterrent. Cooperation between police and the civil sector on monitoring manifestations of antigypsyism and victim support is described in the report as 'exemplary'. One example of a promising practice launched by the Commissioner was the 'Roma Roadshow', which brought together Roma, authorities' representatives, and police officers in the regions to discuss good practices and problems.

The RCM report on ES was fulsome in its praise of the political commitment and determination of the Basque Autonomous Community to tackle structural discrimination, and the rigour and transparency with which annual reviews are conducted to monitor compliance with their inclusion strategy. One related welcome development involved all the major Basque governing institutions signing up to an official declaration of recognition and coexistence with the Roma People and against antigypsyism. With regard to the national objective concerning support for victims of antigypsyism, the report noted the significant increase in the budget for the state-level 'Victim Assistance and Guidance Service for Discrimination Based on Racial or Ethnic Origin' provided by CEDRE and coordinated by FSG.

A number of countries (AT, IT, LT, RO) reported conducting anti-bias training for public officials, as well as awareness-raising events, Holocaust remembrance activities, and the production of teaching materials related to Roma history and culture. While these are doubtless welcome developments, their impact remains an open question. As the LT report stated, "while such campaigns may influence public opinion, their effectiveness remains unclear in the absence of impact evaluation".

### 2.4. Recommendations

#### **Recommendations for Member States:**

1. Design and incorporate into NRSFs clear and measurable objectives to ensure unhindered access to justice and protection against discrimination. These should be accompanied by sufficient resources and support for municipal authorities, the justice system, and all relevant duty-bearers to ensure effective implementation and robust impact monitoring.

2. Strengthen relevant institutions and improve access to anti-discrimination complaint mechanisms; expand training on the implementation of anti-discrimination procedures; ensure such training is of high quality and made mandatory for key professional groups.
3. States engaged in democratic backsliding should promptly cease their harassment of anti-discrimination, human rights, and watchdog CSOs, and repeal decrees and laws that deliberately target the shrinking of civic space.
4. Ensure that all complaints of police abuse against Roma are promptly investigated in an impartial manner by an independent body, and that suspected perpetrators are suspended from duty immediately and for the duration of the investigation, particularly when there is a risk that they might otherwise be in a position to repeat the alleged act, commit reprisals against the alleged victim or obstruct the investigation.
5. Provide funding for rights-based CSOs and enable access to funding for grassroots CSOs that are working to combat antigypsyism. Application procedures for grants should be reviewed and simplified, particularly by reducing administrative burdens and co-financing requirements.

**Recommendations for the European Commission:**

6. Bring cases to the Court of Justice of the European Union when Member States fail to ensure the effective enforcement of the Race Equality Directive. In particular, the ongoing infringement proceedings concerning segregation in education and housing.
7. Endeavour to ensure that no equality bodies or other official bodies responsible for combating discrimination remain circumscribed in terms of independence, resources, and mandate.
8. Broaden the scope of areas in which the Race Equality Directive applies so the Directive can be used to challenge the most egregious forms of discrimination against Roma. For example, forced evictions, abuse by law enforcement, and discriminatory actions by health and social institutions, all of which may be considered as relating to the provision of public services.

### 3. EDUCATION

by Simona Torotcoi (*Global Forum of Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent*)

Across the EU, educational systems have undergone significant reform aimed at promoting inclusion, digital competence, and lifelong learning, with overall attainment levels rising steadily over the past two decades.<sup>12</sup> However, these positive trends often mask persistent inequalities that disproportionately affect Roma people. While EU frameworks and national strategies emphasise inclusive education and equal opportunities, implementation remains uneven, and progress for Roma students lags behind that of the general population.

Education is consistently recognised across the European Union as a cornerstone of Roma inclusion, yet the goal of achieving equitable access to quality education remains profoundly unfulfilled.<sup>13</sup> In many Member States, Roma education has been perceived as a high political priority and received a significant share of financial investment within thematic Roma programmes (HR, PL). However, structural discrimination, pervasive segregation, and high dropout rates persist as critical problems across all Member States. These persistent challenges demonstrate that fundamental issues of attainment, segregation, and discrimination continue to obstruct the equal exercise of the right to education. CSOs universally identify antigypsyism as the root cause of educational challenges, leading to widespread segregation.

#### 3.1. Main challenges and root causes

The challenges Roma students face are deep-rooted and structural, manifesting across multiple areas, and implementation efforts have generally failed to address them.

**Institutional antigypyism** is moving from being an external social prejudice to an institutional barrier often enforced by school personnel. Monitoring reveals that low expectations, stereotyping, and outright discrimination from teachers and staff are common in most countries (AT, CZ, DE, HR, IE, LV, NL, PL, RO, SE, SK). This institutional bias often underpins the misplacement of students into segregated tracks. Discrimination manifests through the denial of enrolment to children without identity documents (CY) or the discriminatory use of reduced timetables (IE) – a form of educational segregation.<sup>14</sup>

In a few countries, CSOs highlight the failure of the state to acknowledge antigypyism in relation to educational segregation, despite CSOs recognising it as the primary barrier (ES, FI, SE). In BG, the government monitoring report stated that "ethnic origin cannot and should not be considered a sign of vulnerability", a position that civil society argues avoids addressing antigypyism.

**Educational segregation** remains a widespread and critical problem, often resulting in Roma students being concentrated in educational facilities of lower quality, with limited resources and low academic standards (BG, HR, CZ, EL, HU, RO, ES, SI, SK). The percentage of Roma children in segregated primary classes in HR rose from 19% to 22.5% in the 2023/2024 academic year, indicating an increasing trend of ethnic segregation despite policy goals. Similarly, SK identified 468 primary schools at risk of segregation in 2022/2023, demonstrating the vast scale of the problem. This segregation often occurs under the guise of remedial or compensatory education. Educational segregation, once predominantly characterised by separate, dilapidated schools

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<sup>12</sup> See: Eurostat. (2025). *Eurostat regional yearbook. 2025 edition*. Publication Office of the European Union. Available at: <https://www.bollettinoadapt.it/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/KS-01-25-037-EN-N.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> The FRA Roma Survey 2024 suggests that early childhood education and care (ECEC) enrolment has improved, with every second Roma child now attending ECEC (42% in 2016 to 53%), yet Roma civil monitoring reports show that a lack of available and accessible pre-school education (ECEC) is still a critical problem (CY, CZ, EE, RO), severely limiting school readiness. The FRA data reveal that progress in other fundamental educational indicators has either stagnated or worsened: upper-secondary educational attainment has seen no change; segregation remains a deeply ingrained issue and has actively worsened since 2016 in countries such as BG, CZ, EL, FR, and RO. The FRA survey shows that the discrimination experienced by Roma in contact with educational institutions has worsened, increasing to 14% in 2024 from 7% in 2016.

<sup>14</sup> Reduced timetables refer to the practice of assigning Traveller children reduced school hours or days. The issue is acknowledged within policy documents, such as the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy II (NTRIS II), which aims to address this form of discrimination.

(especially among the countries with the largest Roma populations and the most acute challenges – those belonging to RCM's Cluster 1), is now increasingly manifesting as secondary segregation (separate classes within ostensibly integrated schools) and the misplacement of Roma into special education tracks (predominant in countries with smaller Roma populations, RCM's Clusters 3 and 4).

**Misplacement into special education** persists. In CEE countries, this is often compounded by the per-capita funding system in education, which can incentivise misplacement, thereby going hand-in-hand with antigypsyism. The misplacement of Roma children into special education programmes is a critical problem in countries like AT, DE, HU, NL, LV, and SK, where rates remain disproportionately high. For instance, some Roma families in LV agree to special education placement because costs for accommodation, meals, and materials are covered, a critical factor rooted in socio-economic difficulties. The Ombudsman's Office in LV states this is a critical problem requiring an immediate solution.

Critically **low educational attainment** persists across all clusters. For example, in EE, the proportion of Roma aged 15+ with secondary, vocational, or higher education declined from 27% in 2021 to around 23% in 2023 and 2024, contrasting sharply with the general national increase (76% to 79%). In ES, 62.8% of Roma youth aged 16-24 do not complete compulsory secondary education (compared to 4% nationally), whereas in CY, virtually no Roma students reach university.

High **dropout** rates remain a critical problem across primary and secondary levels (EL, ES, FI, HU, IE, LV, RO, SK, SE). In LV, dropout remains a key challenge, with 7.5% of Roma students failing to complete basic education in 2023/2024, missing the 6% target. In HU, the prior reduction of compulsory schooling to 16 years has significantly contributed to this trend. Concurrently, the government's strategic focus on establishing a benefit system that "promotes activity and encourages employment" absorbs individuals without educational certificates, disproportionately including Roma youth, and involving a highly controlled, low wage.

**Increased selectivity in the education system** pushes Roma and disadvantaged pupils towards lower-quality vocational fields, while often discouraging them from pursuing higher education entirely (CZ, FI, RO). The HU education system, while maintaining scholarship programmes and support for tutoring centres and Roma colleges to help students acquire vocational certificates and further academic degrees, is unanimously described as seriously unfair and continues to deepen structural social inequalities. Roma youth are associated with a low proportion of secondary school completion and minimal chances of entering higher education, while the selective nature of the system is reinforced by 'white flight' and the expansion of church schools, which attract non-Roma students and the local teaching elite.

**Early school leaving** remains a critical structural problem across almost all monitored Member States, driven by profound poverty, pervasive segregation, and housing instability.

Structural economic and housing instability significantly contribute to high early school leaving dropout rates across numerous Member States. This is strongly linked to unfavourable housing conditions (BG, CY, CZ, EE, EL, ES, HU, LV, RO, SK). In BE, the housing situation is identified as a critical structural barrier that causes frequent displacement, directly resulting in critically low school attendance (39%) and high dropout rates for Traveller children.

Severe administrative access barriers complicate **enrolment** for foreign/refugee children and those in informal settlements. In FR, municipalities actively exploit administrative rules, often stalling enrolment or requiring proof of future itinerary for home education (IEF), an inherently impossible demand, which has resulted in a 32.3% denial rate for applications from itinerant families.

The persistent lack of reliable, disaggregated **data** on Roma pupils' ethnicity and their educational outcomes is a critical structural barrier that makes it impossible to measure progress, identify discrimination, or evaluate the real impact of policies, resulting, in some cases, in the institutional denial of segregation (BG, CY, CZ, EE, EL, SE, SI). In several of these contexts, the absence of ethnic data is used by authorities as a justification for not acknowledging, documenting, or addressing segregation. The lack of robust ethnic data and the resulting inability to measure policy impact is a general and structural problem across Member States.

The low level of digital skills and competences among Roma pupils and adults is a critical problem in most CEE countries. Furthermore, if educational institutions close, as happened during the COVID-19 pandemic, limited access to technology and support exacerbates inequalities.

### 3.2. Policy responses and their effectiveness

Across Europe, governments have adopted a wide range of responses to improve Roma educational inclusion, spanning measures against segregation, early school leaving, and barriers to higher education. While some states have introduced promising tools, monitoring systems, and targeted forms of support, others continue to implement approaches that are fragmented, inconsistent, or risk reinforcing exclusion. The following overview summarises notable national policies, emerging practices, and ongoing challenges in how states address the diverse educational needs of Roma learners.

Education policy implementation is frequently jeopardised by reliance on short-term, fragmented projects and on temporary EU funds (CY, CZ, ES, HU – where some EU funds are frozen; IT, LT, LV, and RO). This unstable funding prevents the development of the systematic, long-term approach required for structural change (CZ). Fragmentation is also directly linked to the lack of post-compulsory educational support for Roma (IT). In Italy, the renewed National Project (2024-2027) allocated EUR 40 million under the Child Guarantee but targets only 3,160 recipients, leading to criticism regarding its efficiency and the mismatch between funding and targets.

When it comes to responses to segregation, in ES, highly decentralised government structures complicate the implementation of national strategies at the regional level. EL's National Roma Contact Point (NRCP) is explicitly opposed to desegregation, believing that special measures could backfire and that the focus should be on improving the quality of education provided. In HU, despite the NRSF mentioning the prevention and elimination of educational segregation, the practice remains widespread and is often supported by politicians and churches close to the government. HR has introduced an activity for co-financing targeted transport for Roma children from segregated settlements to integrated schools, but this measure has not been utilised due to the low uptake stemming from parental concerns and a lack of trust-building efforts. Meanwhile, SK's Ministry of Education has initiated controversial policies, such as planning for the establishment of "ethnic minority" Roma schools in segregated areas, which civil society argues contradicts the NRSF's inclusion goals and would legalise the Roma segregation.

When it comes to dropout prevention, the RO national framework, the Early Warning Education Mechanism (PNRAS-MATE), provides tools to identify students at risk of dropping out and trigger timely interventions.

SI has adopted new guidelines for amending legislation to increase Roma educational inclusion, which include measures to reduce financial benefits for non-attendance, perceived by CSOs as a financial penalty.

The most successful intervention observed across Europe is the utilisation of Roma/educational mediators and assistants as a localised support model. This role of Roma mediators and assistants significantly strengthens school-home communication and boosts school attendance – for example, in all three Baltic countries with only very small Roma populations. The Ventspils Roma Teacher Assistant Model in LV successfully overcomes language barriers and engages illiterate parents. In LT, the deployment of Roma mediators in Vilnius has improved communication and contributed to increased school attendance. The Roma Mentorship Service in Valga, EE, is recognised as an effective 'good practice model' for increasing kindergarten attendance and strengthening family-school cooperation.

At the local level, the Roma Information and Knowledge Centre (RIKC) in SE successfully used home visits and direct dialogue with families to achieve a significant reduction in absenteeism among Roma pupils. In CY, the EU co-funded 'School and Social Inclusion Actions+' (DRASE+) initiative provides comprehensive, localised support, including extra teaching, free meals, and assistant class teachers in schools with large Roma populations.

Regarding scholarships and higher education, HU employs various support mechanisms, such as Roma colleges for young Roma pursuing higher education. Similarly, the 'Romako for Higher Education' project in FI has received ESF+ funding for 2025-2027 and is likely to support Roma educational pathways in higher education.

### 3.3. Promising cases and interventions to learn from

The path to sustained progress in Roma education, aligned with the EU's vision of quality education for all, relies on translating substantial EU financial opportunities into permanent, state-led structural reforms that dismantle segregation and institutionalise successful, localised support models, all while mandating

transparent, disaggregated monitoring and meaningful Roma participation.<sup>15</sup> BG has successfully transferred funding for educational mediators from EU projects to the state budget, earmarking a specific annual budget and formally establishing the profession.

The Recovery and Resilience Facility in SK allocated EUR 172 million to expanding kindergarten capacity, creating a significant structural opportunity to improve early access for Roma children. Given the country's well-documented shortage of preschool places, particularly in municipalities with large Roma populations, this investment has the potential to reduce waiting lists, increase enrolment at the age of three, and close early learning gaps that later strengthen segregation and increase early school leaving. If implemented with clear geographic targeting, inclusive admission criteria, and complementary outreach (e.g., Roma mediators engaging families), this expansion could become one of the most impactful early-years interventions in the country.

Similarly, ES's PROA+ programme represents a substantial opportunity, with EUR 360 million invested between 2021 and 2024 in supporting schools with high concentrations of socially vulnerable pupils. For Roma communities, this programme can strengthen inclusive education by providing tutoring, personalised learning support, and extended learning time in schools whose catchments often overlap with Roma neighbourhoods. Because PROA+ allows regions and schools considerable flexibility to tailor measures to local needs, it has the potential to address both the academic and socio-emotional barriers faced by Roma learners. When used strategically, paired with intercultural mediators, anti-bias training for teachers, and targeted family engagement, PROA+ can help reduce the internal segregation practices (such as compensatory groups) that disproportionately affect Roma students.

In DE, the *Recommendation on dealing with Antigypsyism in Schools and Education* adopted by the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs (KMK) represents an important opportunity to advance systemic change. Although its implementation depends on the voluntary commitment of individual federal states (*Länder*), the Recommendation provides a comprehensive, nationally endorsed framework that schools and education ministries can use to strengthen teacher training, develop anti-bias curricula, and improve responses to discrimination against Roma and Sinti pupils. Its existence creates a shared policy baseline across all *Länder* and offers civil society, Roma organisations, and education institutions a concrete reference point for advocacy, monitoring, and the development of pilot programmes.

In RO, the 2024 *Methodology for Monitoring School Segregation* represents a significant opportunity to strengthen enforcement and accountability. For the first time, schools and inspectorates have a unified national framework they can use to identify, report, and address segregation, creating clearer pathways for corrective action.

Similarly, SK's piloted segregation risk-monitoring system (identifying 468 schools at risk) creates an important opportunity to shift from anecdotal evidence to data-driven interventions. By mapping segregation risks systematically, the Ministry of Education can prioritise resources, design targeted support measures, and develop transparent mechanisms to prevent the institutionalisation of segregated schooling.

The extension of compulsory education in FI in 2021 (involving raising the minimum leaving age from 16 to 18 years) is likely to raise the educational level of the Roma population and may prevent the premature adulthood of Roma teenagers, notably early marriages and leaving school early, by enabling the acquisition of secondary education degrees.

### 3.4. Recommendations

#### **Recommendations for Member States:**

1. Implement binding legislative measures to eliminate educational segregation and structurally address the overrepresentation of Roma children in special education.
2. Urgently revise and standardise diagnostic tools and assessment procedures to eliminate the misclassification of Roma children into lower educational tracks and special education.

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<sup>15</sup> See: European Education Area. *Quality education and training for all*. Available at: <https://education.ec.europa.eu/focus-topics/improving-quality>

3. Formally incorporate and systematise the employment of Roma mediators and assistants across all vulnerable schools, establishing clear job profiles, career pathways, and stable, state-funded salaries.
4. Mandate compulsory, comprehensive training on Roma history, culture, and antigypsyism for all teachers, school personnel, and child protection professionals to prevent biased interventions and low expectations.
5. Develop an integrated approach to address the critical lack of accessible, quality preschool education for Roma children. Member States should address barriers to preschool attendance by reimbursing kindergarten fees and providing necessary transport.
6. Provide second-chance learning pathways and support for adult literacy for early school leavers.

**Recommendations for CSOs:**

7. Significantly increase advocacy efforts to address educational segregation by leveraging new legal tools (e.g., Romania's Monitoring Methodology) and utilising legal action against municipalities that refuse enrolment.
8. Invest in building internal capacity for project management, advocacy, and policy analysis to effectively challenge state narratives and ensure active involvement in the design and evaluation of all NRSF cycles and funded projects.
9. Leverage EU funding to secure independent research on antigypsyism in education.

## 4. EMPLOYMENT

by Zuzana Polačková (*Institute for Forecasting, Slovak Academy of Sciences*)

Progress in Roma access to quality employment and labour-market integration remains limited in most countries. In several states (AT, CZ, RO, SK), weak labour-market inclusion is identified as a key barrier to inclusive action in other fields.

Exclusion from the labour market worsens disadvantage in other areas of life. This leads to material deprivation and deepening social exclusion. In turn, these conditions further lessen labour-market participation. The process is bidirectional and mutually reinforcing: exclusion from the labour market is both a cause and a consequence of barriers in other domains, such as education, healthcare, housing, social rights, and political rights.

Employment is not only a source of income; it is also a key factor in social stability, engagement with institutions, and the reduction of long-term marginalisation. Long-term social exclusion (FR, EL), low educational attainment (BG, CZ, DE, IT, RO, SK), and persistent segregation in education and housing (BE, CZ, EE, EL, HR, IE, LV, PL, RO, SI, SK) seriously limit Roma access to resources, services, and social networks outside their communities. These factors are essential for successful entry into and stable retention in the labour market.

Access to quality jobs and Roma participation in the formal labour market matter beyond the individual. Better labour-market outcomes in Roma communities shift public perceptions and weaken stereotypes and majority prejudices. Making equal access to stable employment a social policy priority is therefore essential for strengthening social cohesion and intergroup trust.

### 4.1. Main challenges and root causes

Roma remain largely excluded from labour markets in most countries, reflecting persistent shortcomings in policy design and implementation.

**Low levels of education**, qualifications, and digital skills represent one of the most critical barriers to Roma labour-market access. In several countries (AT, BE, CY, FI, IE, LV, NL), this is further exacerbated by low literacy levels or limited language proficiency. Furthermore, re-skilling and up-skilling programmes only partially reflect the specific needs of Roma, with participation requirements that are often difficult to meet (BE, BG, CZ, FR, IE, RO). A related challenge is limited access to digital tools, which are increasingly essential for interacting with public employment services or job matching, such as the shift of public employment services to the online environment (SE), and for accessing online education (DE, IE). This situation is complicated by low levels of IT skills, whose importance in the labour market continues to grow (LT, SK).

High **youth unemployment** remains a pressing challenge in all monitored countries. Young Roma, who are frequently excluded from the labour market and at high risk of transitioning into NEET (not in education, employment or training) status, are significantly affected by early school leaving (CY, EE, FI, EL, HR, HU, NL, RO, SI, SK), which often results in long-term unemployment from an early age. In several countries, Roma youth unemployment exceeds 50% (FI, HR, RO, SK), while support programmes lack sufficient targeting and show limited results (AT, CY, EE, FI, EL, HU, LT, RO, SI). Lowering the school-leaving age has further increased youth unemployment (HU), with a disproportionate impact on girls.

Significant **gender inequalities** in labour-market access are also evident across countries. Low labour-market participation among Roma girls and women is linked to limited access to childcare (AT, BG, CY, CZ, ES, FR, EL, HR, HU, IE, IT, LT, SI), traditional gender norms (RO, SK), and low educational attainment. This results in discrimination against Roma girls and women (CY, FR, HR, IE, IT, RO, SK), both compared to other women and Roma men. Most countries still lack targeted programmes for Roma women and girls; such explicit initiatives are reported only in AT, CZ, ES, FI, HU, LT, SE, and SI.

The weak **performance of integrated support services** is evident across all monitored countries, where the quality of public employment services provided to Roma is consistently assessed as insufficient. Because services are generic and inadequately sensitive to the intersectional disadvantages Roma face, they tend to be ineffective and fail to address the barriers to labour-market entry and retention. In addition, problems such as the physical inaccessibility of employment offices or programmes (BG, CZ, FI, NL, RO), capacity underfunding (LT, SI), and organisational complexity or fragmentation (EE, FI, IT, LT, LV, RO, SI) contribute to diminished access

and support for Roma jobseekers. Administrative barriers, complex registration procedures, and missing documentation – obstacles that prevent many Roma from entering the system at all – are significant issues in numerous countries (BE, BG, DE, EE, FR, IE, RO).

Weak **coordination between employment services and other areas** of support (social services, education, housing, etc.) persists across all countries, limiting the implementation of case management and the provision of individualised, long-term coaching (BG, CY, CZ, DE, EE, ES, FI, FR, HU, IE, LT, LV, PL, RO, SK, SI). Preventive measures remain underdeveloped (HU, IE), and services often operate only as short-term, intermittent programmes without systemic anchoring (BG, CY, EE, ES, HU, NL, SE). Limited coordination between programmes, poor utilisation of potential synergies, and the insufficient involvement of local governments (EE) or CSOs (RO) significantly reduce the effectiveness of interventions. These shortcomings in collaboration hinder the development of sustainable solutions.

Pervasive **labour-market informality** and the low **quality of jobs** occupied by Roma constitute a persistent problem across Europe. Because Roma are disproportionately represented in seasonal, low-paid, unstable, and hazardous work outside standard labour-law or formal contractual frameworks (BE, BG, CZ, DE, EE, ES, FR, IE, IT, RO), they face ongoing labour-market vulnerability. Systematic violations of the labour rights of Roma employees have also been documented in several countries (DE, ES, FR, HU, IT, LT, SI, SK) as well as instances of practices bordering on exploitation or human trafficking (DE, FR, IT). As a result, even employed Roma often remain in the 'working poor' category, with incomes insufficient to cover basic household needs (BG, DE, HU, IE, RO, SK). Sectoral concentration in the riskiest industries (e.g., construction) and the performance of these jobs without adherence to minimum occupational health and safety standards are also widespread issues (IT, RO, SK).

Roma exclusion from the standard labour market and limited access to effective employment services result from multiple structural barriers. These stem from entrenched systemic **discrimination** and recurring **antigypsyism** (AT, BE, BG, DE, FI, EL, IE, IT, NL, PL, RO, SE, SI, SK). In many countries, a Roma-sounding name or appearance leads to rejection before qualifications or abilities are assessed (CZ, EE, LT, LV).

The situation is further complicated by the attitudes of political elites, who often advance simplified **racist narratives** that portray labour-market participation solely as the result of individual effort, while ignoring the structural barriers Roma face. The issue of Roma employment is also frequently instrumentalised in populist discourses that condition access to social rights on labour-market participation and legitimise restrictions on support for disadvantaged groups (FI, SK). More generally, there is a lack of political commitment, whether at the national or local level, to long-term, ethnically sensitive, and inclusive solutions (CY, CZ, EL, HR, HU, IT, NL, PL, SE, SI, SK).

This trend is, to some extent, counterbalanced by the European Commission's stance, which consistently promotes systemic, evidence-based, and inclusive approaches to Roma social inclusion.

#### 4.2. Policy responses and their effectiveness

The adoption of NRSFs signals a political commitment to improving Roma access to the standard labour market and to establishing a framework for systematic, long-term policy responses. However, in practice, many countries do not fully utilise these strategies, and programme objectives related to Roma employment are often considered insufficiently ambitious (BE, IE, LV). The limited use of pre-existing strategies appears to be due to several factors. Roma inclusion may be politically sensitive in many contexts, making it challenging for governments to prioritise and allocate sufficient funding to relevant measures. Responsibilities for Roma inclusion are also often distributed across various ministries and local authorities, which may lead to weak coordination and inconsistent implementation. As a result, national strategies may sometimes function more as formal commitments than as drivers of meaningful, sustained change.

The implementation of programmes supporting Roma employment is primarily funded by the European Cohesion Policy. Many states run large-scale programmes financed through the ESF+ (ES, HR, HU, LT, RO, SK), often implemented at the national level as part of mainstream policies. However, the quality of these interventions targeting Roma remains problematic: their linkage to the mainstream labour market is weak, and several countries report that programme participants frequently revert to their original situation after completion (BG, CY, PL, SK).

Many programmes that target Roma labour market inclusion are described as fragmented, underfunded, administratively burdensome, and short-term (NL, RO). The implementation of measures is uneven and non-

systemic (FR, SI). In some cases, available funding is used for activities outside the national action plans (HR) and lacks demonstrable impact, thereby weakening the policy's strategic direction. Support programmes vary considerably across countries. Some prioritise the development of the social economy and social enterprises as tools for Roma employment (CZ, HU, SK), while others focus on vocational education and skills development (DE, IE, IT, PL).

An overreliance on public works and weak employer engagement characterise the approach of many countries, where employment support for Roma remains primarily linked to the implementation of public works schemes (BG, CZ, ES, FI, EL, HR, HU, RO, SK). These jobs are characterised by low pay, limited career progression, and a weak link to the standard labour market, with individuals often remaining in such positions long-term without realistic prospects of transitioning to stable employment.

Activities aimed at strengthening Roma participation in the standard labour market are significantly lagging and are explicitly mentioned in only a few countries (AT, BG, CZ, FR, HR, PL, RO). There is an urgent need to scale these interventions and mainstream Roma employment support across Europe.

A relatively new trend is the creation of jobs designed 'within communities for communities', targeting exclusively Roma and typically involving various forms of assistant or support roles, such as community or order-maintenance services coordinated mainly by local municipalities or other public authorities. While these roles may serve a purpose in local contexts, they do not lead to career progression, facilitate the building of social networks outside Roma communities, or contribute to the development of social capital outside the Roma community. This phenomenon is particularly pronounced in SK.

A lack of reliable, disaggregated data on Roma employment represents a challenge across all countries that were examined, as this prevents the accurate identification of employment needs and outcomes. Most states apply an 'ethnically blind' approach within public employment services and either do not collect administrative data on the ethnic background of participants at all (BG, CZ, DE, FR, EL, HR, IE, NL, RO), or data collection faces methodological and practical barriers that significantly reduce its usability (AT, BE, EE, LT, LV, PL, SI). As a result, this lack of data complicates the measurement of progress towards national strategy targets: many strategies declare ambitious objectives but lack clear indicators, baselines, or impact-evaluation mechanisms (CY, ES, HU, IT, PL, SE, SK). Where targets do exist, they are often either insufficiently ambitious or, conversely, unrealistically high (AT, PL, SK, SE), largely due to the absence of the robust data needed to set and monitor realistic goals. Despite long-standing pressure to improve programme effectiveness, monitoring and evaluation remain inadequate, one key reason being the absence of relevant data (BG, CY, CZ, FI, LT, NL, SE).

Discrimination is widely recognised across Europe as a main reason for low Roma labour-market participation. However, most countries do not address the elimination of the former in their policy responses. Only a few states (CZ, SE, or DE, where no Roma-specific measures are in place, but many Roma from the Balkans or intra-EU mobile Roma benefit) have dedicated programmes, while many explicitly state that such measures are absent.

#### **4.3. Promising cases and interventions to learn from**

Across Europe, a wide spectrum of initiatives can be identified that demonstrably and effectively support Roma employment. These are mainly local or regional projects, led by CSOs or local authorities. Only rarely are such measures firmly embedded in mainstream national policies. Despite the diversity of approaches, evidence shows that their success depends on several recurring factors. These include long-term and stable funding (AT, ES); multidisciplinary coordination across labour market services, education, and social support (ES, FR); individualised and continuous client support (FI, FR, LT, LV, SI); the visible presence of Roma professionals within institutions (BE, BG, CZ, SI); and close cooperation with employers (FR, PL).

These findings show that promising practices may be classified into several groups:

Integrated and comprehensive programmes combine different forms of support, from training and employment to social services. They also address broader determinants of social exclusion (AT, EL, ES, FR).

Social enterprises create accessible jobs and offer individualised support for the gradual transition to the open labour market (CZ, HU, IE, SK). They also provide a protected environment in which individuals with complex disadvantages can build work habits, acquire soft skills, and stabilise their situation before entering mainstream employment.

The presence of Roma mediators and professionals within institutions improves mutual trust, communication, and the link between the community and public services. The most successful examples of this are those operating in environments where Roma and non-Roma populations interact naturally, creating opportunities to strengthen social capital (BE, BG, CZ, SE, SI).

Programmes delivered through a cross-sectoral approach link directly to the standard labour market. They involve local governments, civil society, and employers (FR, PL). In several countries, stable and well-established CSOs coordinate effective models (AT, ES). This is especially evident when these organisations oversee the sequencing of interventions by other actors, such as public employment services and employers.

#### 4.4. Recommendations

##### **Recommendations for Member States:**

1. Introduce the more systematic use of proxy indicators to monitor the situation of Roma populations in line with legal frameworks, thereby improving the quality and availability of ethnically sensitive data without breaching legislation.
2. Expand mechanisms for monitoring discrimination and create tools to identify it even when victims do not report incidents. Implement participatory approaches, such as involving Roma actors in inspection activities or using mystery shopping techniques.
3. Implement measures that compensate for Roma's limited social capital outside their communities, particularly by actively connecting jobseekers with employers and supporting interventions to reduce employer prejudice.
4. Structure funding to sustain programmes with a proven impact over a longer time horizon, and integrate validated models into mainstream policies to minimise fragmentation and short-term interventions.
5. Create conditions that enable the wider implementation of locally driven initiatives. Encourage partnerships between municipalities and CSOs with in-depth knowledge of local needs.
6. Systematically create and fund positions for Roma within programmes that connect Roma and non-Roma communities; ensure these are stable jobs rather than short-term project posts, and that they are filled by relevant professionals.

##### **Recommendations for the European Commission:**

7. Require that EU-supported employment programmes ensure outreach to Roma, and their effects on Roma employment are measurable, long-term, and assessed through clearly defined indicators directly linked to national strategic documents on Roma integration.
8. Adjust administrative rules to make the implementation of integrated interventions within a single programme less burdensome, enabling the use of combined measures and innovative methods.

## 5. HEALTHCARE

by Balázs Váradi (Budapest Institute)

Poor health in Roma communities is prevalent across Europe. Some Roma are completely excluded from health care, while most face hostility and discrimination within healthcare settings. Available literature on Roma and health agrees that Roma people suffer from poorer health than the majority population; this is closely linked to the social determinants of health.

Specifically, Roma are less likely to be vaccinated, have fewer opportunities for good nutrition, and experience higher rates of illness. They are less likely to be covered by health insurance, and the estimated life expectancy for Roma is consistently lower than the corresponding national average. Infant mortality among Roma is estimated to exceed national averages by several percentage points, and Roma infants experience more infections and diseases than other groups living in similar economic conditions.<sup>16</sup>

### 5.1. Main challenges and root causes

The **health outcomes** of the Roma are much worse than those of the majority everywhere in Europe. The most striking, albeit by far not the only measure of this, is the difference in life expectancy, which is the highest at 12.8/12.5 years (women/men) in Italy and the lowest in Romania (4.6/3.5) years.<sup>17</sup>

To a greater or lesser degree, money, employment, and social capital improve the **chances of patients receiving adequate and timely healthcare**. This is true because in several European countries, based on non-payment, immigration status, or other, often administrative criteria, not everyone is covered by health insurance. For example, healthcare may involve additional costs not covered by insurance (so-called out-of-pocket costs); access to (public, free-of-charge) healthcare services might be limited or slow (with waiting lists of months or years); and the quality of healthcare available to lower-status, rural, underinformed patients may be lower. This puts people with less money, who are out of work, without connections or the necessary information – and many Roma fall into these groups – at a disadvantage when it comes to healthcare.

The lack of an adequate **supply of public health care services** – especially pre- and postnatal care, preventive care, emergency care (incl. ambulance response times), access to a general practitioner (including average time/patient) and to ambulatory care in disadvantaged areas with a higher than average concentration of Roma – can be a major issue in many countries (BG, CZ, DE, HU, RO, SL).

Healthcare professionals and administrators are not immune to widespread **antigypsyism**, as reports from many European countries signal. Thus, anti-Roma discrimination, systemic bias, and prejudice within healthcare settings are a sad fact of life in all European countries included in the most recent FRA study, and especially so in CZ, EL, IE, and IT. In general, in 2024, the percentage of Roma respondents who felt discriminated against because of being Roma/Traveller when accessing health services in the past year ranged from 9% (ES) to 41% (IT).<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> See: European Public Health Alliance. (2018). *Closing the life expectancy gap of Roma in Europe*. Available at: <https://epha.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/closing-the-life-expectancy-gap-of-roma-in-europe-study.pdf>

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<sup>17</sup> European Union Agency of Fundamental Rights. (2024). *Rights of Roma and Travellers in 13 European Countries: Perspectives from the Roma Survey 2024*. Available at: [https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/fra-2025-roma-survey-2024\\_en.pdf](https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2025-roma-survey-2024_en.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

## 5.2. Policy responses and their effectiveness

In many countries, the NRSFs have failed to substantively address health challenges or to reflect earlier RCM feedback; even worse, in some countries (AT, EE), healthcare as a policy area is not even included in the NRSF. The health-related measures of the NRSF are generally not found commensurate with the scale of problems (AT, BG, CZ, EL, ES, HU, IE, SE, SI, SK), although in some countries (BG), problems have intensified further. Several Member States left unconsidered concerns repeatedly raised in RCM's earlier cycles (CZ, DE, HU, LV), including the incomprehensibility of some information (HU). In several countries (ES, HU, IT, SK), the implementation of the measures outlined in the respective strategies is missing, or at least undocumented. Conversely, in IE, the promise is made that a Roma Health Action Plan will be elaborated by the end of 2026.

Targeting necessary healthcare measures to the Roma is extremely hard when Roma-specific health data are not available or adequate (esp. CY, ES, RO), or authorities refuse to provide experts with access to a rich base of relevant, pre-existing public health data (HU). Mainstreaming or targeting the healthcare interventions the Roma need based on other indicators than ethnicity (e.g., geography) may be an adequate but second-best arrangement. Alas, geography- or income-based targeting can also miss the mark, as in IE, where the *Sláintecare* Healthy Communities Programme has been found to inadvertently exclude 80 per cent of the Traveller population.

As mentioned above, the health insurance coverage of the Roma is sharply divided in Europe: In AT, CZ, DE, EE, and PL, coverage is reported to be universal or near universal, with CY and EL welcome recent additions to this list in 2019 and 2016, respectively. But even in these countries, awareness of coverage may not be fully present among the Roma and in some countries (EE, and especially IE, where the 'habitual residence condition' bars the majority of Travellers from having a medical card), the Roma often encounter high de facto bureaucratic barriers to obtaining coverage, while out-of-pocket medical expenses and co-payments can still pose a problem (CZ). At the other extreme, a lack of healthcare coverage for non-emergency care is still a major issue to address in several Member States with a large Roma population (BG, HU, FR – Roma in informal settlements, RO, SK).

Even for those Roma covered by insurance or who can afford out-of-pocket expenses, regarding services that are free, equal access to necessary healthcare often remains a challenge. The barriers to equal access take different forms, mainly related to hidden costs of accessing 'free' healthcare (due to travel, time off work or duties related to the home), a lack of awareness of their availability, the administrative burden (BG, FR, HU, IE, RO, SK), barriers linked to digital literacy (FI, SE) or linguistic ones (AT, CY, FI, SE). Some country reports (BG, EL, ES, HU, PL, RO, SI) note that recent healthcare interventions have addressed some facets of the issue; these include targeted vaccination efforts (BG, EL), mobile health units (EL, HU), and telemedicine (HU), as outlined in the following subsection.

One type of targeted measure for improving Roma's access to healthcare is deploying Roma health assistants and mediators, as used in several Member States (BG, CZ, EL, FR, LV, RO, SK). In this area, too, a lot more remains to be done as far as the quality of implementation (CZ, SK) and sustainability (EL, SK) are concerned. Health information and promotion campaigns and efforts are reported to be in place in several countries (BE, CZ, HU, IT, SE, SI).

Several countries face an acute lack of public health care services. The phenomenon of the Europe-wide healthcare personnel shortage is hard to compare across Member States, but out of the 14 countries covered by the most recent thematic OECD report, it is most acute in AT, IT, LV, PT, and ES.<sup>19</sup> According to the country reports, this challenge is being partially addressed in BG, EL, and ES, but even then, there remains ample room for further improvement.

Anti-Roma discrimination, systemic bias and antigypsyism within healthcare settings is at least mentioned in many NRSFs or equivalent strategic documents (BG, ES, FR, IT, SK, RO), while false, stereotypical assumptions and prejudices among healthcare professionals are reported in at least some countries (CZ, DE, EE, EL, FR, HU, LT, SE). Nevertheless, only isolated government interventions to combat the issue are reported at the preparatory phase of analysis (RO), or at the point until surveys are planned (end of 2027) (IT), but the former are largely missing. Training healthcare professionals to recognise and avoid (sometimes unconscious)

<sup>19</sup> OECD/European Commission. (2024). *Health at a Glance: Europe 2024: State of Health in the EU Cycle*. OECD Publishing. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1787/b3704e14-en>

discrimination could be a way forward, but such efforts are only reported in ES, IT, and SK. A law on financial compensation for the illegal forced sterilisation of Roma women has been in effect since January 2022 in CZ, but implementation is criticised as problematic.

New initiatives to provide patients, including Roma, with information on their rights regarding public health care services (including access, quality, confidentiality, etc.) and sufficient recourse mechanisms if those rights are violated are not widely reported in this cycle. The exceptions are a training course for Roma Platform Coordinators, the effectiveness of which, alas, has not yet been assessed (LT), and a planned operational procedure in RO.

### 5.3. Cases and interventions to learn from

The many and acute challenges that the Roma face concerning healthcare require a host of different solutions that resist Europe-wide generalisation. The former include natal and perinatal care (BG, EL), mental health and addiction issues concerning youth (EL, SI), promoting healthier lifestyles (SI), and dealing with the aftermath of the practice of forced sterilisation of Roma women (CZ). Some solutions reported in this cycle that could be instructive for other countries include:

- The 2021-27 extension of the 'Healthy Communities' (*Zdravé komunity*) programme in Slovakia. The programme is focused on enhancing the health and social conditions of marginalised Roma communities, with particular emphasis on women and children. The programme has been active since 2003 and includes a wide range of health mediation and community-based interventions, *inter alia*, support in hospitals, HR resource development, and social inclusion. It is cofinanced by the ESF/ESF+ and the government. In its current phase, with increased ESF+ funding, it focuses on promoting social inclusion and health equity and is being integrated with other social services and an interministerial working group to address intersections.
- Hungary's ESF+-financed 'Telemedical Healthcare for Disadvantaged Settlements' programme, part of the broader FETE initiative, uses telemedicine to connect patients and doctors in underserved areas with limited healthcare infrastructure, reducing inequalities caused by geographical and resource barriers.
- An important recent achievement in Bulgaria was the amendment of Ordinance 26 in August 2022 and June 2024. Under this amendment, the Ministry of Health guarantees testing for all newborn children for phenylketonuria, congenital adrenal hyperplasia, congenital hypothyroidism, spinal muscular atrophy, severe combined immune deficiencies, and cystic fibrosis, regardless of health insurance status. Moreover, free tests are provided to examine the risk of having a child with Down syndrome, other aneuploidies, spina bifida, anencephaly, severe abdominal wall defects, and other genetic diseases. Further, DNA analysis for autosomal recessive, autosomal dominant, X-linked, and mitochondrial diseases. As of 1 January 2023, every uninsured woman is entitled to up to four preventive examinations during pregnancy.

### 5.4. Recommendations

#### Recommendations for Member States:

1. Member States without *de jure* universal, free health insurance coverage should review whether and how their health insurance system is failing socially excluded groups and, if needed, take reasonable measures to remedy the situation. Where out-of-pocket medical expenses or co-payments hinder access to the healthcare system, they should assess to what extent healthcare affordability affects indigent citizens' health status and what policy changes could mitigate this.
2. Gather health statistics, collect reliable and detailed data, and produce and review evidence concerning Roma and the health gap between Roma and non-Roma for policy purposes (including mapping the needs and barriers faced by vulnerable subgroups of Roma, especially children, youth, women, the elderly, and LGBTIQ), ensuring the full protection of rights to privacy. Public resources commensurate with the size of the health inequality should be expended to address identified health gaps.
3. Put adequate mechanisms in place to improve information provision if this is hindered by linguistic, educational, social, cultural, or other factors or distrust, potentially including hiring more Roma as healthcare personnel and training providers in intercultural skills.

4. Make sure that adequate low-barrier complaint mechanisms and legal redress are available to investigate reports of anti-Roma discrimination and antigypsyism in healthcare. Ensure proven cases are remedied, and policy lessons are learned and incorporated into national policies.

**Recommendations for the European Commission:**

5. Mandate the use of the equivalent of ESF+ and ERDF funds earmarked for healthcare and public health development associated with binding, efficient mechanisms to prevent and sanction ethnic discrimination and systemic bias in healthcare in the next programming period.
6. Continue to urge Member States in annual country-specific recommendations to close the acute gaps in health outcomes between members of the majority and the Roma.
7. Support transnational cooperation among Member States to improve the coordination of policies that will facilitate the access of intra-EU mobile Roma to healthcare in their de facto country of residence.

**Recommendations for CSOs:**

8. Strengthen cooperation with academics, public health, and government experts to find a way of using ethnic data in public health that respects privacy while generating the necessary indicators for targeting, monitoring, and evaluating the health of the Roma population.

## 6. HOUSING

by Nóra Teller (Metropolitan Research Institute)

Europe's housing crisis is linked with the increased market pressure in urban hubs that is fuelled by demographic change and the financialisation of housing. The new supply of affordable (and social) housing is lagging, and welfare states have been failing to meet social needs for a few decades now, especially after the great financial crisis of 2008. High demand and low supply create not only a spiral of unaffordability but also obstacles to housing mobility and, hence, to the social inclusion of groups especially hit by housing inequality and poverty. Moreover, with the skyrocketing of energy prices and the recent green transition policies' general impact on vulnerable households, energy poverty disproportionately affects families in disadvantaged situations.

These core changes in housing markets and systems in Europe hit many Roma families, whose position is further challenged by spatial segregation and isolation in many of the Member States.

Even in countries with a very small Roma population (e.g., below 20,000 people), segregation persists. The Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) has played a pivotal role in showcasing the severity of these challenges at the European level,<sup>20</sup> drawing attention and creating space for the (future) monitoring of developments, among other factors, in the housing sector, and delivering evidence on the progress of the implementation of national strategies.<sup>21</sup>

### 6.1. Main challenges and root causes

The key housing challenges affecting Roma families comprise a number of critical issues:

Living in **informal housing** or on **land with unclear legal status** creates tenure insecurity and exacerbates housing inequalities. Crucially, it also makes regularisation and investment into infrastructure difficult, if not impossible (BG, CY, LT, RO, SE).

**Forced evictions** are often carried out without proper notice, legal justification, or the provision of adequate alternative housing, resulting in family homelessness and creating chronic insecurity (BE, BG, EL, FR, HU, IT, RO, SE), despite the fact that a growing number of legal cases state that the right to the protection of the home outweighs property rights.<sup>22</sup>

In many Member States, Roma families are concentrated in **segregated** settlements, camps, or neighbourhoods that are physically or socially isolated. This often results from deliberate policy choices by local authorities and from increased regional inequalities rooted in the transition years of the early 1990s in CEE, which exacerbated the effects of state assimilation policies of the 1960s and 1970s. Inaction regarding mechanisms that reinforce segregation also fosters division and inequalities. Social-economic inequalities are present in all Member States, and residential segregation is also present in nearly all countries, irrespective of the size (and historical composition) of the Roma communities, and regardless of whether they live in rural or urban areas, or are autochthonous or people with a migration background.

Very often, Roma settlements lack essential services (water, sanitation, electricity, garbage collection), and dwellings are poor, substandard, and overcrowded (BG, CY, EE, EL, ES, HU, LV, RO, SK). Furthermore, settlements may be exposed to environmental hazards, as they are often located close to landfills, polluted areas, or in neighbourhoods more exposed to natural-disaster-related risks like floods (EL, FR, HU, RO, SK).

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<sup>20</sup> European Union Agency of Fundamental Rights. *Roma and Travellers in the EU - New Survey!* Available at: <https://fra.europa.eu/en/video/2025/roma-and-travellers-eu-new-survey>.

<sup>21</sup> European Union Agency of Fundamental Rights. (2024). *Rights of Roma and Travellers in 13 European Countries: Perspectives from the Roma Survey 2024*. Available at: [https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/fra-2025-roma-survey-2024\\_en.pdf](https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2025-roma-survey-2024_en.pdf)

<sup>22</sup> One of the first ones: Case of *Yoedanova and others v. Bulgaria* (2012), see: <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng?i=001-110449>,

Be it in the private or public rented sector, Roma families face **discrimination** as a barrier to accessing housing from private or social landlords, even at the local bureaucratic level. This is a highly prevalent issue, reported across the majority of EU countries (AT, BG, CZ, DE, EL, ES, HU, IE, IT, LV, NL). Moreover, the lack of clear housing policy frameworks, and specifically social housing law and policy in general, creates room for ineffective interventions, e.g., housing investments that strengthen segregation (for example, in BG, CZ, EL, HU, NL, PL, and SK). Most recently, HU passed a law on 'the protection of local identity' that allows all local municipalities to prohibit home ownership for arbitrary reasons, literally creating space for anti-Roma discriminatory local legislation.<sup>23</sup>

Increasing or high **housing costs** and energy prices, coupled with growing housing cost indebtedness, create financial traps for many. This severely hinders access to stable, healthy housing solutions, as reported in a number of Member States (AT, BE, ES, LV, PL, SE, SK).

The most severe combination and scale of these challenges (often correlated with the number of Roma people in the country) is reported in RO, where approximately 60% of the 1.2–2 million Roma live in segregated and underserved settlements without titles. In BG, the challenge is of a proportionately similar scale, where Roma people often live without any entitlements due to a lack of registration, leaving them in extremely vulnerable situations in ethnically homogenous communities. In EL, the lack of the right to land is also a core challenge that diverse resettlement projects have failed to tackle. In SK, families often face high levels of segregation and discrimination, similar to the situation in HU. In CZ, many families live in overpriced private hostels, a form of substandard, shared accommodation. The living conditions of Travellers are also frequently hampered by the low availability and poor quality of halting sites (BE, FR, NL).

The housing quality, accessibility, and affordability gap faced by many Roma communities in Europe is linked with a number of structural challenges, including antigypsyism and discrimination. First and foremost, antigypsyism and discrimination affect every aspect of life, creating and reinforcing barriers to service use and hindering people's access to adequate and integrated housing. The enforcement of rights for many Roma is hampered by weak anti-discrimination measures, and often by bureaucracy that excludes low-literacy and low-income populations. Across the EU, the Racial Equality Directive is poorly enforced, allowing discrimination by landlords, employers, and public agencies to continue.

The failure to address structural challenges is strongly linked with a lack of political will and funding at local, and often regional and national levels: addressing housing exclusion is consistently hindered by insufficient national budgets, political inertia, and delays in opening and disbursing EU funds, leading to a reliance on short-term, un-scalable projects, some of which even create more segregation. The poor enforcement of national-level policy objectives and principles at the local/community level is often linked to local resistance and political risks, as short-term costs and potential conflicts must be borne and managed by local communities, while the long-term benefits accrue at the broader societal level.

Despite efforts at the EU level, many countries also suffer from a lack of comprehensive data and monitoring systems for observing and evaluating policies and interventions. In the absence of ethnically disaggregated data and reliance on (exclusively) non-ethnic targeting, interventions are very likely to fail to meet the needs of Roma communities. This often goes hand in hand with the limited participation of Roma: communities are often involved symbolically rather than meaningfully in decision-making and monitoring processes, undermining policy relevance.

## 6.2. Policy responses and their effectiveness

To address the persistent housing exclusion and segregation challenges, a number of tools and actions have been initiated across the Member States, often supported by EU Funds. Such examples include social housing construction, upgrading, mentoring, and broader social inclusion programmes that enhance the financial stability and labour market inclusion of families, who then can improve their housing consumption levels. EU funds function as a lever, but are also associated with risk: funds are often delayed, may be connected with tight and restrictive allocation rules, and programming settings may hamper participatory planning. At the same time, across the Member States, EU funds are the most relevant source for the implementation of NRSFs.

<sup>23</sup> Rorke, B. (2025). *Apartheid by stealth: ERRC condemns Hungarian law on the protection of local identity as discriminatory*, European Roma Rights Centre. Available at: <https://www.errc.org/news/apartheid-by-stealth-errc-condemns-hungarian-law-on-the-protection-of-local-identity-as-discriminatory>.

However, initiatives often remain at the local project level. Devolved and decentralised programming tasks, such as local action planning that translates national frameworks into local actions (BG, CZ, EL, HU, PL), can create local momentum for Roma inclusion. Most often, however, implementation remains limited to local targeted projects (e.g., transitional housing in FR, 'Domov' in SK, relocation interventions in IT). Such projects still play a key role, demonstrating that tailored, integrated, and well-managed efforts can yield positive results. Reportedly, some ambivalent outcomes have also emerged: despite ambitious goals, HU's Housing and Social Integration Programme (HSIP), an initiative that has now been running for close to two decades with some disruptions, aimed to abolish segregated Roma housing and stimulate integration, but independent analyses suggest these programmes have not contributed to a significant reduction in the number of segregated settlements, at best leading to only local improvements.

Initiatives that go beyond the project level also exist. Recent legal reforms initiated in BG may tackle one of the key barriers to citizenship/rights: address registration for residents in informal settlements is now being allowed. Roma mediators (e.g., in the areas of education, health, and in general at the local level) have been playing a key role in facilitating access to mainstream services in a few countries, too – for example, to increase access to (rented) housing, like in IE, and to access housing finance and legal protection, like in BG. More systemic, yet tangible progress has occurred with land legalisation, formalisation, and zoning. For example, servicing may be facilitated by the inclusion of segregated settlements into urban plans (as in SI). In ES, regional-level programmes for dismantling illegal and informal settlements through integrated interventions and housing desegregation measures are broadly acknowledged and replicated. The 'MarEa' programme, which works towards overcoming 'camp' systems in IT, targeted Housing First interventions for families in CZ, and more generally, social housing system-related reforms and actual social housing investments from EU funds in CZ, have the potential to make important progress.

However, most of these initiatives fail to address issues at scale and may remain ineffective, given that they do not combat discrimination in housing, do not create sustainable, desegregated housing solutions, and often lack ambition in general. For example, although the EURSF explicitly calls for desegregation, and many countries have formally aligned with this goal, practical implementation falls short. While on paper the majority of countries have strategies aimed at reducing residential segregation and combating housing discrimination (EL, HR, HU), these strategies often rely on mainstreaming, such as funding general social housing that may (or may not) be accessible to Roma, rather than designing well (and, if needed, ethnically) targeted desegregation projects, or at least monitoring and incentivising desegregation outcomes for vulnerable Roma population groups. Given that Member States often do not define concrete, measurable targets, timelines, or clearly earmarked budgets for implementation and monitoring, accountability remains fragile.

A further reason for the mismatch between the interventions and the social inclusion goals is the greater focus on improving housing quality over spatial and social integration. In some countries (BG, EL, PL, SK), the focus of major investment is on improving substandard living conditions within existing segregated settlements, with no ambition to desegregate Roma housing. Investments within (overwhelmingly) Roma neighbourhoods are essentially *in situ* upgrading, which is a key human rights priority but does not promote spatial desegregation. Ultimately, some interventions may represent not only a divergence from the EURSF's core principles but also a direct violation of international human rights law. Thus, even though considerable funding may reach Roma communities, the impact will only be life-changing for individual families, but will not have a systemic effect or reduce stigmatisation and tackle mechanisms that reinforce exclusion, deprivation, and segregation. Reports also state that some of the temporary solutions offered to families, e.g., during relocation processes (HU, FR, IT, NL), may create tenure insecurity and additional vulnerabilities. The absence of effective access to justice means that segregation and discrimination remain unpunished and are often seen as 'normal'.

### **6.3. Promising cases and interventions to learn from**

The range of housing challenges faced by Roma requires multifaceted responses at both local and systemic levels. This cycle's reports refer to a few interventions that have proved effective, have had or will have a long-term inclusion and desegregation impact, or, alternatively, create organisational and institutional structures that are essential for tackling the housing exclusion, discrimination, and residential segregation of Roma.

- overcoming systemic residential segregation (IT): The Municipality of Rome's action plan to overcome the 'Camp System,' along with the 'Asti' and 'Collegno' programmes, are models for structured, multi-sectoral, and sustainably funded local interventions aimed at genuine housing desegregation.
- ES's programme of housing desegregation and social inclusion has been serving as a benchmark for programme design for a number of other EU countries to learn from.

- addressing the lack of formal titles (BG): The successful amendment to the Civil Registration Act in Bulgaria (2024), which provides for *ex officio* addresses, is a clear legal solution to a fundamental barrier for thousands of people.
- anti-discrimination measures and new housing support legislation (CZ): As a general framework defined by the Czech EU funding authorities, funding allocation rules prohibit any social housing investments in segregated areas, as defined based on hard statistical evidence. Moreover, the Czech Trade Inspection Authority has used situational testing to tackle housing discrimination, which, through the concrete enforcement of the anti-discrimination law, has resulted in fining discriminatory landlords. The largely rights-based Housing First programmes that address family homelessness in select Czech cities have also reached Roma families and created desegregated housing solutions for them. The new Housing Support Act introduces three key instruments aimed at improving access to housing for vulnerable groups. Firstly, Housing Contact Points will be established in every municipality, with extended powers. These centres will provide counselling, assess housing need, propose tailored support, coordinate services, and collect data. Secondly, the law introduces a system of guarantees for private landlords and compensation for municipalities that offer housing within the supported system. This mechanism is designed to increase the supply of affordable rental housing by mitigating risks for property owners. Finally, the act emphasises housing assistance for tenants in the form of targeted social work and counselling aimed at preventing housing loss.

#### 6.4. Recommendations

##### Recommendations for Member States:

1. Enact binding legislation that explicitly prohibits racial and spatial segregation in housing.
2. Develop a clear definition of segregation, as well as a transparent monitoring system for desegregation and the contribution (or lack thereof) of funded projects to desegregation.
3. Mandate proportionality reviews for all demolition/eviction orders, and create prevention measures to avoid evictions.
4. Systematically review and abolish discriminatory policies that prevent Roma from accessing housing and social benefits. This includes resolving the issues of unregistered residence and the discriminatory eligibility criteria for social housing/welfare benefits applied by public sector workers.
5. Dedicate a larger and stable portion of the national budget (not solely relying on EU funds) to increasing the supply of affordable, non-segregated social housing. This must include safeguards to prevent the construction of new segregated settlements and incentivise placing Roma families in mixed communities.
6. Facilitate and incentivise the more effective implementation of national policy goals to maintain interest, commitment, and engagement in long-term inclusion processes, including housing desegregation. More support and funding should be available at the local level.
7. Provide CSOs with adequate, multi-annual funding to enhance their role in anti-discrimination support, enabling them to proactively challenge evictions and housing discrimination and maintain legal aid networks.

##### Recommendations for the European Commission:

8. Mandate the use of ESF+ and ERDF funds to prioritise funding for non-segregated housing and infrastructure projects. Funding should be explicitly linked to desegregation goals and include sanctions for Member States that use funds to improve housing within segregated settlements without a corresponding plan for spatial integration.
9. Escalate infringement procedures and apply financial sanctions against Member States that fail to prevent forced evictions without providing adequate, dignified alternative housing or compensation.

##### Recommendations for municipalities:

10. Local governments, with the involvement of CSOs, should promote and replicate local desegregation intervention models, focusing on sustainable placement rather than temporary solutions. Local (pro-

• Roma CSOs should be empowered to lead the monitoring and co-design of interventions and municipal housing plans to ensure they meet the community's needs.

## 7. SOCIAL PROVISIONS

by Ágota Scharle (Budapest Institute)

The 2023 *Council Recommendation on Adequate Minimum Income* has given new impetus to promoting investment in social protection at the European level. The recommendation calls for combining income support, inclusive labour market policies, and access to services. The annual monitoring reports on minimum income published since 2023 provide a thorough review of the state of play, support governments to improve their strategies, and may also help ground the advocacy work of civil society organisations.<sup>24</sup>

The most recent of these reports shows that mainstream measures for alleviating poverty and social exclusion fall short of the EU objectives outlined in the Council Recommendation regarding the adequacy of benefit levels and the accessibility of benefits and enabling services.<sup>25</sup> Social protection systems are the least developed in the post-socialist countries with the largest Roma populations (except in CZ). According to the report, about half of Member States introduced individualised social inclusion plans for minimum income recipients, and some followed the 2023 Council Recommendations in ensuring that inclusion plans are drawn up within three months of accessing the minimum income benefit (BG, IE, HR, PT, RO, SK); however, in some of them (BG, RO, SK), the limited capacity of public employment services is likely to restrain actual implementation.

### 7.1. Main challenges and root causes

The national RCM reports point to three key challenges, with some variation across countries.

The **adequacy of minimum income benefits** is particularly low in several CEE countries (BG, HU, RO, SK) or insufficient (ES, LT, SI). In other countries, benefit levels appear to be less of an issue. The level of social benefit is often a politicised issue. In the absence of a clear and legally binding mechanism that links benefit levels to a measure of the actual cost of living, they may decline over time (due to inflation) or fluctuate with political cycles. The 2023 Council Recommendation promotes the use of methodologies for setting and regularly updating minimum income levels; however, the most recent monitoring report mentions ten countries where no specific methodology is used, including five countries with the largest Roma communities and most acute challenges (EL, HU, IT, RO, SK).

In LV, benefit levels are linked to a poverty threshold defined by the government, which was increased substantially in 2025; however, the report concludes that the current levels are still inadequate. In CZ, the new reform that aims to simplify the benefit system may also lead to a general reduction in adequacy, especially for the most vulnerable households (families with young children, single parents, retired women). Critics of the reform have raised concerns that the level defined in the new, simplified scheme does not reflect the actual cost of living.

The FI report notes a further issue that may be relevant in countries where the minimum income is calculated on the basis of household size and total earnings. Moreover, the administration of minimum income schemes is not flexible enough in adapting to the changing conditions of recipient households (especially changes in the number of dependent members or earners), and this increases the risk of severe deprivation in Roma households.

Structural **difficulties in benefit take-up** (accessibility) are reported in most countries. Eligibility rules may include criteria that are stigmatising or difficult for Roma to fulfil. Several countries with large Roma communities (BG, HU, SK) make benefit receipt conditional on participating in public work, which (although it increases the benefit level) is stigmatising and can also interfere with casual work opportunities. In most other countries, minimum incomes are usually tied to citizenship or residence, which often excludes Roma (AT, ES).

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<sup>24</sup> European Commission. (2025). *The 2025 Minimum Income Report. An overview of the implementation of the 2023 Council Recommendation on adequate minimum income ensuring active inclusion across EU Member States*.

Available at: <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-14905-2025-ADD-1/en/pdf>

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

Most countries report that Roma communities face **constraints in accessing social services** and/or that available services are not tailored to their needs. Sometimes, social counselling focuses on enabling access to cash benefits (BG, EL) without the necessary investment in developing services and approaches that would enable recipients (or their children) to move out of poverty.

Access to quality social services may be constrained for various reasons, some rooted in a lack of political will, and some related to institutional or cultural obstacles. In the countries with the largest Roma communities, mainstream services, such as community social work or debt service management, are underfunded and weakly monitored by the central government, which may reflect the lack of a genuine political commitment. This implies that social workers often lack the time, the expertise, and the motivation to provide effective, individualised services, and in most cases, they cannot rely on the broad range of specialised services to tackle special needs, such as debt management or psychotherapy. The lack of capacity also implies that social workers are seldom able to use a holistic approach or comprehensive case management, but resort to tackling partial issues or mediating between authorities and clients (BG, HU, SK, RO).

In most other countries, mainstream social services may have sufficient capacity and Roma are formally eligible, but their access can still be limited by several factors. One such factor mentioned by many reports is geographical location: Roma communities often live in the relatively less developed regions of a country or in segregated communities, and the compensatory mechanisms associated with the funding of public services often do not fully ensure that funding matches local needs. This leads to regional disparities in the availability and quality of services that put Roma communities at a disadvantage (CY, EL, FI, FR, IT, LT, PT). Further, well-developed mainstream services may not actively reach out to Roma, which further reduces the take-up of benefits and services (AT, FR).

The lack of horizontal and vertical coordination across the elements of highly fragmented welfare systems is cited by many reports across all clusters (AT, BE, BG, CZ, DE, EL, ES, FI, FR, HR, HU, IE, IT, LT, NL, PL, RO, SE, SI, SK). Fragmentation can lead to low take-up, as clients are easily 'lost' between service providers. This also implies that clients are often not referred to the services that best meet their needs (even when the service exists). While most countries largely rely on CSOs to provide social services, SK noted a lack of coordination between the government and CSOs.

Some countries cited uncertainties about funding for social inclusion measures. In EL, the Roma branches of municipal community centres, and in SK, the services of street social work and community centres have been supported with EU funds. Civil society organisations warn that services may be discontinued or trimmed when EU support is no longer available.

Discrimination and/or the lack of cultural awareness of public service providers was mentioned in almost all reports as an additional underlying cause of low take-up and the inadequate quality of services.

## 7.2. Policy responses and their effectiveness

Several countries reported the lack of a government strategy for Roma inclusion that outlines well-defined, effective measures, goals, and measurable indicators that ensure accountability (AT, ES, FR).

Some countries have focused on improving mainstream social protection: BG has substantially increased the level of social benefits over the past five years and introduced a new social services act in 2020, with the aim of broadening access among vulnerable groups. RO has unified several social assistance programmes into the new minimum inclusion income, with the aim of simplifying and improving support to those in poverty. IT also introduced a new means-tested benefit in 2024, the inclusion allowance, which provides financial support and promotes social and labour-market inclusion. However, it requires continuous legal residence for at least five years, which may exclude many Roma. It should be noted that some countries have curtailed mainstream benefits: in some cases, this took the form of failing to index the size of the benefit to annual inflation (e.g., in CZ, and HU), and in Slovakia, eligibility conditions were tightened.

In the countries with the largest Roma populations, the backbone of Roma inclusion strategies is reducing poverty by promoting labour-market inclusion (BG, RO, HU). There are a few measures to strengthen social protection and services, such as development teams in SK (see more detail in the next section) and new tools in CZ to support the capacity-building of specifically Roma and pro-Roma CSOs.

In the other clusters, a few countries have introduced Roma-specific measures. Such targeted measures typically focus on one or more of three areas:

- (a) improving outreach and access to services by introducing or expanding a network of mediators to improve communication between Roma communities and public service providers (BE, SE)
- (b) reducing discrimination by training the staff of public services in cultural awareness (FR, SI)
- (c) improving coordination between the stakeholders involved in implementing the Roma strategy (SI).

In EL, municipalities could apply for additional funding to set up so-called 'Roma branches' in their community centres to provide tailored support to the Roma community. The country report notes that some of these branches are located within or immediately adjacent to segregated Roma neighbourhoods, which may inadvertently reinforce residential and social isolation. Some initiatives that potentially perpetuate segregation may contravene the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, predominantly financed through ESF+.

The reports do not provide detailed information on the effectiveness of these policy responses. In some cases, this is justified by the fact that the policies targeted poverty in general, and assessing their impact on Roma communities is difficult due to the prohibition of ethnic data collection. Some of the measures are too recent to be evaluated. In some cases, the reports point to delays and other limitations in implementation. For example, in FR, implementing the anti-discrimination training for public agencies reportedly moved slowly due to the lack of financial and human resources.

### 7.3. Promising cases and interventions to learn from

SK introduced 'Development Teams' (as a National Project by the Office of the Roma Plenipotentiary) in 2023. The teams include experts specialised in specific areas of support: housing, early care, youth work, employment and job counselling, social work, and community development. These are being implemented in 60 municipalities with marginalised Roma communities. This is expected to improve the quality of service of field social workers and community centres, but will need to be further developed by introducing quality standards and regular quality assurance mechanisms.

The training scheme for Roma-bridge builders in SE (specifically aimed at social service workers) is an extension of a pilot programme initially started in 2011.<sup>26</sup> It provides information on the relevant legislation, case-handling procedures, and communication methods needed to support bridge builders in their dual identity: as civil servants and as members of the Roma community. The training is free of charge for municipalities that (plan to) employ bridge-builders, and the Swedish National Agency for Education provides salary compensation for participants.

SI established a National Roma Platform and organised a series of professional training sessions for various stakeholders, such as community centres, school counselling services, and Roma coordinators, to increase the capacities and awareness of professionals regarding the specific socio-economic challenges faced by Roma.

### 7.4. Recommendations

#### Recommendations to Member States:

1. Allow for more flexibility in the design and management of services and promote efforts to improve the coordination of welfare services at the local level, but strengthen quality control by the central government to ensure that social services are accessible and of high quality across the country.
2. Evaluate the effectiveness of pilots and ESF-funded measures and provide stable funding to those that prove effective.
3. Invest in the coordination of employment and social services in order to improve outreach to Roma and other vulnerable groups, as well as the range and quality of services.
4. Invest in community-based local development programmes.

<sup>26</sup> Mosley, H., Scharle, Á., Stefanik, M. (2017). *The Role of PES in Outreach to the Inactive Population*. Icon Institute, European Commission, DG Employment. Available at: <https://op.europa.eu/mt/publication-detail-/publication/ce86219d-2d84-11e8-b5fe-01aa75ed71a1>

5. Systematically engage Roma CSOs and service providers working in Roma communities in designing and implementing social inclusion programmes.

**Recommendations to the European Commission:**

6. Formulate detailed guidelines for minimum standards concerning the provision of minimum incomes with respect to the adequacy, indexation, and entitlement conditions of such benefits.
7. Mandate the use of the equivalent of ESF+ and ERDF funds earmarked for social services associated with binding, efficient mechanisms to prevent and sanction ethnic discrimination and systemic bias in social services in the next programming period.
8. Keep encouraging Member States in annual country-specific recommendations to invest in anti-discrimination measures.
9. For countries with the largest Roma communities and the most acute challenges, improve the adequacy of minimum income schemes and complement work-oriented programmes with social services according to participants' needs.

**Recommendations to CSOs:**

10. Advocate the regular monitoring of poverty and social inclusion outcomes for the Roma and of indicators of access to benefits and social services.
11. Advocate the systematic involvement of Roma in designing and monitoring publicly funded social inclusion programmes and build the capacity to enable Roma to perform effectively in such roles.

## 8. CHILD PROTECTION

by Reneta Krivinozova (Phiren Amenca)

Across the EU, child protection systems are increasingly shifting toward prevention, early intervention, and family-based care. Related EU frameworks such as the European Child Guarantee encourage Member States to expand early childhood services, strengthen family support, and reduce reliance on institutional care. Although several promising initiatives are emerging, including integrated outreach teams, improved cross-sectoral coordination, and foster-care reforms, implementation remains uneven. In many Member States, such measures are still at the pilot-project level, inadequately funded, or not yet included in long-term strategies.

A persistent challenge is the absence of robust, ethically designed data systems to monitor outreach to and outcomes for Roma children. Without reliable information, inequalities remain invisible, and reforms are difficult to evaluate. Ensuring that EU-level ambitions translate into tangible improvements therefore requires not only better services but also stronger monitoring, sustained investment, and meaningful Roma participation in designing and implementing child protection measures.

CSOs participating in the RCM report that Roma children continue to be disproportionately exposed to child-protection interventions, often driven by the practice of treating poverty-related hardship as neglect rather than structural disadvantage, including social exclusion, inadequate housing, discrimination, and limited access to early childhood education, health services, and adequate nutrition. These overlapping barriers do not create solid ground for children's development and directly shape the trajectory and frequency of child-protection interventions. Roma children remain overrepresented in institutional care (BG, CZ, EL, FI, HU, LT, RO, SE, SK), CSOs report the mistrust of authorities involved in child protection (BG, DE, FI, FR, LT, SE), and cultural misunderstandings affect the assessments and placements of children (FI, LT, SE). Additional obstacles, including substandard living conditions and food insecurity, as well as discriminatory treatment in education, policing, and social services, have been documented (BE, EL, ES, IT, LT, LV, NL, RO, SI). These national findings mirror broader EU-wide patterns of housing deprivation, low participation in early-childhood services, and barriers to basic social rights. Together, they highlight the urgent need for coordinated, cross-sectoral action involving social protection, housing, education, and anti-discrimination policy, supported by culturally sensitive and rights-based child-welfare practice.

### 8.1. Main challenges and root causes

A prevalent and evident challenge is the overrepresentation of Roma children in institutional care (BG, CZ, FI, HU, LT, RO, SE, SK). In some countries (BG, CZ, HU), Roma children are sometimes placed in care immediately after birth, often linked to assessments of inadequate housing or poverty rather than neglect. In countries where family-based services are weak (BG, HU, LT, RO), the issue of institutionalisation remains common.

Poverty is highlighted as a structural driver of these interventions. The reports describe severe material deprivation (RO), precarious income security, and a lack of basic household goods (IE) and living conditions defined by overcrowding and poor infrastructure (BE, EL, ES, LT, SI). Sometimes (BG), access to social benefits is conditional on vaccination or school attendance, disproportionately affecting Roma families and increasing their exposure to protective systems.

Discrimination is another cross-cutting theme across various reports, which document experiences of antigypsyism influencing welfare decisions (BE, BG, DE, FI, HU, LT, SE). Roma parents describe interactions with child-welfare or related authorities shaped by prejudice or stereotyping rather than individual assessment (DE, FR, SK). This contributes to mistrust (BG, FI, LT, SE), leading to families ultimately avoiding seeking assistance out of fear of child removal.

Preventive services tend to be inadequate and not evenly distributed geographically (BG, HU, LT, RO, SK). Shortages of specialists and coordination gaps limit early intervention. In HU, legislative reforms have increased administrative burdens while weakening professional autonomy, reducing the capacity for preventive work.

Insufficient recognition of Roma identity and cultural misunderstandings are reported from several Member States (FI, LT, SE); children placed in care sometimes lose their cultural or linguistic ties, and kinship care is underused.

Early and forced marriages remain a concern in several countries (BG, CY, EL, IT, SI), where national reports highlight the persistence of the practice, and the lack of consistent, coordinated prevention. Measures are often fragmented or short-term, and states have established limited frameworks. While IT has introduced a targeted initiative through the VOICES project, most interventions across these Member States remain isolated efforts rather than parts of comprehensive prevention strategies.

Finally, significant data gaps persist, as data disaggregated by ethnicity are not collected or used (BE, ES, LT, RO). Where ethnically disaggregated data exist (CZ), they confirm Roma children's overrepresentation in state care.

Beyond this, other forms of data gaps are reported across additional countries: for example, limited and non-systematic data on antigypsyism incidents affecting children (DE); insufficient information on the situation of homeless Roma families (FR); fragmented data across sectors and inconsistent national monitoring (HU); and a lack of understanding of the experiences of Roma children in care (FI, SE). Together, these gaps limit the ability of national authorities to identify disparities, monitor progress, and implement evidence-based reforms.

Structural poverty and social exclusion remain the primary drivers of the challenges (BE, EL, ES, IE, IT, LT, LV, NL, RO, SI), shaping the daily lives of Roma families and their contact with child-protection systems. These structural disadvantages are reflected most visibly in housing conditions: informal settlements (BG, EL, HU, RO, SK), camp-type settings (IT), socially excluded neighbourhoods (CZ, ES, LT), and persistent overcrowding (BE, EL, ES, LT, SI). Although these situations are manifestations of material deprivation, they are often misinterpreted by authorities as indicators of the neglect of children. This misclassification increases the risk of child-family separation and therefore contributes directly to the disproportionate presence of Roma children in alternative forms of care.

Alongside poverty-related challenges, discrimination across welfare, education, and child-protection systems (BE, BG, DE, FI, FR, HU, LT, SE) also shapes assessments, placement decisions, and everyday interactions with families. Such bias reinforces mistrust of authorities, discouraging families from seeking support and undermining cooperation once child-protection procedures begin, potentially extending a child's placement outside of their family.

These challenges are exacerbated by weaknesses in preventive services. Shortages of specialists, gaps in coordination, and uneven territorial coverage limit the availability of early, voluntary assistance (BG, HU, LT, RO, SK). As a result, families often encounter child-protection services only at crisis points, when problems have already escalated, and interventions become graver.

Further bottlenecks are reported in the insufficient use of cultural mediation and the inconsistent involvement of Roma civil-society actors (BE, FI, HR, LT, LV, SE). Without sustained cultural mediation, child-welfare practices misinterpret Roma parenting patterns and family structures, reinforcing misunderstanding and creating additional barriers to sustaining trust.

Finally, fragmented responsibility across ministries and agencies (BE, HU, EL, SK) weakens the sustainability of care and reduces accountability. This institutional fragmentation limits the continuity of policy responses and the ability of child-protection systems to address interconnected issues such as housing, education, and social support in a coordinated manner.

## 8.2. Policy responses and their effectiveness

The extent to which NRSFs address child protection varied markedly across Member States. Some countries have incorporated explicit commitments (BG, CZ, EL, FI, SI, FR – poverty-related measures, IE, LT – education-related measures, LV – through mediator involvement, NL – poverty-related measures), while others have referred to the issue only indirectly or conceptually (AT, DE, HU, SK). In several cases, details about child protection were absent altogether (BE, ES, HR, PL).

Across these differing approaches, effectiveness was further constrained by structural problems: weak implementation (BG, EL, LT, SI), gaps in monitoring and indicators (BE, HU, RO, SK), fragmented institutional responsibilities (BE, EL, HU, SK), insufficient funding and workforce capacity (BG, HU, LT, RO, SK), or overemphasis on crisis response rather than prevention (BG, HU, LT, RO, SK).

Several Member States have introduced legislative reforms, though with mixed results. In CZ, the 2024 ban on institutional care for children under the age of three represents alignment with the EU standard and is a

significant step toward deinstitutionalisation and the expansion of foster care. In HU, recent amendments have increased state competence and power and placed additional administrative constraints on professionals, in turn weakening preventive work. In SE, minority-rights provisions exist in law but remain insufficiently applied in child-protection practice. BG has adopted new legislation on preventing violence and child abuse, yet the measures most relevant to Roma families are limited. In RO, high legal thresholds for family reunification continue to hinder efforts to return children from care to their families, particularly where poverty is the underlying factor. Together, these reforms underline that legal reform alone is insufficient without strong implementation and sustained investment in preventive and family-based services.

### 8.3. Promising cases and interventions to learn from

Several Member States have introduced promising initiatives that demonstrate measurable and well-documented improvements in child protection and social inclusion.

In FI, the 'SOILA' project and the Roma-led family support centre provide culturally sensitive assistance to Roma parents involved in child-protection proceedings. They are expected to strengthen trust, improve cooperation between families and authorities, and help parents navigate complex procedures.

In LV, the deployment of Roma mediators has significantly improved communication between families and social services, increasing service uptake and reducing the misunderstandings that previously escalated into child-protection cases.

In HR, mobile teams and community centres established under the Child Guarantee extend services into isolated areas, allowing families who previously had no access to support to receive early assistance and guidance.

In EL, community centres have been expanded. This measure, complemented by partnerships with universities to deliver targeted education and outreach activities, has begun to improve school participation and engagement among Roma children.

In IT, the 'VOICES' project offers a structured community-based approach to addressing early and forced marriage, using peer engagement and awareness-raising to open dialogue in communities where the issue occurs.

Finally, FR's mixed outreach teams (*maraudes mixtes*) offer an integrated approach to working with families in informal settlements, improving coordination between social and child-protection services and enabling the earlier identification of risk.

These initiatives are promising because they encourage and strengthen preventive work, improve cultural competence, expand outreach to underserved areas, and build trust between Roma communities and public services, an issue that has consistently been identified as weak in many Member States.

At the same time, several legislative and structural reforms are reshaping the broader child protection landscape. In CZ, the ban on institutional care for younger children, together with expanded foster care support, stands out as one of the most substantial and durable systemic changes promoting deinstitutionalisation.

Integrated outreach models are also emerging: NL is applying a barrier model designed to identify and mitigate exploitation-related risks among families facing multiple, complex challenges.

Education-based protection mechanisms have likewise been strengthened. In LT and LV, mandatory preschool, the introduction of teacher assistants, and the establishment of support centres are improving the early detection of risks. SI, through the Child Guarantee, is expanding access to early childhood services, further reinforcing preventive and protective measures.

Although these initiatives and reforms reflect meaningful innovation, their effectiveness remains uneven. Many remain pilot projects, operate only within limited geographical areas, or are not yet fully embedded within broader policy frameworks, which constrains their long-term systemic impact.

## 8.4. Recommendations

### **Recommendations to Member States:**

1. Strengthen child protection by ensuring adequate and stable funding of involved institutions, public and civil society, addressing the workforce shortage they face, and intensifying cross-sectoral coordination with education, social services, housing, and health services.
2. Expand preventive and family-support services and early-intervention provision in underserved areas.
3. Address structural poverty and eliminate punitive measures by eliminating harmful conditionalities, integrate the goal of child-poverty reduction into Roma strategies, and remove discriminatory administrative barriers.
4. Combat discrimination and antigypsyism by introducing mandatory anti-discrimination training for all personnel, and ensuring equal intervention standards. Strengthen cultural competences and formally involve Roma mediators throughout child-protection processes.
5. Reform foster-care and deinstitutionalisation practices, expanding family-based alternatives, reducing institutional placements, and preserving sibling unity and cultural identity. Implement comprehensive strategies to prevent early and forced marriage.
6. Improve data collection and monitoring, establishing ethical systems to track child-protection outcomes and address inequalities.

### **Recommendations to the European Commission:**

7. Strengthen EU oversight by requiring Member States to include explicit child-protection measures in NRSFs. Encourage the publication of disaggregated data and provide guidance on Roma-targeting to ensure compliance with EU Roma frameworks.
8. Consolidate and scale up successful EU-funded pilot projects, expanding effective models such as mobile teams and community centres.
9. Reinforce EU-level action on exploitation by strengthening requirements under the EU Roma Strategic Framework and the Child Guarantee to address trafficking and exploitative early marriage.

### **Recommendations to CSOs:**

10. Expand community-based support, increasing mediator, assistant, and outreach roles to help Roma families engage with public services.
11. Strengthen legal and monitoring functions by documenting antigypsyism that affects children and assist families facing discriminatory removals, while advocating for policy improvements and the strengthening of NRPs.

# CONCLUSIONS

by Marek Hojsík (DI/CEU)

The thematic chapters of this report present a coherent landscape concerning how Member States have implemented their NRSFs during the first half of the current EURSF 2020-2030. While each policy domain has its own policy architecture, actors, and operational constraints, the combined evidence reveals a structural pattern across all sectors. Collectively, they suggest that the challenge does not always consist only in the absence of commitments, tools, or financial resources. Even where these are present, their effects are often hampered by weak implementation systems, the limited capacity or willingness to confront antigypsyism in institutional practice, and the failure to embed Roma equality as a durable governance priority. This concluding synthesis examines how these contradictions surface across policy areas, and what the implications are for the second half of the EURSF.

Across the policy fields analysed in this report, Member States' efforts vary substantially in ambition and capacity. Moreover, the limited translation of NRSFs into real change stems from a dual failure of governance: weaknesses at the national level are as obstructive as local resistance – as discussed in the Introduction. The thematic chapters repeatedly show that measures remain fragmented, project-based, and in many contexts negligible. This results in uneven territorial impact and a reliance on isolated initiatives rather than systematised institutionalised practice. Moreover, national administrative and financial frameworks that do not reflect the needs of the grassroots sometimes create additional burdens or even obstructions for promoters of promising localised practices.

A second major pattern concerns governance arrangements: namely, underdeveloped vertical coordination, unclear mandates, and insufficient monitoring. Although several mechanisms connect the EU level (EURSF) to the national level (NRSF) – including cohesion policy regulations (Roma-specific objectives, enabling conditions, the participation of stakeholders in monitoring committees); the European Semester; and infringement procedures – none of these tools creates a binding implementation chain linked to the local level with clearly defined obligations, minimum standards for local execution or mechanisms for enforcement. Roma-related measures are viewed as optional, not mandatory.

Efforts to connect centrally formulated Roma inclusion objectives with local delivery have been attempted, but often without meaningful effect. In the current and previous programming periods, some Member States encouraged (or even required) municipalities to develop local strategies or action plans for social/Roma inclusion (equality, desegregation, etc.). However, municipalities either simply ignored such requests (because of a lack of capacity or because they did not find them meaningful),<sup>27</sup> or these documents remained completely disconnected from funding and implementation.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, to achieve their development goals, municipalities can opt for funding opportunities with less demanding requirements than dedicated social inclusion or Roma inclusion funding streams; the consequence of such cherry-picking is that the needs of some local groups remain unaddressed.

In addition to the poor vertical coordination, we observe similar weaknesses in the horizontal dimension: while national strategies include the right principles and Roma-specific objectives, other ministries and agencies rarely translate them into their sectoral policies and funding schemes. In fact, sometimes their own objectives and practices contradict the NRSFs' logic.

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<sup>27</sup> See, for example: Roma Civil Monitor. (2025). *Civil society monitoring report on the implementation of the national strategic framework for Roma equality, inclusion, and participation in Greece*. Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg. Available at: <https://www.romacivilmonitoring.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/RCM2-2024-C1-Greece-FINAL-ISBN.pdf>

<sup>28</sup> For example: Salner, A. et al. (2013). *Lessons from Slovakia's Comprehensive Approach: Assessing the feasibility of designing and implementing integrated territorial programs targeting marginalized Roma communities*. Slovak Governance Institute. Available at: <https://www.governance.sk/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/SGI ACA EN.pdf>

Finally, monitoring systems are underdeveloped. Across Member States, indicators are not standardised, disaggregated data is scarce or contested, and evaluation frameworks remain incomplete. In many cases, governments report activities rather than outcomes, preventing any assessment of progress.

While the Introduction establishes the fight against antigypsyism as a fundamental aspect of policymaking, the thematic chapters show how this phenomenon persists in sectoral practices despite legal prohibitions – and often contributes to the ineffectiveness of efforts to promote equality, inclusion, and the participation of Roma. In education, it manifests as misplacement into special education facilities, the low expectations of teachers, and the tolerance of segregation. In housing, it shapes discriminatory allocation practices, informal evictions, and the toleration of substandard living conditions. In employment, it takes the form of discrimination by employers, racialised stereotypes, and the concentration of Roma in precarious, low-quality jobs. In healthcare, it contributes to lower-quality treatment, prejudicial conduct, and administrative barriers. The chapters suggest that improvements remain fragile and contingent, without systemic measures to address institutional discrimination and implicit bias, including through enforcement, mandatory standards, and the monitoring of outcomes.

Instead of being addressed as a systemic governance challenge requiring structural reform or the enforcement of anti-discrimination law, antigypsyism is often reduced to awareness-raising measures or symbolic recognition.

Participation structures exist in most countries, yet the chapters collectively demonstrate that they rarely influence policy content, implementation, or evaluation. Consultation mechanisms are often symbolic, irregular, or perceived as instruments for information dissemination rather than the co-construction of policy. Roma civil society typically participates in an advisory or observer role, without meaningful agenda-setting power. Moreover, the scarcity of Roma professionals in public institutions (beyond mediator roles, and in the worst case, short-term ones) limits their ability to shape policy from within.

This limited participation also weakens accountability. Monitoring systems often document activities rather than evaluate outcomes; equality bodies lack mandates or resources; and corrective mechanisms are rarely activated. This combination of weak accountability and limited participation reproduces Roma exclusion rather than disrupting it.

The thematic chapters provide strong evidence that exclusion is reproduced through the interaction of disadvantages across policy fields. Education outcomes are shaped by housing, health conditions, and social insecurity. Child-protection interventions often arise not from parental neglect but from poverty, overcrowding, or a lack of preventive services. Labour-market exclusion both results from and reinforces low educational attainment and weak access to healthcare. Social and healthcare services are harder to access for families facing unstable housing or discriminatory administrative practices. Barriers in social services or administrative systems exacerbate mistrust and reduce access to benefits and entitlements. This interdependence means that sector-specific reforms, if they happen at all, are rarely sufficient. Integrated, cross-sectoral planning remains limited, and the thematic chapters highlight that where such coordination does exist (such as with Spain's desegregation models, Finland's Roma-led family support, or community-based social work structures), the impact is more sustainable.

Despite the overarching challenges, the report identifies significant divergence across Member States. Some countries, such as Spain, Czechia, Finland, and Latvia, show more consistent trajectories of progress, characterised by stable governance architectures, investment in community-based models, and stronger Roma participation. Italy's gradual dismantling of *campi nomadi* and expansion of inclusive education and housing approaches also indicate positive institutional shifts.

Conversely, several Member States with the largest Roma populations show stagnation or regression, particularly where political hostility to civil society, weak local governance, or discriminatory administrative practices dominate. In these contexts, the absence of enforcement and the weakening of independent oversight structures correlate with systemic inaction. A third group of countries is characterised by highly uneven implementation, with pockets of innovation offset by weak national coordination or insufficient local capacities.

This divergence is not random. It mirrors differences in political will, administrative culture, and the strength of domestic equality institutions. It also reflects whether Member States link the NRSFs to sectoral reforms or treat them as standalone frameworks. Thematic evidence suggests that where NRSF commitments are embedded in mainstream policy systems, progress is more consistent and resilient.

Across all domains, several unresolved structural barriers continue to limit progress. Segregation remains widespread in housing and education, with limited enforcement of anti-discrimination law and few binding desegregation obligations. Many services (education, social work, healthcare, child protection) lack a cross-sectoral approach (case management), limiting their effectiveness. Moreover, some remain dependent on EU projects, with weak sustainability once funding cycles end. Preventive approaches, particularly in child protection and social services, remain underdeveloped, leading to crisis-driven interventions rather than early support. Local-level discretion continues to undermine national commitments, particularly regarding desegregation, inclusive school management, child-protection decision-making, and social service outreach. Data gaps limit monitoring: many systems remain 'ethnically blind', preventing evidence-based planning and the detection of discrimination.

The report draws attention to several conditions that consistently enable progress. The first is stable, multi-year funding, either from national budgets or EU instruments designed to support long-term structural action rather than isolated projects. Second, integrated and multi-sectoral service models linking education, social work, employment, and health are more effective, especially when rooted in local needs. Third, Roma-led initiatives, along with the active involvement of Roma and pro-Roma organisations, and experts with experience in design, monitoring, and delivery, significantly improve policy relevance and trust. Such models require investment in capacity-building and the already-mentioned predictable financing. Fourth, robust local leadership, political or administrative, can overcome structural resistance and ensure the implementation of inclusive measures despite contextual constraints. Fifth, clear mandates embedded in sectoral laws or binding frameworks ensure that policies are implemented consistently and not merely dependent on local discretion. And finally, robust monitoring systems capable of identifying and tackling discrimination and enforcing anti-discrimination norms, as well as the usage of legal instruments to ensure compliance with national policies and regulations by municipalities or governmental agencies, are necessary.

The cumulative evidence of this monitoring cycle suggests that meaningful progress toward the 2030 EU Roma targets will require a strategic shift from commitment-based to obligation-based governance:

#### **Roma equality needs to be embedded in sectoral legislation**

Strategic documents alone cannot ensure consistent implementation when sectoral laws, budgetary frameworks, and institutional routines remain unchanged. Member States need to integrate Roma equality directly into the core machinery of public administration, creating durable mandates that will not depend on political cycles or discretionary interpretation. Budget processes must allocate predictable resources to these obligations, ensuring that commitments are financed as part of mainstream provision rather than ad hoc projects. In parallel, administrative routines (planning, inspection, data collection, and service standards) should systematically integrate equality requirements. Without this institutional anchoring, NRSFs commitments will continue to sit alongside rather than within the structures that shape everyday decision-making.

#### **Local implementation must become mandatory, not discretionary**

Roma equality needs to be operationalised through defined obligations for municipalities, clear delivery standards (e.g., desegregation principles), and localisation plans as a precondition for the endorsement of NRSFs. Without binding requirements, national strategies will continue to be unevenly translated into practice.

#### **Conditionality mechanisms need to extend to the local level**

The EU's enabling conditions should underpin local Roma inclusion strategies as prerequisites for any local development investment. Performance-based funding, modelled on the Recovery and Resilience Facility, can be used to reward municipalities that deliver structural improvements, including desegregation and preventive social services. Payments should be suspended where persistent segregation or non-implementation is documented.

#### **Existing EU rules must be enforced**

The European Commission should consistently use infringement procedures and pursue litigation when Member States breach anti-discrimination law. The European Semester should monitor Roma equality in the Member States with the most acute challenges (not necessarily limited to those with the largest Roma populations) as an area of structural reform, reflecting both progress and backsliding.

**Local capacity must be strengthened where capacity (not political resistance) is the obstacle**

Technical assistance, mentoring, and model templates (such as those piloted in Czechia) should be scaled. EU funding should support long-term community development roles within Roma civil society rather than only service-delivery projects, enabling CSOs to participate in planning, implementation, and monitoring.

The evidence presented in this report demonstrates that Roma equality and inclusion remain a governance challenge with systemic implications. Progress is possible – indeed, it is documented in several Member States and numerous localities – but it is not accidental. It arises when political will, institutional structures, community participation, and sustained investment align. The divergences observed across Europe show that the trajectory toward 2030 is neither predetermined nor irreversible. The remainder of the EURSF will determine whether the commitments made in 2020 translate into measurable improvements in the lives of Roma or remain aspirational.

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